

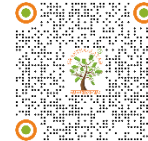
Original Article

## ENHANCING ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING: EVIDENCE FROM MARGINALIZED GRADUATE STUDENTS

Roopa Ramadevi K <sup>1\*</sup>, Ranjit Kumar Pati <sup>1</sup>, Visweswara Rao Chenamallu <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, GIET University Gunupur, Odisha, India

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, M.S.N. Degree and P.G College, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, India



### ABSTRACT

English communication skills are essential for academic and career advancement, yet students from marginalized communities often struggle due to limited exposure and traditional grammar-focused teaching methods. This study investigates the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in enhancing English communication among 30 graduate students from the Dombo community. Over an eight-week intervention, learners engaged in role plays, group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and presentations. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and student feedback. Results showed measurable gains in fluency (35%), pronunciation (25%), confidence (30%), and reduction in stage fear (10%). These findings confirm that TBL fosters practical language use, autonomy, and confidence by shifting the focus from passive learning to active communication. The study concludes that integrating TBL into rural curricula and providing teacher training can significantly improve communicative competence in underserved contexts.

**Keywords:** Task-Based Learning (TBL), English Communication Skills, Marginalized Students, Learner - Centered Approach, Rural Education

### INTRODUCTION

English has become the global language of opportunity and mobility, serving as a key tool for accessing higher education, global communication, and cross-cultural collaboration. However, for learners from marginalized and rural communities, English often represents both a gateway and a barrier. The disparity between urban and rural educational contexts in India continues to hinder equitable access to quality English instruction. Among these groups, the Dombo community—a socially and economically disadvantaged group—faces distinct challenges such as limited exposure to English, lack of qualified teachers, and minimal opportunities for interactive learning.

English today is not only a subject taught in classrooms but a passport to higher education, career growth, and social mobility. In India, where English acts as a bridge language linking diverse linguistic backgrounds, the ability to communicate confidently becomes a determining factor for professional success. However, students belonging to marginalized and rural communities seldom receive equal learning opportunities. Their exposure to English remains limited, and communication is often confined to textbook drills, memorization, and translation-based learning. As a result, they may possess theoretical knowledge of grammar but struggle to express their ideas fluently in real situations.

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Roopa Ramadevi K ([rooparama.devik@giet.edu](mailto:rooparama.devik@giet.edu))

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Traditional English teaching methods in rural areas are predominantly based on the grammar-translation approach, emphasizing memorization of vocabulary and grammatical rules rather than authentic communication. This teacher-centered approach neglects the functional aspect of language learning—using English as a tool for expression, creativity, and interaction. As a result, learners often develop theoretical knowledge without the confidence or fluency to use English in real-world contexts [Richards and Rodgers \(2014\)](#).

Task-Based Learning (TBL) has emerged as an effective alternative to traditional pedagogy by emphasizing the use of language as a medium for accomplishing meaningful tasks. Rooted in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), TBL encourages learners to engage in problem-solving, collaboration, and performance-based activities that simulate real-world communication [Ellis \(2003\)](#), [Willis \(1996\)](#). Through TBL, learners acquire linguistic forms implicitly as they negotiate meaning and perform authentic tasks such as debates, interviews, or presentations. Unlike rote learning, TBL motivates learners by integrating cognition, interaction, and creativity.

This study explores the potential of TBL to bridge the communication gap among Dombo community students by examining its effects on fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and stage fear. It also identifies implementation challenges and proposes recommendations for integrating TBL into rural English language curricula. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of research promoting inclusive and learner-centered approaches to language education in marginalized settings.

Furthermore, English today is intertwined with aspirations of social upliftment. For students belonging to historically disadvantaged communities, acquiring English proficiency becomes not merely an academic skill but a pathway to dignity and equal participation. Unfortunately, the uneven quality of schooling in rural belts, limited exposure to English-speaking environments, and societal hesitation act as stumbling blocks. In many cases, learners possess strong conceptual knowledge, yet their inability to communicate confidently in English creates a psychological barrier, resulting in low academic participation and missed opportunities.

Traditional lecture-based and grammar-translation methods often ignore these socio-emotional challenges. Learners memorize sentence structures and vocabulary, but when asked to speak in real situations, they pause, switch languages, or avoid participation entirely. This is where TBL emerges as a powerful pedagogical bridge, allowing students to “learn by doing,” encouraging active language use, and supporting confidence building through repeated communicative practice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Task-Based Learning (TBL) derives from the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which revolutionized second language pedagogy by prioritizing communication over grammar accuracy. According to [Nunan \(2004\)](#), tasks are goal-oriented activities that require learners to use language for authentic communication rather than mechanical drills. [Ellis \(2003\)](#) defines a task as an activity where learners focus on meaning and use their linguistic resources to achieve a communicative outcome. [Skehan \(1998\)](#) identified three dimensions—fluency, accuracy, and complexity—that together determine communicative competence.

[Willis and Willis \(2007\)](#) proposed a task cycle consisting of three stages: pre-task, task, and post-task. In the pre-task stage, learners are introduced to the topic and vocabulary. The task stage involves collaborative performance, while the post-task stage focuses on reflection and language refinement. This cyclical process encourages active engagement, critical thinking, and learner autonomy.

Recent studies have extended the TBL framework to marginalized contexts. [Van den Branden \(2016\)](#) and [Long \(2015\)](#) emphasize the importance of authentic, need-based tasks in promoting real communication. [Carless \(2018\)](#) found that even in resource-limited Asian classrooms, task-based teaching improved student motivation and participation. [Nguyen \(2020\)](#) and [Rahimi and Zhang \(2022\)](#) highlight the role of technology-mediated TBL, where digital storytelling and online collaboration enhance language fluency and learner confidence. These studies demonstrate that TBL can adapt to varying educational contexts and foster inclusivity.

In the Indian context, [Kumaravadivelu \(2006\)](#) and [Rao \(2021\)](#) noted that the success of TBL depends on teacher readiness and contextual flexibility. Despite infrastructural challenges, TBL offers transformative potential for students who lack exposure to spoken English. It empowers learners to become active participants in their learning journey, thus reducing linguistic anxiety and promoting communicative competence. However, barriers such as inadequate teacher training, limited classroom time, and rigid assessment systems often hinder its large-scale implementation.

Additionally, contemporary research highlights the psychological benefits of TBL. According to [MacIntyre et al. \(2021\)](#), willingness to communicate is directly influenced by classroom climate, task support, and emotional comfort. TBL naturally promotes these conditions by shifting focus from “performance correctness” to “meaningful expression.” Studies in Indian rural contexts [Ghosh \(2022\)](#), [Shanmugam \(2023\)](#) indicate that socially anxious learners, once hesitant to speak, became vocal participants when exposed to scaffolded task-based environments.

In addition, learner autonomy theory [Little \(1991\)](#), [Benson \(2011\)](#) supports the foundation of TBL. By allowing learners to self-evaluate, negotiate meaning, and collaborate, TBL nurtures independence and internal motivation. These elements are crucial for students from marginalized spaces that often rely solely on teacher guidance.

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Task-Based Learning (TBL) on English communication skills among marginalized learners. The mixed-method design ensured the triangulation of data and increased the reliability of findings by combining measurable outcomes with rich, descriptive insights.

Quantitative data were derived from pre-test and post-test assessments that measured students' progress in fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and stage fear, while qualitative data were obtained through classroom observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and teacher feedback reports. This dual approach aligns with recommendations by [Creswell and Plano Clark \(2018\)](#), who emphasize the importance of integrating numerical and experiential data in educational research.

Learners were first oriented to task-based learning principles, and initial hesitation was addressed through ice-breaker conversations, brainstorming sessions, and supportive peer interactions. The teacher acted as a facilitator, offering prompts, demonstrating speech models, and gradually reducing assistance as learners gained independence. Materials included cue cards, short videos, vocabulary charts, and real-life situational scripts. Feedback mechanisms included peer observation sheets, self-reflection notes, teacher comments, and weekly oral feedback circles, ensuring multiple opportunities for reflection and improvement.

### PARTICIPANTS

Thirty graduate students belonging to the Dombo community, a marginalized group from a rural region of India, were purposively selected for this study. All participants were enrolled in a language development program organized by the Department of English, GIET University, Gunupur. The students' age ranged from 19 to 23 years, and the group consisted of 18 female and 12 male learners.

The participants had limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and most had received instruction through traditional grammar-translation methods. They were selected based on their willingness to participate and signed informed consent forms as per institutional ethical guidelines [Cohen et al. \(2018\)](#).

### DURATION AND PROCEDURE

The intervention was conducted over eight weeks, with three 90-minute sessions per week. Each session involved communicative, task-based activities designed to foster language use through real-life contexts. The instructional sequence followed the TBL framework proposed by [Willis \(1996\)](#), consisting of three stages:

- 1) **Pre-task phase** – Introducing the topic, brainstorming, and activating background knowledge.
- 2) **Task phase** – Performing tasks collaboratively through discussions, role plays, or problem-solving.
- 3) **Post-task phase** – Reflecting on performance, providing feedback, and reinforcing linguistic accuracy.

Tasks included role plays, debates, group discussions, information-gap activities, and short presentations. Students were encouraged to use English throughout the sessions while teachers acted as facilitators rather than authority figures.

### DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The following tools were used for data collection:

- **Pre-test and Post-test:** These assessed students' performance across four parameters—fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and stage fear.
- **Observation Checklists:** Classroom observations focused on student participation, peer interaction, and communicative engagement.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with 10 randomly selected students to capture personal experiences and perceptions about TBL.
- **Teacher Feedback Forms:** Collected reflections from instructors about student improvement and classroom dynamics.
- **Reflective Journals:** Students maintained journals documenting their learning journey and challenges faced during tasks.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Quantitative data were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests and percentage growth analysis to compare pre-test and post-test results [Field \(2018\)](#). Qualitative data from interviews and journals were examined using thematic analysis [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), which identified patterns related to motivation, anxiety, and linguistic confidence.

**FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

A noticeable outcome of the intervention was improved social interaction among learners. Students who rarely interacted across small peer groups started forming collaborative support networks. Many reported practicing English outside classroom sessions with roommates and friends. The learning community extended beyond the classroom as students created WhatsApp practice groups and recorded short audio responses to daily speaking prompts. These self-initiated efforts demonstrate the motivational shift triggered by the tasks.

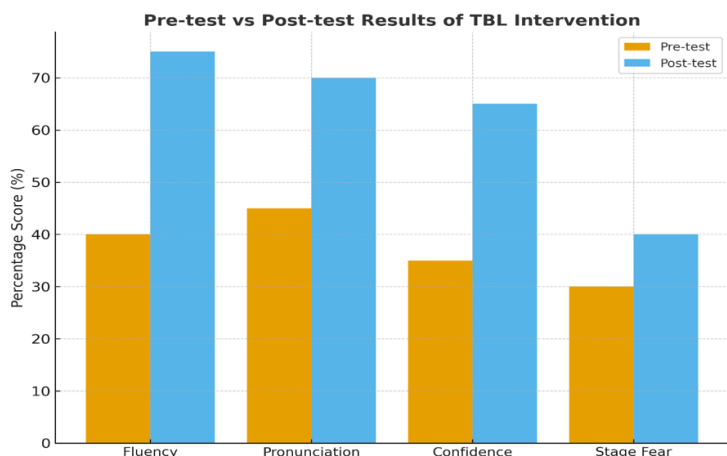
Internal classroom behavior also transformed. Initially quiet learners volunteered to introduce daily sessions, summarize group work, and even anchor small classroom events. Teachers noted reduced fear of judgement and increased peer encouragement. Instead of laughing at errors, students began correcting each other politely and celebrating successful communication attempts.

The results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in all four communication parameters following the eight-week TBL intervention as shown in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

Table 1 Analysis of Communication Based on Different Skill Areas			
Skill Area	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Improvement
Fluency	45	80	+35%
Pronunciation	50	75	+25%
Confidence	40	70	+30%
Stage Fear (Reduction)	30	20	-10%

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1 Pre-Test Versus Post-Test Results of Task Based Learning.**

**IMPROVEMENT IN FLUENCY**

From [Figure 1](#), students showed marked improvement in their ability to express ideas spontaneously without prolonged pauses or code-switching. Activities such as role plays and group discussions provided natural contexts for extended speech, encouraging students to negotiate meaning and formulate responses in real time. Similar results were reported by [Rahimi and Zhang \(2022\)](#), who observed that task-based interaction enhances lexical retrieval and conversational fluency.

## PRONUNCIATION AND PHONETIC CLARITY

There was a notable enhancement in pronunciation accuracy, attributed to repetition-based activities like reading aloud, mock interviews, and phonetic drills incorporated into post-task reflection sessions. Learners developed awareness of intonation, stress, and rhythm through peer feedback and teacher modeling. This aligns with findings by [Nguyen \(2020\)](#) and [Levis \(2022\)](#), who highlight the role of interactive tasks in phonological development.

## CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION

Before the intervention, most students exhibited hesitation and a fear of being judged. By the sixth week, over 80% of the participants reported increased comfort in using English during discussions and presentations. Teacher observations confirmed that students displayed greater willingness to initiate conversations and correct each other's errors constructively. The peer-supported learning environment fostered through TBL was instrumental in reducing anxiety and enhancing self-efficacy, echoing findings by [Littlewood \(2020\)](#) and [Carless \(2018\)](#).

## REDUCTION IN STAGE FEAR

The inclusion of public speaking activities such as "Pick and Speak," extempore sessions, and presentation days helped students gradually overcome stage fright. The low-pressure, collaborative atmosphere encouraged learners to view mistakes as part of learning rather than as failures. Over the eight weeks, a 10% reduction in stage fear was recorded, which significantly improved classroom participation and performance in English-related tasks.

## QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS

Students' reflective journals and interviews revealed that TBL was perceived as enjoyable, engaging, and practical. One participant wrote:

"Earlier, I used to memorize answers for exams. Now I can talk about my ideas freely in English. I enjoy working with my friends on activities."

Another remarked:

"When I played the role of a teacher in class, I forgot my fear. I realized I can speak better than I thought."

Such reflections indicate a shift from passive learning to active, self-directed engagement, aligning with the principles of learner autonomy described by [Dam \(1995\)](#) and [Little \(1991\)](#).

## CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

Despite positive outcomes, the study highlighted several challenges that could hinder large-scale adoption of TBL in marginalized settings:

- 1) Limited Exposure to English:** Learners rarely used English beyond the classroom, reducing language retention and practice opportunities.
- 2) Teacher Preparedness:** Many rural English teachers lacked familiarity with communicative and task-based pedagogy [Kumaravadivelu \(2006\)](#).
- 3) Inadequate Resources:** The absence of audiovisual aids, internet access, and projectors limited the variety of tasks that could be implemented.
- 4) Time Constraints:** TBL activities required extended sessions for planning, execution, and reflection, which clashed with rigid institutional timetables.
- 5) Assessment Practices:** Traditional exams focusing on grammar discouraged risk-taking and spontaneous communication.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic intervention and capacity-building through policy reform and professional development.

Another challenge identified was the persistence of grammatical insecurity. Many learners believed that speaking English requires "perfect grammar," a mindset resulting from years of traditional schooling. As a result, initial task cycles involved hesitation and repeated translation attempts. Teachers had to consistently reassure learners that fluency develops before grammatical perfection in communicative settings. Moreover, some families did not understand the need for communicative English and pressured students to prioritize exam content over speaking practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Integrate TBL into Mainstream Curriculum:** Education boards and universities should adopt TBL principles to promote communication-oriented language education.
- 2) Teacher Training and Workshops:** Continuous professional development programs should be organized to familiarize teachers with task-based methodologies.
- 3) Use of Low-Cost Digital Tools:** Open-access mobile applications, podcasts, and virtual collaboration platforms can provide additional exposure to English.
- 4) Community-Based Learning Clubs:** Establishing English clubs and peer mentorship programs can extend learning beyond the classroom.
- 5) Formative Assessment Practices:** Incorporating portfolio evaluation and self-assessment will encourage reflective learning and learner autonomy.
- 6) Policy Support for Inclusive Education:** Governments should allocate specific funding for rural language improvement programs focusing on marginalized learners.

Institutions must also consider establishing Student-Led Speaking Forums, morning assembly English slots, and cultural event participation, where learners practice announcements, anchoring, storytelling, and debates. Furthermore, low-cost solutions like English-only lunch breaks, pair-talk buddies, and reading circles can sustain task-based learning even without technology. Teacher mentorship programs and peer shadowing can support new instructors adopting TBL. When supported holistically, TBL becomes not only a classroom strategy but a campus-wide language development culture.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Task-Based Learning (TBL) is an effective pedagogical framework for enhancing English communication among marginalized learners. The Dombo community students, who initially exhibited hesitation and low confidence, achieved measurable gains in fluency, pronunciation, and communicative competence within eight weeks of TBL intervention.

Beyond linguistic outcomes, TBL empowered learners socially and psychologically by nurturing self-confidence, teamwork, and learner autonomy. These findings reinforce the argument that when learning environments emphasize meaning-making and collaboration over rote memorization, marginalized students can achieve substantial progress in both linguistic and interpersonal domains.

Ultimately, this study re-affirms that communication confidence grows through authentic use, not rote learning. For marginalized learners, spoken English becomes a medium of empowerment — to present ideas, participate socially, and imagine broader futures. By integrating TBL into mainstream rural education systems, institutions can democratize language learning and strengthen academic equity. Long-term adoption has the potential to redefine rural students' language identities, creating confident graduates capable of competing globally.

TBL, therefore, serves not only as a language-learning strategy but also as a transformative educational practice that promotes inclusion and equity in English education.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

This study was limited by its small sample size and short duration. A larger, longitudinal study across multiple institutions would provide deeper insights into the sustained impact of TBL. Future research could explore technology-mediated TBL, teacher training models, and gender-based participation differences in marginalized groups. Additionally, integrating AI-based speaking tools for pronunciation and fluency assessment could further enhance task-based language development in under-resourced regions.

Future explorations may also evaluate teacher attitude shifts during sustained TBL practice, as well as parental perception development when students demonstrate communication gains. Additionally, technology-assisted task-based learning using mobile-friendly tools, AI speech trainers, and community radio language clubs may further support rural learners. By combining TBL with digital literacy, future programs can multiply the impact and reach of communicative English beyond the classroom.

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## APPENDIX

### Sample Task 1 – Role Play: At the Marketplace

Objective: To practice transactional English and polite requests.

Instructions: Students perform a dialogue between a shopkeeper and a customer.

Focus: Use of polite expressions, negotiation language, and real-time corrections.

### Sample Task 2 – Group Problem-Solving: Planning a Community Event

Objective: To encourage teamwork and English-based decision-making.

Instructions: Groups design an awareness campaign for their village (topic: Clean Environment).

Focus: Vocabulary expansion, persuasive speech, and presentation skills.

### Sample Task 3 – Presentation: “My Dream Profession”

Objective: To develop public speaking skills and self-confidence.

Instructions: Each student prepares a 2-minute talk about their dream job.

Focus: Pronunciation, intonation, and audience interaction.

Student Feedback (Selected Excerpts)

“TBL helped me to speak English without fear.”

“Group discussions gave me confidence to express my ideas.”

“Earlier, I memorized notes, but now I can speak naturally.”