

**The Effectiveness of Task-Based Learning
Approach (TBL) on Developing
Communication Skills in English for the
Saudi EFL Preparatory Year Students**

By:

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of using task-based learning on developing communication skills in English for the first year university students

The researcher employed a sample of (100) EFL learners studying at a university in the Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia. The researcher chose two classes: one class was as an experimental group consisting of (50) students and the second one was as a control group consisting of (50) students. The traditional method was used in teaching the control group, while the task-based learning approach was used with the experimental one in the first term of the academic year (2019-2020).

The researcher used three tools: an interview to find out the level of the students in communication skills, a test (pre & post-test), and an observation card to measure the communication skills of the students. The collected data were analyzed and treated statistically. T-test and the effect size equation were used to measure the effect size of task-based learning approach on the experimental group in each domain of the test.

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The findings of the study revealed that there were significant differences in learning communication skills in English between both groups: the experimental and the control, in favor of the experimental group due to using the task-based learning.

The study recommended the necessity of implementing task-based learning approach in teaching and learning English communication skills to get better learning outcomes in students' achievements. Also, the study concluded with recommendations for practice and future research concerning the effectiveness of using task-based learning approach on different English language skills and other university courses as well

Key words: Task-Based Learning Approach – Communication Skills

Introduction:

Language is the instrument of the human beings in communication and thinking, and transmitting thoughts to others. Learning a language requires time, willingness and effort to take risks. Learning a language needs practice, permanent exercise, and exposure. Memorizing great numbers of grammatical rules and vocabulary alone will not help too much if not used them in real life situations. That's why language teachers often ask their students to do tasks and communicate in class together following the principles of "task-based" learning." (Abeberese, 2011)

According to (Staton, 2012) the world we live in now has rapid change and progress. There is no doubt that the processes of teaching and learning students and preparing them to live and adapt in this society need to be developed and changed so that students can acquire different knowledge, skills, experiences and values.

(Mario, 2010) stated that professors must help students adapt to these rapid changes by giving them the opportunity to active learning, and to train students on how to be responsible for their own learning process, as well as on sensing and discovering different challenges and problems and how to deal with and solve them by themselves.

So, we must know the strengths and points that need to be improved and developed between students, and also we must respect their methods of thinking and find out their abilities and invest them in a good way by directing them to the methods that make them able to think effectively and able to create and innovate. (Abeberese, 2011)

As cited in (Sopacio & Bargas, 2016) people have many different languages all over the world. In any language, the communication skills are the same. Communication skills are defined as the exchange of

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thoughts, views and ideas with the intention of conveying information. The purpose of communication is to convey one's beliefs, ideas, thoughts or needs with clarity so as to reach a consensus or a mutually acceptable solution.

Communication skills are one of the elements of common skills that are very important between the students. Through their years in the classroom, students would have been exposed to different situations, in and outside of the university, where they have to use their communication skills, for example team work and class presentations. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate about the level of communication skills of the students. (Shabana, 2014)

Check (2013) defines communication as a complicated transactional process to share information and thoughts between the teacher and the learner. It is a dynamic process of sending and receiving message. The purpose of communication is to convey one's beliefs, ideas, thoughts or needs with clarity so as to reach a consensus or a mutually acceptable solution.

According to (Hans, 2014) the relationship between learning strategies and verbal classroom interactions is an important relationship and has a role in developing the scientific culture of learners. This process relies on the need for motivation to accomplish communicative tasks. (Mousa, 2018) stated that the teaching process is a communication process between the professor and the learner, in which the professor tries to provide students with skills and experiences using many educational methods and means.

Many approaches, which care of educational process, have arose and seek to develop university subjects, including a Task-Based learning approach. The Task-Based learning approach assists the professor in designing the

lesson and achieving the curriculum aims as it is highly efficient, and emphasizes self-learning, flexibility in application, and use it depending on the situation. And when the professor allows the students to participate in the educational process, or gives the students free time to work in educational tasks, this will increase the excitement of the students' motivation to learn. (Fadel, 2015)

Task-based learning offers the student an opportunity to do the task as they can. The focus of lesson activity is the task and the language is the instrument which the students use to complete the task. The task is an activity in which students use language to achieve a specific outcome. The task reflects situations from our life and learners focus on meaning. Making a phone call, booking a flight ticket, writing a letter, solving a problem, sharing ideas, giving instructions can all be considered as activities or tasks (Anjum, Kayani, & Jumani, 2019).

According to ((Rodriguez, 2010) Task-based learning is an approach where the planning of learning materials and teaching lessons are based on doing a task. A task refers to an activity where communication is necessary: for example; deciding decisions, solving a problem, designing or organizing a topic, or telling someone to do something. A task must involve the processing of information, and some kind of communication or interaction. In a task-based approach, learners learn by doing.

Rod (2018) stated that Task-Based Learning Approach aims to provide learners with a natural context for language use. Learners have abundant opportunity to interact the interaction facilitate language acquisition. Task-Based Learning Approach is a collaborative learning method. The teacher's role is only as a facilitator.

Anderson (2019) declared that Task-based learning gives the chance to the learners to reach the aim of the

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language in order to improve language proficiency with the teacher guidance. In task-based learning the learners place themselves in a real situation where communication skills are needed to accomplish the task. The language is used by the learner to do the tasks which are needed for a communication purpose in order to achieve aims.

Task-Based Learning is one of the ways of implementing a communicative language teaching. Task-based Learning (TBL) is an approach that has roots in the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, and it is teaching and learning English through real life tasks. In order to fully acquire language, it must have real meaning and used in natural contexts.

Tang, Chiou and Jarsaillon (2015) revealed that TBL is effective in enhancing fluency, and useful in vocabulary acquisition. The main advantages of task-based learning are that language is used for real communication, and that at the stage where the learners are preparing their task, they are forced to consider language form in general rather than concentrating on a single form. So, the aim of task-based learning is to lead from accuracy to fluency. (Moore, 2018)

Pilot Study:

In the light of the observation and experience of the researcher of the present study in the field of English language teaching:

1. The researcher observed the little attention attached to developing communication skills in some universities.
2. By reviewing the directives of the Ministry of Education in which students are trained in active learning, enabling students to acquire a set of learning strategies and giving them an opportunity to contribute to the educational process.

3. In addition, a number of studies, which were conducted in TEFL field for creating a motivating climate and using suitable strategies including Task-Based learning approach to develop learners' language skills.
4. The above findings confirmed that there was a problem in developing English communication skills for many of the students. The results revealed that students need to participate in the learning process to reach fluency, flexibility, originality or elaboration. The researcher noticed that the students were unable to generate or associate ideas in a well organized and coherent manner.

Statement of the Problem:

The problem of the study could be summarized in the following statement: the first-year university students lacked English communication skills. They are unable to reach fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. Thus, in an attempt to solve this problem, the present study proposed the Task-Based learning approach in a trial to develop the necessary communication skills for the students.

Research Questions:

This research study is guided by two research questions as follows:

1. What are the necessary English communication skills for the preparatory year students?
2. What is the effect of the Task-Based learning on developing the necessary communication skills for the students?

Purpose of the Study:

This study aims at:

1. Identifying the communication skills necessary for the first year university students.

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2. Designing a suggested framework based on using the Task-Based learning approach.
3. Measuring the effect of the suggested framework based on using the Task-Based learning approach on developing the first year university students' EFL skills.

Significance of the Study:

1. Drawing the attention of EFL specialists to use the Task-Based learning approach in order to use structured teaching strategies.
2. Improve the learning process and advance the development process in the field of teaching.
3. Drawing the attention of EFL specialists to use the Task-Based learning approach as a means of encouraging students reflect their authentic ideas and thoughts.
4. It broadens the professor's awareness to the student's English communication skills to provide them with suitable activities that help improve their performances.
5. Drawing the attention of EFL professors to the importance of students' participation in learning process.

Limitations of the Study:

Since it is beyond the limits of a single study to consider a wide range of factors, the present study was confined to:

1. A randomly assigned group of the first year university students
2. The communication skills necessary for the first year university students.
3. The Task-Based learning approach to develop communication skills.
4. Two units of English students' book.

Hypotheses of the Study:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the communication skills pre- and post administration of the test in favour of the post test mean score.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- and post tests in each communication skills in fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration in favour of the post- administration mean scores.
3. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-administration of the EFL communication skills test in favour of the experimental group.

Variables of the Study:

- ***Independent Variable:***

This refers to the treatment implemented with the experimental group in this study represented in a framework that is based on the Task-Based learning approach.

- ***Dependent Variable:***

This refers to the development in the experimental group's communication skills targeted by the treatment.

Definition of Terms:

Communication Skills:

Communication has also been defined as sharing and giving meaning occurring at the same time through symbolic interactions (Seiler & Beall, 2005).

"Communication skills have been defined as sharing and giving meaning occurring at the same time through symbolic interactions" (A.basheer keshta, 2016)

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"Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another, whether or not it elicits confidence" (Staton, 2011)

"Communication skills are defined as a person's ability to provide information that is easily understood by others" (Rafeek, (2017)

In the present study, communication skills are defined as "the information and thoughts you want to deliver in an understandable way even orally or written."

Task-Based Learning Approach:

Task-Based Learning (TBL) seems a possible option for the foreign language classroom nowadays in order to enable students to learn the language and, at the same time, acquire the skills they need to live in society nowadays. (Murat Hismanoglu, 2011)

In the present study, Task-Based Learning (TBL) is defined as "a approach that supports self-learning, which is based on a set of successive steps and procedures that are implemented in order to provide learners with a set of integrated skills and requires understanding and accomplishing specific tasks with a goal and meaning."

Research Design Overview

The present study followed the analytical descriptive method for reviewing the related literature and studies, and the quasi-experimental for conducting the experiment, collecting data, and analysing the results. The design used in this study was the non-equivalent group design. This design is identical to the pre- test / post-test control group / experimental group design in all aspects except that intact groups rather than randomly assigned ones are used.

Procedures of the Study:

1. Reviewing literature and previous studies related to communication skills and Task-Based learning approach.
2. Designing a framework based on using the Task-Based learning approach for developing the first year university students' communication skills.
3. Constructing a pre/post communication skills test for the first year university students and ensuring its validity and reliability.
4. Choosing a sample randomly of students and dividing it into an experimental and a control group.
5. Administrating the pre- communication skills test.
6. Implementing the proposed framework on the experimental group.
7. Administrating the post communication skills test.
8. Analysing the collected data statistically.
9. Interpreting results, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

Data Collection Methods:

The present study made use of the following instruments:

Interviews:

The researcher met some professors of English and asking them about the level of the students and how they communicate with each others or with professors. Through their answers the researcher knew that the students communicate difficulty.

List of Oral Communication Functions and Forms:

A-The aim of the list:

It is to identify the oral communication skills and functions that first year university students should obtain.

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B- The Sources of Constructing the List:

The researcher depended on different sources to construct the list. He explored books of oral communication and speaking skills. The researcher asked specialized teachers, instructors and professors who teach English about the main and sub-skills needed for oral communication skills among the first year university students.

C- Description of the List:

The list includes the main oral communication skills. The researcher prepared these necessary skills which are necessary to be used in daily life through different situations.

D- Validity of the List of Oral Communication Functions:

The researcher showed the list of oral communication functions to a number of referees of English professors, teachers, and education specialists in order to judge the suitability and importance of the tool through adding, deleting or correcting. The juries' responses revealed that all the functions are very important.

Observation card:

The observation card was used twice; it was used before applying the experiment to determine the level of the experimental group before applying the approach. The experimental group development in oral communication skills was the focus of the observation.

The researcher observed some of the first year university students while they are communicating to know how they are communicating with each others or with their professors. The researcher found that most of the students have a problem in EFL communication skills.

Test:

Tests are the most useful tool of educational research as a data collecting technique and they provide material for most experimental studies in education. The test was prepared by the researcher to measure the students' communication skills. It was used as a pre-test applied before the experiment and a post-test applied after the experiment.

The Aim of the Test:

The test aimed at measuring the effect of using task-based learning approach on developing the first year university students' oral communication skills in English language (expression, fluency, vocabulary, understanding and grammar).

The Sources of Constructing the Test:

The researcher depended on the previous studies and books in oral communication skills and on his experience as a teacher of English in constructing the test. Moreover, the researcher consulted the English education specialists in teaching English language.

The Items of the Test:

The test consisted of five (5) main questions related to the oral communication sub-skills. The items of the final version test were distributed into five (5) questions as follows:

- What would you say in the following situation?
- Discuss the following topics
- Finish the following sentences with words from the list
- Correct the underline words
- Choose the correct word between brackets

Results

The main purpose of the present study was to develop the most necessary communication skills for a sample of

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first year university students through the use of a proposed framework. So, before implementing the framework with those students, a communication skills test was pre-administered to both the control and the experimental groups of the study. Then, the t-test formula for independent two groups' samples was used to ensure that there was no statistically significant difference between mean scores of the two groups before the experiment, and that any development in the experimental group skills would be due to implementing the proposed framework with them.

The following formula Morad (2000) was employed :

$$"t" = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{\sqrt{\frac{(sd_1)^2 + (sd_2)^2}{(N - 1)}}$$

Where:

"t": the calculated value of the difference between mean scores.

M1: the mean scores of the experimental group students.

M2: the mean scores of the control group students.

Sd1: standard deviation of the experimental group.

Sd2: standard deviation of the control group.

N: Number of pairs of students.

The following table shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the control and the experimental groups on the pre-administration of the test in the communication skills.

Table 1 "t" Value of the Difference Between the Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups' students on the Pre-Administration of the test.

Group	Std. Deviation	Mean	NN	Calculated t- value	Tabulated T	Sig
Control	5.03065	26.8919	50	1.98	2.617	Non significant at 0.01
Experimental	5.71298	29.0270	50			

From table (1) the "t" calculated value (1.98) was lower than the tabled T value (2.617) with (72) degrees of freedom at the (0.01) level of significance. Thus, there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental group students and the control group students' mean scores on the pre-administrations of the communication skills test. This was an evidence that both groups were almost at the same level of communication skills before the experiment.

Table (2): "t" Value of the Difference between the Mean Scores of the Experimental students on the post- pre Administrations of the Test. The following table shows that there was statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and the experimental groups on the pre- test in communication skills.

Group	Std. Deviation	Mean	NN	Calculated t- value	Tabulated "T"	Sig	effect
Pre-test	2.581	29.027	50	81.73	2.70	Significant at 0.01	Large effect
Post-test	5.712	92.054	50				

The above table indicates the following:

The "t" calculated value (81.73) was significantly higher than the T tabled value (2.70) with (36) degrees of freedom at the (0.01) level of significance. Thus, there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental group students' mean scores on the pre and post communication skills test in favour of the post test.

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The mean score of the experimental group students on the communication skills test post administration (92.054) was higher than their mean score on the pre administration (29.027). Thus, a development of the overall communication skills of the experimental group students was proved, due to the proposed framework as illustrated in the above table. Thus, the first hypothesis of the study was verified.

Table (3): Differences between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- and post tests in each communication sub-skill.

Skill	Test	Mean	N	Deviation	Calculated t	Tabulated t	Sig
1- Communicative Expression	Pre	2.70	37	1.33	24.08	2.704	Significant at 0.01
	Post	7.56	37	0.64			
2-Fluency	Pre	2.05	37	1.10	32.84	2.704	Significant at 0.01
	Post	9.08	37	1.11			
3-Vocabulary	Pre	3.18	37	1.46	24.96	2.704	Significant at 0.01
	Post	8.94	37	0.66			
4- Understanding	Pre	2.32	37	1.20	28.06	2.704	Significant at 0.01
	Post	7.67	37	0.74			
5-Grammar	Pre	3.64	37	1.53	24.09	2.704	Significant at 0.01
	Post	9.75	37	0.59			
	Post	8.27	37	1.30			

From the above table, it is clear that the "t" calculated value of each of the communication sub skill. Respectively was significantly higher than the T tabled value (2.704) with (36) degrees of freedom at the (0.01) level of significance. Thus, there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental group students' mean scores of each communication skill on the pre \ post

administrations of the communication skills performance test in favour of the post administration of the test. Thus, the second hypothesis of the study was verified.

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Table (5.4): Differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and control group on the communication skills post-test.

Group	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Calculated t- value	Tabulated T	Sig
Control	5.129	25.729	37	70.253	2.617	Significant at 0.01
Experimental	2.581	92.054	37			

The above (5.4) table confirms the following:

It was proved that the experimental group students' mean score (92.054) was higher than the mean score of the control group students (25.729) on the post administration of the communication skills test. This is a highly significant difference which showed that the experimental group students attained remarkable higher scores than the control group students in the post-test. Therefore, development of the experimental group students' communication skills was due to the proposed framework.

The "t" calculated value (70.253) was significantly higher than the T tabled value (2.617) with (72) degrees of freedom at the (0.01) level of significance. Thus, there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control group students' mean scores on the post administration of the communication skills test in favour of the experimental group students as illustrated in the above table. Thus, the third hypothesis of the study was verified.

Results of the Study:

Based on the statistical analysis performed on the data, the following results were found:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the communication skills pre- and post tests in favour of the post test mean score.

2. There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group on the communication skills pre- and post tests in every skill in favour of the post- administration mean scores.
3. There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-administration of the EFL communication skills test in favour of the experimental group.
4. The proposed framework has a large effect size on developing the EFL communication skills of the experimental group students as a whole.
5. The targeted communication skills were developed at different rates.
6. The proposed framework had increased the experimental group students' using of the Task-Based learning used in communication skills.

In order to answer the first question of the present study, the researcher reviewed the literature, communication skills and provided a list of the necessary skills required for the first year university students to communicate easily. The skills were classified into four main skills as follows: a) Fluency, b) Flexibility, c) Originality and d) Elaboration.

In order to answer the second question, the researcher calculated the effect size of the suggested framework on developing the required communication skills. The effect size was statistically large. This clarifies that the suggested framework had a large effect size on developing communication skills using the Task-Based learning approach. Thus, the second question was answered.

Answering the study questions and verifying its hypotheses showed that the Task-Based learning approach had a large effect size on developing each of the skills required for the first year university students.

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Based on the findings of this study, results showed that implementing the task-based learning approach as a tool to improve students' communication skills has significant effects on the students' communication skills. The researcher used different techniques and strategies during the lessons; different activities, tasks, worksheets, songs, games, pictures, realia, photos, and music.

English language communication skills lessons were explained to students using different class organizations; individual work, pair-work and group work. This class organization created a lively, energetic, and positive learning atmosphere. These enjoyable activities affected positively and reduced the barriers of English language communication skill; shyness, hesitation, anxiety, worry and lack of knowledge.

It was also observed that the students gained great improvement in comprehension, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary; oral communication skills.

Discussion:

It can be claimed that after the implementation of the proposed framework, the experimental group students demonstrated tangible progress in overall communication skills. This progress might be ascribed to several aspects:

First, the Task-Based learning approach was used as a teaching approach. It is proved to be motivating and effective. Using the Task-Based learning approach helps students to think and communicate easily. So, it mimics the way their brains think. It is used for any thinking or learning task. The Task-Based learning approach helps students to link ideas and make connections between information they want to deliver. This helped them to better communication.

Through the Task-Based learning approach students generate ideas very quickly and are encouraged to explore different ways to think and communicate. Students can benefit greatly from the Task-Based learning approach because it is able to consume all the common skills found in creativity, flexibility, and organisation of ideas. Through sessions, students followed many steps. They try to think with each other then write what they want to say after that say what they want.

Second, the design of the framework led to providing the students with continuous evaluation and giving them an immediate feedback, which helped them greatly in integrating and developing their communication skills. The instructor's positive feedback encourages students to communicate easily with each other.

Noticeably, the feedback students received throughout each session was based on the integration of self-correction, interactive peer correction, and supplementary instructor intervention. It is worth mentioning that this feedback focus on communication skills and increase their self-confidence and motivation at the same time.

In displaying the results of the study, the researcher presented an account of the development of experiment group students communication skills due to the use of the Task-Based learning approach. This is shown in the difference between the pre and post administrations mean scores of the experimental group students. The difference between the students' mean scores in the pre and post administrations of the test was statistically significant. This is because the students were aware of the importance of the Task-Based learning approach in communication skills. The research has shown positive results as the Task-Based learning approach brought about significant improvement in enhancing the communication skills of the students.

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In addition, using the Task-Based learning approach motivated learners to get involved in the learning process and express themselves freely without hesitation. Thus, they felt free while generating their ideas and came up with unique and unexpected thoughts that were completely different from one student to another and they are able to deliver these thoughts.

The study findings can be beneficial for other researcher in the future research as well, especially those who deal with difficulties pertaining to EFL communication skills or eager to use Task-Based learning approach for developing the performance of the students in EFL.

To sum up, the findings of the present study were positive. The hypotheses of the study were accepted through the statistical analysis of results, and all its questions were answered. The proposed framework has a large effect size and effectiveness on developing the most necessary communication skills for first year university students. It has a large effect size on communication skills.

Recommendations:

Based on the results and discussion of the present study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Communication skills instruction should be given more attention in Saudi EFL classes. More time and effort should be exerted to develop these vital skills.
2. The proposed framework in the present study can be adopted for teaching communication skills to students at other educational stages taking into consideration students' ages, needs, interests, and linguistic proficiency levels.
3. Professors should help students using the Task-Based approach that plays an important role in communication

skills and can assist students in developing knowledge about communication skills.

4. The Task-Based learning approach training should be incorporated into the syllabus of EFL communication skills teaching so as to raise students' awareness of factors in communication skills and to promote their autonomy in learning communication skills and in lifelong learning as well.
5. Students should be encouraged to be active instead of waiting passively for professor's instructions. The professor's role is to facilitate promoting students' awareness of the Task-Based learning approach and to increase the appropriate application of the Task-Based learning approach in communication skills.
6. Supportive feedback and motivational factors should be used with students throughout sessions' phases not only to assist the students identify their weakness communication skills and ways of overcoming them, but also to enhance their strengths. If this was earnestly accomplished, the students' motivation, initiation, autonomy, and involvement will increase.

Conclusion:

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions can be made:

1. The present study provided an evidence for the effectiveness of the proposed framework on developing the most necessary communication skills for first year university students.
2. The communication skills targeted developed at different rates of large effect sizes of the proposed framework.
3. The Task-Based learning approach allowed to generate, organise and connect many ideas so the framework

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proved to be effective in developing communication skills.

4. The results of the study provided evidence for the large effect of the proposed framework on increasing the experimental group students' use of the Task-Based learning approach in communication skills.
5. Designing the proposed framework in a cycle form, led to providing the students with continuous evaluation and giving them an immediate feedback, which helped them greatly in developing their communication skills.
6. Using the Task-Based learning approach helped students develop levels of communication.

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