Augmenting Freshman Rural Engineering Students' Interaction in English Language using Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

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Abstract— **Today's engineer constantly delivers on both national and international work fronts which gives interaction in English language a key role. This requires teachers to work on their interaction abilities especially for the students who come from rural background. It has been observed that rural students find it difficult to get acclimatized and comfortable with the usage of grammatical concepts in real time situations. This observation necessitates researchers to cater to the needs of these students through proper pedagogical interventions for continuous improvement. Over the years many researchers have used many theories and approaches to enhance interaction skills of rural students but these studies have given temporary solution. Here lies major lacuna thus the current study focuses on how rural freshman engineering students' interaction can be augmented with the Task based language teaching approach. TBLT is an approach that emphasizes the learning of language through the completion of meaningful tasks. It is based on the belief that language is best learned when it is used to complete a real-world task. It provides students with immersive and engaging learning environment and promotes the practical and effective use of language in real-life situations. The study uses quantitative research approach. A sample of 35 rural freshman students of Technological University is obtained and analyzed. Based on the Pre-Intervention Test and the Post-Intervention Test the results reveal that TBLT strongly augments rural students' interaction in English language using CEFR's Common Reference Levels: Self-Assessment Grid. After the intervention, students were requested to evaluate their performance using the assessment grid once again. Encouragingly, there was a clear indication of improvement in their self-assessment outcomes.**

Keywords—**Interaction; Engineers; Pedagogical Intervention; Task Based Language Teaching.**

JEET Category—**Research paper**

I. INTRODUCTION

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) gives a learner-centered approach and thus is an innovative approach. It gained huge attention in the field of second language acquisition and is rooted in communicative language teaching. This approach focuses on enhancing and honing learners' language proficiency by involving them into meaningful and purposeful tasks that simulate real-life situations. These designed tasks serve as the driving force for the students in terms of language learning, pushing learners towards using the language for actual communication and solving the task given.

Task-Based Language Teaching originated in the 1980s as it emerged as a strong response to the varied limitations the traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods had. Many scholars and practitioners realized that learners many a times struggle to apply the concepts of the language learned in classrooms to the real time situations and scenarios and hence fail to articulate in English language especially the ones who come from rural background. This has led to a call for more communicative and task-oriented language teaching approaches. Jane Willis, Michael Long, and Rod Ellis are the key figures who developed TBLT and laid the theoretical groundwork on the approach in their works explaining the importance of tasks in language learning (Willis, 1996).

This approach upholds the fact that language learning becomes the most effective when learners themselves get engaged in meaningful, thought provoking and goal-oriented tasks that require the learners to use the target language. These tasks are activities as simple as ordering food from a restaurant or participating in a group discussion or presenting a topic to peers in the classroom. These tasks are designed carefully to make them more genuine and relevant in order to cater learners' needs and interests. These tasks promote a conducive

environment for the students to take participative role in their own language development.

The approach involves a cyclical process. It begins with the selection and designing of the task followed by the performance of the learners. The tasks are performed individually, in pairs or in groups based on the instructions given by the teacher in the classroom. Once the task is performed the learners are given feedback by the teacher which includes the teacher's reflection on the usage of language, areas of improvement. Post getting feedback from the teacher the students introspect on analyzing their language usage, incorporating feedback, and working towards improvement. This reflective component of TBLT ensures that learners not only improve their language skills but also develop their metacognitive awareness and become more independent language learners.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Task-Based Language teaching in promoting language learning outcomes. For example, a meta-analysis by Norris and Ortega (2000) found that TBLT led to substantial gains in language proficiency and communication skills across various languages and learner populations. Additionally, Skehan's (1998) "Limited Attentional Capacity Model" provides theoretical support for TBLT by suggesting that learners benefit from focusing on meaning-oriented tasks rather than language forms.

Thus, TBLT represents a student-centered, communicative approach that focuses on the usage of target language in authentic situations. By engaging learners in meaningful tasks, TBLT fosters language proficiency, communication skills, and metacognitive awareness. This paper is a humble step towards exploring the huge benefits the approach offers rural engineering students in augmenting their interaction in English language.

II. MOTIVATION

The significance of mastering the English language in rural engineering education is multi-fold. The competence to effectively express oneself in English has garnered notable attention within academia. Given the contemporary learning environment, acquiring English as a foreign language holds paramount importance. Proficiency in English pronunciation and enunciation not only enhances confidence in verbal communication but also bridges the language gap for rural students lacking an education-oriented environment.

Various strategies have been suggested to aid rural engineering students in enhancing their English language interaction. Initiatives include raising awareness about the value of communicative English, motivating students from rural backgrounds to utilize their existing English language skills, designing a structured approach for language learning, and integrating innovative teaching methods such as technology to expedite language acquisition.

The hurdles faced by rural engineering students in articulating English are manifold: limited exposure, challenges in pronunciation, communication barriers, and scarcity of resources, cultural disparities, low self-assurance, and restricted opportunities. Proficiency in interaction forms the bedrock of effective engineering communication. This ability refines complex concepts for coherent transmission and facilitates the expression of ideas.

The importance of interaction extends across various domains:

1. **Effective Communication:** Mastery in interaction is pivotal for clear and cohesive conveyance of intricate ideas, a fundamental element for individual or collaborative achievements.

2. **Professional Success:** Engineers who adeptly articulate their ideas are more likely to thrive in their careers as they can effectively communicate concepts to stakeholders, clients, and peers.

3. **Collaboration:** Interaction plays a pivotal role in collaboration by ensuring mutual comprehension among team members, leading to enhanced efficiency and innovation.

4. **Goal Setting:** Clearly articulating learning objectives assists engineering students in framing their pursuits, thus aiding in assessment and accomplishment.

Enhancing interaction skills involves clear enunciation and pronunciation of words, adequate volume and pace, avoidance of mumbling, and appropriate use of tone and body language. Rural engineering students can hone these skills through public speaking practice, active participation in group discussions, and seeking constructive feedback from peers and mentors.

A current research initiative concentrates on elevating the interaction capabilities of rural students through task-based approaches. This research aims to foster improved English interaction skills among these students, thereby facilitating their integration into academic and professional spheres.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research conducted in Indonesia revealed that implementing Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) for English language learning has the potential to enhance students' speaking proficiency. The study utilized a quasi-experimental methodology to investigate whether integrating TBLT into English education can positively influence students' speaking skills. The participants consisted of two groups of senior high school students: one group received instruction through TBLT, while the other was taught using conventional methods. Through the application of pre-test and post-test assessments, the study demonstrated that TBLT activities facilitated the improvement of students' speaking abilities by providing practical opportunities for communication practice.

Similarly, a study conducted in Thailand indicated the efficacy of TBLT in augmenting the speaking skills of Thai learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Employing a quasi-experimental design, the research examined the impact of TBLT on the speaking proficiency of Thai EFL learners. Like the previous study, the research involved two groups, one exposed to TBLT instruction and the other following traditional teaching approaches. By conducting pre-test and post-test evaluations, the research revealed that TBLT exercises enriched learners' speaking skills by creating meaningful avenues for communication.

In Iran, another research endeavour investigated the impact of TBLT on speaking skill enhancement, utilizing a mixed-methods research design. The study engaged two distinct groups of students, one group receiving TBLT instruction and the other exposed to traditional teaching methods. By integrating pre-test and post-test assessments with qualitative data collected through interviews and observations, the research identified the benefits of the TBLT approach for both educators and learners. The findings emphasized that TBLT not only fosters an enthusiastic learning environment but also significantly contributes to the development of speaking skills.

Furthermore, a study conducted in Turkey explored the perceptions of English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher regarding the effectiveness of TBLT in augmenting speaking skills. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study involved EFL teachers in evaluating the utility of TBLT for enhancing speaking abilities. Despite challenges posed by the language of instruction, students evaluated TBLT as a valuable strategy that provided suitable settings for language acquisition.

The book authored by Mike Long, titled "Second Language Acquisition and Task-Based Language Teaching," reinforces the psycholinguistic credibility of TBLT, thus substantiating its effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills.

An inquiry titled "Implementing Task-based Language Teaching to integrate language skills in an EFL program at a Colombian University" focused on skill integration through TBLT within an English as a foreign language program at a Colombian university. The study highlighted TBLT's role in promoting skill integration, particularly speaking, by immersing students in real-life activities that enhance communicative competence.

Similarly, a study examined "The Effect of Task-based Language Teaching on Augmenting Speaking and Listening Skills of Young Thai EFL Learners" using mixed-methods research to investigate the influence of TBLT on the English speaking and listening skills of young Thai EFL learners. The findings confirmed the positive impact of TBLT in enhancing the speaking skills of these young learners.

In a study conducted by Kris Van Den Branden (2016), the effectiveness of TBLT was underscored in nurturing learners' communicative competence by providing them with authentic opportunities for engaging in meaningful communication.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to find out how TBLT augments rural students' interaction ability in English language. The study was conducted on the freshman students of a technical university in Karnataka, India. To form a group of rural students a google form was circulated asking the following information.

1. Name
2. Medium of Education in School till matriculation
3. The place they completed their schooling from.
4. Mother Tongue

The google form generated 170 students who completed their schooling from a rural place of Karnataka. And 90 students had completed their schooling through Kannada medium. This study was conducted on 35 students in order to give individual attention on each student.

In order to find out the Interaction ability of these 35 students in English language a Formative test was conducted. This test concentrated on assessing students' interactive skills in English. The faculty used Common European Framework Reference's Scale, Quality Aspects of Spoken language use to assess students on the formative test which was conducted before intervention and summative test post intervention. And to self-gauge their English Language Interaction abilities students were given Self-Assessment Scale from Common European Framework Reference for languages was given and students were asked to assess themselves.

The CEFR classifies language ability into six levels, from A1 to C2, which can be further classified into three broad categories: Basic User, Independent User, and Proficient User, depending on the demands of the local context. 'Can-do' descriptors are used to define the levels. In 2001, the levels did not just materialize out of nowhere; rather, they developed gradually over time.
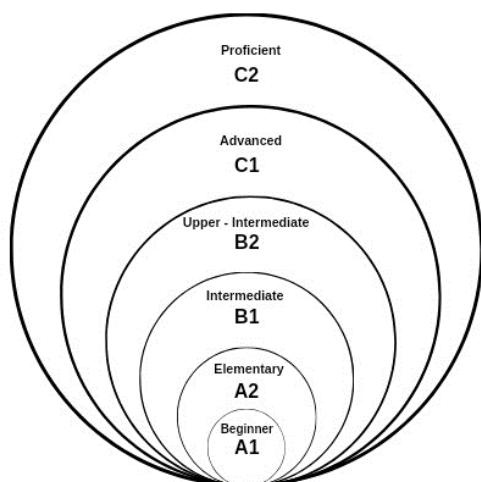
Fig. 1. CEFR's Six Levels of Language Proficiency A1 to C2 (Source: The CEFR Levels - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (coe.int)).

The CEFR has three scales namely,
1. Common Reference Levels: Global Scale
2. Common Reference Levels: Self-Assessment Grid
3. Common Reference Levels: Quality Aspects of Spoken language use.

Self-assessment holds great significance as it promotes self-awareness and reflection. Through introspection, individuals gain insights into their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to set realistic goals and plan for personal growth. This process empowers better decision-making by aligning actions with values and aspirations, ultimately enhancing self-confidence and adaptability. Furthermore, self-assessment cultivates accountability and responsibility, driving individuals to take ownership of their development and communicate effectively. It plays a vital role in career planning, fostering a lifelong learning mindset and enabling individuals to navigate challenges with resilience. Overall, self-assessment is a pivotal tool that paves the way for continuous improvement and success in both personal and professional realms.

(SPEAKING SKILLS)

Scale	Speaking-Interaction
A1	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
A2	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I cannot usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.
B1	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g., family, hobbies, work, travel, and current events).
B2	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.
C1	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.
C2	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.

Fig. 2. CEFR's Common Reference Levels- Self Assessment Grid. (Source: The CEFR Levels - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (coe.int)).

For the current study the second scale "Common Reference Levels: Self-Assessment Grid as shown in Figure 2 is used. This scale is used in order to orient learners, teachers, and other users within the educational system for some practical purpose, a more detailed overview is necessary. It is a self-assessment orientation tool intended to help learners to profile their main language skills, and decide at which level they might look at a checklist of more detailed descriptors in order to self-assess their level of proficiency. The students were given the self-assessment scale before the intervention and post intervention.

The selected 35 students were trained using TBLT. The action plan is shown below. The students were exposed to TBLT tasks for continuous ten sessions of two hours each. The students were given information on the related vocabulary and phrases. The students were also asked to watch online videos related to the tasks allotted. The students were asked to listen to these online videos frequently in order prepare themselves on the different vocabulary, phrases, and statements.

Task 1: Sharing Travel Story

Language Objectives: Narrating past experiences, using descriptive language.

Instructions: Share a memorable travel experience with your friends or family. Describe the destination you visited, activities you did, and your feelings about the visit. Use descriptive language to make your story engaging and interesting.

Task 2: Debate

Language Objectives: Expressing opinions, supporting arguments, counterarguments.
Instructions: Social media's impact on society. Prepare arguments for the topic and against the topic, and participate in a structured debate.

Task 3: Everyday Problems

Language Objectives: Offering solutions, making suggestions, discussing pros and cons.
Instructions: In pairs, discuss everyday problems like traffic congestion or pollution. Brainstorm solutions and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each suggestion.

Task 4: Getting to know your friend

Language Objectives: Asking open-ended questions, active listening, paraphrasing.
Instructions: Pair up and take turns interviewing each other. Ask questions about hobbies, interests, and experiences. Practice active listening and paraphrasing to show understanding.

Task 5: Restaurant Role-Play

Language Objectives: Placing orders, asking for recommendations, making polite requests.
Instructions: Role-play a scenario where one person is a customer and the other is a server in a restaurant. The customer asks for recommendations and places an order.

Task 6: News Report Discussion

Language Objectives: Summarizing news, expressing opinions, discussing current events.
Instructions: Bring in a news article to share with the class. Summarize the article and discuss its implications. Engage in a class discussion about the topic.

Task 7: Storytelling Chain

Language Objectives: Cooperative storytelling, maintaining a narrative, using transitions.
Instructions: Sit in a circle. Start a story with a few sentences. Each person adds a sentence to continue the story. Focus on using transitions to create a cohesive narrative.

Task 8: My Ideal Vacation

Language Objectives: Describing preferences, using conditional sentences.
Instructions: Discuss your ideal vacation with a partner. Describe the destination, activities, and accommodation. Use conditional sentences to talk about what you would do.

Task 9: Problematic Customer Service Call

Language Objectives: Expressing complaints, negotiating solutions, using formal language.
Instructions: Role-play a customer service call. One person is a customer with a problem, and the other is a customer service representative. The customer expresses their issue, and the representative works to resolve it.

Task 10: Cultural Exchange Presentation

Language Objectives: Sharing cultural information, explaining customs, using visuals.
Instructions: Research and prepare a presentation about a cultural aspect of your country. Share information about traditions, holidays, or customs with the class, using visuals to enhance your presentation.

V.   DATA ANALYSIS

Self-assessment is a valuable tool for evaluating language proficiency and promoting language learning. Research has shown that self-assessment can enhance learners' motivation, self-awareness, and decision-making skills. Beyond analyzing language learning itself, self-assessment can aid students in evaluating their learning capacities. Since the 1970s and 1980s, when educators began exploring how students learn a language rather than linguistic systems, self-assessment in language teaching and learning has become more and more common. Self-assessment as a measurement technique has been investigated for validity and reliability, and researchers have discovered that it often exhibits reasonable correlations with outside measures. One of the learner-oriented assessment techniques that has drawn an increasing number of practitioners in recent years is self-assessment.

The students were asked to assess themselves using the assessment grid before the intervention. As shown in the Table I out of 35 students 54% students categorized themselves under A1 category, 31% categorized themselves under A2 category and 14% categorized themselves under B1 category. Figure 3 shows the graphical representation of the data shown in Table I.

TABLE I
PRE- INTERVENTION SELF- ASSESSMENT GRID -
(SPEAKING SKILLS)
https://www.coe.int/lang-cefr

Category	Total no of students
A1	54%
A2	31%
B1	14%
B2	0
C1	0
C2	0

under A1 category.

Figure 4 shows the graphical representation of the data shown in Table II.
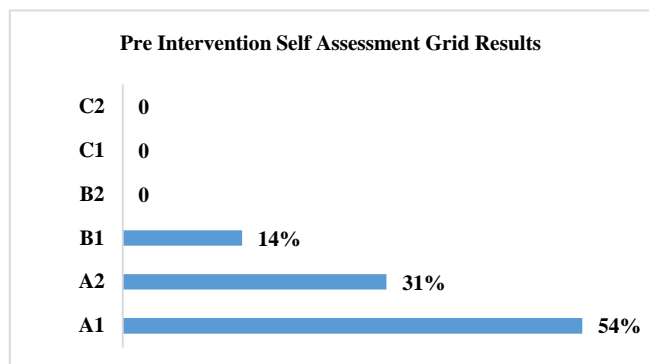
Pre Intervention Self Assessment Grid Results

Fig. 3. Graphical Representation- Pre-Intervention Self-Assessment Grid Results

The study thus focused on augmenting rural engineering students' Speaking Interaction in English language. The students were trained through the 10 designed sessions using TBLT.

TABLE II
POST- INTERVENTION SELF- ASSESSMENT GRID
(SPEAKING SKILLS)
https://www.coe.int/lang-cefr

Category	Total no of students
A1	14%
A2	3%
B1	26%
B2	43%
C1	11%
C2	3%

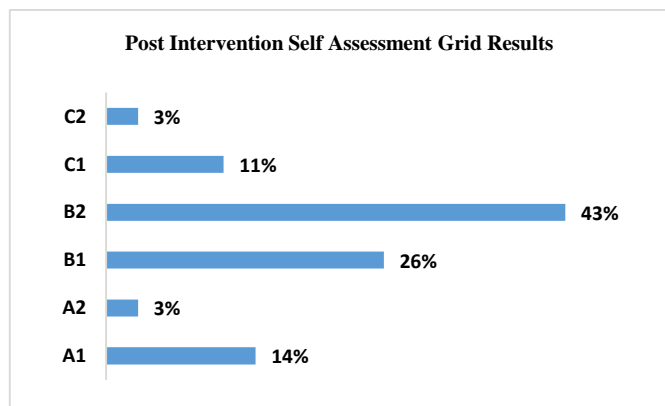**Post Intervention Self Assessment Grid Results**

Fig. 4. Graphical Representation- Post-Intervention Self-Assessment Grid Results

The students were asked to assess themselves using the assessment grid after the intervention. The students have shown improvement in their self-assessment. As shown in the Table II out of 35, 3% students categorized themselves under C2 category, 11% categorized themselves under C1 category, 43% categorized themselves under B2 category, 26% categorized themselves under B1 category, 3% categorized themselves under the category A2 and 14% of them categorized themselves

Further the improvement of the students was also mapped by comparing the formative test which was conducted before the intervention and summative test which was conducted after the test. As shown in the Table III in the formative test out of 35 students, 74% students were found under A2 category and 26% students under A1 category. Figure 5 shows the graphical representation of the data shown in Table III.

TABLE III
PRE- INTERVENTION FORMATIVE TEST
(ON INTERACTING SKILLS)

Pre-Intervention Formative Test - On Interacting skills	
Scale	No of Students
A1	74%
A2	26%
B1	0
B2	0
C1	0
C2	0

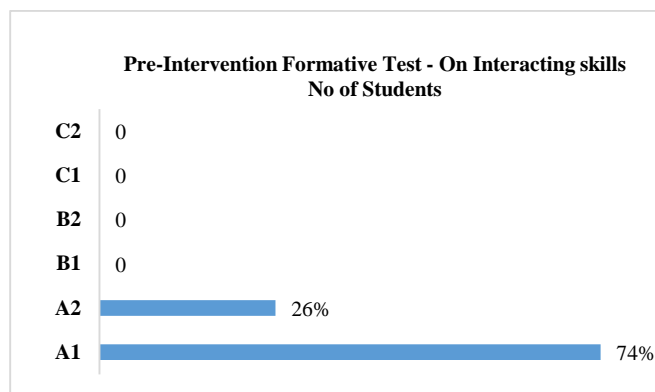**Pre-Intervention Formative Test - On Interacting skills No of Students**

Fig. 5. Graphical Representation- Pre-Intervention Formative Test

There is seen improvement in the summative test. As shown in the Table IV 20% students were found under A2 category, 43% students were found under B1 category, 28% students were found under B2 category, and 8% students under C1. This shows that task-based language teaching has accelerated rural engineering students' interaction ability in English language. Figure 6 shows the graphical representation of the data shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV
POST- INTERVENTION SUMMATIVE TEST
(ON INTERACTING SKILLS)

Post -Intervention Summative Test - On Interacting skills	
Scale	No of Students
A1	0
A2	20%
B1	43%

B2	28%
C1	8%
C2	0

Post -Intervention Summative Test - On Interacting skills No of Students

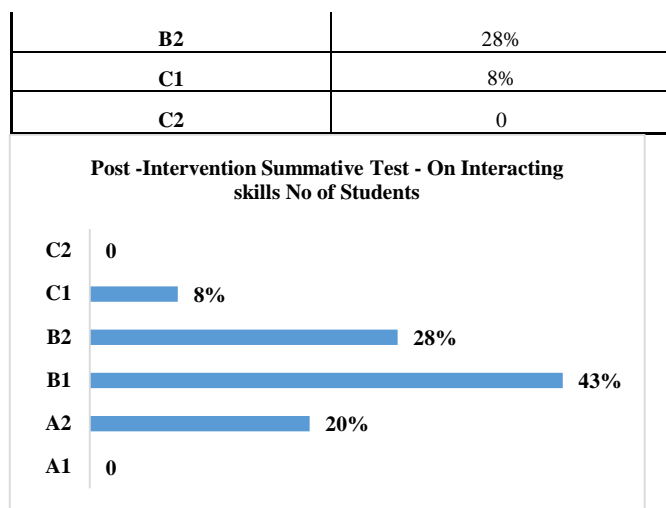|	
C2	0
C1	8%
B2	28%
B1	43%
A2	20%
A1	0

Fig. 6. Graphical Representation- Post-Intervention Summative Test

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The initial self-assessment of students using the assessment grid was conducted before the intervention. The data presented in Table II, which encompassed a total of 35 students, revealed how these students perceived their own abilities across different categories. The majority, accounting for 54% of the student cohort, placed themselves within the A1 category. Meanwhile, 31% of students self-categorized under the A2 category, indicating a diverse distribution of perceived skills. Additionally, 14% of the students saw themselves falling into the B1 category, signifying a subset of learners who assessed their abilities at this level. This initial self-assessment snapshot provided valuable insights into the students' self-perceived proficiency levels across the given categories. It also provided valid insight that no student categorized himself/herself under B2, C1 and C2 levels.

After the intervention, students were requested to evaluate their performance using the assessment grid once again. Encouragingly, there was a clear indication of improvement in their self-assessment outcomes. As detailed in Table II, out of the total cohort of 35 students, a modest 3% of students positioned themselves within the C2 category, while a larger 11% found resonance with the C1 category. Notably, a significant 43% of students saw fit to categorize themselves in the B2 category, showcasing substantial progress. Moreover, a considerable segment of 26% of students identified themselves in the B1 category, further highlighting their advancement.

This self-assessment data underscores the positive impact of the intervention on the students' self-perceived abilities and underscores the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing their skills.

The progress of students was also assessed by comparing their formative test results prior to intervention with the summative test conducted afterwards. Initially, in the formative test, 74% of 35 students fell under A2, and 26% under A1. Improvement

was evident in the summative test, with 20% in A2, 43% in B1, 28% in B2, and 8% in C1 (Table IV). This indicates that task-based language teaching has enhanced English interaction skills among rural engineering students.

This study explored the TBLT for augmenting students' interacting skills in English and explored the importance of the self-assessment in English language. The inferences of the results provide facilitators and teachers with valuable insights to enhance their language teaching practices using TBLT.

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