

Citation: Fatima, U., Shoaib, T., & Anwer, S. (2021). The Impact of Task-Based Language Instruction on Oral Communication Development in ESL Students. *Global Language Review*, VI(II), 140-152. [https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021\(VI-II\).16](https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021(VI-II).16)



The Impact of Task-Based Language Instruction on Oral Communication Development in ESL Students

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Abstract

In this study, the aim of the investigation was to find the impact of using task-based teaching methods on the oral communication skills of ESL students at the undergraduate level. The investigation was carried out in a university at the tertiary level by checking the influence of task-based language teaching on 22 ESL students. After looking at the results obtained in the study, it is found that the task-based teaching method has a significant influence on the oral communication skills of the students. Personally, it was observed that some of the students investigated in the study started to concentrate on the activities; they also started to adopt the words spoken by other students in their vocabulary. Therefore, it was observed that other students speaking significantly improved and enhanced the verbal and non-verbal expressions of the students. On the basis of the results obtained, it can be said that teachers should make use of task-based teaching methods in the classroom activities to improve the oral communication skills of the students, as it will help them to perform well on the job. In addition, speaking abilities are required for different stages of life. Therefore, they should be focused on every degree program for professional development.

Key Words: ESL, Oral Communication, EFL, Task-Based Approach

Introduction

Background

Oral communication is an essential factor in successful communication because it is used in daily routines. Oral communication helps in dealing with people appropriately and is important as communication becomes difficult without it (Elsayed & Hassan, 2019). Oral communications skills should be acquired because it is a platform that glues all the language components together, and communication takes place. Oral communication is used in many domains, which include education, professional, at home, and in the outer world (van Kleeck, 2014). Oral

communication demands changes with the change of environment. For example, the communication environment in the office, universities, and at home is different from each other.

Language is the source of communication. It's the way through which ideas are shared with others. Therefore, oral language is the people's main way of communicating and an important skill to carry out successful communication with each other (Sandlund et al., 2016). A number of languages are used as a source of communication in different countries because every country has its own

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language. However, English is considered a standard language, so students must enhance their communication skills in English due to global competition ([van Kleeck, 2014](#)).

Nowadays, English is one of the most spoken languages in the world. Its importance is merited because it has an international standard; therefore, everyone should be able to communicate in English to get in touch on an international level ([Faridi et al., 2020](#)). Oral communication is the spoken interaction between two or more people. Not everyone is an effective communicator ([van der Veen et al., 2017](#); [Bartels & Richards 2013](#)). According to [Faridi et al. \(2020\)](#), many students enrolled in ESL classrooms should focus on developing oral communication skills.

Oral communication demands skills of listening and responding to them through verbal communication. Therefore, it is necessary that students should be active listeners and responders to be called good communicators ([Waluyo, 2019](#)). Every student has a different mindset and adopts concepts in a different way; thus, a variety of topics are required to make them capable of responding to the job responsibilities ([Sandlund et al., 2016](#)). One of the best ways to deal with the students is to teach oral communication through a task-based language teaching method designed according to the interest level of each student ([van Kleeck, 2014](#)).

Teaching through tasked based language teaching method demands the following approaches ([Sandlund et al., 2016](#)):

1. To give learners confidence to try speaking in a language they know.
2. To give learners tips for developing interaction abilities.
3. To give learners a chance to benefit from noticing how experts talk to each other.

If teachers teach students through task-based language teaching methods identified above, students will be able to improve communication skills.

Statement of Problem

Oral communication skills are considered an

important part of life; however, very few people in Pakistan possess adequate speaking abilities ([Khan 2015](#)). [Beding and Inthapthim, \(2019\)](#) are the only studies carried out in Pakistan highlighting a major gap in the literature of teaching through a task-based approach. Therefore, this study makes use of a task-based language teaching approach to resolve the issue of poor communication skills among Pakistani students and reduce the literature gap. Moreover, not many studies are carried out in Pakistan aimed to improve the oral communication skills of the undergraduate students.

Objectives of the Study

This research study works on the following objectives:

- To investigate the effect of TBLT on the oral communication skills of ESL learners.
- To investigate the perceptions of ESL learners on the impact of using TBLT on oral communication skills.

Research Questions

This study investigates the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of TBLT on the oral communication skills of ESL learners?
2. What are the perceptions of ESL learners on the impact of using TBLT on oral communication skills?

Limitations of study

This study has the following limitations:

- The study investigates students at one university only.
- This study is limited to analyzing one experimental observation only.
- No other methodology of teaching is focused except task-based methodology.

The Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the limited literature in the context of oral communication skills in Pakistan. This study makes a significant contribution to the

findings of teaching oral communication through task-based language teaching methods.

Definition of keywords

- ESL: English as a second language, the teaching of English in those countries, who not use its native language, but prefer to learn because of high demand globally ([Khan 2015](#)).
- EFL learners: English as a foreign language, in those countries where it is not used as a native ([Khan 2015](#)).
- Oral communication: the process involved in expressing ideas by mouth ([Ayub&Lodhi, 2016](#)).
- Task-based language teaching: using the concepts of different tasks to teach ([Khan, 2015](#)).

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides the evaluation of the literature review under the light of various research articles carried out by scholars worldwide. The context of the literature review is the role of the task-based method of teaching on the oral communication skills of ESL students. In a task-based or TBLT teaching method, a teacher makes use of activities that positively impact oral communication skills if used effectively ([Ayub&Lodhi, 2016](#)). The task-based instruction methods provide the platform, supported with unique teaching methods for the teachers. In the below-explained literature review, the review of the task-based teaching method (TBLT) is provided, as argued by the scholars.

A Critical Review of Task-based Teaching Methods

According to the research article presented by [Chen and Wang \(2019\)](#), task-based teaching contains many platforms that offer a variety of teaching methods. Additionally, task-based language teaching can be used with the technology in many ways (Bartels & Richards, 2013). Another study supports the statement and writes that the task-based learning approach follows 'message-oriented activities,' resulting in a collaborative learning platform

([Khatib, & Dehghankar, 2018](#)). Based on the statements presented above, it can be said that task-based learning is beneficial when it comes to making use of activities and technology simultaneously.

In an investigation presented by [Khatib, and Dehghankar \(2019\)](#), it was found that task-based teaching is effective in improving the oral communication skills of the ESL students. However, sometimes it disturbs the classroom environment because collaboration increases the chaotic atmosphere in the classroom ([van Kleeck, 2014](#)). [Khan \(2015\)](#) presented a clear distinction between regular English teaching methods and task-based activities. He argued that regular teaching methods are mostly based on following a specific path and a straight line. On the other hand, task-based teaching incorporates activities that improve all four components of English. However, the factor of the chaotic atmosphere should be kept under consideration, as it can impact on the classroom environment negatively.

In the regular English teaching methods, the form-based teaching methodologies are used by the teachers, whereas, in task-based teaching, activities must be used ([Santhosh&Meenakshi, 2017](#)). Nonetheless, if the activities are not used by the teacher when the task-based learning approach is being used, then learning cannot be made interactive ([van der Veen et al., 2017](#)).

It was not the case until the end of the 1980s when task-based language teaching methods were recommended by scholars ([Khan, 2015](#)). However, when English teaching to foreign learners became difficult in the 1980s, then this method of teaching came into being ([Elsayed, & Hassan, 2019](#)). Although many studies have been presented by scholars from the 1980s to date, none of them is able to develop the best teaching method by using this teaching method. This is because of the reason that task-based language teaching comprises many activities; however, they all cannot be used in all the classroom environments ([Khan, 2015](#)). It is the responsibility of the teacher to select an appropriate method of teaching using task-based teaching method; otherwise, oral communication cannot be improved.

Another study presented by [Sandlund, Sundqvist&Nyroos, \(2016\)](#) argues that there is no

authentic way of teaching by using task-based teaching methodology. The statement is also supported by the study of ([van der Veen et al., 2017](#)), arguing that task-based activities should be appropriately selected by the teacher for achieving targeted oral communication skills. This learning platform demands a critical understanding of the issues commonly found in the students, supported by the deployment of relevant activities ([van der Veen et al., 2017](#)). Based on the above-explained statements, it can be argued that an effective learning platform by making use of task-based methodology cannot be achieved without addressing the problems faced in activities development.

Recommendations to use a Task-based Teaching Method

One of the recommended approaches by [Khan \(2015\)](#) that can be adopted by the teachers is exposing the students to real-life situations. These activities can be induced by allowing the students to feel free to use any linguistic form to deliver their message. This activity is also recommended by the study of ([van Kleeck, 2014](#)), who writes that when students are encouraged to speak, what they want, their communications skills improve rapidly. Moreover, ([van Kleeck, 2014](#)) points out a difference between traditional language activities and task-based activities outcomes. They wrote that task-based activities have linguistic outcomes, whereas regular teaching methods provide 'non-linguistic outcomes.'

Although task-based activities influence communication skills rapidly, it presents a challenge when it comes to selecting an appropriate method of teaching. For example, it is necessary that a task must be meaning-based, must include a communication channel, must include real-life scenarios, must be goal-oriented, and must be assessed according to targeted outcomes ([Sandlund, Sundqvist&Nyroos, 2016](#); [Ayub&Lodhi, 2016](#); [Rittapirom, 2017](#)). Hence, it can be said that the task-based learning method demands above-explained criteria in the development of activities for achieving targeted communication outcomes. Furthermore, the task-based approach should be supported by a high number of activities developed after adopting critical thinking ([Santhosh, &Meenakshi, 2017](#)).

The task-based learning method is, although not an old concept, many teachers still face issues in selecting the best method of teaching oral communication to the ESL student ([Rittapirom, 2017](#)). Santosh &Meenakshi, (2017) used the method of a task-based approach in the study and found that it positively impacts the oral communication skills of the ESL students. TBLT approach is now followed worldwide by institutions, colleges, and universities. The reason behind that is the use of various activities that can be used by the teachers in teaching ([Rittapirom 2017](#)). If the arguments above are summarized, it can be said that language learning can be made effective by using TBLT approach, as well as oral communication skills. However, activities use is necessary.

According to the study of [Khan \(2015\)](#), the university learning in Pakistan with TBLT approach is very poor. The reason behind that is the unavailability of authentic material and poor development of activities by teachers. A similar argument can be found in the study of [Al Hosni \(2014\)](#), who argues that the development of teachers in Pakistan is required, with the aim to explain those TBLT activities. [Khatib, and Dehghankar \(2019\)](#), in contrast argue that TBLT learning method cannot be successful in Pakistan because teachers lack in good speaking abilities, except for a few. Hence, it becomes necessary that teachers should have excellent communication skills before they can transfer the concepts to ESL learners.

Pakistan government and private institutions offering ESL programs found that the task-based learning method is good, and learners are able to make rapid progress ([Elsayed, & Hassan, 2019](#)). Furthermore, the task-based learning method develops speaking skills at the international level; however, the efficiency of the students reported by the study of [Al Hosni \(2014\)](#) was far below satisfaction. Based on the findings reported by their study, it was concluded that teachers in private institutions of Pakistan are unskilled, and training is required ([Al Hosni \(2014\)](#)). The study also stated that ESL teachers in Pakistan need to use their own way of using TBLT because the TBLT approach is not good when it comes to providing a pattern of teaching ([Al Hosni \(2014\)](#)).

Research Methodology

Research methodology is an important part of the research study because it identifies the ways the author used for the collection of data and its analysis. This study made use of a single-group quasi-experimental design.

The objective was to improve oral communication skills of the ESL students. The task-based learning method was applied. Talk-based learning offers an interactive platform where a lesson is taught around a central task (Elsayed & Hassan, 2019). Following stages were followed for the pre-test.

- Participants were asked to speak for 4-5 minutes on the given topic.
- Oral communication skills were measured through an oral proficiency rubric (included in appendices) which focused on different aspects or oral proficiency, including

Unlike other approaches, TBLT helps in meeting academic and professional needs because, in all the above stages, it demands the use of all language resources instead of just selecting one pre-selected item (Bartels & Richards, 2013). It provides a platform to teach oral communication topics by delivering the lectures and working in groups. Working in groups results in effective learning in the classroom (van Kleeck, 2014). A natural context of

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test (self-created)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-test	7.04	3.85	15.4	-0.66	14.74
Post-test	16.14	2.78	11.12	10.58	21.7

In the table above, range, minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values in the pre-test and post-test are compared. The mean score obtained is 7.04 and 16.14 in pre-test and post-test, respectively. The results above highlight that there is a significant difference in OC skills of the students before and after the experiment. A high value of SD also goes with the statement, showing an increased level of dispersion and scores clustering together.

Whereas the minimum and the maximum value obtained in pre-test and post-test depicts the range value to be 15.4 and 11.12, respectively. Based on that, it can be said that dispersion was greater in the

learning is developed, enhancing the oral communication skills of the ESL students.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the oral proficiency of the participants before and after the experiment. The reason to use this method was to understand the difference between the two results (before and after the experiment). The results can be found in the next chapter.

Population and Context

The study was carried out in a classroom of 'Jinnah University for Women' with 22 students of ESL learners.

Sampling and Sampling Technique

Purpose sampling technique was applied for the selection of the students. The sample size was of 30 students, out of which 22 were selected after performing the purposive sampling.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, some descriptive statistics, comprising of mean, range, minimum and maximum, and standard deviation values were found.

pre-test, which significantly reduced after the post-test. This shows that the oral communication skills of the students after the post-test significantly improved (due to low dispersion). The minimum and maximum values obtained show improvements in the obtained scores of the respondents.

Hypothesis Testing: Paired t-test

The following hypothesis was tested by using the paired t-test methodology:

- H_{0A}:** There isn't any significant difference in the oral communication skills of learners before and after the experiment.

Table 2. Paired sample t-test (Source: self-created)

Paired Sample Statistics				
	Mean	N	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean
Pre-test	7.04	22	3.85	0.8208
Post-test	16.14	22	2.78	0.5927

Table 3. Paired sample t-test

Paired Differences								
	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest – posttest	-9.1000	4.7462	1.012	11.1432	-7.0568	8.9882	42	0.000

In order to test the differences between two sets of data parametrically, subject independence, interval data, variances of homogeneity, and normality distribution are crucial factors required to be analyzed. For the testing of observed data obtained before and after the experiment, a paired t-test was performed, and raw data from the independent subjects was evaluated using an interval scale. The assumption for the normal distribution of data was tested through an empirical approach using skewness and kurtosis ratios. The table shown below for the results shows two values divided into pre-test and post-test sections. As an observation of the results, it is found that the pre-test is insignificant, whereas the post-test is significant. On the basis of the values, it is concluded that pre-test data is distributed normally; however, post-test is not.

In Table 4.2.2.1., different values can be found. In the values, a significant difference is found in the scores of oral proficiency before the experiment (M=7.04, SD= 3.85) and after the experiment (M=16.14, SD = 2.78) (p = 0.000) which is > 0.05.

In the tables presented above, especially in a paired t-test table, it can be observed that there is a meaningful difference among the observed mean values of the participants in this study. A significant difference between the pre-test and post-test perception is found (M=7.04, SD= 3.85, t(42)=8.9882, P=0.000). The results differences obtained are significantly large on the basis of the investigated population. If the results obtained are analyzed, it can be said that a significant difference between the oral communication skills of ESL students before and after the results is observed. The graph below shows mean difference observed before and after the test.

Hypothesis Testing

H_{0A}: There isn't any significant difference in the oral communication skills of learners before and after the experiment

Table 4. Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.027 ^a	.001	-.052	2.85119

a. Predictors: (Constant), Pre-test

Table 5. ANOVA (pre-test and post-test comparison)

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.116	1	.116	.014	.906 ^b
	Residual	154.456	19	8.129		
	Total	154.571	20			

a. Dependent Variable: Post-test
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Pre-test

Table 6. Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	16.004	1.322		12.109	.000
	Pre-test	.020	.165	.027	.119	.906

a. Dependent Variable: Post-test

A multiple regression was calculated for the prediction of oral communication skills after the experiment. A regression equation was calculated, which came out to be $F(1,19) = 0.014$ $p = 0.906$ with R^2 of 0.001. The participants predicted that OC is

equal to $16.004 + 1.322$ (constant) + 0.020 (pre-test). As can be noticed positive regression is found between post-test and pre-test ($p < 0.05$), indicating that participants were found with good oral communication skills after the experiment.

Qualitative Analysis of the Feedback Forms

Table 6. Thematic Analysis

Sub-themes	Specifications	Frequency	Participants' responses and codes
1. Environment	a. Free-hand	9	P1: '...speaking improved day by day. P2: '...free to speak...'. P4: '...confident for speaking English.'. P6: 'freedom for speaking...'. P10: '...free to speak.'. P11: '...free to speak...'. P13: 'free to speak...'. P17: '...we speak freely.'. P22: '...speak freely without...'
	b. Belief	10	P4: '...confidence level pushed...'. P6: '...confidence with the activity.'. P9: '...boost my confidence.'. P10: '...confidence and vocabulary...'. P11: '...confidence level...'. P12: '...able to speak in front of audience...'. P14: '...built my confidence level.'. P19: '...confidence level'. P20: '...and also my confidence level...'. P22: '...confidence gain.'
2. An entirely new experience		15	P1: '...liked debate...'. P2: 'free to speak...'. P4: 'individual speaking class...'. P5: 'Confidence improved...'. P6: '...like debating...'. P7: 'group discussion...'. P8: '...free to speak...'

3. Which is the weakest component of speaking you would like to improve	Debate	13	<p>P9: ‘...group discussion.’ P10: ‘...chance to correct our speaking skills.’ P12: ‘Group activity..’ P15: ‘liked debate...’ P16: ‘liked debate...’ P17: ‘debates...’ P19: ‘debate and speech etc....’ P21: ‘I enjoyed debates...’ P1: the worst part was debate..... P2: one thing that was debate.... P5: ‘I don’t like my debating....’ P6: ‘I am weak in individual speaking....’ P8: ‘I don’t like individual task.’ P12: I don’t like debate...’ P18: In debate, we come to knew....’</p>
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The participants were provided with a feedback form at the end of the experiment. Overall, the participants enjoyed the experience of speaking because their confidence level improved. In addition to this, they also enjoyed freedom and belief (confidence) to a speech during the classroom. They argued that they enjoyed the activities in the process because the participants were allowed to select the topic on their own and also the vocabulary. While asking what they liked the most during the experiment, they rated debate and group conversations as the best activity, and ultimately the thing which they would like to improve.

Discussion

In the results obtained, it is evident that there is a significant difference among oral communication skills of ESL students before and after the experiment. The results obtained are similar to [Beding and Inthapthim \(2019\)](#), who also found that the task-based approach positively influences the oral communication skills of ESL students. In addition, a task-based approach significantly contributes to the professional speaking abilities of the ESL students, who are able to land a job by improving their oral communication skills. Since TBLT method is based on using of activities, it is an interactive platform, and interaction always increases the communication skills of the ESL students ([van Kleeck, 2014](#); [Khan 2015](#); [Sandlund, Sundqvist&Nyroos, 2016](#)). Some other arguments related to the results obtained are critically evaluated in the upcoming paragraphs.

After looking at the results obtained above, it can be said that the performance of the participants in terms of the oral communication skills significantly improved and that they should be

treated with a task-based teaching method for the improvements in oral communication skills. According to the study of [Khan \(2015\)](#), oral communication skills can be improved by using task-based teaching methods because it demands the use of activities in the classroom. In the findings also, it is also found that the task-based teaching method improved fluency and words selection of the participants; thus they should be encouraged to participate in task-based activities.

According to the study of [Rittapirom, \(2017\)](#), if the performance of the students in the classroom is needed to be improved, the task-based methodology should be adopted. However, some studies argued that students should be allowed to participate in the activities in the classroom, but technology should also be used ([Khan 2015](#)); [Bartels & Richards, 2013](#)). The results obtained in this study do not go with the last statement because the investigators were able to improve oral communication without using technology. Therefore, it can be said that task-based teaching improves the oral communication of the ESL students.

In the findings, it is observed that the oral communication skills of the ESL students significantly improve in terms of word choice selection also. The results go in favor of the study of [Khan \(2015\)](#), arguing that the performance of the students in words selections during the speech can be improved by involving them in activities. In this study, the findings show that task-based teaching changes oral communication speaking abilities by a major scale, not minor; therefore, it must be used by the management of the university. To be specific, task-based teaching method should be deployed by the management and made compulsory.

Based on the arguments presented above, it can be said that the task-based teaching method improves all the components of speaking, which include (fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, content, word choice). Hence, it should be used in conjunction with the activities used, for practical exposure to the speaking environment. It will help the students to become a rock star in professional life, and conquer English-speaking interviews with relative ease.

Conclusion

In this study, the aim of the investigation was to find the impact of using task-based teaching method on the oral communication skills of the ESL students at the undergraduate level. The investigation was carried out in Jinnah University for Women, Karachi. After looking at the results obtained in the study, it is found that the task-based teaching method had a significant influence on the oral communication skills of the students. Personally, it was observed that some of the students investigated in the study started to concentrate on the activities, they also started to adopt the words spoken by other students. Therefore, it was observed that other students speaking significantly improved and enhanced the verbal and non-verbal expressions of the students. On the basis of the results obtained, it can be said that teachers should make use of task-based teaching method in

the classroom activities to improve the oral communication skills of the students, as it will help them to perform well on the job. In addition, speaking abilities are required for different stages of life. Therefore, they should be focused on every degree program for professional development.

Ethical Considerations

During the experiment, no student was forced to participate forcefully. Before the pre-test and post-test, formal permission was obtained with the principle for the investigation. It was humbly requested to provide with a classroom and one hour time to conduct an investigation. It ensured to the participants that their names would be used for investigation purposes only, and nothing else. In addition, the investigation was carried out in the presence of the teacher in the classroom.

Recommendations

Future studies should be carried out in different studies, as this study was based in one university of Karachi only. Future studies should incorporate more factors, such as the impact of task-based teaching influence on writing, reading, and listening skills. The participants should be increased in future studies. The discussion on the practices followed in other countries and in Pakistan should be presented by performing a comparative analysis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Checklist

Pre-test and Post-test (Source: [ESL speaking Rubric, 2018](#))

	Emerging	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
Pronunciation	The student struggles to pronounce Words.	The student is Inconsistent in their pronunciation. Some words are pronounced correctly, and others are not correct.	The student's pronunciation is clear, with few Errors.	The student's pronunciation is exceptional and mirrors a native speaker.
Fluency	The student has great difficulty correctly putting words together in a sentence.	The student demonstrates some fluency and is able to construct a simple sentence.	The student is able to respond to the prompt with few errors and relative ease.	The student speaks clearly and articulately with no hesitation.
Comprehension	The student's speech does not reflect comprehension of the topic or prompt.	The student's speech reflects basic comprehension, but with frequent errors.	The student's speech reflects strong comprehension of the topic or prompt with few errors.	The student's speech reflects a clear understanding of the topic or prompt and includes details.
Content	The student's content is not relevant to the prompt or question.	The student's content has some relevance to the topic, but incorrect words are used.	The student's content is relevant to the topic, with few errors.	The student's content reflects deep understanding of the topic.
Word Choice	The student is only able to speak a few words; none relate to the topic.	The student's word choice is very basic, with a few errors.	The student's word choice enhances his or her response to the topic or prompt.	The student's word choice reflects a sophistication in speaking, similar to a native speaker.

Appendix B – Feedback form

Student's name: _____

1) Did you like your English language speaking classes? Why?

2) Did your English language speaking skills improve after taking these classes? How?

3) What do you like the most in these classes? Explain

4) Is there anything which you don't like and want it to be improved in future? Explain

Thanks and regards

Appendix C – Topics

1. How money is important
2. Memorable day
3. Pros and cons of cell phones
4. Bad day
5. Got a chance to go abroad
6. Cooking
7. Hobbies
8. Favorite food
9. School life versus university life
10. Siblings goals