

**THE EFFECT OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE
TEACHING ON SRI LANKAN
UNDERGRADUATES' SPEAKING SKILLS**

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by

ALOYSIUS BRITTO ITHAYARAJ

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ESL	English as A Second Language
GCE(O/L)	General Certificate Examination, Ordinary Level
GCE(A/L)	General Certificate Examination, Advanced Level
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L2	Second Language
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TESOL	Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
ELTU	English Language Teaching Unit
DELT	Department of English Language Teaching
L1	First Language
TBL	Task-Based Learning
ALM	Audio Lingual Method
CLL	Community Language Learning
CBI	Content Based Instruction
EMI	English Medium Instruction
NEC	National Education Committee
ABOE	Activity-Based Oral English
UGC	University Grants Commission
NIE	National Institute of Education
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
DE	Department of Education

MHE

Ministry of Higher Education

MPil

Master of Philosophy

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**KESAN PENGAJARAN BAHASA BERASASKAN TUGAS TERHADAP
KEMAHIRAN BERBAHASA MAHASISWA SRI LANKA**

ABSTRAK

Pendekatan mengajar dalam membangunkan kemahiran bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris di peringkat universiti di Sri Lanka telah mencapai kemuncak wacana dalam forum ilmiah. Walaupun begitu, percubaan guru untuk pelbagai kaedah pengajaran yang inovatif dan aspirasi pelajar terhadap penggunaan kaedah yang menarik dan dinamik oleh guru untuk mengembangkan kemahiran bertutur tetap menjadi masalah tanpa berkompromi. Untuk menangani isu-isu ini dengan pendekatan pengajaran yang inovatif, kajian ini cuba menguji kesan Pengajaran Bahasa Berasaskan Tugas (TBLT) untuk meneliti sama ada TBLT ini berkesan dalam membantu pelajar meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur mereka. Untuk tujuan ini, kajian ini dirancang dengan objektif dua serampang. Pertama, untuk mengkaji kesan TBLT berbahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan mahasiswa di Sri Lanka. Kedua, untuk meneroka sikap pelajar terhadap TBLT dan penggunaannya untuk belajar kemahiran bertutur. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan mod campuran. Dalam fasa kuantitatif, tiga puluh pelajar ditempatkan dalam setiap kumpulan kawalan dan eksperimen masing-masing. Fasa kualitatif dengan temu bual separa berstruktur merangkumi 10 peserta pelajar dari kumpulan kawalan. Berdasarkan kaedah eksperimen kuasi, sampel dari dua kelas yang berasingan dipilih dari dua universiti awam di Sri Lanka. Kumpulan eksperimen terdedah kepada intervensi yang berlangsung selama dua bulan. Semua pelajaran yang dirancang untuk kumpulan kawalan dibuat berdasarkan prinsip-prinsip arahan berdasarkan tugas. Untuk menganalisis data kuantitatif, kedua-dua ujian statistik deskriptif dan inferensi

dilakukan melalui SPSS. Untuk menganalisis bahagian kualitatif kajian, analisis terma dilakukan. Hasil kuantitatif yang menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara kumpulan kawalan dan kumpulan eksperimen kerana TBLT mempunyai pengaruh yang besar terhadap peningkatan kemampuan bertutur keseluruhan pelajar. Hasil ini diterima oleh peningkatan kesan TBLT pada rentang kuasa dua eta berikut (0.086), (0.13), (0.13) dan (0.13) dalam komponen pertuturan masing-masing dalam; perbendaharaan kata, sebutan, unsur tatabahasa dan kelancaran. Hasil analisis kualitatif meneroka fakta bahawa TBLT telah meningkatkan tahap motivasi dan keyakinan dalam mempelajari kemahiran bertutur dengan menghilangkan rasa malu sebagai penghalang utama untuk bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini menegaskan bahawa TBLT mempunyai implikasi terhadap pengajaran kemahiran bertutur dan meningkatkan kemampuan pembelajaran mahasiswa. Ia mengesyorkan proses berasaskan tugas dalam pengajaran bukan kemahiran bertutur sahaja dimasukkan tetapi kemahiran belajar bahasa Inggeris yang lain seperti membaca dan menulis juga diperlukan. Ia juga menyarankan bahawa kajian empirikal lebih lanjut dilakukan mengenai penggunaan tugas dalam kurikulum melalui pendekatan pedagogi dan pembelajaran di sekolah dan universiti.

THE EFFECT OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON SRI LANKAN UNDERGRADUATES' SPEAKING SKILLS

ABSTRACT

Teaching approaches in developing speaking skill in English at the university level in Sri Lanka have reached its epitome of discourse in scholarly forums. Nevertheless, the teachers' attempts for various innovative teaching methods and learners' aspiration on teachers' use of interesting and dynamic methods on developing speaking skill still remain as uncompromised issues. To address these issues with an innovative teaching approaches the present study attempts to test the effect of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to examine whether it has effectiveness in helping students to enhance their speaking skill. To this end, the present study is designed with two-fold objectives. First, to investigate the effect of TBLT on speaking English among undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Second, to explore the attitudes of students towards TBLT and its usage to learn speaking skill. The study employed a mixed mode research design. In the quantitative phase, thirty students were included in each control and experimental group respectively. The qualitative phase with semi-structured interview included 10 student participants from the treatment group. Based on the quasi experimental method, the student participants of two separate classes were selected from two public universities in Sri Lanka. The experimental group was exposed to the treatment that lasted for two months. All the lessons devised for the treatment group were based on the principles of the task-based instructions. To analyze the quantitative data, both descriptive and inferential statistical tests were performed in the SPSS. To analyze the qualitative part of the study, thematic analysis was performed. The quantitative results analyzed

in eta squared test revealed that there was a significant difference between treatment and control groups as the TBLT had (0.25) a large effect on increasing overall speaking ability of the students. This result was received by the increasing effect of TBLT at the following eta squared range (0.086), (0.13), (0.13) and (0.13) in the components of speaking respectively in; vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical elements and fluency. The finding of the qualitative analysis explored the fact that TBLT has increased the level of motivation and confidence in learning speaking skill through eliminating shyness the primary barrier for speaking English. It asserts that TBLT has an implication on teaching speaking skills and on increasing the learning ability of the undergraduates. It recommends incorporating task-based process in teaching not only speaking skills but also in other skills of learning English such as listening, reading, and writing. It also suggests further empirical studies on adopting tasks in curricula of pedagogical and learning approaches in schools and universities at large.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Proficiency in English has become an indispensable factor for having sustained in globalizing context (Prasangani, 2014). In this scenario of the widespread functionality of English language, Pogensee (2016) finds the necessity for upgrading the input of English Language Teaching (ELT) to make it as an effective and an operative approach. Subsequently, this led to make constant attempts on exploring diversity of innovative teaching methods in ELT and Second Language (L2) teaching context (Nunan, 1989). As an attempt to resolving the drawbacks in other teaching approaches, the Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) methods were introduced after 1980 (Harmer, 2007). Nunan (1989) and Tavakoli (2012) find TBLT as an effective medium to teach L2 rather than the other contemporary methods as it provides platform for real time learning with more cooperative, creative and cognitive learning process focusing not only on meaning but also on the form of the target language (Nunan, 1989; Willis & Willis, 2013). Nevertheless, in context of ELT in the universities in Sri Lanka TBLT has not been practiced effectively and authentically. On the other side of the coin, in concerning the English as a Second Language (ESL) context in the universities in Sri Lanka, there are more issues found in speaking among the undergraduates rather than the other skills of learning English (Kennedy, 2017; Samaranayake, 2016). In this line, it has been postulated that incorporating the task in teaching speaking skill among undergraduates will attribute to the effectiveness in learning speaking among the students in the universities (Kennedy, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to determine

the effectiveness of TBLT in teaching the speaking skills in the tertiary level of students in Sri Lankan context and to explore the possibilities for adapting the TBLT methodology in teaching speaking skills.

This research sets out to analyse the effect of Task-based language teaching in developing speaking skill among the undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The effect of the task is examined via incorporating the task in thriving Speaking skill. In this line, to probe this fact, the present study in this first chapter constitutes the primary factors pertaining to the research such as background of the study, problems statements, objectives, research questions and hypothesis followed by the rationale. It, then, moves on to defining the significance of the study and limitations that challenge the present study. Operational definitions peppered throughout this work have also been defined.

1.2 Background of the Study

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is an island surrounded by the Indian Ocean and has sub-continental boundaries of Indian peninsula to its west, Maldives Island to its south and Andaman and Nicobar Islands to its east and north respectively (Geographic Coordinates for Sri Lanka, 2018). It is 435 km long from north to south and 225 km wide from east to west and the extend of the area is 65,610 square km lying between latitudes $5^{\circ}, 55'$ - $9^{\circ}, 51'$ North and longitudes $79^{\circ}, 41'$ - $81^{\circ}, 53'$ East (Geographic Coordinates for Sri Lanka, 2018). The prominent salient feature of this island is that it has been mostly influenced by the geographical, historical, linguistic, cultural, political, and social characteristics of India as it is a closest sub- continent of the island among the other South Asian countries. Therefore, the important factor to be noted in the trend of English education in Sri

Lanka and the emerging literature studies pertaining to the paradigm of TESL that they share many common features of English education of its neighbouring counterparts India predominantly and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan considerably (Raheem & Devendra, 2010).



Figure 1.1. Location of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean

Source: Google Map

The population of Sri Lanka is about 21.67 million which shares ethnicities with Sinhalese 74.9 %, Tamils, Moors, Burghers and others respectively 15.67%, 9.3%, and 0.5% (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka [DCSS], 2017). The specific feature of the country is that it is a multi-religious nation consists of 70% of Buddhist, 12.6% of Hindus, 9.7% of Islam and 7.6% of Christians and others (Prasangani, 2018). The literacy rate has been marked as 92% (DCSS, 2017). Along with the two major languages; Sinhala and Tamil spoken in 70%, and 27 %

respectively, English has been authenticated as an official language and thus, it has become an inevitable lingua franca in the nation (Prasangani, 2018). In the total population 15 % of the people speak link language of English. The range of speaking English is higher in urban areas than the rural areas which share respectively as 34.1% and 32.9% (Prasangani, 2018).

Education in Sri Lanka is mainly sustained by the two ministries; Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education. The public schools, Pirivinas (school for Buddhist monks) Private schools, International Schools, Teacher Training Colleges, and the National College of Education are administrated by the Ministry of Education. Whereas the Ministry of Higher Education governs the institutions pertaining to the higher education such as Public Universities, Higher Educational Institutions and Institutes of Postgraduates Studies.

Table 1.1

Institutions Governed by the Ministry of Education

Institutions	Number
Schools	10184
Pirivinas	753
Private Schools	80
Teacher Training College	07
National College of Education	20

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2018

The entire public schools totally and the private schools partially are administered by the Ministry of Education. The structure of education system is based on the British structure of schooling system where the schooling category starts from Primary Level from Grade One to Five, the Junior Secondary from Grade Six to Nine, the Senior Secondary from Grade Ten to Eleven and Collegiate or the GCE(A/L) from Grade Twelve and Thirteen (DCSS, 2017). English is taught as a second language from Grade Three in the primary level up to the end of Grade Thirteen, the GCE (A/L) in public schools (Kennedy, 2017). Some of the public schools where vernacular language either Sinhala or Tamil as a medium of instruction conduct the semi-English medium (bilingual) curriculum where certain important subjects like Maths, Science, Health Science, Civics, Geography are taught in English medium. Apart from the public schools, the private and the international schools give the prime focus on the instruction of English medium. English is taught as a L2 as part of their curriculum in Teacher Training Colleges and in National colleges of Education.

Aiming at producing skilled employees, time to time government has taken considerable measures to upgrade the level of speaking proficiency of the students in schools (Prasangani, 2014). Under circular 05/2007 of 02/03/2007 special English programme ‘English as a tool for thinking with global’ was introduced in schools with an objective of giving more opportunities for speaking among the students in class. In 2008 creating a modal common routine in the class another speaking English programme ‘English as a life skill’ has been implemented in schools. The students have been given naturalistic environment in class to develop the speaking skill (Prasangani, 2014).

1.3 English at the Tertiary Level

The fifteen public universities, ten higher educational institutions and eight postgraduate institutes are governed by the Ministry of Ministry of Higher Education.

Table 1.2

Institutions Governed by the Ministry of Higher Education

Institutions	Number
University	15
Higher Educational Institution	10
Institute of Postgraduate Studies	08

Source: Department of Census and statistics, Sri Lanka 2018

The higher education system in Sri Lanka gives considerable range of concern on ESL system at the university level to upgrade the English proficiency of the students who enter the university with 10 years of formal ESL education at school from Year Three to Year Thirteen. At the tertiary level the students from all the disciplines of studies are exposed to the General English programme which is the part of their curricula and the courses are conducted by the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) or the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) in the university. The students need to necessarily secure the minimum requirement in English along with the major course to get through the degree (Student Charter, 2012). On the other hand, as far as L2 acquisition at the universities and other higher educational institution are concerned, considerable level of proficiency of language has been found in math and science related fields of study. Nevertheless, as far as the fields of arts, social sciences, and humanity studies are concerned, it is still felt a need for an improvement for achieving proficiency level among the students.

One of the reasons could be felt for this condition is that most of the students who are enrolled for these courses are found with low proficiency in English at the time of their enrolment (Coperaheva, 2011). Especially most of the students find difficulties in speaking as they rarely expose themselves to the speaking environment in English since they feel shy and fear of making mistakes in pronunciation and grammar (Kennedy, 2017). Basically, these students have lack of skills in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and fluency in speaking and this hamper the proficiency of their speaking (Attanayake, 2018). The DELT and ELTU undertake the TESL curriculum to teach General English to the students with varying level of proficiency in English in the faculties. Instruction for the faculties of Medicine, Science, Technology and Agriculture is in English (Kennedy, 2017). Therefore, DELT or ELTU undertakes the responsibility for upgrading proficiency level of the students to read, comprehend, write and present in English. Further, DELT and ELTU support the graduates to develop four skills of language learning; listening, speaking, reading writing along with grammar with the exposure of three hours of lectures per week (Prasangani, 2014). Considerable efforts are made for student-activity based learning with the support of authentic tools; listening cubicles, tape recorders and educational video films (Mahawatha, 2012).

Apart from DELT and ELTU, Department of English (DE) which comes under one of the faculties related to stream of social science or humanities offers general and special degree programmes in English (Kennedy, 2017). The curriculum is mostly focused on English Literature and Linguistics with the duration of three years for General Degree (GD) and four year for Special Degree (SD) (Prasangani, 2014).

1.4 Historical Background for Western and English Education Sri Lanka

British colonization, the protagonist of Western Imperialism among Portuguese and Dutch in Sri Lanka was the catalyst to strategically establish English education in Sri Lanka (Mukharjee, 2012; Raheem, 2010, p.165). The introduction of English as an official language and the three layers of schooling systems which prioritized the Private and Anglo-Vernacular schools favoured the children of high class, wealthy influence groups, landlords, and merchants (Prasangani, 2018). This marginalized the children from vernacular schools from getting quality English education. This resulted an emergence of long-lasting perennial rift in the history of professional and social status in Sri Lanka (Mukharjee, 2012). Moreover, this rendered a social condition with minority of high-class elite group with proficiency in English and majority of lower and middle class with meagre competency in English (Coperehewa, 2011). This is the major catalyst for the emergence of mass learning population for English as a second language in the chorology of TESL education in Sri Lanka. English had become a badge of superiority which divided the population (Raheem, 2010).

Thus, the English education has been a stimulant to determine the social status. But after 1956 English education was found declining in its significance as the vernacular languages such as Tamil and Sinhala were introduced as official languages, and they were used as media for education in schools and higher educational institutions (Mukharjee, 2012).

Nevertheless, English is still held superiority in the high profile of administrative, academic, and commercial sectors (Raheem, 2010). The English education once again begins to flourish and witness a renaissance after 1990 as the

government has realized the necessity for increasing the proficiency of English in schools and universities. Thus, the government attempts to find a solution for the contemporary problem of unemployment which is predominantly caused by unskilled jobseekers (Raheem, 2010).

Alongside, some private universities, educational and non-governmental institutions such as British Council, Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB) provide considerable supports to boom the English education in Sri Lanka.

1.5 Problem Statement

However, in spite of the optimistic and challenging scenario prevailing in language teaching and learning in the context of L2 acquisition, as reverberates sparsely in the previous sections, there are some problematic issues to be addressed and rectified in the level of tertiary education. In the history of L2 education at undergraduate level in Sri Lanka, teacher-oriented grammar translation and conventional teaching methods had been in practice till it found the sweeping changes in the education system around 1995 (Attanayake, 2017). Before then, the pedagogical approaches were mostly based on the teacher-oriented method focusing the activities on the Grammar Translation method with the little exposure to reading and writing as prescribed in certain textbooks (Prasangani, 2015). In 1990 the National Youth Commission (NYC) found a need for upgrading an efficient teaching strategy level of English education for undergraduates (Prasangani, 2014). Kennedy (2017), finds the teachers of English with the lack of teaching strategies and emphasizes a need for upgrading the teaching new innovative strategies skills and proficiency.

Therefore, new methods have been introduced and most specifically the student centred Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) strategy is launched to the system, Nevertheless, it has not been practiced properly or sparsely implemented due to emerging difficulties in feasibility of the programme as it focused only on meaning rather than the structure of the language (Raheem, 2012). It has given priority for communication and meaning of the target language than grammar. Therefore, accuracy in learning has not been taken place in classroom. This has led many teachers to face difficulties in preparing lesson plan and notes of lesson with expected objectives in achieving accuracy in language learning. Moreover, as the classroom teaching was focused only on communication and exchange of interaction it has created noisy and resulted in disturbances to neighbouring classes.

The CLT approach is attempted by few teachers, but later it is abandoned due the practical difficulties in making lesson plan and controlling classes. Therefore, an instant necessity is felt for a need for incorporating an appropriate teaching strategy in the instructional approach (Prasangani, 2015). As a remedial measure for the drawback in CLT, the researcher in this study attempts to resolve this issue in incorporating the Task-based Language Teaching and ascertaining its effectiveness in teaching speaking skill among the undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Further, many studies have been conducted that have investigated the effect of TBLT on developing various skills in learning English such as reading, listening and writing (e.g., Albino, 2017; Lap & Trang, 2017; Tang, Chiou & Jarsaillon, 2015). But few have examined the effect of this procedure on the speaking skills of EFL learners (Kaddour, 2016) even though it has suitable elements on improving more on speaking skill than the other skills of learning English (Willis & Willis, 2015)

In a study on adopting the task with teaching Youjin, and Xiang (2015) find that only little attempts and studies were made on TBLT practice at the tertiary level in Sri Lankan context while other Asian countries deliberately had attempted on it (Newton & Bui, 2017).

Wickramesekara, (2016) in a study finds that the undergraduates in Sri Lanka are linguistically underprivileged. Availability of authentic materials is comparatively more for the other skills of learning English than the speaking skill (Albino, 2017; Samaranayake, 2016) they do not have the required standard in English. Moreover, the speaking skill has become more problematic than the other skills of language learning (Albino, 2017). The students find huge challenges in speaking to express their views and ideas in English. Many of the students from stream of arts, social science and humanity studies are found with difficulties in presentation skill (Attanayake, 2017).

The following table from Wickramesekara, (2016) shows a need analysis made among 500 undergraduate students investigating the need for proficiency in learning English. The result has found that almost 458 out 500 (91.6% of) students need to be improved in speaking than the other skills. This proves that the speaking skill has become more challenging than the other skills such as reading, writing, listening, and grammar and need for a remedy (Hettiarachchi, 2015).

Table 1.3

Need Analysis for the proficiency in English among the undergraduate in Eastern University, Sri Lanka

Skill	Faculty				Total
	Faculty of Arts	Faculty of Law	Faculty of Management	Faculty of Science	
Reading	71	81	43	63	258
Writing	82	110	64	70	326
Listening and taking notes	76	84	53	72	285
Speaking	125	127	90	116	458
Grammar	100	114	64	70	348
Presentation Skill	87	114	81	114	396

Source: Adopted from Wickramesekara, (2016)

Therefore, the present study by incorporating the task strategies in teaching speaking skill, attempts to show the effect of task to increase the proficiency in speaking English among undergraduates in the tertiary level.

The effectiveness of TBLT is intended to be proved in this study by testing it on the ability on speaking. Therefore, the proficiency of speaking has to be measured by its sub skills of the speaking; vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and fluency as they are the common deliberative problematic issues in speaking among the students (Albino, 2017; Alzboun et al., 2017; Crowther, 2015; Hesmatontya, 2015).

The study of Alzboun et al. (2017) attempting to find the effect of role play upon the Jordanian EFL students finds pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and comprehension are the root causes of the problem of speaking. Therefore, the study considers them as variables and objectives for the research. In this line, Crowther (2015) in another study analysing the effectiveness of speaking task in

L2 acquisition , highlights , .pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and discourse as the basic problem in speaking, and constitutes them as variables and objectives for the study In the same way, in the background of Sri Lankan undergraduates context, Mahawatha (2012), finds pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar as hampering issues in speaking English. Attanayaka (2018) in the study observes deficiency in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary as major hindrance for speaking. Moreover, Hesmatontya (2017), highlights vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, comprehension and accent as sub-skills for measuring speaking proficiency in the globalized institutional testing forum; IELTS and TOEFL (IELTS Speaking Assessment Criteria, 2015). In analysing these studies, they have commonly taken vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and fluency as the variable for their study process. Therefore, in this line the present study, attempts to take vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and fluency the prevailing problematic issues speaking as the variable for measuring the proficiency in speaking which is to be treated by TBLT. Therefore, the researcher constitutes these variables as objectives and dependent variables in this study.

1.6 Objectives of the Research

Based on the need for upgrading the sub skills of the speaking among the undergraduates and the necessity of the study for probing the effectiveness of task on the speaking skills this study postulates the following objectives.

- 1) To determine the effectiveness of task-based language teaching in terms of significant change in overall speaking proficiency in comparing between control and treatment groups.

- 2) To determine the effectiveness of the TBLT in developing the vocabulary in speaking English.
- 3) To determine the effectiveness of TBLT in increasing the accuracy in pronunciation in speaking English.
- 4) To determine the effectiveness of TBLT in increasing the use of accurate grammatical elements in speaking English.
- 5) To determine the effectiveness of TBLT to increase the fluency in speaking English.
- 6) To explore the students' experience towards the TBLT approach in learning the speaking skill.

1.7 Research Questions

As a means to achieve above objectives following research questions are postulated for the study:

- 1) Is there a statistically significant difference, in terms of participants' overall speaking proficiency between the control group and treatment group using TBLT?
- 2) Is there a statistically significant difference in terms of vocabulary in participants' speaking English between the control group and treatment group using TBLT?

- 3) Is there a statistically significant difference in terms of pronunciation in participants' speaking English between the control group and treatment group using TBLT?
- 4) Is there a statistically significant difference in terms of the accurate use of grammatical elements in participants' speaking English between the control group and the treatment group using TBLT?
- 5) Is there a statistically significant difference in terms of fluency in participants' speaking English between the control group and the treatment group using TBLT?
- 6) What are the students' experiences towards task-based language teaching approach in learning the speaking skills?

1.8 Hypotheses

Mills and Gay (2016) suggest null hypothesis to be constituted in the empirical investigation when there is a lack of literature study seen in the intended field of study. On account of this fact, in the present study null hypotheses are formulated since the scarcity of literature studies are seen for categorically investigating the effect of task-based language teaching in improving speaking skill in the undergraduate context in Sri Lanka (Youjin et al., 2015):

H₀1: There is no statistically significant difference in terms of participants' overall speaking proficiency between the control groups and the treatment groups using TBLT.

H₀2: There is no statistically significant difference in terms of vocabulary in participants' speaking English between the control groups and treatment groups using TBLT.

H₀3: There no statistically significant difference in terms of pronunciation in participants' speaking English between the control groups and treatment groups using TBLT.

H₀4: There is no statistically significant difference in terms of the accurate use of grammatical elements in participants' speaking English between the control group and the treatment groups using TBLT.

H₀5: There is no statistically significant difference in terms of fluency in participants' speaking English between the control group and the treatment groups using TBLT.

The qualitative research question requires participants' intensifying experience and researcher's exploration of facts to arrive at conclusion or form a theory. Therefore, this rejects the hypothesis (Mills & Gay, 2016). Based on this account, it is observed that in the present study, the sixth research question inclines to qualitative study, as its solution requires the participants understanding, views, and experience on the approach of TBLT on speaking. Therefore, since the sixth question typically qualitative, ultimately it rejects formal hypothesis (Mills & Gay, 2016).

1.9 The Rationale of the Study

This study attempts to fill up the gap emerged by the lack of research and literature studies on implementing the task-based language teaching for improving the speaking skill in the realm of TESL in the undergraduates context in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the present study intends to focus on two issues as primary and secondary. The primary concern is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the task and create an initiative environment to incorporate the task-based language teaching in the realm of TESL context in the universities in Sri Lanka. The secondary focus is to assert the fact that task could be the effective medium to teach and to develop the proficiency in speaking skill which has been found as the most challenging skill in learning English among the undergraduates.

As far as the speaking proficiency of majority of the undergraduates in Sri Lanka is concerned, it remains low (Kennedy, 2017). It is the existing procedure of the government on disregarding the proficiency of English as a compulsory requirement for university admission aiming at benefiting the underprivileged rural area students with tertiary level of education (De.Silva, 1978). Moreover, the policy of the government on emphasizing the indigenous languages Tamil and Sinhala as medium of instruction for certain discipline of studies in tertiary level and inadequate exposure of English at the school level to meet the requirement of the university education have become the catalysts for the problem of speaking English among the undergraduates (Kennedy, 2017).

On the other hand, the teaching approaches to address these issues in speaking at tertiary level were not effective and innovative. In the history of TESL education in Sri Lanka teacher-oriented grammar translation methods had been in

practice till it found the sweeping changes in pedagogical approach in 1990. The CLT is introduced for dynamic and innovative teaching. But, it has been soon abandoned or sparsely practiced by the few teachers because of the difficulties in implementing the method as it mainly focuses on meaning rather than on structure of the language (Ginige, 2002; Raheem, 2010). Moreover, very little attempts has been made on CLT in TESL context categorically at the university level. Ovando et al. (2003) and Porcaro (2011) find that the TESL lecturers in the higher education Sri Lanka are still acquainted with traditional chalk-and- talk and drilling methods for teaching. Adding to this Mc Donogh and Kim (2007) find that teachers have scanty knowledge on an effective teaching method like TBLT to incorporate it with their teaching. Moreover, Youjin et al (2015) find that only little attempts have been made on TBLT related research in the Sri Lankan context. Further, literature studies and related empirical researches on TBLT and its mechanism on resolving issues in speaking in the domain of ESL are hardly seen in the Sri Lankan context.

Therefore, the prevalent necessity for finding the remedy for increasing the level of proficiency on speaking English with an effective and an innovative teaching method is importantly felt among the students in the tertiary level of education in Sri Lankan universities. Consequently, the present study attempts to fill up the gap on the lack of practicing the TBLT in developing speaking skill in the context of TESL among the undergraduates. Subsequently, the study would be an initial endeavour to eliminate prevailing shortage of related literature studies pertaining to the field concerned.

1.10 Significance of the Study

The process and the results of this study may gain significance as it is believed to address some of the crucial issues in the realm of teaching and learning of the domain of ESL in the Sri Lankan university context. This study might be an initiative endeavour for TBLT related study in the background of TESL of the university setting. This might pave the way for such imminent research and literature studies yet to be done pertaining to this field.

Sequencing the task in practice in class is reported as a core challenge in TBLT. This study in its third chapter Methodology attempts to process the tasks in teaching speaking skill in the class among the undergraduates. Therefore, the present study may disseminate some understanding and skills on sequencing the task in teaching English especially in teaching speaking skill. This may provide teachers, lecturers and teaching practitioners with further knowledge and skills in sequencing the task in class and give them confidence to attempt to incorporate it in teaching speaking skill.

Alzboun et al (2017) find that the conventional teacher centred method is still used in teaching speaking skill. The outcome of this study may educate the teachers with values of constituting TBLT in their teaching and inspire them to attempt this approach in their ESL classrooms. Broadening further, since this study is initiative, this may encourage teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum reviewers and policy makers to revise the curriculum and scheme of work by incorporating task alongside the conventional and teacher-centred methods (Ovando et al., 2003; Porcaro, 2000). Thus, the present study becomes a ground for creating a pitch for

pedagogical attempt on TBLT alongside their traditional pedagogical approaches (Ellis, 2003).

The current study demonstrates the way for stimulating the students to feel real time use of language by drawing them upon intrinsic motivation while learning. The diversity of the tasks documented in the third chapter might persuade learner to involve in learning freely, independently, cooperatively and creatively (Ellis & Ellis 2013). Subsequently, this may increase the wide range of intrinsic motivation and bring the students to feel real time use of target language (Ellis, 2003). Thus, this study may set an example for fulfilling the eagerness and the expectation of students in learning the language with free and independent approach escaping from the traditional teacher-oriented method to student-centred teaching (Ministry of Manpower, 2009).

This study may show the means to approach speaking skill and increase the proficiency. The students and the teachers may be able to find the way to overcome difficulties that encounter in speaking by using the task-based approach.

This study will enhance further research and literature studies to be done in the domain of TESL, especially in Sri Lankan context. Evidences are hardly seen for TBLT being practiced in Sri Lankan L2 pedagogical circle. Therefore, this study made on TBLT and its related effect on speaking is going to be an initiative for further research and literature studies to be attempted on L2 teaching. Further attempt can be made as an experimental study expanding from speaking to other skills such as reading, writing, listening, grammar, and other aspects of language teaching.

Thus, this study has a diversity of significance in the aspects of teaching and learning approach and the prospectus for use of TBLT in the domain of TESL in Sri Lankan context. In fact, these significances will hold a strong fertile ground for TBLT to be practiced not only speaking in tertiary education, but also other skills of language teaching in schools and higher educational institutions at large.

1.11 Limitations

According to the available literature studies, there had been comparatively only few studies made on TESL and no such investigation ever made on TBLT in Sri Lankan context. Therefore, accessing of adequate information on literature studies and research made on TBLT is much challenging task and daunting effort. Consequently, this study has to depend mostly on first-hand information and resource to be collected in the native environment and the related information collected from neighbouring countries where the similar situation is seen in the domain of TESL.

- (a) There had been a large number of participants in the control and treatment groups. Therefore, the researcher has to guide the research assistant to cater all students to be undergone pre and post tests and then select first 30 students. This has acquired consuming of additional time and days.
- (b) Getting the permission for research from the respective authorities delayed and this caused further delay in entire implementation schedule.
- (c) Challenging in getting the students on time as they sometime go for practical, tutorial lecture sessions and field trips.

1.12 Operational Definitions

According to the view of Mills and Gay (2016), in this study the terms of definition describes the operational importance and the function of each variable and primary term of this study with its brief definition.

1.12.1 Task

Task is the core of TBLT, and it is defined as a piece of work undertaken as a medium of learning a language (Ellis, 2009). Non-linguistically Long (1985, p. 89) defines real-world task as “a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others freely or for some rewards.” According to Nunan’s (2004) linguistic view of approach a task is an action or an activity which is employed linguistically process or understand the language. Acquainting with Nunan’s view, Willis and Willis (2013) pedagogically and linguistically explain task as a work plan which helps learners to learn the target language. In viewing the operational approach of task according to Nunan (2004) the use of varieties of task in ESL and EFL teaching approach, the task makes the language teaching more effective and communicative as it provides the way for language learning in naturalistic situation. Based on these distinguished accounts of the task, in this study the varieties of task; such as gap filling tasks, follow up tasks, corrupted text tasks and personalizing tasks are employed at the TBLT interventions performed in the treatment group of the selected samples. These tasks are incorporated in teaching to increase the interest in enhancing pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency of speaking aiming at increasing the speaking skill in the treatment group (Albino, 2017). As prescribed by Willis and Willis (2013) the tasks are used in the three phases of the teaching session: Pre-task, Task sequence and Post-task.

The three phases of the task are technically operated in present study. At the beginning of the session as for setting the scene, the pre-task is performed to make the learners to understand the topic or the subject of the session to be learnt (Willis & Willis, 2013). The pre-task employed at the beginning of the session would help the learners to get some ideas on the subject matter to be discussed in the class. The tasks with pictures or some brainstorming tasks related to the topic are discussed and subsequently the learners are drawn to the main topic where the task sequences are performed in the second phase. At the task sequence varieties of tasked used to do the subject matter of the session. The tasks are chosen to suite the main topic to be taught tallying the proficiency level of the students in the class (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). The post-task is constituted to enhance and increase the fluency of subject matter learnt in the task sequence (Willis, 2007). The pre-tasks, in this study, are used to re-emphasize the form focus exercises in form of activities like repeating, summarizing, evaluating and getting feedback (Willis, 2007).

Task is the independent variable, and this influences the dependant variable speaking in the current study. The term task has been distinguished as conceptual definitions related to this study. Tasks are used in the instructional programme of this study to achieve its goal; accuracy, complexity and fluency (Nunan, 1989). Incorporating the task in teaching, learners are expected to achieve the accuracy at the initial level. The varieties of complexity of task are given in the class to achieve the final goal the fluency.

1.12.2 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

The pedagogical based definition of TBLT underpins several principles and practices in the realm of ESL and EFL teaching (Nunan, 2004). Focusing on learner's needs-based approach, emphasis on communicative interaction through using the target language, use of authentic texts, concern not only on meaning but also on the form of the language, opportunities for learners' experience in the classroom and providing stimulating opportunities for practicing the classroom language outside the classroom are some of the practices and principles of TBLT (Nunan, 2004). Accordingly, the present study intends to focus on communicative interaction focusing not only on meaning but also on the form of the target language when implementing the TBLT with the treatment group of the students (Nunan, 2004).

TBLT provides an effective learning environment for the students to learn L2 (Sofyana. 2015). In agreeing, Willis and Willis (2013) prescribe the TBLT for primary skills of language learning such as listening, speaking, reading and writing and other aspects of language learning components like grammar and vocabulary. However, Albino (2017) emphasises the importance of TBLT on speaking skills and argues that the TBLT is more exclusively and categorically suitable for speaking skill than the other skills of learning English. In this line, in the present study the TBLT is defined as a pedagogical approach which is practiced among the Sri Lankan undergraduates to see whether it is effective in developing the speaking skill. The TBLT is applied to the students in treatment group to probe its effectiveness in developing speaking skill. Moreover, as prescribed by (Nunan, 2004) the present study implements the TBLT for teaching speaking skill focusing not only in meaning but also in the form of the language in the treatment group.