

# **Enhancing Students' Communicative Skills through the Implementation of Task-Based Learning**

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## **Abstract**

This initial study aims to examine the effect of task-based learning implementation to enhance students' communicative skills. A one-group pretest-post-test experimental design was conducted with 37 first-year students as the participants. Video-making was selected as the assigned task. The outcomes were two short videos on the assigned topics. The results reveal that before the treatment, the students' communicate skill was moderate (mean= 13,11), while after one-semester-length implementation, their skill increased and was categorized as high (15.45). Furthermore, there was a significant difference on students' communicative skill before and after the treatment ( $t\text{-value} > t\text{-table} = 5.585 > 2.021$ ). It implies that the task-based learning through video-making task significantly enhanced students' communicative skills. Finally, some implications for language learning regarding the results of the study were also presented.

*Keywords:* communicative skill, task-based learning, video-making, input hypothesis, output hypothesis, competence, performance

## **Background**

Being urged by educational and technological changes, English teachers need to carefully consider the following aspects of classroom instruction. The first aspect is creating students' friendly learning environments which can minimize students' anxiety to communicate in English and which can stimulate students to actively participate in the

classroom discussion. The next aspect is providing a variety of practical English activities and tasks that can be applied in the real-life communication contexts. Finally, it is significant to implement appropriate teaching media in terms of technology so that students' motivation and interest in learning English can be facilitated (Brown, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001)

Regarding to the above aspects, there is a need to develop what Hymes (1971) in Savignon (1997) refers to as 'communicative skill' which refers to the ability in using a language for communication purposes in a certain context. Some educational experts have pointed out the importance of adapting communicative skills in language learning for preparing students to communicate well in a working field. It is communicative skill addressed by Skehan (2003) which has an essential role to enhance one's success in learning and using the language to cope with the working demands. In addition, Richards (2006) asserts that communicative skill enables students to use the language properly for different purposes and functions. In the sense that it enables students to vary the language based on the participants, settings and the degree of formality as well.

This study employs task-based learning as an effort in improving students' communicative skill. Compared to the teaching of grammar rules, communicative task facilitates students to collaborate on activities which are authentic and appropriate to the real-life communication contexts where students can use their individual learning styles. Besides, task allows students to creatively express their thought. Task also influences students' language acquisition as when it is done in group or in pair in which interaction occurs, they can cooperate to use English for communication (Harmer, 2007). Furthermore, when enjoyable learning environment is generated and the language acquisition can be facilitated, learners' communicative skills can be promoted. This study focuses on the communicative skill which refers to the ability in using English appropriately to understand a series of utterances, to use expressions, to convey information and to maintain the flow of

communication in a certain context. Furthermore, from the variety of available educational-related technologies, this study utilizes video as teaching media and the implementation of video-making as a communicative task.

In consideration to the background and review of related literatures, the investigation over the implementation of interactive teaching techniques into language instruction, thus, becomes indispensable. This study proposes video-making as a communicative task to assist students in using English. The task is potentials to change the students' role from mere consumers to producers by the technological advancement. Accordingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. How is the students' communicative skill before and after the implementation of task-based learning?
2. Does task-based learning give statistically significant difference on students' communicative skill before and after its implementation?

### **Literature Review**

To be able to communicate well, students need to possess communicative skills. Communicative skill refers to the ability of using a language to convey and exchange ideas (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). Furthermore, Sullivan (2000) defines communicative skill as the ability an individual displays to effectively communicate with others. The communicative skill is, further he asserted, set of skills through the use of either oral language or written language that enable students to convey information so that it is received and understood. In a broader sense, communicative skill is the ability of students either spoken or written to interact with other speakers and make meaning.

In the application, communicative skill has certain characteristics. Richards and Rodgers (2001) argues that communicative skill is considered more important than grammar

mastery. It is based on the beliefs that a student learns a language best through communicating in it and thorough several activities which are meaningful and involve real communication. Furthermore, there are two aspects supporting the enhancement of students' communicative skills, namely activities and interaction (Savignon, 1997). The activities should provide opportunities for students to improve not only accuracy but also fluency. Further, the activities should accommodate different language skills including listening and speaking, reading and writing, since they are commonly used simultaneously in a real-life context. The other aspect is interaction which is important in enhancing students' communicative skill since it enables students to understand, express, and exchange ideas. In this sense, both teacher-students and students-students interactions should be highly promoted in the classroom settings.

The classroom activities that can be implemented are varied. As recommended by Richards (2006), the activities include task-completion, information gap, information-gathering, information-transfer activities and role plays. In addition, there are some general principles and practices focusing on communicative skills amongst ELT practitioners. Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggest to provide students with different range of authentic tasks which require interactive spoken communication. Brown (2000) considers that communication will happen in the classroom context if communicative tasks are promoted, input to the language outside the classroom is exposed, and output of the authentic language is produced. In addition, Larsen-Freeman (2000) highlights the importance of facilitating paired work and small group work which enable students to interact and communicate. Those practitioners emphasize the activities of communicative skills, particularly on authentic communicative tasks which are conducted in paired or small group.

Regarding the task-based learning, numerous studies report that effective task-based learning highlights the use of authentic language which facilitate students' needs, involves

collaboration, and requires autonomy among students. Besides, it is a process-oriented with an emphasis on skills integration. Therefore, the task-based instruction is designed to enhance the language in real-life context (Gardner, 1995; Levine, 2004).

In the implementation of task-based interaction, there are two types of tasks that should be carefully designed. As proposed by Nunan (2004), the tasks include *target tasks* and *pedagogical task*. The target task refers to the real-world-context language, meanwhile the pedagogical task refers to the classroom language. All tasks should be designed to equip students with the communicative language needed in certain topic discussions in the classroom which are also related to real-world situations. Furthermore, a task should have the combination of the following components, namely goal, input, content, roles of teachers, roles of students, setting, procedure, activity, and output (Nunan, 2004).

### **Theoretical Framework**

In acquiring a language, the role of input is undeniably essential. There are some arguments that associate the needs of input in language learning. One of the most well-known input theories is proposed by Krashen (1985) as cited in Ellis (2008). *Input* is defined as every target language that students is exposed to through senses and that potentially provides them with knowledge about the target language (Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999). The Input Hypothesis as proposed by Krashen (1985) in Ellis (2008) involves students' understanding of what they hear and read or the input which goes into their minds through ears and eyes. Based on the Krashen's points of view, students need to receive a lot of comprehensible input in the target language to assist them in understanding it.

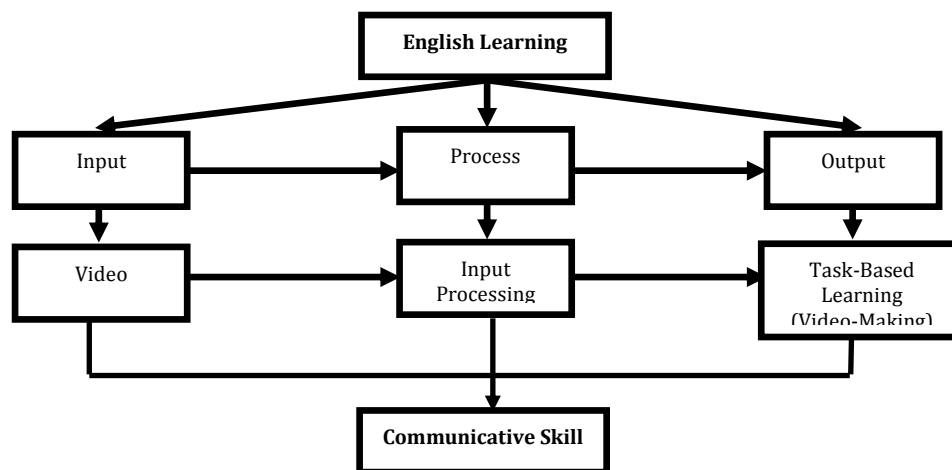
However, the Krashen's view about input hypothesis that becomes the only matter in language acquisition did not receive many supports. Other theorists believed to focus more on the practice function of language production rather than merely on input, especially in fluency. In this point of view, language use and language performance are equally important

to develop skill components in language learning. In addition to input, students need opportunities to produce the target language. Contrast to the input hypothesis is the comprehensible output hypothesis asserted by Swain (Swain, 1985, cited in Ellis, 2008). *Output* is language produced by the student. The output hypothesis states that to learn a language, in addition to comprehensible input, students also need to create comprehensible output, involving students speaking or writing. The output can be comprehensible or incomprehensible to an interlocutor. Swain (1985) in Ellis (2008, p. 957) has proposed that, “When students have to make efforts to ensure that their output is comprehensible, acquisition is fostered”. Swain argues that input is essential, however, it is not sufficient to acquire a language. That is to say, both language input and language output impact a student’s acquisition of the target language.

In addition to input and output hypothesis, competence and performance also play an important role in language learning context. Basic distinction between competence and performance has been significantly drawn by some language experts and practitioners. Chomsky (1965) defines competence as one’s language knowledge, while performance as one’s actual language use in a certain situation. A few years later, an expansion of the competence or performance distinction was made by Hymes (1972). Referring to Hymes (1972) as cited in Mitchell and Myles (2004), competence is the abstract and hidden representation of language knowledge held inside one’s mind. Performance, on the other hand, concerns with the process of applying the underlying knowledge to the actual language use in a concrete situation. Besides, Brown (2000) identifies competence as the knowledge a person has in mind which is unobservable. In contrast, he defines performance as the observable behaviors and the noticeable appearance of competence.

This study focuses on the implementation of task-based learning through the use of video-making task to enhance students’ communicative skill. The selection of the technique

is based on the following reasons. Firstly, videos are regarded as the appropriate learning resource and material since video provides two aspects that significantly contribute to language acquisition. The aspects are comprehensible input and output. The comprehensible inputs provided by video are both in terms of audio and visual inputs, namely words and pictures or sounds and images, while the comprehensible output is the listening comprehension, communication using target language and the real experience of native speaker communication (Levy, 2010). Secondly, to observe the significant difference of students' communicative skill after the implementation of task-based learning through video-making, the researcher used the competence and performance theories. The students' communicative skills could be observed from their performance in the video they produced. Finally, the selection of video-making task is based on the literature deficiencies from previous researches that consider students as only the consumer or passive users of technology.



**Figure 1. Research Construct Mapping**

The hypothesis proposed is:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a statistically significant difference on students' communicative skill before and after the implementation of task-based learning.

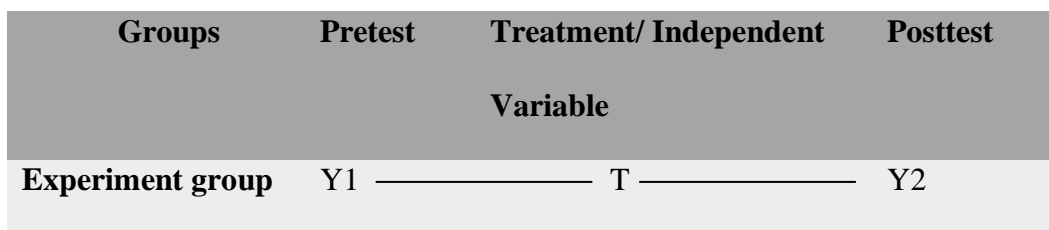
The hypothesis implies that the task-based learning through video making task significantly enhances students' communicative skills.

### **Methodology**

The quantitative approach was employed in this study with the experimental research as its design. The experimental research was selected as it fits the purpose of the study which is to identify significant difference in learning outcomes of students' communicative skills after the implementation of task-based learning through video-making. The use of experimental research is supported by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) who argue that experimental research design is a research aiming to observe the impact of a certain treatment to a particular group(s). Specifically, the researcher studied a single group using *within-group experimental design* (Cresswell, 2012) or so-called as *the one group pretest-post-test* experimental design (Cohen, et. al., 2011).

Regarding the implementation, this study was conducted in a private Islamic university in Yogyakarta during the first semester of academic year 2016/2017. The sample of the study was one class from batch 2016 consisting of thirty-seven (37) first-year students. This group was randomly selected as the experimental group. In addition, the variables are described as follows. The independent variable (T) was the proposed treatment, the task-based learning through the video-making task. The dependent variable was the score of students' communicative skill (Y) obtained from their performance in the video they made. Y<sub>1</sub> represents a pretest of dependent variable before treatment, while Y<sub>2</sub> represents a post-test of dependent variable after the treatment. The design of this study can be represented as in Figure 2.





**Figure 2. Research Design** (Cohen, et. al., 2011, p. 282).

In this study, there are some terminologies related to the topic of the study that are necessary to be given an operational definition. This is done to facilitate the perception and understanding of the terms used. The terms are related to the variables and treatment.

There were two variables in this study, the independent and dependent variables, namely task-based learning and communicative skill. The independent variable, task-based learning, is operationally defined as a language learning instruction which requires students to comprehend and interact using the target language to complete a task through video-making. The intention of such activity primarily focuses on fluency rather than accuracy. The outcome of the task is short videos produced by students. Meanwhile, the dependent variable, students' communicative skill, refers to the students' ability in using English appropriately to understand a series of utterances, to use expressions, to convey information and to maintain the flow of communication in a certain context. The data of students' communicative skills were revealed from their performance in the recorded video they produced.

Other than the research variables, there was treatment given. The treatment given to the experiment group employed the use of technology namely, video-making task, in which the students produced two short videos as the final product of task completions. In the videos, the students acted out a role-play based on the given topics as if in the real-life contexts. The topics were about business telephoning (making and answering phone calls in a formal setting) which was conducted in a group of three, and about Master of Ceremony (becoming an effective formal MC) which was done in pair. Before recording the video, the students performed the role play in front of the classroom with their peer or group members. This step

is called a rehearsal activity before they proceed to the recording phase. Next, the role play was recorded by using their mobile phone video recorder device. The videos were then played in the classroom to get comments or inputs from the other students about their friend's performance in the video. The comments are in terms of delivery, pronunciation, content and vocabulary.

To ease the data gathering, the criteria and indicators of communicative skill performance are determined. In assessing students' performance, the criterion reference of *Communicative Performance* modified from Richards (2006) and Nunan (2004) is used (table 3.2). Therefore, the data of students' communicative skill were gathered from the score of students' recorded performance in the video.

**Table 1. The Aspects of Communicative Skill Performance**

No.	Communicative Skill Performance	Indicators	Aspects
1.	Delivery	Student performs very well with confidence	fluency, volume, eye contact, note-reliance, peer-cooperation, confidence.
2.	Pronunciation	Student performs very well with clear pronunciation	intonation, stress, pauses, rhythm.
3.	Content	Student performs comprehensive and understandable content (using appropriate language expressions & conjunctions)	language expression, conjunction, focus, clarity, originality, and video quality.
4.	Vocabulary	Wholly appropriate for task	Diction or word choice related to the topic of discussion

For the data analysis, descriptive statistics was used to answer the first research question about the students' communicative skill before and after the treatment by observing the mean score. In addition, paired sample t-test or dependent sample t-test was used to analyse the data since this study involved a single group measuring the performance before and after completing a treatment during a semester. Prior to it, normality and homogeneity

tests were operated. Finally, using the sign (P-value) and the t-value, the research hypothesis was drawn.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The first result presents the data distribution of the students' communicative skill score. The data score was gathered from the students' recorded performance in the video they produced. The mean scores of the students' communicative skills before and after the implementation of task-based learning using video-making task are also presented as the answer to the first research question. In addition, the second research question is answered by seeing the result of the *sig* (*P value*) and *the t-value*.

**How is the students' communicative skills before and after the implementation of task-based learning?** To find out the students' communicative skill before and after the implementation of task-based learning, the pretest and post-test scores were analyzed. The following chart presents the result of the students' communicative skill in the pretest and the post-test.

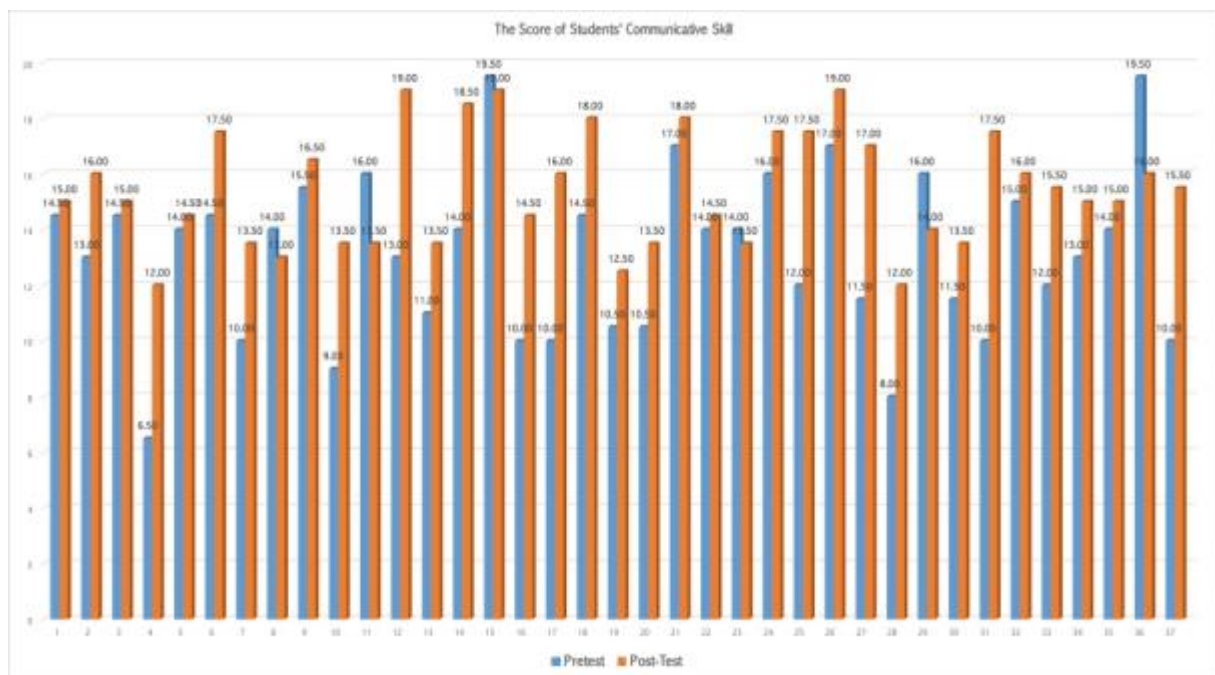


Chart 1. The Score of Students' Communicative Skill

The chart represents the score of each students' communicative skill. Among 37 participants, 31 students got higher score in the post-test compared to the pretest. Their score improvement ranged from 0.5 to 7.5 points which could be observed from the gain score. The student who performed significant progress in the communicative skill was participant 31 with the gain score of the post-test and pretest was 7.5. Then followed by participant 12 and 17 whose gain score was 6.0. This infers that those students' communication skill enhanced after the implementation of task-based learning through video-making task. Unfortunately, there were also 6 participants who got lower score in the post-test than the pretest. Those were participant 8, 11, 15, 23, 29, and 36. Their communicative score decreased ranging from -0.5 to -3.5 points. The student with -3.5 gain score was participant 36, in which his score decreased from 19.5 to 16. These descriptive data, however, could not be used to draw a conclusion to answer the first research question. Therefore, the mean scores of the pretest and the post-test was analyzed. In addition, the following range score was used to show the students' communicative skill before and after the treatment implementation.

**Table 2. The Interpretation Level of Students' Communicative Skill**

No.	Level	Score	Interpretation
1.	Very high	>17.3	Students' communicative skill level is very high
2.	High	14.6 – 17.2	Students' communicative skill level is high
3.	Moderate	11.9 – 14.5	Students' communicative skill level is moderate
4.	Low	9.2 – 11.8	Students' communicative skill level is low
5.	Poor	6.5 – 9.1	Students' communicative skill level is poor

Minimum score : 6.5

Maximum score : 19.5

The Paired Samples Statistics of the pretest and post-test below (table 3) was used to observe the students' communicative skills before and after the implementation of task-based learning through video-making task. From the mean scores, it is found out that the mean

score of the pretest is higher than the mean score of the post-test. The mean score of the pretest of 37 students is 13.11 (SD=2.94) which belongs to moderate level, while for the post test of 37 students, the mean score is 15.45 (SD=2.03) which is categorized as high level. This infers that the students' communicative skill before the implementation of the task-based learning was in the moderate level, while after the implementation, their communicative skill is improved into high level.

**Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pretest	13.11	37	2.94
Posttest	15.45	37	2.03

**Does task-based learning give statistically significant difference on students' communicative skills before and after its implementation?** Since this study involves a hypothesis testing, thus, the inferential statistics is applied. This study used paired sample t-test or dependent sample t-test. However, before approaching the paired sample t-test analysis, two requirement tests should be met including test of normality and test of homogeneity (Bluman, 2008).

**Normality test.** The normality test was conducted to confirm that the data of the dependent variable are normally distributed. The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. The decision is based on the following criteria, the data distribution is normal if the Sig value is higher than 0,05 (P value > 0,05). The result of the normality test is presented in table 4 below.

**Table 4. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test**

		Pretest	Post-test
N		37	37
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	13.11	15.45
	Std. Deviation	2.94	2.03
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.223	.199
	Positive	.223	.199
	Negative	-.161	-.109
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.221	1.088
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.101	.187

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

The result of the One K-S test presented in table 4 shows that the *sig.* value is 0.101 and 0.187 which are higher than 0.05 at the 95% degree of confidence ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it infers that the data are normally distributed.

**Homogeneity test.** The test of homogeneity was used to determine whether the proportions for a variable are equal when several samples are selected from different population. The Levene test is used to test the homogeneity of the data. The decision is based on the following assumption, the data are homogenous if the Sig values is higher than 0,05 ( $P$  values  $> 0,05$ ). The result of the Levene test is presented in the table below.

**Table 5. Test of Homogeneity of Variance**

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Communicative Skills	Based on Mean	.657	1	102	.462
	Based on Median	.596	1	102	.535
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.596	1	98.373	.535
	Based on trimmed mean	.619	1	102	.457

Since the result of the Levene test shows that the *Sig* values are higher than 0.05 ( $P > 0.05$ ), it implies that the variances are equal. Thus, the population from which the groups were sampled was homogeneous.

**Paired sample t-test.** The dependent t-test or known as the paired-sample t-test was used to analyze whether there is a significant impact of implementing task-based learning on students' communicative skill during one semester.

**Table 6. Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest -Post-test	-14.28	2.485	1.690	-16.289	-9.377	-5.585	36	.000

To interpret the result of the paired sample test above, the  $t$ -value and the Sig. (2-tailed) value are analyzed. For the  $t$ -value, if the observed  $t$ -value is higher than the  $t$ -table,  $H_1$  is accepted (observed  $t$  value  $>$   $t$ -table). While for the Sig. (2-tailed), if the Sig value is lower than 0.05,  $H_1$  is accepted ( $P$ -value  $>$  0.05). If two of the requirements met, the result was significant.

From the result, the  $t$ -value at (d.f.= 36) is 5.585, while the  $t$ -table at (d.f.= 36) is 2.021. Here, the  $t$ -value is higher than the  $t$ -table ( $5.585 > 2.021$ ). In addition, seeing the result of the Sig 2-tailed value, the  $P$ -value is .000 which is lower than 0.05 ( $.000 < 0.05$ ). The results indicate that there was *a statistically significant difference* between the pretest and the post-test. The decision is to accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) that there is a statistically significant difference on students' communicative skill before and after the implementation of task-based learning. The result implies that the task-based learning through video making task significantly enhanced students' communicative skills.

## **Discussion**

Communicative skill became the focus of this study because it is believed as one of the significant skills in language learning. As asserted by Richards (2006), communicative skill enables students to use the language properly in a range of different purposes and functions. In the sense that it enables students to vary the language based on the participants, the settings, and the degree of formality as well. In addition, the tasks which were implemented in the study emphasized on the communicative skills as the learning objective. There have been strong notions supporting communicative skills to become the main goal of language learning outcomes. As Savignon (1997) points out, models of communicative skill serve as goal specifications for language teaching and testing.

The results of statistical analysis showed that there was an improvement on students' communicative skill after the implementation of task-based learning. The students' communicative skill before the implementation of the task-based learning was categorized as the moderate level, while after the implementation, their communicative skill was improved to the high level. By the implementation task-based learning through video making during one semester, the students demonstrated the improvement of their communicative skill which were observed from their performance. The students communicate better and with more confidence at the end of the implementation treatment as they get a chance to have more English exposure used in the real-life context. During the process of completing video-making tasks, students are given the chance to enhance their communicative skill. Since the activities in the video-making tasks facilitate the learners with communication exchange, interaction and negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 2008). All are conditions that lead to the enhancement of students' communication skill.

Among recent manifestations on the effort to enhance students' communicative skills, task based instruction has started to become a main principle idea in ELT practices. Skehan



(2003) describes a task as an activity with an objective which can be observed and measured through performance. It focuses on meaning delivery, problem solving, and is appropriate to the real-life context. Furthermore, Nunan (2004) suggests that tasks should concern with communicative language use. In other words, he refers to the activities which allow students to comprehend and interact using the target language focusing on fluency rather than accuracy.

In addition, the result inferred that the implementation of task-based learning through video-making was effective to enhance students' communicative skill. The use of video as the learning media and video-making as the communicative task utilized in this study was proved to benefit the students as both are technologies which students are familiar with and interested in. The implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language learning is believed to benefit students in some aspects. Firstly, the nature of ICT provides an ideal framework for language teaching and learning, since its main entity is information and its purpose is communication (Levy, 2010). Secondly, ICT provides the potential as mentioned by Ganderton (1999), to expose students to various authentic resources, to enable students to receive information, and to communicate with native speakers of the target language. Lastly, ICT reflects a non-traditional and less-boring teaching as it gives more chances for creating authentic, relaxing and motivating learning interactions.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

There are two research questions of this study. The first is, "how is the students' communicative skill before and after the implementation of task-based learning?", and the second is, "does task-based learning give statistically significant difference on students' communicative skill before and after its implementation?" The answer to the first research question was that the students' communicative skill before the implementation of the task-

based learning was moderate, while after the implementation, their communicative skill became high. Moreover, the results of the second research question indicated that there was a statistically significant difference on students' communicative skill before and after the implementation of task-based learning, thus, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted. The result implied that the task-based learning through video making task significantly enhanced students' communicative skills.

The results of the study provide several significant implications regarding the implementation of the treatment to language learning. First, language teachers are strongly suggested to shift the focus of instructions from the teaching of grammatical structures to the development of communicative skills. Secondly, the objectives of language teaching and learning should be based on the enhancement of communicative skill and on the ability of students to use the target language for communication. In addition, meaningful activities and tasks should be provided to facilitate students to comprehend and interact using the target language outside the classroom. Finally, it becomes essential to understand how teachers can provide teaching aids that fit students' interests and characteristics. One of the ways is by implementing information communication and technology in which students are mostly exposed to and interested in.

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