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Scientific Report of Action Research in Developing English Speaking Skills of Intermediate Level Learners

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Abstract: ***When one was asked about competence in other languages it would certainly sound odd to be questioned "How many languages do you write?" A question such as "How many languages can you understand (or read)?" makes more sense, but usual question is "How many languages do you speak?" Speaking is the main skill by which a language acquired. These action research aims to develop speaking skills of intermediate level learners, who cannot catch up in speaking English with their peers during extra lessons. Based on interviews carried out to get initial data on the speaking skills, it was found out that the students had problems in speaking due to low listening skills and poor comprehension which in turn made the learners felt unconfident to speak. To help the learners, task-based learning was adapted through an action research in nine (three week) additional classes. Five learners participated in this study. The data were taken from the results of the pre-test to post-test, interview, and observations. The findings show that the use of task-based learning can help learners improve their speaking skills of four indicators assessed: listening skill, vocabulary, grammar and comprehension.***

Keywords: Speaking skill improving, task-based learning, turn-taking, information-gap, role-play, storytelling, simulation, drama.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning English is very difficult for students in a country where it is a foreign language. English language is not spoken all the time. Language speaking environment do not experience that language practice environment. Though it is an English class, teachers are bound to use their native language for the learners understanding. Take into consideration: listening and speaking go together. Whatever a learner listens he/she speaks. Moreover, because speech almost always involves interaction with at least one other speaker, multiple demands are in place at the same time: monitoring and understanding the other speaker(s), thinking about one's own contribution, producing that contribution, monitoring its effect, and so on (H.D.Brown, 2007).

It was decided to conduct this study, because the researcher noticed some learners of her extra classes for intermediate level are not active in speaking activities, in spite of the fact that their grammar and vocabulary let them speak fluently. Considering all problems that make the learners are not easy to speak, the researcher is intended to conduct a study during nine additional lessons to improve students' speaking skills using task-based learning. The Report describes some effective ways of improving English speaking which were used during the research.

II. METHODS OF IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS

To be able to speak foreign languages, the students should not only understand the knowledge of the language but also have the skills to use the knowledge (Bygate, 2009). The linguistic knowledge encompasses structure, meaning, and use through four types of knowledge: phonological, grammatical, lexical, and discourse (Burn, 2016). To employ all the knowledge and skills in speaking, the learners need to be trained with various communication activities such as turn-taking, information-gap, role play, simulation, storytelling, and drama.

Turn-taking activity helps the learners to learn how to negotiate control of a conversation. It is a rule that manage conversation how participant change when the turn is given. The learners ask simple questions and give a minimal response. The mini responses are usually predictable of ten idiomatic phrases that participants use to identify understanding, agreement, doubt, and other responses to what another speaker is saying. It is necessary for the learners to construct simple sentences, use the target expressions and vocabulary they need when speaking.

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Information-gap activity is based on the principle that there are gaps in real-life communication in which people do not share the same information (Goh, 2007). This activity can be carried out in the classroom to fulfill the need of the students to listen and bridge the gaps in an interaction. The students use the language to exchange some information and get the meaning across.

Role-play is a "complete range of communication technologies to develop language fluency, to promote student interaction during the class, to increase students' motivation, and share responsibilities between teacher-student" (Kusnierek, 2018). The findings of a study conducted by Krebt (2017) show that there is a significant improvement in the speaking skill of the experimental group of learners using role-play.

Storytelling is used as an effective teaching tool in a language classes. The students will be able to experience meaningful learning in which they convey ideas, do some reflection on the dialogues used, work together in groups and construct new knowledge of what they have learnt (Alterio, 2008).

Simulation is an activity where students imitate a situation, in this kind of activity they have to use appropriate words, phrases. This activity trains listening skills as well.

Drama is one of the speaking activities that can be conducted and contributes to the emotional quality of the foreign language lesson. It helps to reduce speaking anxiety promotes positive feelings toward the learning experience. Drama helps the learners create authentic interaction in learning language (Sweeney, Preedeekul & Kunyot, 2017). Drama can integrate the four skills in addition to providing the platform for the learners to actively use and practice the target language with each other.

III. IMPLEMENTING TASK-BASED LEARNING

The core of task-based learning is a learning experiment in which the students practice the language they have learned by completing tasks. The complete task-based implementation follows certain phases: pre-task, during the task, and language focus (D.Willis & Willis, 2007).

The first phase is the pre-task, which is for the teacher to provide the learners with the language they need. The teacher introduces the topic and provides instructions on the task. The teacher has brainstorming the vocabulary that the learners have learnt and will be used for completing the task. The teacher activates the students' linguistic resources to prepare them for the task cycle. It is important to remind the learners to speak only English from the beginning of the phase since it will become their habit which finally helps them to develop their speaking skills.

The second phase is task-cycle. The learners enlarge their participation in the main task in group and pairs. The learners may use a variety of communication strategies to complete the task, for example, they use negotiation skills to understand the character of a picture (Thompson & Millington, 2012). The learners use their existing language knowledge to complete the tasks. It is possible for the learners to complete the task by carrying out other activities, for instance, practicing dialogues, role-play, turn-taking, and gap-information in pairs and storytelling, and drama in a group. They can exchange information and practice some interactional strategies through role-play and simulation. The students may do negotiation of meaning during turn-taking. The teacher assists if necessary and comments on the task and activities.

The task cycle is followed by language focus. The teacher draws the learners' attention to the correct use of English. The learners should be reminded that accuracy and restructuring also have significance. The teacher provides feedback on form or word meaning from context and allows the learners to repeat some speaking activities or to create a speaking performance as an output. The students are given a chance to reflect on their learning by commenting on their findings of the task, repeated activities and the grammar error are considered during the task repetition.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Five learners, who successfully passed the period of grammar-oriented study period, but their speaking performance is much worse in comparison with their group mates, are enrolled in this study. They are: Grade 10 (three of them) and Grade 7 (two of them) students of a secondary school in Chirchik. The learners participated three weeks of planned extra lessons for forty-eight weeks. Based on the results of an interview and observations to get the first data, it showed that the learners had problems in speaking due to their low listening skills and lack of confidence. In phase 1, the learners were introduced topics and reminded of the language expression and vocabulary they needed to use to complete the tasks. They listened to a short dialogue. The researcher participated as the teacher in this study did some brainstorming.

In phase 2, the students sat in group. They started speaking through various activities from practicing simple dialogues, turn-taking, gap-information, interview, discussion and short role-play at the first until the ninth meeting. The learners carried out storytelling, simulation and drama at the last two meetings.

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In phase 3, the learners reported their activities and were given feedback on form. They evaluated their learning and repeated some speaking activities using appropriate grammar, and vocabulary.

To maximize the results of students' speaking improvement, the researcher adopts a classroom action research through one cycle. The cycle consists of four steps namely planning, action, observation, and reflection.

V. FINDINGS

The pre-test results show that leaners' speaking skill is considered low because the listening is the lowest, compared to other indicators. Researcher found out low comprehension and listening is the main reason that prevents her students from speaking confidently. While the extra lessons, these students performed good enough in grammar and vocabulary for their level.

The post-test shows that the score of indicators of speaking is in the range of 71-80, in which they are considered as in a good level of speaking. The highest score is still grammar 80, followed by vocabulary and comprehension 75, and listening 70.

VI. DISCUSSION

The students seem to increase their confidence as they carry out the speaking activities step by step from practicing simple dialogue until performing a mini drama at the end of the research. The learners were trained to be aware and to get used of applying appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and get used to listening materials.

The learners were not confident at beginning but then they enjoyed the turn-taking activity in pairs, filling gap-information, while listening. One way to encourage learners to begin to participate is to help them build up a stock of minimal responses that they can use in different types of exchanges (Marriam Bashir; Muhammad Azeem, 2016). Variety of topics used for conducting role-play may help the students improve their vocabulary (Krebt,2017).

The grammar of learner was not low but their accuracy demanded improvement, because they could not use the memorized grammar rules. Therefore, the researcher decided to provide the students with speaking activities that challenge the students to evaluate their speaking particularly on the use of grammar.

VII. CONCLUSION

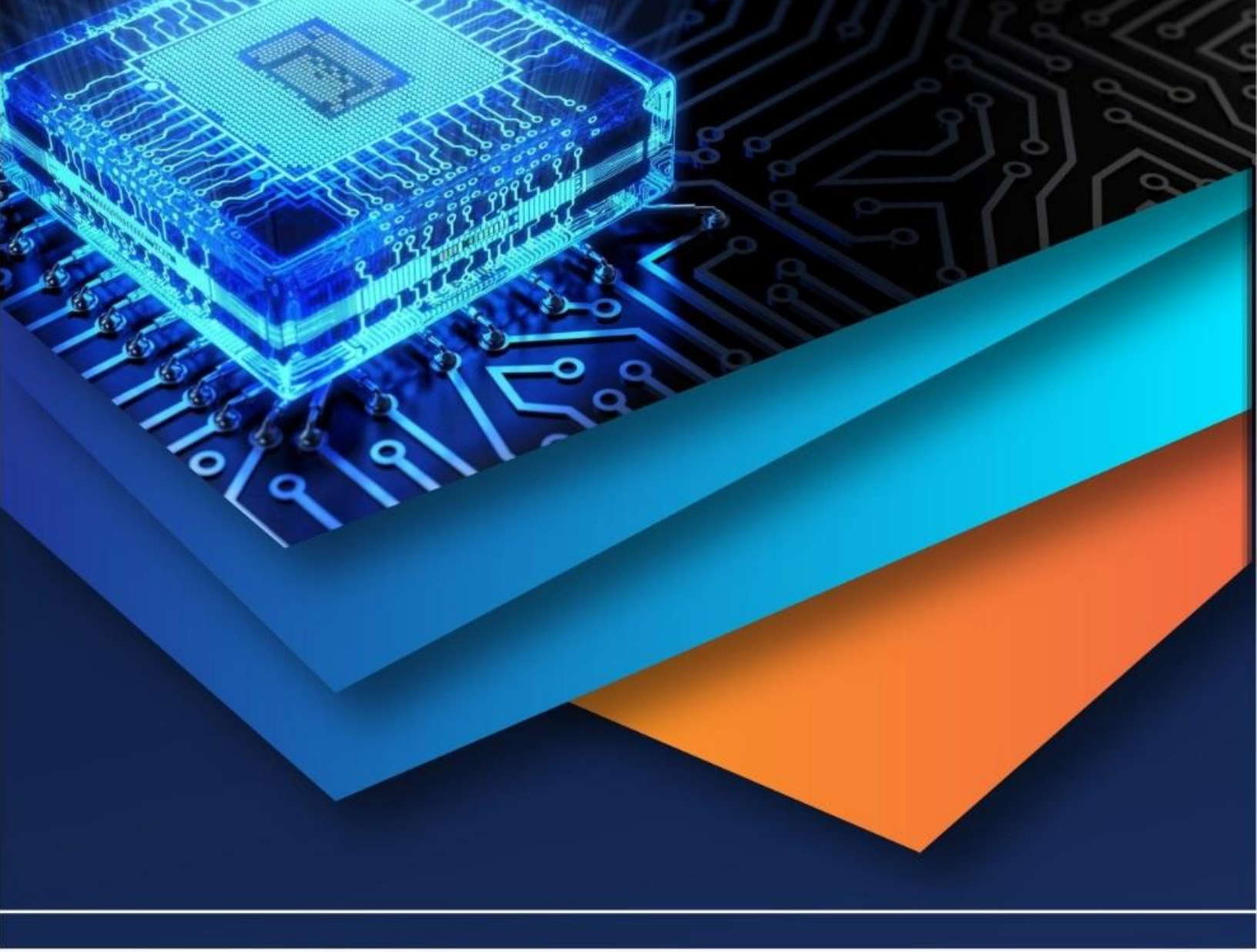
In conclusion, this study aims to improve learners' speaking skills through task-based learning. The results of pre-testing and post-testing show development on students' score after the use task-based learning.

The improvement of the students' scores indicates that learners' speaking skills increase. This fact is supported by the students' response to the use of the chosen method of learning. They said that undergoing tasks through various activities in pairs and group works facilitate them to speak better English. They can practice simple dialogues, turn-taking interview, discussion, short role-play, simulation, and mini-drama. The most important is that they can evaluate their learning. Various learning experiences motivate the learners to improve their speaking skills in the future.

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