

Developing Student-Teacher Interaction Through Task-Based Instruction

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Abstract

The current study investigates how student-teacher interaction can be developed through task-based teaching in undergraduate students' Saudi teaching and learning context. An experiment was conducted for five weeks on 85 male undergraduate students at a Saudi public university based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The study investigated different types of student-teacher interaction through task-based teaching (speaking activities). The results revealed that the experimental group (43 students) evinced much more enthusiasm, willingness, engagement and readiness in their in-class participation than their peers in the control group (42 students). The student-teacher interaction also helped students to be more responsive to general and specific topics in speaking activities. The study recommends that decision-makers in education make student-teacher interaction part of the student's monthly assessment. It also recommends that more efforts be made to foster the awareness of students, teachers, and parents awareness of the academic and non-academic importance of interaction. One final recommendation of the research is that student-teacher interaction should be more emphasized and integrated into the school curriculum and adopted as a critical teaching strategy.

Key words:

Interaction; task-based; teaching; strategy; speaking skills.

1. Introduction

Among the key factors of successful education, student-teacher interaction ranks at the top priorities. The ultimate objective of education systems is to make students and teachers work in a more cooperative, challenging, and respectful environment. To achieve these goals, many research studies have been conducted to show how student-teacher interaction is vital to the quality of classroom teaching and learning. In pedagogy, the role of today's instructors and teachers is expected not only to be engaging in their classes but also to engage students in different contexts holistically. Good teachers interact with their students in a variety of informal, social, and customized contexts. This requires a sense of friendliness and affability to make it happen. Student-teacher interaction is not scalable, and it is critically crucial for personalized learning outcomes [1]. Teaching and learning are no longer two poles apart; the interaction is the catalyst that incentivizes teachers and students to be engaging and engaged.

Student-teacher interaction goes beyond the borderline of traditional teaching: the teacher prepares the syllabus, lesson plans, presentation, activities, and tests while the students pay tuition, sign up courses, attend classes, study, do assignments, submit work, take tests, and graduate [2]. This is simple only when we view it in a vacuum. The most significant learning and teaching process is the positive communication between stakeholders, which becomes more efficient when we unveil the richness of education growing in a range of interaction nuances [2]. The increasingly growing digitalized education, especially in COVID19, has made student-teacher interaction critically important when speaking classes are provided online. The opportunities for student-teacher interaction are suitable for distance teaching and traditional and offline modes of instruction [3] ‘ [4].

Saudi Arabia has recently emphasized learning and teaching competencies, and the school curriculum has also been updated to address the students'/teachers' needs and best benefit from the high-quality international practices. However, student-teacher interaction has not yet received the appropriate attention from academic leaders, educators, and experts. Teachers and students need to be engaged in what they do; it is a two-way interaction. The current study is a new attempt to develop multidimensional student-teacher interaction through task-based teaching.

1.1 Significance of the study

Student-teacher interaction is key to realizing success in both teaching and learning. It is hypothesized that when student-teacher interaction is developed, the learning and teaching outcomes are potentially optimized. Therefore, the current study seeks the following outcomes:

1. To design student-teacher interaction skills in teaching and learning competencies so that they become integrated in their daily practices in their classes and their school life;
2. To make teaching and to learn more of quality than quantity and make teachers and students not just engaged but also engaging each other;

3. To disseminate, among academic leaders, teachers, educators, principals, counselors, and supervisors, the culture of student-teacher interaction as part of daily instructional practices;
4. To enhance the students' and the teachers' attitudes and behaviors in terms of academic, social, psychological, emotional, and interpersonal abilities.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study examines how important it is to develop student-teacher interaction through task-based teaching strategies for college-level students. It investigates, in particular, developing student-teacher interaction through speaking task-based activities.

1.3 Questions of the Study

The study answers three research questions:

1. Can student-teacher interaction be enhanced through speaking skills activities?
2. What impact does student-teacher interaction have on EFL teaching and learning?

1.4 Sampling

The research population is the entire undergraduate students in the Saudi public universities in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The sample of the research made up a total of 85 undergraduate students. The sample was randomly selected from a Saudi public university located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The sample was almost equally divided into two groups: the experimental (43) students and the control (42) students. The participants had mixed abilities in English, speaking skills in particular. In addition, the participants had different academic, psychosocial, and emotional behaviors/attitudes. The experiment lasted for five weeks; the task-based teaching was used to teach speaking skills; the topics changed almost every two days to allow the students and the teacher to interact in various ways better.

1.5 Instrument

The study adopted a sample of different speaking skills available online and on DVDs for classroom and home use. This included selected debate topics from 'The Grand Final of Interschool Debate Competition on Asia-Pacific Affairs', 'Inter-University Debate Competition' conducted and hosted by American University in the Emirates, and 'TED Talks' available at www.ted.com. In addition, the task-

based teaching strategy also included topics of the students' choice and topics the researcher deemed appropriate and more engaging. The teacher, also had a list of the participants divided into different rows and columns for classroom observation and feedback. In addition, the researcher has assigned an expert assistant to monitor and record the information required in the table. This helped the teacher to be more engaging and engaged in the interaction.

2. Methods and Procedures

Tasks

In the experimental group, the participants were requested to read, collect and search for as much information as possible to evince readiness, enthusiasm, and willingness in the task-based speaking. For the first 15 minutes, the selected video was played, the teacher watched and saw who would stand for or against the topic under discussion. Then, in a couple of minutes, students arranged their seats, each group facing the other. Three neutral students were selected every time as judges or arbitrators to settle the debate. Then the teacher orchestrated and set four task-based activities; each activity was designed to assess a specific component in student-teacher interaction.

Task One

The general response to the topic: this activity measures the students' and the teacher's readiness, willingness, and enthusiasm to respond to general questions posed. This helps students of low participation voice their opinions no matter how laconic or terse their response is. The purpose here is to engage them and make them interact on their own accord. Here, the student can choose the number of words he deems sufficient. This gives an indicator of his psychosocial and emotional interaction in addition to his academic engagement. Some students are hopelessly inarticulate, so it would be a good idea to increase their student-teacher interaction regardless of being little.

Task Two

Response to a specific question: this task is meant to encourage students who are by nature taciturn or reticent. The teacher chooses easy questions or questions that require the student's responsibility to be gradually engaged in discussion. This can be done as a teacher-student, or two students can have a short dialogue on a simple topic. Questions that feature 'Yes-No' answers can be a good start, then WH-Questions can be used to extend the interaction.

Task Three

Response to student-teacher interaction: in pairs or foursomes, students first speak to the partner(s) they choose to speak with at their ease and comfort. This helps

students who do not have high social, emotional, and psychological interaction be more open to public discussion and show their ability to engage in two-way interactions. For example, one student can be the leader or spokesperson to represent others, and other work in the shadow, supporting him with ideas, words, cues, or gestures. Later, the students switch their roles to take the lead and enhance their engagement.

Task Four

Self-initiated engagement: this activity is the result of continuous encouragement and motivation for the students to start speaking and interacting without being always spurred. Students are expected to initiate speaking about several topics and interact with their peers and their teacher by this time. In addition, such students can suggest topics and invite their classmates for more engagement and interaction.

The control group traditionally took their speaking classes: the teacher being the only source of information, the one who speaks dominantly through the whole class leaving poorly engaged students unmotivated and disengaged.

3. Findings

The study revealed exciting and seminal results based on the performance of both the control and experimental groups. In answering the first research question, the in-class implementation of the task-based teaching strategy has revealed considerable effects on the development of student-teacher interaction over the five weeks of the experiment. Figure (1) shows that the experimental group participants outperformed their control group counterparts in terms of student-teacher interaction, the time students and the teacher spend discussing the topic(s), asking relevant questions, responding to specific points, and initiating topics for discussion. In addition, the number of students who gradually got more engaged and engaging in the relational student-teacher interaction has also increased, as shown in Figure (1):

By comparing the number of students who gradually got more engaged and engaging in the student-teacher interaction, the experimental group participants' evinced more enthusiasm, willingness, and readiness to the task-based teaching strategy. However, the number of the control group students remained almost the same. By week four, all students in the experimental group were active in-class tasks, while in the control group; the number of interactive students did not reach six students! This is definitely due to the teacher-dominating class.

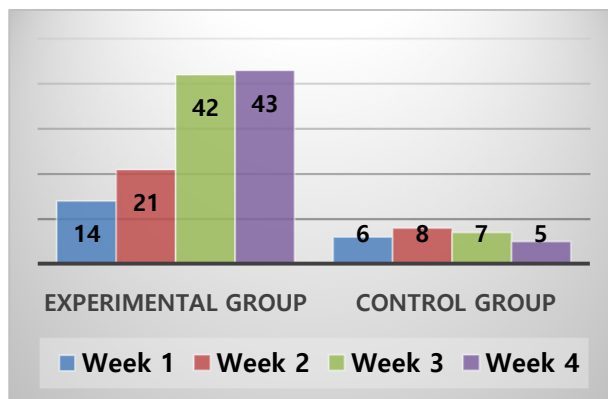


Figure 1. Number of engaged/engaging students

Furthermore, the experimental group outperformed the control group in being interactive in more than one way. Through the four tasks carried out, the students in the experimental group did better in the tiered activities. Not only did the teacher consider the student's different academic levels, he also took into account their different psychosocial and emotional attitudes and behaviors. The students were provided with different options to show engagement in the task-based teaching strategy, ranging from interaction with yes-no questions, in-pair and in-foursome activities ending up with self-initiated interaction with the teacher and the students as shown in Figure (2):

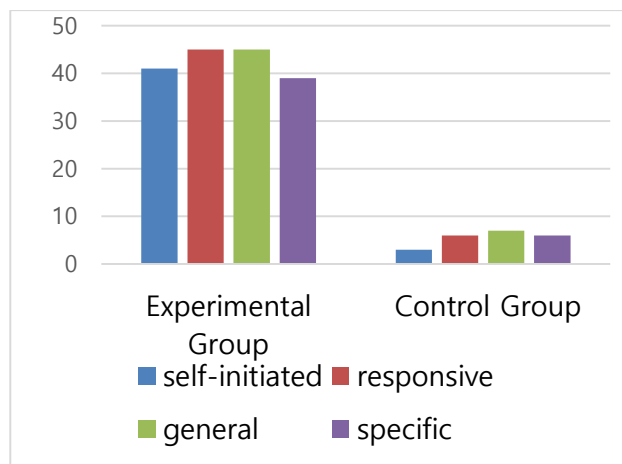


Figure 2. Types of student-teacher interaction

The term 'self-initiated or 'self-generated' engagement means the student's ability to suggest, create and initiate an engaging discussion to engage the classmates and the teacher. The term 'responsive' refers to the students' readiness and preparedness to interact with any topics brought to discussion impromptu. Finally, the term 'general' means the students' ability to interact with general topics, while specific means expressing themselves with

more detail and in-depth on specific topics. As shown in Figure (2), the experimental group students displayed more student-teacher interaction than those of the control group.

The teacher in the experimental group is an orchestrator or a facilitator, so the time left for the students to show interaction is much more than the time squeezed in the control group. The task-based teaching strategy shows that the student-teacher interaction developed the time spent by the students in the experimental group, interacting with each other and the teacher, as shown in Figure (3):

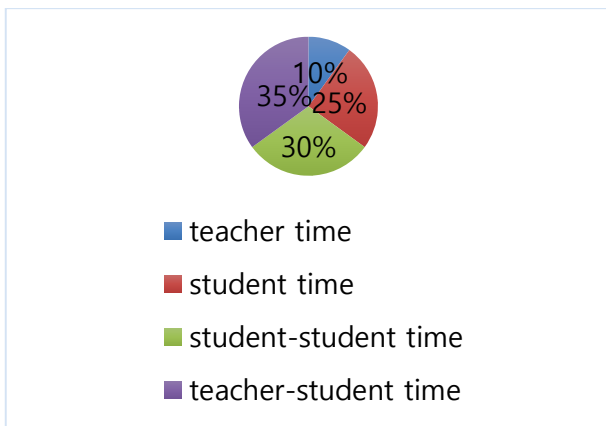


Figure 3. Time spent in student-teacher interaction

Things did not go the same for the control group regarding the amount of time allotted. The time of the class was not equally distributed, as shown in Figure (4). Much of the time was used by the dominating teacher, and sparingly occasional moments were left for some students to show relative participation and engagement:

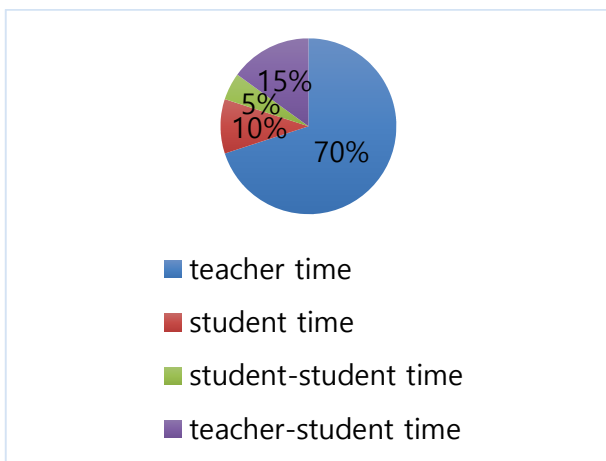


Figure 4. Time spent in traditional speaking classes

The students here are more like listeners, and if given some time, they are sparing with interaction and remain reticent, using rude or laconic comments.

In the experimental group, students showed two main types of student-teacher interactions: argument and counterargument. Thanks to student-teacher interaction, the counterarguments were more produced and added great enthusiasm, interaction, and engagement to the class. Figure (5) shows the number of arguments and counterarguments in week (4) versus the number of those made in the control group:

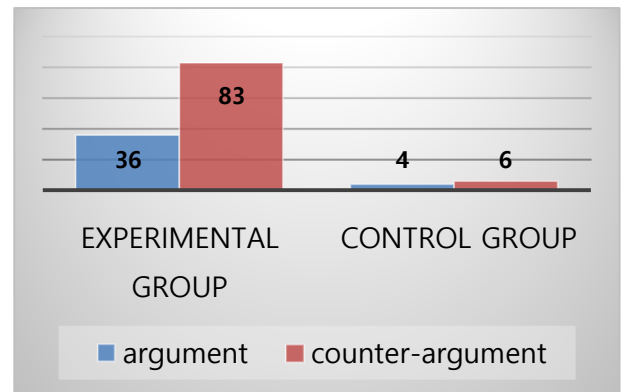


Figure 5. Arguments and counterarguments

The expert assistant has observed the number of arguments and counterarguments in each group to monitor the nature and types of student-teacher interaction.

The study also revealed that the students evinced more interaction, willingness, enthusiasm, and readiness to engage due to the teacher's facilitating and orchestrating role. Figure (6) shows the number of interactions per student in the experimental group in weeks (3) and (4), in contrast to those made by the students in the control group:

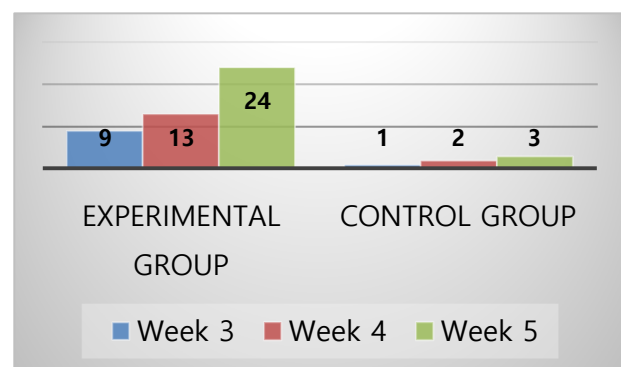


Figure 6. Number of interactions per student

Interestingly, the study also revealed that the student's interaction was developed and enhanced in terms of length

of speaking engagement. The student's verbal participation was measured roughly by the number of minutes spent interacting with peers, with the teacher, or even when explaining an idea to the whole class, as shown in Figure (7). The average students' verbal participation length was recorded in week three as a randomly selected sample of both groups.

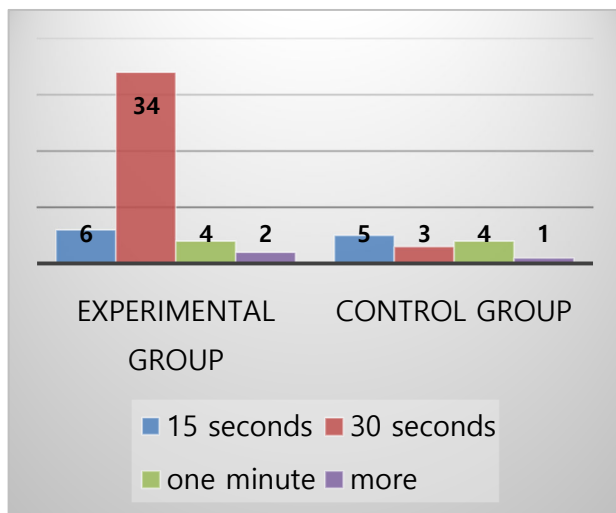


Figure 7. Length of student interaction

In the experimental group, it is clear that many students made their interactions for about 30 seconds or a little more (34) students; while, the rest for more or less 15 seconds, one minute or more. However, in the control group, the few students (5 students) made interactions, which lasted for 15 seconds or a little more, 3 for 30 seconds and 4 for more or less one minute, and one student made it for more than one minute.

4. Discussion

Based on the results presented above, the main conclusion is that student-teacher interaction could be developed through a task-based teaching strategy. Students' interactions increased in terms of frequency and length of speaking engagement. The research also revealed that when the teacher was a friend of students, they developed their ability to initiate and generate arguments and counterarguments of relevance to the class. Again, when well-orchestrated, the low participation students were brought to the foreground to evince willingness, engagement, and readiness to at least interact to yes-no questions, making short comments. In answering the second research question, experimental group students were observed to have been enthusiastic about developing their academic achievement and changed their psychosocial and emotional behaviors and attitudes. The

student-teacher interaction helped the students who were marked as taciturn, inarticulate, reticent or otherwise expressed to increase their interaction. The teacher also understood more how students' learning preferences and styles work and thus customized some activities for students with low and medium interactions.

The results proved the early hypothesis: student-teacher interaction can be developed through task-based teaching strategy in the Saudi teaching and learning context. The study showed that student-teacher interaction could be enhanced through speaking task-based activities. Teaching speaking skills and learning speaking as a critical language skill were also reported to have been improved through student-teacher interaction. The results also show that student-teacher interaction has several impacts. The students' academic achievements have significantly improved in speaking, and they have developed better skills in argument, debate, expressing opinions, and open discussions. The students' psychosocial and emotional behaviors and attitudes have changed for good: several reserved and introverted students started to interact gradually. The teacher also better understands how his students think, act, and interact. Teachers being engaged and engaging in their speaking classes can participate in curriculum design to produce better learning outcomes based on best teaching practices.

5. Recommendations

The study has come up with a set of key and practical recommendations for decision and policymakers at the macroscopic level of administration and for educators, parents, students, principals, supervisors, and curriculum designers at the microscopic level of teaching and learning processes. The recommendations can be summarized in the following:

- Teachers should receive in-depth training on the nature of student-teacher interaction and possible techniques to implement it in class.
- Students should be educated on the importance of in-class interaction and how important it is to develop their academic, emotional, psychological, and social behaviors.
- Student-teacher interaction should be integrated in all language skills activities at different levels of study to enhance enthusiasm, readiness, engagement, and willingness;
- Assessment should include the degree and type of in-class interaction.

6. Conclusion

Researching the relational behaviors between the students and the teacher is of great importance for education. It helps educators redirect, redesign, and reshape the teaching and learning processes and redefine the existing relationships between the teacher and the students. Interestingly, the student-teacher interaction reveals that teachers should manifest readiness, willingness, and enthusiasm in what they teach, be engaged in the teaching process, and engage students in what is being taught. Likewise, students should develop a multi-fold relationship with the teacher and the students. Through a four-way interaction (students, teacher, content, and method), learning outcomes develop and take a better track that produces better learning outcomes. For the students to interact with the teacher and vice versa, there must be a multi-purpose catalyst that finds more overlapping areas and points of mutual interest. With the teacher being more of a friend of the students and being friendly to their diverse learning styles and preferences, students can best interact with their classmates and teachers.



Hashem Alsamadani received the M.A. and PhD degrees, from Ohio Univ. in 2008 and 2009, respectively. After working as assistant teacher (from 2001), an associate professor (from 2014) in the Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction, Umm Al-Qura Univ., he has been a professor at Umm Al-Qura Univ. since 2018. His research interest includes reading instruction in EFL, CALL, and second LL techniques and strategies.

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