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ARTÍCULO CIENTÍFICO:

**“TASK-BASED APPROACH WITH INFORMATION GAP ACTIVITIES TO
ENHANCE ORACY SKILLS”**

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Task-based approach with information gap activities to enhance oracy skills

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of a task-based learning (TBL) approach incorporating information gap activities on the oracy skills of fourth-semester students in a National and Foreign Languages Pedagogy program at a university in Los Ríos province. A mixed-methods design was employed, collecting quantitative data through pre- and post-tests using the Cambridge B1 Speaking Rubric, and qualitative data via a perception survey and classroom observations. The results demonstrated significant improvements in students' speaking performance, with the most notable gains in grammar and vocabulary, followed by discourse management and pronunciation. The perception survey revealed that students felt increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and higher levels of motivation and collaborative engagement, recognizing the direct relevance of these activities to their future teaching careers. These findings highlighted information gap activities as an effective, low-cost, and adaptable strategy for enhancing oral communication in higher education. Future research should explore the long-term retention of these gains and compare this approach with other communicative methodologies.

Keywords: Task-based learning, information gap activities, oracy skills, speaking confidence, higher education

Enfoque basado en tareas con actividades de brecha de información para mejorar las habilidades orales

RESUMEN


Este estudio examinó el impacto de un enfoque de aprendizaje basado en tareas que incorpora actividades de brecha de información en las habilidades orales de estudiantes de cuarto semestre de un programa de Pedagogía de Lenguas Nacionales y Extranjeras en una universidad de la provincia de Los Ríos. Se empleó un diseño de métodos mixtos, recopilando datos cuantitativos mediante pruebas previas y posteriores utilizando la Rúbrica de Expresión Oral Cambridge B1, y datos cualitativos a través de una encuesta de percepción y observaciones de aula. Los resultados demostraron mejoras significativas en el desempeño oral de los estudiantes, con los avances más notorios en gramática y vocabulario, seguidos por la gestión del discurso y la pronunciación. La encuesta de percepción reveló que los estudiantes experimentaron mayor confianza, reducción de la ansiedad y mayores niveles de motivación y compromiso colaborativo, reconociendo la relevancia directa de estas actividades para su futura carrera docente. Estos hallazgos destacan las actividades de brecha de información como una estrategia efectiva, de bajo costo y adaptable para potenciar la comunicación oral en la educación superior. Investigaciones futuras deberían explorar la retención a largo plazo de estos logros y comparar este enfoque con otras metodologías comunicativas.

Palabras Clave: Aprendizaje basado en tareas, actividades de brecha de información, habilidades orales, confianza al hablar, educación superior

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INTRODUCTION

The development of oral communication skills in English is a fundamental component for language learners, especially in academic contexts where future professionals are required to express ideas clearly and with confidence. However, many students experience speaking anxiety and a lack of self-confidence, which limits their participation and performance in oral interactions (Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021). These challenges directly affect students' ability to engage in meaningful communication, which is essential for their academic and professional success. This issue is particularly critical in teacher education programs, where graduates must not only achieve language proficiency but also demonstrate it effectively as a model for future students.

Oracy, defined as the ability to express oneself fluently, coherently, and appropriately in spoken language, plays a crucial role in higher education and in preparing competent professionals (Heron, 2019). Despite its importance, the skill of speaking is often less emphasized than other language skills, leaving learners with limited opportunities to practice oral communication in authentic contexts. This instructional gap is observed in an English language teacher preparation program at a university in the province of Los Ríos, where students frequently exhibit underdeveloped oracy skills that hinder their academic and professional readiness.

This research is framed within Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), an approach that promotes language acquisition through the completion of meaningful tasks that replicate real-world situations (Ellis, 2017). Within this framework, information gap activities are particularly effective for encouraging interaction, as they require learners to exchange information to achieve a common goal, thereby fostering negotiation of meaning and active participation (Ortiz-Neira, 2019). Previous studies have highlighted the positive effects of these activities on learners' oral performance; however, there remains a need to explore their impact in higher education settings, particularly in programs that prepare future English language educators. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of task-based learning through information gap activities on the oracy skills of fourth-semester students in a National and Foreign Languages Pedagogy program. The research is guided by the following questions: a) What is the impact of implementing task-based learning with information gap activities on the improvement of oracy skills among these students? b) What are the students' perceptions regarding the

use of information gap activities as a strategy for enhancing their speaking confidence in academic contexts?

Literature Review

Task-Based Learning: principles and classroom effects

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is fundamentally defined as an approach that organizes language learning around communicative tasks, which are activities that require learners to use language with a primary focus on meaning to achieve a non-linguistic outcome (Ellis, 2017). This approach is distinguished from traditional methods by its emphasis on engaging learners' natural abilities for incidental language acquisition through task performance rather than the pre-teaching of linguistic forms.

This perspective is reinforced by Sholeh et al. (2021), who characterize TBLT as a "strong form of Communicative Language Teaching" (p. 134) that positions the student as the central agent in the learning process. The core principle is that undertaking tasks drives second language acquisition in a manner that mirrors naturalistic language learning. The effectiveness of this approach is supported by classroom-based research. For instance, Calvert and Sheen (2014) provide empirical evidence that implementing TBLT can lead to increased student motivation and more active, authentic use of the target language for communication. However, these studies also concur that such positive outcomes are contingent upon careful task design and sequencing, as well as adequate teacher preparation to fulfill the role of a facilitator rather than a sole knowledge authority.

Information gap activities and speaking development

Information gap activities are a task type within Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) where learners possess different pieces of information and must interact to complete a task or solve a problem. By requiring students to exchange missing details, these tasks create a genuine communicative need, fostering negotiation of meaning and authentic interaction (Ellis, 2017). In this sense, information gap activities are not only structured speaking opportunities but also simulations of real communication, where understanding and clarity are essential to achieving a shared outcome.

Empirical studies highlight the positive effects of these activities on speaking development. For instance, Ortiz-Neira (2019) found that young EFL learners improved their oral fluency and interactional

confidence after practicing gap tasks. Similarly, Khamraeva and Berdieva (2023) reported that when such tasks are linked to meaningful or academic content, students are more likely to transfer the acquired oral practice to academic registers. However, the design and scaffolding of the activities are crucial. Nguyen (2021) observed that when tasks are poorly adapted to learners' levels or lack sufficient guidance, they may produce minimal uptake or even increase student anxiety.

Oracy, speaking anxiety and affective factors

Oracy can be defined as the ability to express oneself fluently, coherently, and appropriately in spoken interactions, a skill that is essential for both academic achievement and professional development (Heron, 2019). In higher education, oracy is increasingly recognized as central to student success and disciplinary participation (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2006).

Speaking anxiety, on the other hand, refers to the feeling of nervousness, worry, or fear that arises when learners are required to speak in a second language, particularly in front of others. It is closely associated with affective variables such as fear of negative evaluation and low self-efficacy, which can limit learners' willingness to communicate and reduce their classroom participation (Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021). The strategies learners employ to manage this anxiety are also critical for their speaking performance (Wael et al., 2018; Tahang et al., 2019).

Recent studies also highlight institutional and teacher-related dimensions of speaking anxiety. Assessment-driven curricula, limited opportunities for oral practice, and even teachers' own linguistic insecurity can intensify anxiety, while supportive classroom environments and strategic teacher interventions can mitigate it (Daftari & Tavit, 2017). In this context, (Osboe et al. 2007) emphasize that structured communicative tasks within a supportive environment can help learners reduce anxiety and gradually build confidence in speaking.

Strategies for teaching speaking and practical classroom techniques

Strategies for teaching speaking can be understood as deliberate instructional approaches and techniques designed to help learners develop fluency, accuracy, and confidence in oral communication. These strategies often involve the use of planned communicative tasks, meaning-focused interaction, role plays, and controlled fluency practice, which create opportunities for learners to use language in purposeful ways (Putri, 2019).

Classroom-based research shows that interactive and learner-centered techniques such as pair work and information gap activities promote higher levels of student talk time and more balanced participation compared to teacher-centered lessons (Türkben, 2019; Wulandari, 2020). In addition, teacher professional development and reflection are highlighted as essential elements for success. Studies indicate that training programs which include task design and micro-teaching activities enhance teachers' ability to implement speaking strategies effectively in real classrooms (Calvert & Sheen, 2014; Tindall, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

This investigation adopted a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative components to comprehensively assess the development of speaking skills through task-based interventions. The quantitative dimension included pre and post test measurements of speaking performance, while the qualitative aspect gathered data on participants' perceptions and classroom behaviors through surveys and observations. The study was conducted within an applied research framework, aiming to address the practical challenge of enhancing oral proficiency among teacher training students.

Context and Participants

The study was carried out in a public university located in Los Ríos province, Ecuador. Participants consisted of 30 undergraduate students enrolled in their fourth semester of a language teaching program. The group comprised 23 female and 7 male students ranging in age from 19 to 25 years. The study aimed to evaluate whether participants' speaking proficiency corresponded to the B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Their involvement in the research was voluntary, and they represented diverse academic backgrounds within the language teaching discipline.

Data Collection Instruments

Three primary instruments were employed for data gathering. The first instrument involved video recordings of participants' speaking performance, serving as both pre and post tests. Students recorded one-minute responses to five prompt questions concerning their academic experiences and professional development. These recordings were evaluated using the Cambridge B1 Speaking Rubric, which assessed grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, and pronunciation. The second instrument

consisted of an eight item perception survey using a five point Likert scale, administered after the intervention period to measure changes in confidence, anxiety, and attitudes toward speaking activities. The third instrument involved structured classroom observations conducted during ten intervention sessions, documenting student engagement and interaction patterns during information gap activities.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were collected through two primary instruments. First, video recordings of speaking performances served as pre-test and post-test measures. These recordings were evaluated using the Cambridge B1 Speaking Rubric, which generated numerical scores across three domains: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, and pronunciation. These scores were statistically analyzed using SPSS version 2025 software. The analysis included descriptive statistics to determine mean scores and standard deviations, along with inferential statistics to identify significant differences between pre-test and post-test results.

Second, a perception survey featuring eight Likert-scale items was administered following the intervention period. The survey data were analyzed using percentage distribution calculations for each item. These results were summarized in tabular format and underwent descriptive analysis to identify patterns in participants' perceptions of their speaking confidence, anxiety levels, and attitudes toward the implemented activities. The quantitative analysis of both instruments provided measurable evidence of changes in speaking proficiency and student perceptions. Qualitative data were gathered through structured classroom observations conducted during ten intervention sessions. These observations documented student engagement, interaction patterns, and implementation of information gap activities, providing contextual insights into the learning process.

Ethical Considerations

The research implemented rigorous ethical safeguards to protect participant rights and ensure data confidentiality. Prior to commencement, all participants received detailed informed consent forms explaining the study's purpose, voluntary nature of participation, and anonymity guarantees. Written consent was obtained from each participant. Additionally, formal permissions were secured from relevant course instructors to conduct research during regular class sessions. All data were stored securely with access restricted to the research team, and information was used exclusively for academic

purposes. The study design ensured alignment with regular curriculum objectives, eliminating any potential academic risks to participants.

Innovation

The implementation lasted five weeks, during which students participated in two sessions per week, each lasting approximately 40 minutes. The intervention was designed around information gap activities, which were integrated into various speaking tasks to promote meaningful interaction and the development of oracy skills. The process began with a pre-test to assess students' existing speaking abilities, using a task based on the topic Talking About My Experience as a Language Teaching Student. Before the intervention began, the researcher observed the students' interaction patterns, linguistic skills, and familiarity with vocabulary related to the topics covered. Based on these insights, the activities were carefully designed to encourage communication, vocabulary use, and discourse management across multiple topics.

Table 1. Intervention Sessions and Topics

Session	Intervention Topic
1	Pre-test: <i>Talking About My Experience as a Language Teaching Student</i>
2	Consonants
3	Vowels
4	Teaching Strategies and Methodological Techniques
5	Bingo (Consonants and Vocabulary)
6	Post Method Predicament
7	Role Play Blended Model
8	My Words in Sound
9	Teaching Barriers and Facilitating Factors
10	Post-test: <i>Talking About My Experience as a Language Teaching Student</i>

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To evaluate the impact of the task-based approach with information gap activities on oracy skills, quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were collected from 30 students. A paired-samples t-test was conducted in SPSS to compare mean scores. This quantitative analysis was supplemented by qualitative data from a perception survey and structured classroom observations, providing a holistic understanding

of the intervention's effects.

RQ1. How impactful is using task-based information gap activities on students' speaking skill development?

The intervention had a substantial positive impact on students' speaking skills, as measured by the Cambridge B1 rubric. As shown in Table 2, the mean pre-test score ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.76$) was significantly lower than the post-test score ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.46$), indicating marked improvement in oracy performance.

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics from Participants

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-Test	3,2217	30	,76493	,13966
	Post-Test	4,2000	30	,46750	,08535

Note: N= sample; Sdt= standard

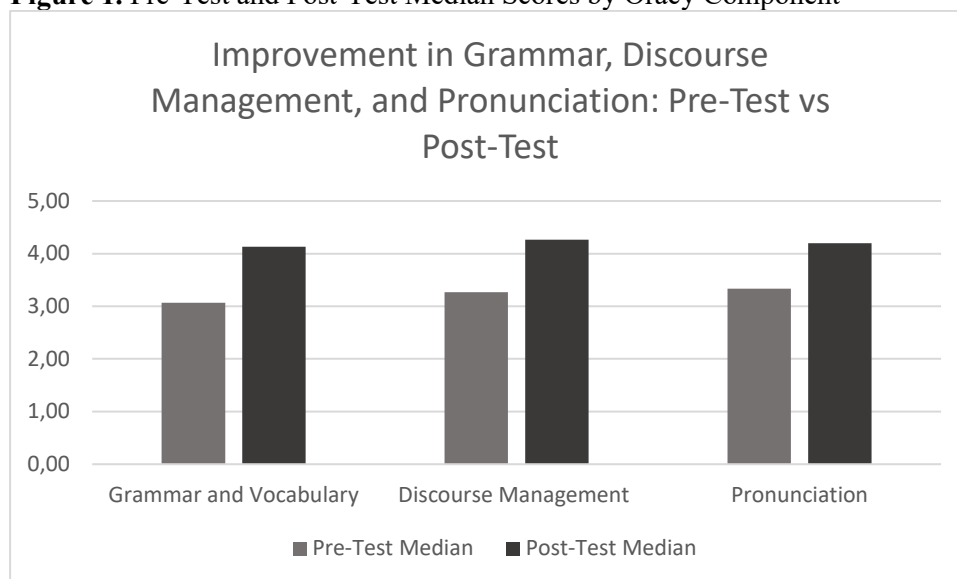
Table 3 shows a strong, statistically significant positive correlation between pre- and post-test scores ($r = 0.792$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that students with lower initial proficiency improved proportionally, demonstrating the intervention's inclusivity.

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations of the Results from Participants

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair1	Pre-Test & Post-Test	30	,792	,000

Analysis of subskills revealed post-test median improvements across all three rubric components: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, and pronunciation. The most substantial gain was in grammar and vocabulary, suggesting the tasks effectively prompted learners to utilize a broader and more academic lexical repertoire in real-time.

Figure 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Median Scores by Oracy Component



Note: Gray bars represent pre-test median scores; black bars represent post-test median scores. Data are expressed in median values on a 1–5 scale.

These findings indicate that the task-based activities significantly enhanced oral proficiency. The improvement is attributable to the authentic communicative need inherent in information gap tasks, which required learners to negotiate meaning and produce sustained discourse. These results align with Namaziandost et al. (2019), who demonstrated that information-gap tasks significantly enhanced EFL learners' speaking fluency.

Nevertheless, while Namaziandost et al. (2019) primarily highlighted fluency gains, the present research also documented notable improvements in linguistic accuracy and discourse management. This broader impact suggests that information gap activities, within a coherent task-based framework, can foster more holistic language development. This observation is consistent with the principles of TBLT, which posit that meaningful task engagement can drive acquisition across multiple linguistic domains (Sholeh et al., 2021).

Beyond quantitative data, observations and reflective practice yielded deeper insights. A notable observation was the strong collaborative spirit that emerged. After an initial adaptation period, students grasped that communication was key to task completion. The classroom dynamics featured both negotiation moments and highly effective collaboration, indicating the activities fostered not only linguistic skills but also collaborative problem solving abilities.

From the instructor's perspective, the main challenge was ensuring students understood the purpose and

mechanics of the activities. This was addressed by integrating tasks into the academic curriculum, with topics aligned to concurrent coursework through faculty coordination. This contextualization helped students perceive the tasks' professional relevance. The resulting active English communication was an enriching indicator of target language engagement, underscoring the importance of strategic planning and curricular alignment.

Furthermore, indicators of positive transfer were evident. Students spontaneously reported reduced speaking anxiety and increased confidence, highlighting the affective benefits of collaborative practice. This perceived comfort is a crucial step toward autonomous language use.

RQ2. What are the perceptions of language students regarding the use of task-based information gap activities as a tool for improving their speaking skills?

Students' perceptions, gathered via a post-intervention survey, were overwhelmingly positive, indicating the methodology was motivating, collaborative, and professionally relevant. Results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' Perceptions after the Implementation of Task-Based Information Gap Activities (N = 30)

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel confident speaking English in class.	10%	40%	47%	3%	0%
2. I feel nervous when I have to speak English in front of others.	17%	47%	33%	3%	0%
3. I can express my ideas clearly in English during educational activities.	3%	43%	37%	17%	0%
4. I use words related to the classroom when I speak English.	13%	47%	37%	3%	0%
5. I enjoy participating in speaking activities with classmates.	10%	60%	23%	7%	0%
6. I feel more comfortable speaking English when I work in pairs or groups.	36%	40%	17%	7%	0%
7. I believe that speaking English is essential for my future as a teacher.	87%	10%	3%	0%	0%
8. I am excited to participate in this speaking project using tasks and gap activities.	43%	47%	10%	0%	0%

Note: Percentages represent the proportion of participants selecting each option on a five point Likert scale, where 1= Strongly

Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The survey revealed strong positivity: 76% felt more comfortable speaking in pairs or groups (Item 6), and 90% expressed excitement about the tasks (Item 8). Notably, 97% recognized the essential role of English for their teaching futures (Item 7). These results are consistent with Diep Anh (2023), who also reported that information gap activities significantly enhanced university students' speaking performance and engagement. Similarly, Türkben (2019) linked interactive tasks to more active participation.

A nuanced finding concerns confidence. While comfort in collaborative settings was high, a combined 64% still reported nervousness when speaking in front of others (Item 2), and only 50% felt confident in class (Item 1). This contrasts with the high levels of enjoyment (70% for Item 5) and perceived utility. This pattern suggested the activities successfully created a supportive environment that motivated participation within small groups, but building confidence for wider forums may require additional strategies. This aligns with Khamraeva and Berdieva (2023), who observed that confidence gains from such tasks can be more moderate among lower-proficiency learners.

Overall, the perception data and observational insights depict a highly effective intervention. The activities created an interactive environment students found motivating and relevant. The significant quantitative gains demonstrate this engagement translated into tangible linguistic improvement. The findings strongly supported integrating structured, communicative tasks like information gap activities into language instruction to enhance both linguistic competence and learners' collaborative skills and motivation, reinforcing their value in teacher preparation programs (Nguyen, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that the strategic implementation of task based information gap activities transcends mere fluency practice, serving as a powerful pedagogical tool in language teacher education. The fundamental insight gleaned from the data is that creating a genuine communicative need, contextualized within students' academic and professional domains, acts as a primary catalyst for oral development. This necessity not only motivates students to speak but also intrinsically drives them to seek out, acquire, and accurately employ a more sophisticated and subject specific lexicon, while simultaneously becoming more conscious of their pronunciation. The desire to embody the role of a

competent future educator provides a powerful layer of motivation, transforming the language learning exercise into professional identity formation.

The unique contribution of this research lay in its curricular integration strategy. Unlike previous applications that often utilize decontextualized or preference based topics, this study uniquely wove information gap activities directly into the fabric of the students' concurrent disciplinary coursework. This approach ensured that the development of oracy skills was not an isolated activity but was intrinsically linked to the content knowledge they were required to master as teaching professionals. Furthermore, it addresses a significant gap by focusing on university level teacher trainees, a demographic less represented in the existing literature compared to school aged learners.

Based on the evidence collected, it is this researcher's stance that this approach is highly recommended for English language teacher training programs. This recommendation is substantiated by key findings, most notably the students' own recognition of its professional relevance. As evidenced by the perception survey, a combined 60% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they actively used classroom related vocabulary when speaking English (Item 4). This indicates a conscious transfer and application of professional language, a critical competency for educators that was directly fostered by the contextually grounded tasks.

Nonetheless, this investigation also surfaces a critical unanswered question: how can the confidence built in collaborative, small group settings be effectively transferred to the high stakes scenario of solo teaching or presenting before a full class? The persistence of speaking anxiety in front of an audience, as reflected in the survey, points to a distinct psychological hurdle that small group interaction alone may not overcome.

Therefore, the logical next step for future research is twofold. First, it would be highly valuable to investigate the comparative effectiveness of information gap activities alongside other methodological approaches, such as presentation training or micro teaching simulations, specifically targeting the development of whole class teaching confidence. Second, a longitudinal study tracking the long term retention of acquired vocabulary and the actual transfer of these communicative strategies into the teaching practice of graduates would provide the ultimate measure of this methodology's impact on teacher preparedness. By exploring these avenues, subsequent research can build upon these findings to

further refine pedagogical strategies that holistically prepare confident and linguistically proficient language educators.

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