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Developing Learners' Oral Communication through Tasks: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers from the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

Teachers are concerned about communication in the classroom. This issue has become a recurring topic in research debates. The ability to communicate verbally is a skill that must be imparted to learners by educational institutions. The development of this skill must commence from the earliest stages of education. The enhancement of students' oral communication skills necessitates the implementation of a task-based approach, entailing the incorporation of requisite speaking tasks or activities. Furthermore, it is imperative that educators underscore the significance of language utilization, given the inextricable relationship between language and communication. This study explores the perceptions secondary school teachers have regarding students' development of oral communication and the tasks/activities employed for this purpose. A qualitative approach was employed, entailing the conduction of 31 interviews with Congolese secondary school teachers. The results of eight deductive and inductive categories were obtained. The findings indicate that educators hold divergent perceptions of students' oral communication skills. Consequently, the abduction process yielded seven criteria, including the purpose of English oral communication, the rationale for English oral communication, the role of teachers in engaging students in oral communication, the drivers for students' English-speaking skills, the characteristics of oral communication, and the challenges. Based on these criteria, four ideal types emerged. The aforementioned types comprise an understanding of English-speaking skills as an elite-oriented practice, an understanding of English oral communication outcomes as teacher-driven practices, an understanding of English oral competencies as student co-constructive in-class practices, and an understanding of English oral competencies as student co-constructive practices beyond the classroom.

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The comparison of the results showed the following main findings: Four ideal types of understanding English oral communication were identified (two fostering English oral communication) (1); teachers' limited understanding of students' development of oral communication (2); teachers' perspectives about the benefits of English oral communication competencies for students' future life (3); teachers' perceptions of language speaking skills as a fostering factor, but language registers as something which is not visible (4), there are teachers employing activating tasks as teaching method for English oral communication (5), English clubs as a trigger of English oral communication (6), and there are teachers who perceive power play as a hindering factor of English oral communication (7). The present study suggests that the implementation of TBLT (through their constituent speaking activities) may serve as an adequate approach to foster students' oral communication. Subsequent research would center on a quantitative study to ascertain the correlation between TBLT and students' development of spoken English competencies.

Keywords: English oral communication, EFL, secondary school, tasks, Task-Based Teaching.