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Enhancing Speaking Proficiency through Task-Based Activities: A systematic literature review in the TVET Context

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Abstract

Speaking proficiency is vital for TVET learners as they prepare for workplace communication. This systematic literature review explores task-based language teaching (TBLT) as a means to enhance speaking skills in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Following the PRISMA framework, we analysed twelve studies from Scopus and Web of Science. The review identified three main themes: (1) task-based speaking activity design, (2) learners' communicative competence, and (3) trends and gaps in TBLT research. The findings underscore the significance of authentic tasks, learner interaction, and the necessity for additional research on digital tools and teacher preparedness within TVET contexts.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning; Speaking Proficiency; TVET

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1.0 Introduction

Oral communication is vital for workforce preparedness, especially in vocational fields where effective speaking can impact job performance. In the context of Malaysian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), students' speaking skills are below expected standards. However, speaking skills are essential for industry-related roles, and employers hold high expectations for them (Kamaruddin et al., 2020). Unlike their academic peers, TVET students must use language in authentic communicative settings and task-based activities, emphasising communicative competence as a key learning goal.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is recognised as an effective method that addresses this need. It involves learning within authentic, meaningful contexts that enhance learning, foster learner self-regulation, and promote language acquisition (Willis & Willis, 2013). For TVET learners, TBLT offers opportunities for workplace communication and the practical application of language in critical situations (Nasir et al., 2022). It supports practising oral communication skills through specific instructions, real-life scenarios, and other

opportunities to develop communicative competence. However, the integration of TBLT in TVET remains limited. Most research focuses on general ESL learners, and speaking achievements within vocational settings remain underexplored (Abd Rahman, 2024).

In light of this matter, the current review of the literature aims to summarise recent empirical studies on TBLT conducted to enhance speaking skills among TVET learners. This study seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Examine the characteristics and classroom implementation of task-based speaking activities in TVET settings.
2. Evaluate the impact of task-based speaking activities on learners' speaking proficiency and engagement levels in TVET programs.
3. Identify prevailing research trends and uncover gaps related to TBLT in training institutions.

Correspondingly, three research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the characteristics of task-based speaking activities and their implementation practices in TVET settings?
2. What effects do task-based speaking activities have on learners' speaking skills and level of involvement in TVET contexts?
3. What are the current research trends and gaps in applying TBLT within training institutions?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) involves teaching and learning second or foreign languages through tasks that learners participate in to develop language skills. This interactive method requires learners to perform tasks that draw their attention to language and utilise their natural learning capacity. TBLT has been widely adopted and theoretically developed (Palanisamy & Rajasekaran, 2024). The approach is grounded in communicative language teaching. It focuses on authentic language used for real-world communication, where learners apply linguistic and sociocognitive strategies to complete communicative tasks. Technology plays a crucial role in TBLT research, facilitating learners' engagement in language learning and enabling them to use language for their needs and purposes beyond the classroom. This study emphasises that understanding the perceptions of both learners and instructors is crucial for adjusting practices and enhancing acceptance and effectiveness in the future (Morgana, 2023).

2.2 Empirical Evidence on TBLT and Speaking Skills

TBLT has been extensively studied and proven to positively enhance speaking skills. Evidence indicates that communicative competence can be improved through TBLT, which encourages learners to engage in real-life communication tasks, leading to notable improvements in fluency, accuracy, and self-confidence in language (Chunliu & Guangsheng, 2025). For example, a study involving Japanese university students showed that TBLT and traditional presentation practice production (PPP) contributed to better speaking proficiency and self-efficacy through different pathways (Harris & Leeming, 2022). Additionally, a meta-analysis of 52 studies found a significant positive effect of TBLT on L2 learning, further confirming the effectiveness of TBLT.

2.3 TVET in Malaysian Context

In Malaysia, TVET is vital in developing a skilled workforce to support a modern economy. UiTM's Higher Education TVET (HETVET) framework connects TVET programmes with higher education, integrating advanced technical skills, critical thinking, and employability skills (Seman et al., 2024). However, challenges remain, including stigma, the limited industrial experience of vocational school teachers, and competing certification systems. Factors such as influence, social image perception, facility quality, and teaching staff calibre affect learners' enrollment in TVET programmes. The Malaysian Government has introduced several industry-driven TVET initiatives to better align training with market demand.

Nevertheless, challenges such as limited participation by minority ethnic groups, a shortage of qualified vocational teachers, and insufficient industry engagement still affect the overall effectiveness of TVET. Integrating ICT and mobile learning into TVET is seen as a strategy to improve education quality and meet the demands of Industry 4.0. It also involves strengthening safety awareness, employability skills, and bridging the skills gap among TVET teachers. Notably, emphasis will be placed on enhancing learners' performance in key subjects relevant to TVET and future employment opportunities such as during the B40@PERDA's (Penang Regional Development Authority) academic enrichment programme, as a regional development authority, plays a role in improving the socioeconomic status of the B40 community (the bottom 40% income group in Malaysia) within its jurisdiction (Ismail, 2021). The move proves the prevalence of TVET in Malaysia.

3.0 Methodology

This paper employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to consolidate previous studies on task-based activities for students' speaking proficiency in TVET (Fig. 1). The review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility. Following these widely recognised guidelines in educational research (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023), the process was designed to ensure thoroughness and reliability. SLR is a method used to examine the literature, map the current state of the art, classify content, and identify future research directions. It is a rigorous process that promotes transparency and enhances the credibility of the review. The approach has also been utilised to evaluate the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in TVET, highlighting gaps and future research pathways, thereby demonstrating its relevance in the TVET domain.

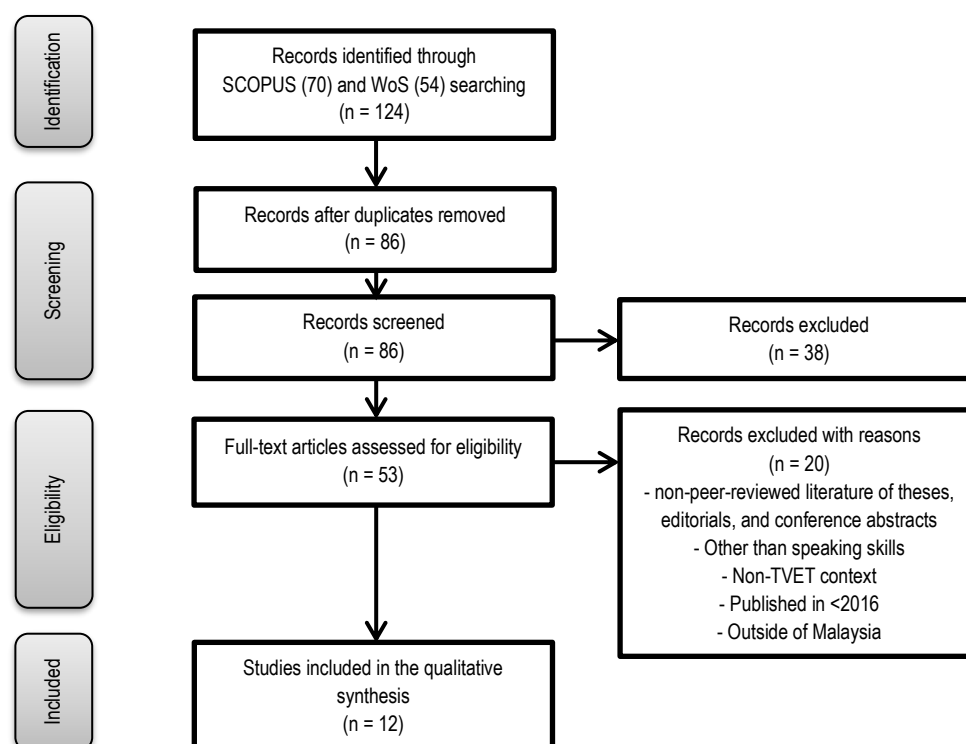


Fig. 1: PRISMA flow diagram for the systematic review

Scopus and the Web of Science (WoS) were selected due to their high-quality indexing, comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature, and importance for education and applied linguistics-specific studies. The two could guarantee the inclusion of high-quality, rigorously reviewed empirical studies that reflected the concentration on TBLT in vocational settings. Additionally, the use of established methodology, as outlined in the PRISMA framework, aims to reduce bias in the screening process. The eligibility criteria were well-defined and applied uniformly. Back translation was followed by the primary researcher reviewing the translations for any discrepancies. Afterwards, ambiguous cases were discussed with academic supervisors to ensure consistency and objectivity.

Thematic coding was carried out using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis technique. We developed the codes during an initial reading of each study, and the themes identified related to task design, learner, and instructional trends. These codes were combined into more general categories through an iterative comparison process, resulting in three final themes. The three research questions drove coding and were iteratively developed and refined by comparing them with the extracted data, such that the interpretation remained clear, coherent, and consistent with the study's objectives.

Two reviewers conducted the screening and quality assessment independently: the lead researcher and a second trained academic. Both applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria consistently across all stages. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Although formal inter-rater reliability (e.g., Cohen's Kappa) was not calculated, consensus was reached on all included studies, supporting the validity and transparency of the review process.

3.1 Search Strategy and Databases

A systematic search was carried out in two primary academic databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The keywords were designed to match the research focus, and Boolean operators were used to combine terms: ("task-based learning" OR "task-based language teaching" OR "TBLT") AND ("speaking skills" OR "oral proficiency") AND ("TVET" OR "vocational education"). Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English from 2018 to 2025, available as full text, were included in the search.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review focused on empirical studies targeting task-based speaking activities to enhance speaking performance. Only research conducted within TVET or vocational education settings was included. The inclusion criteria aimed to ensure the scientific quality of the studies. They were restricted to peer-reviewed articles published in journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science (WoS) from 2018 onwards. These studies had to be published in English and available in full text for thorough review.

Conversely, exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate studies that did not meet the review requirements. Articles focusing solely on other language skills, such as reading, writing, or listening, were not eligible for inclusion. Additionally, research involving general ESL learners not based in a vocational educational setting and non-peer-reviewed literature, such as theses, editorials, and conference abstracts, was excluded. Articles without available full texts were also omitted.

3.3 Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

Key information was extracted from each selected study, including author(s), year, task types, and outcomes. A data extraction table

was created to facilitate cross-study comparison and thematic synthesis. To ensure the quality of included studies, the following indicators were used: (1) peer-review status, (2) clarity of research objectives, (3) relevance to TBLT and speaking in a vocational context, and (4) rigour of data analysis. Table 1 presents a summary of the selected studies.

Table 1. Summary of Included Studies

No.	Author(s)	Method	Task type	Key findings
1.	Chunliu & Guangsheng (2025)	Systematic Review	Communication skills	Effective in enhancing fluency, accuracy, and confidence
2.	Hashim et al. (2025)	Mixed-method approach	Soft skills	Promoted communication, collaboration, and problem-solving
3.	Ng et al. (2025)	Empirical qualitative study	Speaking-focused task within TBLT	Improved speaking performance and engagement
4.	Abd Rahman (2024)	Quasi-experimental	Role-play, dialogue tasks	Improved fluency and interaction
5.	Kiruthiga & Christopher (2024)	True experimental	Task-based language teaching	Significant improvement in professional communication
6.	Azman et al. (2023)	Qualitative	Group discussion, presentations	Enhanced fluency and motivation
7.	Prianty et al. (2022)	Survey & Interview	Workplace simulations	Positive engagement and perceptions
8.	Hassan et al. (2021)	Quasi-experimental	Problem-solving tasks	Increased interaction
9.	Hishan (2020)	Case study	TBLT with Corrective Guidance	Enhanced fluency and accuracy
10.	Omar et al. (2020)	Survey	Interactive language learning activities	Interactive language learning activities improved the learners' English language speaking ability
11.	Saeed et al. (2019)	Validation and reliability testing	English-Speaking Proficiency Test	Reliable and valid test
12.	Shantha & Mekala (2018)	Experimental	Oral communicative tasks	Enhanced speaking proficiency of engineering students, significant improvement in oral proficiency

3.5 Limitation of the Review

This review is restricted to two databases (Scopus, WoS) and omits potential studies from other sources. Language bias may have been introduced, as the study included only English-language publications. Although using two reviewers mitigated subjectivity, thematic coding can be subject to interpretive influences. Subsequent reviews may expand database search coverage and test inter-rater reliability to increase rigour.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Design and Implementation of Task-Based Speaking Activities

The reviewed studies have shown that task-based speaking activities in the TVET context were designed and implemented in various ways. Most shared everyday activities were authentic workplace tasks, collaborative activities, and performance-based assessments (Abd Rahman, 2024; Prianty et al., 2022). The most commonly used task types were role-plays, simulations, and dialogues that simulated professional communication needs, such as customer service in the workplace and job interviews (Nasir et al., 2022). Such activities commonly fit a TBLT model comprising three stages: pre-task planning (modelling and vocabulary presentation), task performance (interaction between peers or in groups), and post-task planning (Willis & Willis, 2013). The activities ranged in complexity from basic information gap activities to organised team presentations, allowing for the individualisation of activities according to learners' skill levels and work contexts. Problems can occur during the implementation of the lesson.

Teachers played a crucial role in scaffolding, but many studies reported that many were not trained to create authentic communicative tasks (Abd Rahman, 2024). Sometimes activities are turned into drills without focusing on clear goals or relying solely on textbooks. Low utilisation of digital technology during TBLT implementation was also an emerging issue, especially when delivered in blended or remote learning contexts (Musa & Rahim, 2024). Teacher competence, contextual appropriateness, and institutional support influence the successful implementation of TBLT. Without support for structured professional development and resources, those good intentions in implementing TBLT will ultimately fail to achieve the desired communicative objectives.

4.2 Impact on Learners' Communicative Competence and Engagement

The selected studies consistently confirmed that task-based instruction improves learners' communicative competence, especially in speaking. TBLT-based participants showed enhanced fluency, interaction strategies, and speaking confidence (Abd Rahman, 2024). This approach, which stresses meaningful, goal-oriented interaction, suits TVET learners whose language use is performance-driven

and aligned with workplace requirements (Azman et al., 2023; Prianty et al., 2022). Tasks such as job interviews, safety briefings, and customer service simulations offered authentic contexts that encouraged learners to engage actively.

A recurring theme across studies was the importance of relevance. Learners were more engaged when they saw the link between tasks and real-world applications. Peer collaboration boosted confidence, especially in low-anxiety environments where students worked in pairs or small groups (Hassan et al., 2021). However, benefits were not universal. Lower-proficiency learners found it challenging to produce spontaneous output when tasks lacked sufficient scaffolding. The inconsistency highlights the need for structured pre-task preparation, such as vocabulary reviews, visual prompts, and guided modelling.

Furthermore, teacher feedback played a vital role in reinforcing learning. Studies emphasised the effectiveness of corrective feedback, peer reflection, and error analysis in helping students internalise key language points (Nasir et al., 2022). TBLT boosts speaking and engagement when tasks are well-supported, relevant, and tailored to learners' proficiency. Successful implementation depends on careful task design and consistent feedback mechanisms to optimise learner outcomes.

4.3 Trends and Gaps in TBLT Research in TVET Contexts

Findings from the studies reveal both encouraging and limiting patterns of TBLT-based implementations for vocational learners. An interesting trend is that there has been a shift toward more task-based, context-specific work that mirrors fundamental world communication skills, such as meetings, product briefings, and phone calls, which align with workplace training. This trend toward task realism provides learners a sense of authenticity and motivation.

A further trend is the integration of soft skills into task-based speaking activities. Besides language use, these tasks also emphasise teamwork, problem-solving, and professional behaviour, aligning TBLT with 21st-century employability skills (Azman et al., 2023). In these activities, learners are required to collaborate in English and think critically, reflecting real-world situations. Digital task delivery is also increasingly popular. Musa & Rahim (2024) highlighted online modules with video conferencing and asynchronous methods as platforms for practising speaking. However, this domain remains underexplored. The limited studies have examined how digital platforms influence engagement, fluency, or learning outcomes in the TVET context.

Although progress has been made, gaps still exist. Most studies are short-term, offering limited insights into the development of speaking skills over time or real language use in the workplace (Ng et al. 2025). An additional unresolved issue is teacher preparedness, which is recognised as a challenge, and there remains limited research on how teacher training impacts TBLT effectiveness (Abd Rahman, 2024). Lastly, a few empirical studies are comparing TBLT with traditional speaking methods. Future research should focus on long-term effects, scalable digital implementation, and evidence-based teacher training to support the adoption of TBLT in TVET.

5.0 Discussion

By examining existing empirical studies, this review explores how task-based activities improve speaking proficiency in TVET contexts. The analysis confirms that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a pedagogically sound and contextually relevant approach for addressing the oral communication needs of vocational learners. Each theme identified in the findings highlights both the strengths and limitations of the current research and practice.

5.1 Task Design and Authenticity in Vocational Contexts

The first research question investigated how task-based speaking activities are designed and implemented in TVET. Results show that TBLT is most effective when tasks are authentic and tailored to workplace functions, such as interviews and safety briefings (Nasir et al., 2022). However, implementation varies widely. Some educators rely on generic textbook tasks due to time constraints or lack of training (Abd Rahman, 2024), which reduces authenticity and learner engagement. New digital tools, such as asynchronous speaking apps and virtual role-plays, can potentially improve access and diversify task design; however, their use remains limited due to digital skill gaps. For TBLT to be successful, tasks should mirror vocational realities and be supported by well-trained educators and strong institutional commitment. Teacher training, task banks, and digital integration are vital for sustainable and meaningful implementation within the TVET framework.

5.2 Speaking Gains, Learner Engagement, and Classroom Realities

The second research question examined how TBLT influences learners' speaking development and classroom engagement. Research confirms improvements in fluency, confidence, and participation when learners engage in tasks with clear real-world relevance (Abd Rahman, 2024; Prianty et al., 2022). Motivation increases when learners perceive functions as relevant to their future employment. Collaborative, low-anxiety settings also increase willingness to speak (Hassan et al., 2021).

However, not all learners benefit equally; those with lower proficiency often require more support, such as vocabulary previews or guided practice (Nasir et al., 2022). The classroom environment plays a crucial role. Mistake-tolerant, peer-supported learning spaces encourage risk-taking and deeper interaction, aligning with sociocultural learning principles. Feedback loops and opportunities for task repetition should be incorporated into practice to maintain gains. While TBLT promotes strong speaking outcomes, its success depends on strategic task scaffolding and supportive classroom environments.

5.3 Research Gaps, Institutional Challenges, and the Way Forward

The third research question investigated trends and gaps in TBLT for TVET. While task realism and digital tools are improving, most studies are short-term and lack longitudinal analysis of speaking improvements. Few examine how TBLT prepares learners for actual

workplace communication over time. Teacher readiness remains a significant challenge. Many instructors encounter barriers, including limited training, a lack of task examples, and time constraints. Professional development is often ad hoc rather than ongoing, which limits the depth of TBLT integration.

Assessment practices are also behind. There is little consensus on the best way to evaluate speaking progress in vocational tasks. Further research on suitable rubrics and performance level descriptors is recommended. Creating partnerships between researchers and policymakers is essential to progress. Investing in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and curriculum reform will help make TBLT a sustainable and scalable approach. Due to its benefits, TBLT will not reach its full potential without systemic support and assistance.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper aimed to explore the potential role of task-based activities in enhancing learners' speaking skills within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. Twelve peer-reviewed articles were examined using the PRISMA framework, focusing on effective task design, participant outcomes, and future directions in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The findings indicate that TBLT is suitable for vocational education, primarily when course tasks are contextually based, communicative, and learner-centred. These approaches foster greater fluency, confidence, and preparedness for real-world communication. However, adoption has been gradual due to issues such as inadequate teacher training, limited institutional support, and underutilisation of digital technologies. To address these challenges, ongoing professional development for teachers is essential to enhance their skills in task design and facilitation.

Furthermore, the national TVET curriculum should be aligned with task-level objectives and assessment to improve coherence and relevance. The role of digital tools, including mobile apps, simulations, and web-based platforms, is to support both delivery and participation. Longitudinal and comparative studies are necessary to assess the long-term impact of TBLT on vocational training. In summary, the findings indicate promising progress in the overall performance of TBLT in enhancing oral communication among TVET learners, which, with adequate support, could be a sustainable approach to preparing learners for workplace communication.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper adds to the literature on language pedagogy in vocational education by drawing attention to the opportunities that TBLT has regarding the enhancement of speaking proficiency in TVET. It provides actionable information on task design, learner engagement, and institutional obstacles to support the further development of modules, teacher training, and integration of digital resources in the TVET context.

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