The Effects of Task-Based Instruction Using Online Language Games in a Flipped Learning Environment (TGF) on English Oral Communication Ability of Thai Secondary Students

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to investigate the effects of task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment (TGF) in developing the English oral communication ability of Thai secondary students and examine the students' opinions of the task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment. The present study employed a mixed-method approach. The two-group pre-test and post-test design was used. The participants were 80 students studying in Mathayomsuksa 3 (grade 9) at a secondary school in Maha Sarakham province in Thailand. Forty students were in the experimental group where the TGF was given as the treatment, and 40 students were in the control group where all instruction was taught only in class. Pre- and post-tests were used to collect the quantitative data. A semi-structured interview was used to collect the qualitative data from the students' opinions. The findings revealed that the students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group after the TGF. The different mean score of the experimental group was statistically significantly higher than the control group ($p < 0.05$), demonstrating that the TGF was effective in improving the students' English oral communication ability. It appears that combining task-based language instruction, flipped learning, and game-based language learning could help the students improve their oral communication skills in English.

Keywords: task-based instruction, online language games, flipped learning environment, English oral communication ability, Thai secondary students

1. Introduction

As the world continues to change and globalization occurs, the English language plays a significant role in several aspects. English has been promoted to a world-leading medium of communication (Alyan, 2013). It has become widely accepted as the primary means of communication in all fields (Yuen, 2014). It cannot be denied that the English language is essential, specifically when English is orally used for communication.

English oral communication skills are important in different contexts. Being able to communicate effectively gives learners an extra opportunity (Ellen, 2001). In a business context, communication skills are very important because they enable businesses to be productive and operate their work efficiently (Silk, 1995). For educational context, having a good command of English can help learners easily pursue their higher studies as they wish (Inkaew & Thumawongsa, 2018). Despite the fact that English oral communication is significant in many fields, it is still challenging for English learners to communicate in English.

Most Thai students have also experienced challenges in English communication. Although they have been studying English for so many years, there are still several problems and possible factors that could lead to students' poor level of performance in English oral communication. The common problems are that students lack confidence in using English and find communication difficult (Boonkit, 2010). In addition, they tend to make grammatical errors, specifically incorrect tenses and structures, as well as poor pronunciation (Boonkit, 2010; Khamkhien, 2010).

In the researchers' context, the students in a secondary school also face the same concerns. The students are shy to speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes. They tend to make grammatical errors while speaking because they do not have enough knowledge to use accurate grammar. Moreover, the teacher tends to

speak more in class compared to the students. This could lead to the problem of passive learning, where the students sit passively listening to the teacher explaining the lesson. These factors may cause Thai students' lower English oral communication ability than expected.

The Ministry of Education declared the Basic Education Curriculum in Thailand, and it serves as the core curriculum for basic national education (Ministry of Education, 2008). The curriculum promotes Thai students to use language for communication for the English subject. It is, for example, stated in the curriculum that secondary students especially grade 9, must be able to use English in "real situations or simulated situations in the classroom, school, community, and society" (Ministry of Education, 2008). Consequently, various English teaching approaches have been promoted to improve English education at all levels.

Having an authentic and meaningful classroom environment of learning English, several communicative approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) have been implemented. A number of studies were conducted to find the most effective ways to help limit the difficulties and problems in English oral communication of non-native English speakers in Thailand. The task-based learning and teaching (TBLT) approach was one of the approaches that has been widely used to strengthen students' English oral communication abilities in different contexts and with different levels of students. According to Van den Branden (2016), TBLT was used to connect the language with personal lives, which was a motivating approach to develop students' language skills. However, some studies (Carless, 2002; Littlewood, 2007; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007) revealed that many challenges were reported in cases where TBLT was used alone, such as a lack of time to complete in-class tasks, a lack of initiative to perform tasks owing to their fear and shyness of speaking English, and refusal to use English when performing tasks. In addition, students with limited English expressed negative feelings about TBLT because they thought it was too difficult for them. Besides, using TBLT alone seems not to match the online learning situation during the Covid-19 pandemic. As some limited points about using TBLT alone were mentioned, such an approach needs to be modified first.

After studying TBLT with another approach, Flipped Learning (FL) seems to be appropriate since students learn the content and material at their own speed through technology in their out-of-class time. Flipped classroom instruction can develop students' speaking ability, decrease difficulties, create more interest, and increase motivation (Jit-armart & Jogthong, 2019). Due to the current situation, the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted learning on-site at school. Learning online via technology plays a vital role in nowadays' education. However, some studies reported its drawbacks. For example, students received knowledge in a passive way where interaction was limited; some of them got bored and refused to watch the videos assigned by the teacher (Cockrum, 2014). As a result, another motivating tool is required for students to learn the content in their out-of-class time. Online language games are suitable for students who feel demotivated to complete the assigned tasks since online language games are fun, motivating, and matched with students of all ages. Moreover, students can independently play games anywhere where the internet is accessed.

After reviewing a number of studies related to teaching approaches used to enhance learners' oral communication ability, most studies revealed several gaps in such approaches. Firstly, even though a great amount of research has been investigating the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT), using it alone was reported that students faced many challenges. Therefore, to adapt TBLT before using it needs to be considered. Secondly, FL seems to be a suitable approach that TBLT can be integrated with. It meets the current trend where technology plays a vital role, so students study the materials via technology in their out-of-class time. This is also matched with the current situation when the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted face-to-face classes. It is now changed to online learning. Thirdly, to flip, there should be an appropriate tool that can fully grab students' attention and have them involved for a long time. For secondary students, games seem to fit well with their learning styles. Games are enjoyable, engaging, and suitable for students at this age. After reviewing several studies related to these three approaches: TBLT, FL, and GBLL, there has been insufficient research done on the study of the combination of two different approaches (Botmart & Supasetseree, 2019). In addition, only one study by Rachayon and Soontornwipast (2019) integrated the three approaches, task-based language teaching, flipped learning, and game-based language learning, all together as the intervention.

In order to bridge these gaps, the present study aimed to investigate the effects of task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment (TGF) in developing the English oral communication ability of Thai secondary students. With this new intervention, task-based language learning offered many advantages in designing communicative activities and developing oral skills. Hopefully, the students improved their English oral communication skills and could eventually communicate in English effectively.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The present study has two research objectives.

1) To investigate the effects of task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment (TGF) in improving the English oral communication ability of Thai secondary students.

2) To explore the students' opinions of task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment.

2. Theoretical Framework

"The Task-based Instruction Using Online Language Games in a Flipped Learning Environment (TGF)" is the title of the present study's framework. It was adapted from the study of Rachayon and Soontornwipast (2019). It was created using three theoretical frameworks: task-based language teaching (TBLT), game-based language learning (GBLL), and flipped learning (FL).

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), TBLT is known as an approach that emphasizes communicative tasks and activities as the primary unit of language education and preparation. The fundamental focus of TBLT is on the tasks to be completed, and language is considered as the required tool for carrying them out (Willis, 1996). The term "task" is described in this study as an activity involving learners in understanding, manipulating, creating, or interacting in the target language to convey meaning rather than manipulate form in order to accomplish a communicative or non-linguistic result, as defined by Willis (1996), Nunan (2004), and Ellis (2003). The TBLT framework employed by Willis (1996) and Ellis (2003) was used in the present study. It comprised three primary stages: pre-task, during the task, and post-task.

In addition to TBLT, flipped learning (FL) is another approach implemented into the TGF to mitigate the disadvantages of TBLT. According to Bergmann and Sams (2014) and Morris and Thomasson (2013), FL is a pedagogical approach in which technology is being used to provide individual instruction to students outside of their class time so that in-class time can be spent on tasks or activities that promote student-centered learning, active learning, and higher-level thinking. In this study, the FL framework was based on Mussallam's FL model (2011, cited in Cockrum, 2014).

Since the present study used language games rather than videos as the teaching material in the flipped learning process, game-based language learning is another strategy included in the TGF intervention. Language games are activities with rules, goals, and fun elements used to provide a fun and more relaxing atmosphere, especially in language classes for students to acquire a second or foreign language (Hadfield, 1990). There are several kinds of language games, such as matching, fill-in-the-blanks, and dialogue games (Educaplay, 2020).

In order to build the TGF model, the TBLT, FL, and GBLL frameworks were examined to establish the consistency between the stages in these three approaches. Then, using the strengths of one framework to overcome the flaws of the others, all three frameworks were implemented to form the TGF framework.

In the present study, the framework of task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment (TGF) was adapted from Rachayon and Soontornwipast (2019). As shown in Figure 1, the TGF framework consisted of four primary stages: Preview, Flip, Task cycle, and Post-task. The Flip stage was done outside of class, while the other three were performed in class face-to-face. The following is a description of each stage.
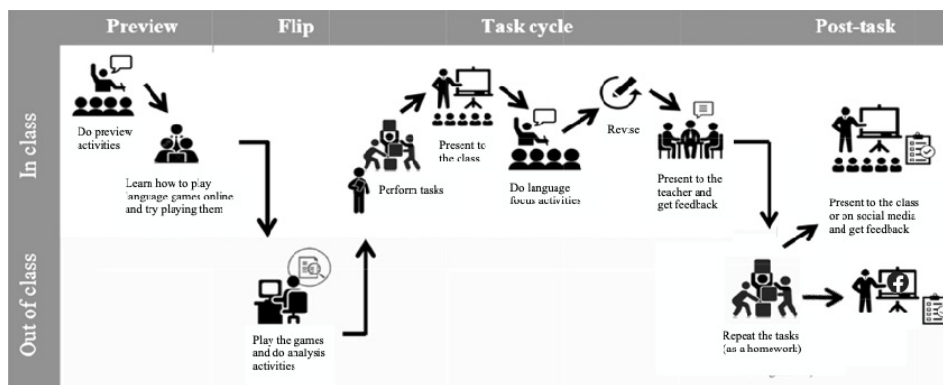

Figure 1. The framework of task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment (TGF)

In the Preview stage, the students were first introduced to the lesson's topic through preview activities or questions. These activities were designed to assist the students in identifying the topic area and setting the goal of playing online language games. Next, the students were presented to the online language games and game analysis process. The games used in the present study included matching, fill-in-the-blanks, and dialogue games. The teacher showed the students how to play the games and demonstrated how to do the game analysis tasks afterward. At the same time, the students observed the teacher play the games before being allowed to try playing them.

In the Flip stage, learning occurred outside of the class. The students were expected to use their free time independently playing the games and doing analysis exercises. The students were expected to learn useful vocabulary, phrases, and structures in this stage. The students used the Preview and the Flip stages as the pre-task activities to prepare for the next step, the Task cycle stage, in which they had to use whatever they learned to carry out a series of communicative activities.

The Task cycle stage consisted of five main steps, all of which were conducted in class. Firstly, the students were asked to work in pairs or small groups to complete the tasks. The teacher worked as a facilitator, monitoring, observing, and encouraging the students while performing the tasks. Secondly, the students were required to show their work to the entire class or present it to a partner or a small group to receive peer feedback. Thirdly, the teacher allowed the students to complete the language emphasis exercises, including vocabulary, grammar and structure, and pronunciation. Then, the students must review and revise their works. Finally, the students turned in their final work to the teacher to get the comments.

In the final stage of the TGF framework, the Post-task stage, the students were given to repeat the task under the new circumstances as a homework assignment and presented their work to the teacher and class. The students presented their work in front of the class in some units, or some of them showed it on Facebook or other social networking platforms. All students in the class were able to see their friends' work. Finally, the rest of the class was asked to provide feedback on the presentations presented by their peers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

The study employed a mixed-method approach, as shown in Figure 2. Quantitatively, the effects of the TGF were investigated by using a two-group pretest-posttest design. The students were separated into the experimental group and the control group. The students in the experimental group received the instruction using the TGF framework, where they must play online language games at home before coming to class. Another group was the control group, where the whole instruction process occurred only in class. Moreover, the students' opinions towards the TGF were investigated, using a semi-structured interview.
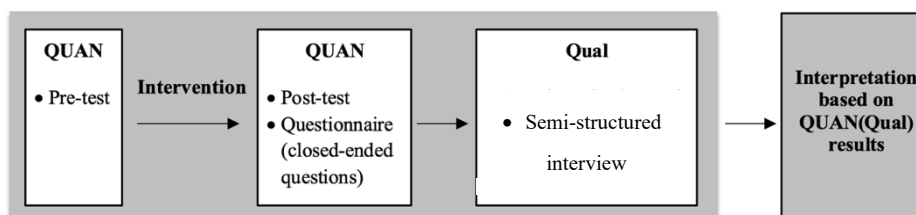

Figure 2. The mixed-method design of the study

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this study was approximately 500 students studying in Mathayomsuksa 3 (grade 9) at a secondary school in Maha Sarakham province who enrolled in the fundamental English class (E23101) in the academic year 2021. The participants were chosen using a convenience sampling method because one of the researchers taught at this school and had to conduct the study with the intact classes. There were 40 students in each class in this school arranging from their entrance exam scores (highest to lowest). The participants in this study consisted of 80 students from 2 classes: 40 students in the experimental group and the other 40 in the control group. The students in these two classes shared similar criteria with the population in terms of their grade, age, internet accessibility, and computer learning experiences.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Instructional Instruments

3.3.1.1 Lesson Plans

In the current study, three-unit lesson plans were designed employing the framework of task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment (TGF). At the Preview stage, the students did preview activities first. Then, the teacher explained and demonstrated how to play online language games online. At the Flip stage, the students played online language games in their free time to learn the content and get ready for the upcoming class. The students also needed to do the analysis activities after playing online language games. At the Task-cycle stage, the students had to perform the tasks in pairs or small groups. After completing the tasks, they were required to show their work to the entire class, a peer, or a small group for peer feedback. Then, the teacher allowed the students to participate in language-focused activities, such as vocabulary, grammar and structure, and pronunciation. Next, the students were asked to review their work and edit them. Then, the students showed their final work to the teacher for comments. At the Post-task stage, the students repeated the task under the new circumstances as a homework assignment and presented their work to the teacher and class. For some units, the students presented their work in class, while for the others, they uploaded their work via Facebook or Line application. All students in the class could see their friends' uploaded work. The rest of the class was assigned to comment on their peers' presentations. The students followed the same steps of the TGF instructional framework in every unit.

In this study, three units, namely Unit 1: Ordering food and drink, Unit 2: Giving/Asking for directions, and Unit 3: Telephoning, were covered. The selected topics are presented in Thailand's basic education core curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A2 level, which is the level that grade 9 students must accomplish.

3.3.1.2 Online Language Games

The term "language games" refers to activities with rules, goals, and fun elements used to offer a more entertaining and relaxing atmosphere, especially in language classes for students to acquire a second or foreign language (Hadfield, 1990). The term "online" can refer to any activity via the internet. Thus, online language games can either partially or primarily be played through the internet (Wang, 2011). In this study, Educaplay was chosen as the most suitable web-enhanced tool where teachers can create fun and interactive activities and share their learning activities with their students. Educaplay provides several game templates shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Types of activities on Educaplay

This study used matching, fill-in-the-blanks, and dialogue games as preview activities to present the lesson's topic. These activities were designed to assist the students in identifying the subject area and enabling awareness of the context. Useful vocabulary, words, phrases, and structures of each unit were covered and designed in these three games.

3.3.2 Research Instruments

3.3.2.1 English Oral Communication Test

Before and after learning through the TGF, the students' English oral communication ability was assessed using the English oral communication test. The test was created following the TGF's course objectives and content. The test was a guided role-play activity, and it was a direct test type. In the test, the participants took part in a

structured one-on-one interaction between the examiner (an English teacher) and the student that lasted around 10 minutes. The participants were provided with a speaking prompt that detailed the situation and the task they needed to perform. The examiner also received a role-playing prompt which included a script and detailed information. During a role play, the examiner followed the script and used the information on his or her card to answer the students' questions.

3.3.2.2 Analytic Rating Scale to Assess English Oral Communication Ability

The rating scale was developed from the Speaking Rating Scale of Michigan English Test (MET, 2020) and Spontaneous Conversation Rubric of LOTE Checkpoint C of the University of the State of New York (LOTE, 2003). The scale consisted of four main components: task completion, language resources, intelligibility or delivery, and comprehension. Task completion refers to the ability to respond relevantly to the given task, and the response fully completes the task. Language resources refer to the ability to use grammatical structures and vocabulary correctly and appropriately. Intelligibility or delivery refers to fluency, pronunciation, and hesitation. Finally, comprehension refers to the ability to understand what is said and asked.

3.3.2.3 The Semi-Structured Interview

To obtain more insightful data from the respondents of how they feel and think about the TGF, a semi-structured, face-to-face interview was used in the present study. Ten respondents were selected for the interview, from 10 percent of the students who got the highest scores from the post-test (a guided role play) and 10 percent of the students who got the lowest scores from the post-test. The interview was conducted in Thai to avoid the students' misunderstanding and later transcribed and translated into English. The interview questions were developed based on Dornyei (2007)'s recommendations (cited in Rachayon & Soontornwipast, 2019).

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection was gathered in the first semester of the academic year 2021 (June-August 2021). Figure 4. illustrates the data collecting process in terms of time and method shown as follows.
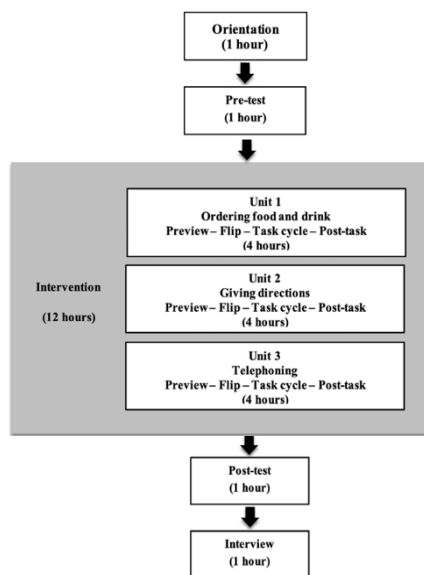

Figure 4. The procedures of data collection

According to Figure 4, the participants were orientated about the objectives of the study and asked for their willingness to participate in the study. Next, the examiner administered the pre-test to the participants. The oral communication performance of each participant was videotaped and then assessed by the researcher using the rating scale developed for this study. Then, the intervention was used unit by unit: ordering food and drink, giving/asking for directions, and telephoning, respectively. Next, the instruction was taught following the TGF framework's stages: Preview, Flip, Task Cycle, and Post-task. After that, the examiner administered the post-test to the participants. Finally, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview to better understand how the participants felt about the TGF.

3.5 Data Analysis

A paired samples *t*-test was used to analyze the pre-and-post-test scores within an experimental group, and an independent samples *t*-test was used to analyze the scores between the control and experimental groups.

For the interview part, the researchers looked for how the participants reported their opinions towards the TGF. The students' responses were coded by two coders. One was a teacher of English, and the other was an examiner of the English oral communication test. The coders identified positive and negative opinions of the students towards the intervention, using Kondracki and Wellman's (2002) content analysis as a coding framework. The inter-rater agreement was 87%.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 The Effects of Task-Based Instruction Using Online Language Games in a Flipped Learning Environment (TGF) on the English Oral Communication Ability of Thai Secondary Students

The paired samples *t*-test was employed to see if there was a difference between the students' pre-test and post-test mean scores within the experimental group. The results revealed a significant difference between the students' test scores, $t(38) = 21.4$, $p < .05$ (Table 1). The students' average post-test score ($M = 11.69$, $SD = 1.75$) was statistically significantly higher than the pre-test scores ($M = 6.05$, $SD = 2.53$) in the English oral communication test (Table 2). This means that after the students participated in the TGF learning, their English oral communication ability was improved.

Table 1. The paired samples *t*-test of the pre-and-post-test mean scores

English oral communication test	Paired Differences						
	M	*SD*	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		*t*	df	Sig (2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
Pre-test - Post-test	5.64	1.64	6.17	5.10	21.4*	38	0.000

*$p < 0.05$

Table 2. The pre-and-post-test mean scores and *SD* of the students in the experimental group

English oral communication test	*M*	*SD*
Pre-test	6.05	2.53
Post-test	11.69	1.75

Additionally, the independent samples *t*-test was used to see whether or not there was a significant difference between the students' mean scores between the experimental group and the control group. The Cohen's d was also calculated to determine the effect size of the difference in the means. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the students in the control and experimental group ($t(76) = -2.25$, $p < .05$). The results also revealed that the post-test mean scores in both groups were higher than their pre-test mean scores (Table 4). In addition, the study found a higher gained score in the experimental group ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.65$) than that in the control group ($M = 4.821$, $SD = 1.57$). This means that the students' oral communication ability was improved after partaking in the intervention.

Table 3. The independent samples *t*-test of the pre-and-post-test scores and the different mean scores

English oral communication test	Independent Samples Test				
	M	*SD*	*t*	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	2.51	0.54	4.679*	74.52	0.000
Post-test	1.69	0.50	3.408*	67.13	0.001
Different score	-0.82	0.36	-2.252*	76	0.027

*$p < 0.05$

Table 4. The pre-and-post-test mean scores and *SD* of the students in the control and experimental groups

English oral communication test	Groups	*M*	*SD*
Pre-test	Control group	8.56	2.20
	Experimental group	6.05	2.53
Post-test	Control group	13.38	2.56
	Experimental group	11.69	1.75
Different score	Control group	4.82	1.57
	Experimental group	5.64	1.65

4.2 Students' Opinions of Task-Based Instruction Using Online Language Games in a Flipped Learning Environment

The results from the semi-structured interviews mostly showed a number of positive opinions. First, the students thought that after learning English by online language games in a flipped environment, they gained more confidence when speaking English. For example,

"I feel more confident when doing the speaking tasks since I have already known some of the expressions before." (Student 3)

"I feel more confident in speaking English since I got to speak English with my friends many times." (Student 35)

Moreover, the students believed that they not only learned useful phrases and expressions from the lessons but also had fun when playing online language games. For example,

"Those three games helped me remember some phrases and expressions more easily." (Student 22)

"I liked playing games the most. It was fun." (Student 1)

"I enjoyed playing online games before getting in class." (Student 12)

Finally, the students found performing speaking tasks became more easily when repeating the tasks. For example,

"At first I thought the speaking activities were difficult. After spending time doing them again and again, I found that performing the speaking tasks was so easy." (Student 26)

"The assigned tasks got a lot easier when we had enough time to practice with our group members." (Student 38)

Despite the positive feedback from the students, some of them found it difficult in playing online language games before coming to class and performing the in-class activities. Some students informed that the topics of the contents were new to them. Thus, the vocabulary, phrases, and expressions used in the games might be difficult for some of them. Additionally, students with limited English, especially speaking skills, tended to have some difficulties in performing the assigned tasks since they had to communicate in English with their teammates in different situations.

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study show that the students greatly improved their English oral communication ability after learning through the TGF. They mostly revealed positive opinions about the overall intervention. The success of using the TGF in the classroom to increase the students' English oral communication ability seemed to be due to the combination of the three language learning approaches, namely task-based language teaching, game-based language learning and flipped learning. These approaches provided the students with effective learning opportunities to improve their English oral communication ability. This section discusses important factors that may contribute to the TGF's success in increasing the students' overall oral communication ability.

5.1 An Opportunity to Practice Some Important Language Features (Vocabulary and Expressions) in a Flipped Environment Before Doing the Speaking Tasks

The students were asked to spend their free out-of-class time playing three online language games on the flip stage. These games included matching, fill-in-the-blanks, and dialogue games. By playing such games, the students had an opportunity to prepare themselves in learning useful vocabulary and expressions before coming to class and performing the communicative tasks. In this stage, it offered a chance for the students to learn at their own pace and in their own preferred ways. This could help them gain more confidence when performing in-class activities.

The findings are in line with several scholars that implemented flipped learning (FL) in EFL classrooms. Cockrum (2014) emphasized that FL offers students the ability to engage with content in their own learning style. Moreover, it gives students more time to interact with others. Another advantage is that students can learn at their own speed with the use of technology they can access. Additionally, Campbell (2008) stated that taking some time before in-class instruction to introduce students' prior knowledge could benefit both teachers and students.

The findings are also consistent with many studies. For example, Quyên and Lợi (2018) conducted a study to examine the effects of a flipped classroom model to improve Vietnamese students' speaking performance. The results showed high improvement in the students' speaking skills. Çakır (2017) also investigated the Turkish student teachers' perceptions about flipped instruction designed for speaking skill development. The results illustrated positive attitudes towards flipped instruction since it was effective to make the students be prepared for the lesson and perform the speaking activities carried out in the class time. The findings found in this study are also in line with other studies conducted in Thailand. For example, Jit-armart and Jogthong (2019) conducted a study to investigate the effect of using flipped classroom instruction on English speaking ability. The findings revealed that learners' English speaking ability showed remarkable improvement.

Thus, FL seems to be beneficial for English classes since it gives opportunities for students to learn the content before attending the class. This helps them get ready and be prepared to do other tasks or activities assigned in class. In addition, the students are more confident in performing the in-class tasks since they know what the content will be about. It can be concluded that giving an opportunity for students to practice some important language features such as vocabulary and expressions before doing the speaking tasks is very crucial.

5.2 An Opportunity to Learn the Content from the Online Language Games

In the intervention, the students were required to spend their spare time within a one-week period playing online language games, such as matching, fill in the blanks, and dialogue games to learn key language features by themselves before coming to class each week. In this step of the intervention, online language games appeared to be an excellent content-delivery tool and hence had a significant role in developing students' English oral communication ability.

The findings support several studies that used games as content-delivery tools. Hadfield (1990) emphasized that language games are used to provide a fun and more relaxing atmosphere, especially in language classes for students to acquire a second or foreign language. Hence, one way to increase the use of the second language is to include online language games in learning activities. Therefore, online language games appear to be able to enhance students' communicative competence. Many scholars, such as Lee (2000), Prensky (2001), Whitton (2010), and Kapp (2012), claimed that games are motivating and can create engagement for users. In addition, games are great media in helping students learn better because games make them study in a relaxing and entertaining way.

The findings from this study are in line with several studies conducted both in and outside Thailand. The study of Dewi, Kultsum and Armadi (2016) used game-based language learning to develop students' both speaking and listening skills. The results clearly showed a positive improvement in students' active participation, confidence, and fluency in speaking skills. In a Thai context, according to the study of Nitisakunwut (2014), games were implemented under the framework of teaching English for communication. There were a number of games used to teach English for communication especially with secondary students.

It can be concluded that games are fun and useful since they assist the students in remembering words and phrases better and more quickly, allowing them to gain more confidence in speaking English and performing speaking tasks in class.

5.3 An Opportunity to Speak English by Performing the In-Class Activities and Tasks

In the TGF, the students had an opportunity to speak English in different situations by performing in-class activities and tasks. Since the students were required to study the topic and content before class, they had much time to practice speaking English in class with their classmates during the task cycle stage.

The findings support several studies that used TBLT to develop speaking skills. Albino (2017) assessed how learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) improved their speaking fluency in a TBLT approach. The findings indicated that learners developed in terms of their speaking fluency by maximizing their speed of speech production, increasing grammatical accuracy, elaborating on their utterances, and developing interactional language. Similar to the study of Akuli and Poonpon (2018), it was conducted based on TBLT to improve grade 8 students' speaking ability. In this study, CEFR-based speaking tasks were used as a research instrument. The results revealed that the tasks could improve the students' speaking ability. TBLT was also used in the context of a university level and revealed a positive improvement of the participants (Inthapthim, 2019).

The results show that after taking the TGF, the students' ability to communicate in English was improved. One of the reasons was that the students had spent a lot of time in class practicing speaking. It can be seen that by engaging in these activities, the students were involved in real communicative contexts. Furthermore, providing them with a large number of communicative activities and tasks appeared to help them enhance their English oral communication ability.

6. Conclusion

In order to help students overcome their English oral communication challenges, task-based instruction using online language games in a flipped learning environment (TGF) was built by combining three language learning approaches, namely, task-based language teaching, flipped learning, and game-based language learning. The findings of the study revealed that the students' English oral communication ability was improved after learning through the TGF. The explanation for this could be that combining these three approaches provided the students with more effective language learning opportunities. Based on the findings, the aforementioned problems seemed to be solved. After the intervention, the students gained more confidence in speaking English. They found communicating in English easier. Moreover, they tended to be able to use suitable phrases and expressions in different situations. The students became more active in class and got to use the language more in real-life situations. Therefore, language teachers should allow students to study the target language before joining the class, as this helps them learn the language. It also allows them to learn the language at their own speed and in their own preferred ways. Using online language games as a self-study tool is highly recommended in this study as well since games enhance language acquisition in a variety of ways. Furthermore, teachers should encourage students to practice speaking skills through a variety of communicative activities. This would help them feel more confident when speaking the language.

Despite the fact that the current study indicated the TGF's usefulness in increasing students' English oral communication ability, it was undertaken with a small number of participants. Future studies should be conducted with a larger number of participants. Additionally, the experiment was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic; thus, in-class time seemed to be somewhat problematic. Future studies may consider conducting the experiment during the normal situation where in-class and out-of-class times can be clearly separated.

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Appendix

The Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured Interview Guide

Opening

1. Greeting the student.

2. Explain the reason for and the purpose of the interview. Summarize briefly what will happen to the interview data and reassure the student on the issue of confidentiality.

3. Ask the student to answer the following questions briefly:

 - How are you?

 - Do you like studying English?

 - What do you do in your free time?

 - Do you like to play games?

Interviewing

1. Help the student recall what he/she did during the course by summarizing the teaching procedure of the TGF and showing all the teaching materials to the student.

2. Ask the student to answer the following questions:

 - In overall, what do you think about the English teaching and learning in this course?

 - What do you think about the teaching method that requires you to learn the materials by yourself before coming to class?

 - What do you think about online language games?

 - Do you think playing online language games help you improve your English oral communication ability?

 - Besides playing games in the flip stage, what other activities do you want to do? Please give an example.

Closing

1. Give the student an opportunity to make additional comments by saying

 - I have no further questions. Do you have anything you want to bring up before we finish the interview.

2. Express thankfulness to the student.