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The Effects of Task-based Language Learning on English Speaking Ability of Grade 6 Students

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ABSTRACT

This experimental investigation aimed: 1) to compare the students' speaking ability after using task-based language learning; and 2) to investigate students' satisfaction after using task-based language learning. The participants were 52 grade 6 students at Anubarnsurin School who were selected by simple random sampling technique. The research instruments were task-based language learning, lesson plans, achievement tests, and questionnaires. The statistics used to analyze the collected data were percentage, mean, standard deviation, and dependent sample t-tests. The findings were as follows: 1) the students' post-test mean score was higher than the pre-test mean score with statistically significant difference at .05 level; and 2) the overall students' satisfaction towards task-based language learning was at the very satisfied level.

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Introduction

In present times, English is the most commonly used language among foreign language speakers. All over the world, speaking English immediately opens up opportunities. Being able to communicate with foreign clients and business partners will provide you with a more challenging position in your career. Therefore, English is very much important in our daily lives. It is necessary in each and every field. Since English is the international and the most spoken language everywhere, we cannot avoid or ignore learning it.

In Thailand, English has played an important role in the daily lives of Thai people for many years due to its influence on education, careers and economics. Having English skills encourages learners to communicate with foreigners comfortably, understand differences in culture and hold positive attitudes towards using English (Genc, Bada, 2005 cited in Sae-Ong, 2010: 1). As Thailand participates in ASEAN community, to understand each other we must communicate the same language. The official language of ASEAN is English; so we can say that English is important for ASEAN community. Bailey, Savage (1994) emphasize that a necessary basic skill of communication is speaking. Speaking is the most important language skill because the speaking skill is concerned with all these purposes such as expressing feelings, sensations, ideas, and beliefs. This skill is so important that we do many of our actions through it (Hasan, 2014). For Thai students, English speaking is deemed to be difficult since English is not their native language (Khamkhien, 2010). The Ministry of Education in Thailand (2002) points out that Thai students have studied English for many years but they cannot speak English in real situation effectively. This indicates that Thai students have a problem about using English, especially in speaking skill. As a teacher, the researcher, who has been teaching English for 3 years has also found that most students have a variety of learning problems and using English. The students cannot use English in conversation or correspondence with others effectively, especially when speaking. The students in grade 6, who are the researcher's students, have high scores in writing tests but they still cannot speak English effectively. Results of speaking tests in the second semester of grade 6 students of academic year 2014 at Anubarnsurin School showed that only 27% of the students obtain more than 60% (Anubarnsurin School Report, 2014). There are many methods which can solve the problems of teaching English speaking. To contribute the ways to solve the problems of teaching English speaking, task-based language learning would be a good alternative approach. Task-based language learning has been increasingly modified in recent years and has been recommended as a way forward in communicative language teaching, including speaking (Ellis. 2003). Task-based instruction can be defined as an approach in which communicative and meaningful tasks play the central role in language learning and in which the process of using language in communication especially speaking, carries more important than mere production of correct language forms (Willis, 1996).

Many researchers such as Murad (2009), Sae-ong (2010), Thongpubal (2010), Phisuthankgoon (2012), Promruang (2012), Thanghun (2012), Hayati (2013) have done research using task-based language learning to improve speaking ability. The results showed that task-based learning activities can enhance students' English speaking ability and promote attitudes towards learning English. To solve the problem effectively, this study aims at investigating the effectiveness of the task-based language learning whether it is able to solve the problem of students'

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learning achievement on speaking for grade 6 learners at Anubarnsurin School. The researcher selects the task-based language learning because she believes that it will be able to solve the problem of students in speaking.

Objective of the study

    1. To compare the students' speaking ability before and after using task-based language learning.

    2. To investigate students' satisfaction towards learning spoken English by using task-based language learning.

Methodology

    Population and Samples

    The population of this investigation were 475 grade 6 students at Anubarnsurin School who enrolled Communicative English (E16202) in the second semester of academic year 2015 of Muang District, Surin Province under the Surin Primary Education Service Area Office 1 and the samples were 52 grade 6 students, selected by simple random sampling technique from 8 classrooms (not including the "king class", a class of exclusively high-achieving students) of grade 6 students.

    Research Instruments

    The instruments for this research included task-based language learning, lesson plans, English speaking pre-tests and post-tests and satisfaction interview questionnaires as follows:

    1. Task-based Language learning: Task-based language learning was created in lesson plans which based on The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008). The class followed a textbook "Say Hello 6" that contained articles from authentic texts and published materials. Five units were provided under the situations below, and each situation was consisted of the contents as follows:

        Unit 1 My Story:

            - Telling friends about yourself

            - Asking friends about themselves

        Unit 2 Going Shopping:

            - Asking friends to go shopping

            - Buying some food

        Unit 3 Good Health:

            - Talking about good habits

            - Talking about how to have good health

        Unit 4 Animals:

            - Comparing animals

            - Describing animals

        Unit 5 The Beautiful World:

            - Talking about how important water and plants are

            - Talking about how to save the environment

According to Willis (1996), Kayi (2006) types of task-based language learning and speaking activities were provided in each unit as follows:

Unit 1: listing, sharing personal experience and information-gap

Unit 2: listing, comparing and role play

Unit 3: listing and role-play

Unit 4: ordering, sorting and picture describing

Unit 5: brainstorming and role play

2. Task-based Language Learning Lesson Plans: Lesson plans were then designed in detail by reviewing research and theories of task-based language learning and speaking. This study was carried out in Communicative English (E16202) which offers to grade 6 learners. The students attended the course three times a week for 25 periods. The researcher followed the frameworks of task-based instruction of Willis (1996) in each lesson plan. Willis (1996) divided the frameworks of task-based instruction in three phases as follows:

2.1 Pre-Task

The teacher introduced the topic and situation and gave clear instructions on what and how the students were going to do at the task stage and teacher also presented useful words or phrases but did not pre-teach any new structures. The teacher helped the students understand the objectives of the task. This stage was also considered the preparatory stage for the task-cycle stage.

2.2 Task-Cycle

This stage included task, planning, and reports.

Task: To carry out the task, students worked in pairs or groups using whatever knowledge of language they could recall to negotiate the task. The teacher facilitated the task, monitored and encouraged the students but avoided correcting any mistakes or errors of form at this stage.

Planning: The students prepared oral or written reports to tell the class what the outcome was. During the time of presentation, the teacher took notes of mistakes and corrected their language. The emphasis was on clarity, organization, and accuracy as appropriate for a public presentation.

Report: The teacher asked some pairs to report briefly to the whole class so every student could compare the findings, or other pairs or groups would have comments. The teacher also gave comments, but gave no public correction.

2.3 Language Focus

Language analysis: The teacher set some language-focused activities based on the text the students have read or heard. The students analyzed the language with a focus on form.

Language practice: Based on the language analysis work, the teacher conducted some practice activities for the students to practice the language.

3. English Speaking Ability Pretest and posttest: The guidelines for designing the test included the Primary English curriculum of grade 6 and contents from Say Hello 6: Units 1-5. The activities, assessment and evaluation in speaking competence were analyzed based on concepts adapted Clark (1986). He classifies 4 categories to score the learner' speaking ability as follows: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency. The speaking test was five interview questions. One student spent 5 minutes to answer all interview questions face to face with three teachers; one English Thai teacher and two native speakers who were the oral English communication raters of Anubarnsurin School.

4. Learners' Satisfaction Questionnaire: The questionnaire was the data collection instrument which used to find students' satisfaction towards task-based language learning. The satisfaction questionnaire included 10 items. The questionnaire was divided into three main parts: participants' personal information, directions and the 5 rating scale questionnaire which had 5 alternatives as follows:

Extremely Satisfied	= completely agree with the statement
Very Satisfied	= mostly agree with the statement
Moderately Satisfied	= quite agree with the statement
Partially Satisfied	= agree with some of the statement
Unsatisfied	= disagree with the statement

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure took place during orientation to post-test about 8 weeks from end of December 2015 to end of February 2016. The scores were collected, compared and analyzed. The data was collected as the following steps:

1 Orientation: this step started in the first week. The teacher explained the curriculum, the purpose, the process of study, the assessment, and the evaluation of English speaking abilities to the students.

2 Pre-test: this step also operated in the first week. The procedure of pre-test was face to face interview between each student and three raters. All raters rated the students' abilities based on the rubric. During the interview, each student answers 5 questions. The interviews were about 5 minutes. The student scores were collected as data to study students' speaking abilities.

3 Teaching: this step operated in the second week. The researcher taught from the first part of January 2016 to the middle of February 2016 in the second semester of the academic year 2015. The students attended Communicative English Course three times a week.

4 Post-test: this step operated in the last week. The procedure was face to face interview between each student and three raters. All raters rated the students' abilities based on the rubric. During the interview, each student answers 5 questions. The interviews were about 5 minutes. The student scores were collected as data to study students' speaking abilities.

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Data Analysis and Statistical Procedure

The obtained data was analyzed as follows:

1. The scores on speaking ability tests counting from pre-test to post-test were converted into mean scores ($\overline{X}$) and Standard Deviation (S.D.).

2. The research compared the scores obtained from the testers in their pre-test and post-test.

3. The t-test for dependent sample was employed to compare and check the mean scores of both pre-test and post-test.

4. Frequency, percentage and content analysis were used to analyze the students' satisfaction.

Statistics Used to Analyze the Data

Statistics used for analysis the data were percentage, mean, standard deviation, and dependent sample t-tests.

Results

The findings of this study are shown in the following order: Table 1) Research Question One, the comparison between students' speaking ability before and after using task-based language learning; Table 2) Research Question Two, the overall satisfaction of grade 6 students towards task-based language learning. The results are based on the quantitative data from pre-test and post-test which rated by three raters, and the questionnaires which answered by the students .

Table 1 Comparison of the Difference between Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores

Learning Achievement	n	Total Scores	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	df	t-test
Pre-test	52	1789.00	34.40	8.10		
					51	42.41*
Post-test	52	3074.33	59.12	11.50		

*significant difference at .05

This table reports the results of the analysis of the quantitative data from the speaking ability test used in this investigation to compare students' speaking ability before and after using task-based language learning. As shown in Table 1, students who learned English after using task-based language learning had higher English speaking ability on post-test mean scores ($\overline{X}$ = 59.12) than in pre-test mean scores ($\overline{X}$ = 34.40) at .05 level of statistically significant difference.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Satisfaction Questionnaire Items (n=52)

Statements	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Level of Satisfaction
1. Task-based language learning helps practice English speaking skill in class.	4.75	0.44	Extremely Satisfied
2. Task-based language learning makes the lesson more interesting.	4.23	0.43	Very Satisfied
3. Task-based language learning helps me be confident to speak English appropriately.	4.46	0.58	Very Satisfied
4. Task-based language learning helps me understand and learn more vocabulary.	4.42	0.50	Very Satisfied
5. Task-based language learning is useful for practicing English speaking in daily life.	4.69	0.46	Extremely Satisfied
6. Task-based language learning helps me enjoy learning English.	4.38	0.49	Very Satisfied
7. Task-based language learning is suitable and useful for my level.	4.35	0.48	Very Satisfied
8 Task-based language learning is based on the student-centered instructional approach.	4.48	0.54	Very Satisfied
9. Task-based language learning helps me understand English structures more.	4.29	0.46	Very Satisfied
10. Task-based language learning encourages me to speak more English.	4.60	0.53	Extremely Satisfied
Total	**4.46**	**0.49**	**Very Satisfied**

Table 2 reports the overall satisfaction of the students toward English speaking ability through task-based language learning hence the samples were asked to complete the 10 items of five rating scale satisfaction questionnaires ranging from 'extremely satisfied' (5) to 'unsatisfied' (1). As shown in Table 2, it indicates that the students' overall satisfaction toward learning spoken English by using task-based language learning was at "Very Satisfied" ($\bar{X}$ = 4.46, S.D. = 0.49). When analyzing each item, it was found that the highest mean score was no. 1 "Task-based language learning helps practice English speaking skill in class." ($\bar{X}$ = 4.75, S.D. = 0.44). The mean score for the second was no. 5 "Task-based language learning is useful for practicing English speaking in daily life." ($\bar{X}$ = 4.69, S.D. = 0.46). Finally, the third mean score was no. 10 "Task-based language learning encourages me to speak more English." ($\bar{X}$ = 4.60, S.D. = 0.53).

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Discussion

The researcher discusses the findings of using task-based language learning to improve English speaking ability of grade 6 students as follows:

1. Comparison of the Students' English Speaking Ability between Post-test and Pre-test Mean Scores

The result revealed that the students' English speaking ability post-test mean score was higher than the pre-test mean score with a statistically significant difference at .05 level. The types of task-based language learning and speaking activities: listing, sharing personal experience, information-gap, comparing, role play, ordering and sorting, picture describing and brainstorming may have encouraged and motivated students to speak and express their ideas and feelings to their friends in the classroom as the idea proposed by Willis (1996), Kayi (2006). Moreover, three phases of task-based instruction: pre-task, task cycle and language focus also may have contributed the students to produce the language appropriately and then speak out confidently and independently as the idea proposed by Willis (1996). The result confirmed the hypothesis in Chapter 1 which is according to past research works as the research of Sae-ong (2010) who examined the use of task-based learning to develop learners' English speaking ability of 40 learners from Mattayomsuksa 4 of Satit Silpakorn School, Nakornpathom. The study was found that the English speaking ability of Mattayomsuksa 4 learners was significantly higher after using task-based learning at the .05 level. The participants had significantly higher mean scores on the post-test than pre task-based learning. Thanghun (2012) studied using of task-based learning to develop English speaking ability of 30 students of Prathom 6 at Paiboonprachasan School. The study was found that the English speaking of Prathom 6 students was significant higher after using task-based learning activities at .05 levels. The task-based learning activities supported students' English learning and speaking ability in the classroom. In addition, Murad (2009) investigated the effect of task-based language teaching program for developing the speaking skill of Palestinian secondary students and their attitudes toward English. The students were in eleventh grade and task-based language teaching performed for three months. The finding was the task-based language teaching program increased significantly speaking skill of the students of experimental group. The students also have positive effect toward English.

2. Students' Satisfaction toward Learning English Speaking through Task-based Language Learning

The result presented that overall students' satisfaction toward learning English speaking through task-based language learning was at "Very Satisfied" level. This result may from having been provided appropriate task-based language learning in the classroom. Students felt very satisfied with learning English speaking through task-based language learning and task-based language learning also have conducted the students have positive effect toward English because the steps and process of task-based language teaching and learning assisted to create delectation, pleasure and confidence to students' English speaking. This finding is supported by Murad (2009) who investigated the effect of task-based language teaching program for developing the speaking skill of Palestinian secondary students and their attitudes toward English. The students were in eleventh grade and task-based language teaching performed for three months. The finding was the task-based language teaching program increased significantly speaking skill of the students of experimental group. The students also have positive effect toward English.

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Furthermore, task-based language learning helped student practice English speaking skill in class and encouraged students to understand more vocabularies and speak more English confidently and appropriately, and also rendered the lesson more interesting and joyful. For all these reasons, students who learned English speaking through task-based language learning had higher speaking ability and were very satisfied in the students' satisfaction level.

Pedagogical Implications

As a result of the findings from the study, the researcher made helpful pedagogical implications as follows:

1. Task-based language learning encourages English speaking ability of students. Therefore, teachers and related person in learning management should use task-based language learning toward English speaking for grade six students to develop English speaking ability of students in other contexts, or classes.

2. Teachers should realize the learners' fundamental knowledge before designing tasks which are suitable for the learners' proficiency level.

3. Teachers need to introduced and explained task-based language learning to students clearly for reaching the learning goal. Make sure that the students understand the way to perform the tasks and activities. According to the task-based approach, allow students to be free when they use their language, do not put them under the pressure. The teacher is a facilitator to stimulate students to speak English as much as possible.

Suggestions for Future Research

Some suggestions for future research are presented as follows:

1. Future research should study the development of English speaking ability by using task-based language learning with high school students because they might be able to do more difficult tasks. Moreover in high school courses, students can apply more varied experiences when sharing opinions.

2. Future research should compare task-based language learning with other approaches or techniques in teaching English speaking.

3. Future research should study using task-based language learning with other skills such as reading, writing and listening.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the use of task-based language learning in grade six students to improve English speaking ability of the students. The samples of this study were 52 grade 6 students at Anubarnsurin School who enrolled Communicative English Course (E16202) in the second semester of academic year 2015 of Muang District, Surin Province under the Surin Primary Education Service Area Office 1. The samples were selected by simple random sampling using classroom assess sampling technique from 8 classrooms (not including king class) of Grade 6 students. The 25 periods of experiment found that task-based language developed the English speaking ability of grade 6 students and makes students have positive attitudes toward English learning.

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