



THE IMPACT OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON CONGOLESE STUDENTS' VERBAL COMMUNICATIVE PERFORMANCE

KIMBOUALA NKAYA

kimboualankaya@umng.cg

Université Marien NGOUABI

ABSTRACT

The present paper investigates the impact of task-based language teaching on Congolese students' verbal communicative performance. The sample population of this study was 210 participants. That is, two (2) teachers of English language and two hundred and eight (208) non-English major undergraduate students from Marien Ngouabi University enrolled at the Teachers' Training College (Ecole Normale Supérieure) in the first year of Mathematics and Biology. In order to carry out this research which is an experimental one, three steps were followed by the researcher: the pre-test, the experimental phase, and the post-test. For reaching the valid and reliable results, prior to the three-above-mentioned phases, "English speaking test" which was the main data collection instrument was pilot-tested and data were collected during normal classes time sessions. Therefore, findings of this study have confirmed hypotheses which stated that contrary to drill-based language teaching, the use of task-based activities such as role-play, simulation and problem-solving have significant impact on students' oral communication performance, on the one hand, and there is significant difference between the two teaching approaches, on the other hand.

Keywords: Approach, Communication, Foreign Language, Impact, Task-based

RESUME

Le présent article étudie l'impact de l'enseignement des langues par le biais des tâches sur la performance en communication verbale des étudiants congolais. L'échantillon de la population de cette étude était constitué de 210 participants. En d'autres termes, deux (2) professeurs d'anglais et deux cent huit (208) étudiants. Tous étaient des étudiants de l'Université Marien Ngouabi inscrits à l'École Normale Supérieure en première année de mathématiques et de biologie. Afin de mener cette recherche expérimentale, le chercheur a suivi trois étapes: le pré-test, la phase expérimentale et le posttest. Pour atteindre les résultats valides et fiables, avant les trois phases susmentionnées, le «test oral de langue anglaise» pris comme instrument de collecte des données a été pré-testé. Les données ont été collectées pendant les séances de classe. Par conséquent, les conclusions de cette étude ont confirmé les hypothèses selon lesquelles, contrairement à l'enseignement des langues basé sur les exercices métalinguistiques, l'utilisation d'activités basées sur des tâches telles que le jeu de rôle, la simulation et la résolution de problèmes a un impact significatif sur les performances de communication orale des élèves, d'une part, et d'autre part, il existe une différence significative entre les deux méthodes d'enseignement de langue.

Keywords : Approche, Communication, Langue étrangère, Impact, Etude de cas

INTRODUCTION

Teaching a language in the foreign language context requires the use of appropriate teaching methods likely to develop learners' language communicative abilities. To

this end, in the present research paper, the use of task-based language teaching (TBLT) as an approach to language teaching has been investigated to measure its impact or effect on communicative language performance of students whose English is not their major.

The present paper aims at investigating whether teaching English through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has any impact on Congolese English language learners' oral communicative performance. In addition, the current research intends to find out whether there is any significant difference between Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Drill-Based Language Teaching (DBLT) commonly used to teach ESP to Congolese students who are not majoring in English. To reach these purposes, the following research questions have been put.

- What is the impact of teaching English through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the Congolese non-English major students' oral communication performance?
- What is the difference in terms of oral communication performance between students taught through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and those taught through traditional teacher-led method, that is, Drill-Based Language Teaching (DBLT)?

From the above questions, the following hypotheses were put:

- Contrary to DBLT, TBLT has a significant effect on learners' oral communication performance.
- There is a significant difference between TBLT and DBLT in terms of learners' oral communicative performance.

1. Literature review

A task is a work-plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, task-based language teaching (TBLT) constitutes both an innovative language teaching method and a thriving area of investigation in the domain of second language acquisition (SLA). The past three decades have witnessed a surge of interest in TBLT which is evidenced by numerous studies carried in the domain SLA (Bygate 2016a; Ellis 2003; García Mayo, 2007 to name but a few).

To start with, this growing interest in TBLT could be in part ascribed to the inherent qualities of tasks; namely, having a primary focus on meaning, inducing learners to draw on their linguistic and cognitive resources, and being outcome-oriented in the

sense that learners are required to use language to accomplish some sort of real-world activity (telling a story, solving a problem, giving directions, etc.)(Ellis 2003). These characteristics have rendered tasks indispensable instruments for not only teaching and assessing languages but also for researching into language learning processes. In other words, tasks pervade many aspects of language teaching research and practice but they may take on different forms and could be used under various guises - that is, real-world tasks which promote situational authenticity or pedagogical tasks which foster interactional authenticity in the classroom (Bygate 2016b). TBLT is now construed as a very broad area of enquiry and there are obviously scores of debated topics from different vantage points which are worth exploring.

Referring to TBLT related researches, in his opening paper, Martin Bygate (2016a) provides an exhaustive overview of the origins of TBLT as well as recent key developments in this area. He argues that TBLT has, in part, emerged out of the need for language educators to help learners with both acquiring the knowledge of language and honing their skills and abilities to use their knowledge in real-world activities. Bygate (2016a) concluded by making a case for three main approaches to the adoption of TBLT: (a) task-supported approach, which involves using tasks to support or complement the existing approaches, (b) task-referenced approach, in which tasks are utilized to characterize the abilities which language learners are supposed to develop by the end of the course, and (c) task-based approach, in which the program is created in terms of a sequence of tasks with the central learning and teaching processes for all the units deriving directly from the tasks themselves, rather than by initial selection of language priorities.

With this in mind, on his behalf, seeing the students got troubles with oral communication, Tseng (2006) conducted a research on "The Effect of Task-Based Instruction on Primary School EFL Students" in Changhua-Taiwan in two months. The results of his study conclude that: (1) the students who learnt with TBLT performed four skills better than students who learnt with traditional teacher-led method; (2) the primary school students positively viewed the use of TBLT in their class. Similarly, to investigate the effect of the TBLT on learners' oral interaction, Murad (2009)'s study showed that there is a great correlation between the students' attitudes towards English due to the interaction between the teaching procedure and subjects' gender.

In the same way as the above quoted researchers, finding the TBLT as an interesting method, Farahani (2009)'s study in which the purposes were to investigate the effects of TBLT on male and female learners and the speaking proficiency differences between male and female learners concluded that the degree of progression between intermediate and advanced English learners of the same gender under task-based approach varied significantly. In addition, Ismail and Meryem (2009) carried out a

study to explore the effects of task-based group activities on students' collaborative behaviors in EFL speaking classes. Their study confirmed that there are different influences of task-based activities and topic-based activities on students and TBLT promotes collaboration among students.

Although there are many studies on task-based language teaching as quoted above, there is no related work on the impact of task-based language teaching on the non-major EFL students' oral performance at University. For this reason, the present study intends to examine the impact of TBLT in the teaching of English to Congolese students whose English is not their major.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Pedagogical setting

The present research was carried out in four months from December 2016 to March 2017 at Marien Ngouabi University (Teacher Training College) in the Republic of Congo.

2.2. Participants

This study had a total of 210 subjects. That is, 2 teachers of English and 208 non-English-major undergraduate students from Marien Ngouabi University enrolled at Ecole Normale Supérieure in the first year of Mathematics (L1MPC¹) and Biology (L1SVT²).

2.3. Instruments

The present study was a quasi-experimental research based on quantitative data gathered from administering a spoken English pre-test and post-test. The data were collected from non-English-major students during normal class time sessions at Marien Ngouabi University.

2.3.1. English speaking test

Prior to the experimentation, the two classes involved in this study set for an oral test as a pre-test. The purpose was to see whether the teaching strategies used by these selected teachers were suitable to enhance learners' verbal communication.

Yet again, after the experiment which was concerned with the use of Task-based approach to the teaching of English to non-English major students in a francophone

¹ L1MPC (1^{ère} année de Licence Maths-Physique et Chimie) means First year undergraduate students of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry

² L1SVT (1^{ère} année de Licence Science de la Vie et de la Terre) means First year undergraduate students of Biology

country, the same students were once more evaluated with another oral test (Posttest). This latter aimed at assessing the value or the impact of task-based approach on learners' language communicative performances.

2.3.1.1. The speaking test procedure

Throughout the test, there were two assessors and two candidates in the exam room. Both assessors evaluated the candidate and filled in both parts of the "Oral Production Evaluation Form". The assessor who had the role of **Examiner-Rater** (*Evaluator 1*) was sitting on the side and was silent. He listened, observed, took notes, and rated each candidate's performance on the spot, using the "Oral Production Evaluation Form".

The assessor who had the role of **Examiner-Interlocutor** was the one who sat facing the two candidates and who conducted the test by interacting with them. He rated candidates when they had left the exam room. So, besides being the Examiner, he also had the role of *Evaluator 2*.

Assessors were changing roles frequently as Examiner-Rater (*Evaluator 1*) and Examiner-Interlocutor (*Evaluator 2*) when they had conducted the test with 3-4 pairs of candidates. However, the frequency of role changing was up to them. The test's duration was about 15 to 20 minutes by a couple of candidates.

2.3.1.2. Interlocutor frame for speaking test

In order to ensure that all students are treated fairly in the Oral Tests and undergo the same test-taking experience and to reduce the variation in the talk of interlocutors, an Interlocutor Frame has been introduced for the present research. In essence, an interlocutor frame spells out exactly what the interlocutor should say from the moment the candidates enter the room till the moment they depart. The purpose of these interlocutor frames was to minimize the differences between the talk of interlocutors and result in a fairer test.

2.4. Data collection procedure

In order to carry out this research which is an experimental one, three steps were followed: the pre-test, the experimental stage, and the post-test. For reaching the valid and reliable results, prior to the three-above-mentioned steps, we pilot-tested our English speaking test. The purpose of that pilot-test was to standardize tests for pre-test and post-test of the research.

2.4.1. *Pre-test*

In December 2021, after one month of classroom observation, we organized a pre-test to our subjects. Thanks to the results of that pre-test, our sample population was divided into two groups which are control group (97 students) and experimental group (111 students).

2.4.2. *Experimental process*

Once the sample population was divided into two groups as said above in the pre-test section, during three months (from December 2021 to February 2022) a task-based teaching approach in the experimental group was implemented.

Three types of tasks were concerned; (1) *Role-plays* which were classroom activities in which students took the roles of different participants in given situations and acted out what might typically happen in a given situation. For example, to practice how to express complaints and apologies in the target language, students were role-played situations in which a customer in a shop returns a faulty article to a salesperson.

(2) *Simulations* which were classroom activities in which students reproduced or simulated real situations and are often involved in dramatization and group discussion. In this task type, learners were given roles in a situation and instructions to follow. For example a doctor-patient discussion over a disease diagnostic. Participants later discuss their actions, feelings, and what happened.

And, (3) *Problem-solving*; here, simple tasks, often involving word puzzles or simple drawings were used to stimulate pair work and oral discussion among small groups of learners in the classroom.

2.4.3. *Posttest*

After the three-month experimental implementation in the class chosen as the experimental group (L1SVT), the whole sample population, that is, the control and the experimental groups took part in the posttest on March 16th, 2022.

The purpose of this posttest was to see whether there is a correlation between task-based language teaching and learners' language communicative performance through a comparative analysis between Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) performed by the experimental group and Drill-Based Language Teaching (DBLT) conducted in the control group.

2.5. *Data analysis procedures*

To find out the statistical analysis result the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24) was used. All data were collected by pre and post-tests. At first,

descriptive statistics of data for pre-test and post-test was done and means of experimental and control group and standard deviation of them compared. At the second stage, to find out the significant difference, the means independent sample T-test was run. Accordingly, the scale significant difference is determined. At the final stage of data analysis a paired samples T-test was carried out for measuring the extent of development in the experimental group.

3. Major findings and discussion

This section focuses on the results of the present study, and then the discussion of findings.

3.1. The impacts of the TBLT on the students' oral performance

With regard to our first research question, this section aims at highlighting results related to the impact of TBLT on learners' verbal communication.

3.1.1. Learners' oral performance before the treatment

In order to find homogenous learners at the beginning of the study, a pre-test consisting of an oral test was administered to the subjects. The descriptive statistics of pre-treatment test appeared in the following table.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	111	24.5833	12.97461	2.64843
Control	97	26.8750	10.60481	2.16470

Table n°1: Descriptive statistics of learners' oral performance before the treatment

As shown in the above table, the mean of scores in the experimental group was **24.58** whereas in the control group it was **25.87**. As seen in this table, there was no significant difference between control and experimental groups. That is to say, they (the two groups) were at the same level of performance before the experimentation. Since there was no difference in the means of learners' oral performance, an independent sample T-test was run to know whether there was significant difference between scores of the two groups.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	T-test for equality of	T-test for equality of means			
		Sig.	t.	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest Equal Variance assumed	.067	-.378	46	.707	-1.2917
Pretest Equal variance not assumed	.067	-.378	44.2	.708	1.2917

Table n°2: Independent sample t-test of pretest

As seen in the above tables, there was not so difference in means of two groups' oral performance in the pretest. According to the independent sample test, the significance in the Levene's Test for Equality of Variance is **.067**, much higher than **.05**, thus the two groups' variances in the pretest are equal.

Although the control group scored a little bit higher than the experimental group, the two-tailed significance for equal variance assumed and not assumed are respectively at **.707** and **.708** much higher than **.05** which indicates that the difference between the two groups in the pretest is not significant. That is to say, tables 1 and 2 reveal that control and experimental groups were in the same position before treatment.

3.1.2. Learners' oral performance after the treatment

As mentioned earlier, after the experiment, we administered a post-test to both groups; the control and the experimental groups. Three activities were concerned as shown beneath in table n°3

	CONTROL GROUP	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP
TASK COMPLETION	COMMENTS	COMMENTS
ACTIVITY 1 DIALOGUE/INTERVIEW 1-5	Responded appropriately to all questions including the most important content points in their answers.	Responded appropriately to all questions including the most important content points in their answers. Here most of them gave complete responses and included more information in their responses than was required by the question

		set.
ACTIVITY 2 ONE SIDED TALK 1-5	Responded appropriately to the questions but with great difficulties. Most of their responses were incoherent and irrelevant.	Responded appropriately to all questions including the most important content points in most of their answers, using the photos effectively.
ACTIVITY 3 MEDIATION 1-5	Responded appropriately to the first question of this activity; gave an irrelevant response to the second question. Had great difficulties forming the questions.	Responded appropriately to all questions including the most important content points in his answers, using the multimodal texts effectively. Had no problem forming accurate questions in this activity.
QUALITY OF PRODUCTION	COMMENTS	COMMENTS
Pronunciation and intonation 1-5	Evidence of L1 accent but output generally intelligible.	No mispronunciations; some evidence of L1 accent. Output fully intelligible.
Lexical range and appropriateness of linguistic choices 1-5	Used a limited range of basic vocabulary with occasional morphological errors, e.g., <i>childrens</i> . Message got across without much difficulty in activity 1 but not very clearly in activity 2 and 3.	Used a wide range of vocabulary and expressions well, e.g., <i>...and probably I'm wrong, I don't know</i> . Lexis was appropriate to the situation and morphologically and semantically correct.
Grammatical accuracy 1-5	Many errors which display limited control of a few basic structures. Had problems in the use of prepositions, articles, subject -verb agreement, formation	Used simple structures correctly and were consistent in their performance. Very few errors were made, e.g. omissions, incorrect use of prepositions, e.g., <i>going for a School</i> , e.g. <i>in picture 9 are</i>

	<p>of tense, e.g., <i>in the school, are have lessons, they have a lessons, e.g., who are the page, e.g., how much the book, e.g., I like read some books.</i> A few attempts to self-correct but were not always successful, e.g., <i>and I have and they have the eh lessons.</i></p>	<p><i>four people, in nine children are four which did not in any way impede communication.</i></p>
Fluency 1-5	<p>Their output was characterized by frequent hesitations and long pauses which tire the listener.</p>	<p>The candidates were fluent, seldom paused.</p>
Use of communication strategies 1-5	<p>Had difficulty in overcoming gaps in communication or facilitating the flow of conversation through the use of appropriate communication strategies. Could not always overcome difficulties even after clarifications had been given.</p>	<p>Member of experimental group were able to ask for clarification and to self-correct.</p>
Cohesion & coherence 1-5	<p>Speech was mainly incoherent, especially in activities 2 and 3, and not cohesively linked, e.g., <i>eh eh....doing are in the school in all pictures in page nine ...and I have and they have the eh... lessons but in two pictures we they are a festival.</i></p>	<p>Their outputs were coherent and sentences were cohesively linked with simple connectors.</p>

Table n°3: Students' overall performances in the post-test

1=	2=	Partly	3=	Moderately	4= Satisfactory	5=	Fully
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From this table n°3, we realize that Control group students had difficulties responding or did not respond at all to most of the questions related to activities 2 and 3. They had great difficulty forming questions in activity 3; they managed to form some questions which were incomprehensible. In general, the control group's students lacked fluency, hesitated frequently and their outputs were characterized by frequent long pauses, reformulations/repetitions and very few instances of self-correction. Many times, their speeches were incoherent and consisted of a string of unconnected words. They made basic mistakes in grammar and syntax (incorrect use or overuse of articles, omissions of prepositions, lack of subject verb agreement, wrong use of subject etc.). Their vocabulary was limited and basic and morphological errors were frequent.

As regards in the experimental group, knowing that some students had difficulties responding to all the questions asked, they therefore formed accurate questions (activity 3) with ease. They were fluent, seldom hesitated, able to ask for clarifications and self-corrected successfully when necessary. They used a wide range of vocabulary appropriately and their errors in terms of grammar and syntax were extremely few and did not in any way impede intelligibility.

In order to compare the two means in the post-test as we did in the pre-test, the descriptive statistics and independent sample T-test was used for finding out the results of the post-test after treatment. The following tables show the results.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	111	41.37	8.63	1.76
Control	97	27.04	10.54	2.15

Table n°4: Descriptive statistics of post-test oral performance achievement

Referring to this table, it appears that there was a great variance between experimental and control groups after the treatment. As the table shows, the mean of the control group is **27.04** whereas that of the experimental group is **41.37**. In addition, there was a great difference between the mean of the experimental and control groups in post-test.

To find out the significant difference between two groups, independent sample T-test was used. The following table shows the results.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	T-test for equality of	T-test for equality of means			
		Sig.	t.	DF	Sig, (2- Mean
Post-test Equal Variance assumed		.348	-	46	.00 14.33
Post-test Equal variance not		.348	-4.2	44.18	.00 -14.33

Table n°5: Independent samples t-test of post-test scores

As seen in this table, the difference between means is so high (**14.33**). According to the independent sample test, the two-tailed significance for equal variance assumed and not assumed are at **.00** which is inferior to **.05**. This indicates that the difference between the two groups in the post-test is very significant.

3.1.3. Comparison of the experimental group's learners' oral performance between the pre-test and the post-test

To find out the rate of succeeding and developing of the experimental group, paired sample T-test was used and the following table shows the results. In other words, gained means of the experimental group's learners in pre-test and post-test were compared according to paired samples T-test.

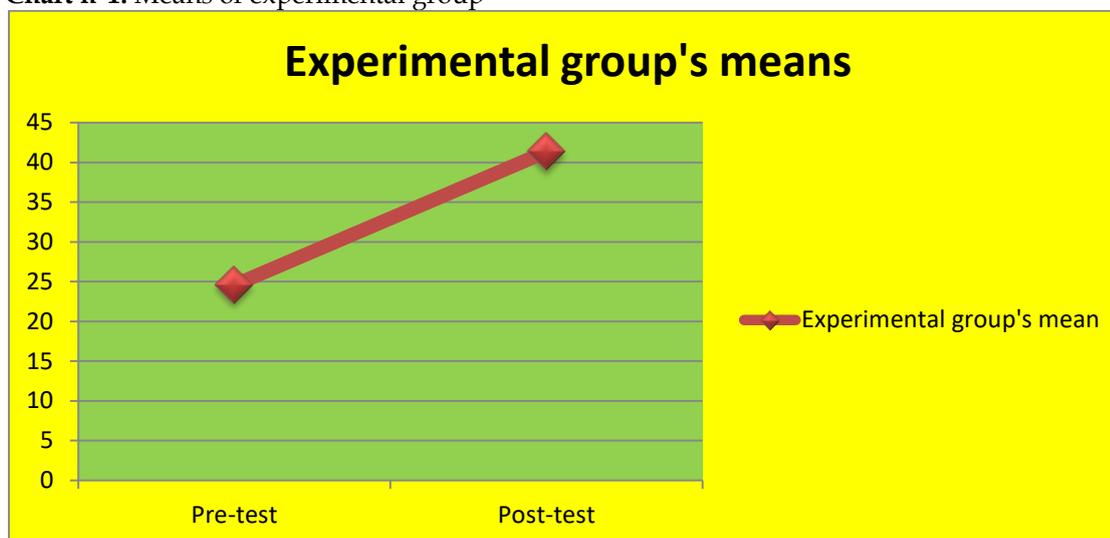
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	Paired sample T-test			
	t.	DF	Sig, (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Pre and Post-tests Equal Variance assumed of the experimental group	-3.84	46	.001	15.7907

Table n°6: Paired sample T-test of the experimental group

As shown in the above table, the means' difference of the experimental group in the pre and post-tests is **15.79**. The two-tailed significance for equal variance assumed is **.001**. It is lower than **.05**. Therefore, such difference between performances in pre-test and post-test is statistically significant at **P<.05**.

Stated differently, the following chart related to experimental group's means comparison illustrates better the means' difference of the experimental group between the pre-test and the post-test scores.

Chart n°1: Means of experimental group



Accordingly, this chart shows that in the pre-test the experimental group scored mean was **24.58**. Thanks to the implementation of the TBLT, learners of that group improved their performances and their mean was valued at **41.37** at the post-test.

3.2. Discussion

In order to check the hypotheses and answer to the research questions of the present study, means difference between experimental and control group was measured. At the beginning of the study, both groups were at the same level of performance and there was no significant difference between them as shown in **tables n°1 and 2**. But in post-test, after treatment, the mean of the experimental group improved.

The results of the present paper points out that the task-based learning was an appropriate method employed to improve students' oral interaction in class. The students' role changed from being interrogated to the interrogator. They were able to ask for help to overcome the difficulties being faced and finally to express the ideas, comments about the question. TBLT improved students' communication in English by giving them opportunities to practice the language in classes. Consequently, their mean's score in the post-test has significantly improved as in **table n°6** where the means' difference of the experimental group in the pre-test and that in the post-test is **15.79**.

According to the current study, there is statistically significant difference between two means of the learners' scores due to task based language teaching on experimental group. The results can be explained by the fact that task-based language teaching develops oral performance of the learners based on the obtained scores of the post-test as shown in table n°3 which is about learners' performance

after the experiment.

The experimental group of the study has developed great oral performance in post-test. The difference between means of pre-test and post-test shows that the learners have had significant difference. This means that task-based language teaching promotes learning and increases their motivation toward learning. The learners in task based language teaching have a vast variety of situations require intensive exposure to language and unlimited interaction with peers who become language users. Furthermore, in task-based language teaching, they enable to improve communicative skills and to practice all language components in real life situation for achieving their goals and needs.

According to obtained results of paired sample T-tests from experimental group before and after treatment, it can be concluded that task-based language teaching has had a great effect on the oral performance of the learners. And all gained scores in the study showed ($p < 0.05$). The experimental group had scored **14.33** higher than the control group in the mean of the post-test. In other words, the experimental group not only has had development rather than the control group, but it has also had an inner development.

The results of the present study, contrary of those of Rahimpoor (2008), Nunan (2004), Skehan (2003), Willis & Willis(2001) who criticized task-based language teaching and by arguing that TBLT does not help learners develop their accuracy, have shown that learners of the experimental group performed oral activities significantly by expressing themselves with appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension simultaneously.

The findings of this paper confirm those of Shabani's and Ghasemi's (2014) which concluded that task-based language teaching has an effect on learners' performances. Moreover, the findings of this research is in line with (Richard & Rodgers, 2001; Ducker, 2012; Janagam, Sureh & Nagarathinam, 2011) which describe task-based language teaching as a vehicle for promoting authentic language and skills for use in real life situation spontaneously.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to see whether the use of TBLT has a significant impact on students' oral communication performances. To investigate the problem, a quasi-experimental study was used in which, there were a control group and an experimental group. Three task-based activities were concerned namely the role-play, the simulation, and the problem-solving. The subjects involved in were 208 first year undergraduate students non-English major enrolled in Mathematics and Biology respectively at Ecole Normale Supérieure of Marien Ngouabi University. As a recall, one has to know that in the Republic of Congo, learners seldom learn the

English language in the real life situation. It is only taught at school as any subject, not really used as a medium of communication. But the results of this research have shown that the use of task-based language teaching in classes gives learners the opportunity to be exposed to English and gave them a chance to practice language by using different activities in classroom's contexts. In this way, learners received much information and they experienced more interactions in English and became much familiar with foreign culture and language.

Again, the present findings illustrate that task-based language teaching is an active methodology which enables the teacher to activate the related schema of the learners by raising and engaging their minds. This view toward task-based learning theoretically and practically matches with Krashen's (1981, 1985, 1996) SLA view toward language learning which is proved in this study. In his view, toward language learning, all the learners should understand language and they should have related schema for moving from known to unknown parts of language.

So, it can be concluded that there was significant difference between control and experimental groups after treatment. Thanks to TBLT, experimental group's students became fluent, seldom hesitated, able to ask for clarifications and self-corrected successfully when necessary. They used a wide range of vocabulary appropriately and their errors in terms of grammar and syntax were extremely few and did not, in any way, block the understanding of the examiner. They achieved higher scores in English speaking test after the treatment. This means that task-based language teaching has positive influence on the oral performance of the students than conventional teaching which was based on drills.

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