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*Original Research*

## From Interference to Fluency: Analysing Indonesian Students' Progress in English Oral Communication

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### Abstract

This study examines the progress of Indonesian students in spoken English through a task-based approach in an EFL classroom. The aim of the study is to identify communication strategies and linguistic aspects used by the students during oral interaction and production. The data collected from 50 Indonesian students attending a Phonetics and Phonology course at Universitas Bandar Lampung was analysed using triangulation with class diary and self-assessment questionnaires. The findings show significant improvements in oral interaction and production, including negotiation, cooperation, mediation, intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and rhythm. However, the students made less effort to intervene in the spoken code of the interlocutor and their own interlanguage. The study recommends training tasks that emphasise paraphrasing and self-improvement of oral discourse to enhance their overall oral proficiency in English. The findings of this study have important implications and provides a promising framework for improving students' communication strategies and linguistic aspects. Therefore, these findings suggest that effective language teaching should prioritise not only linguistic aspects but also communication strategies that enable effective oral interaction. This study's recommendations could be useful for language educators worldwide seeking to enhance their students' overall oral proficiency in English



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## 1. Introduction

Over the past few years, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on students' spoken language exchange in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms (Chauvin, Fenouillet, & Scott Brewer, 2020; Cludia Ho, 2020; Huang, 2021; Walker, 2012). These studies have highlighted the importance of this area of research in improving students' linguistic competence and enhancing their overall communication skills. Additionally, the dynamics of spoken language exchange can be understood in relation to other aspects of the teaching and learning process (Haselow, 2021).

A task-based approach has been identified as an effective method for maximising the use of spoken language in EFL classes. Structured class activities based on this approach have been shown to increase students' engagement and investment in assignments (Chen & Kent, 2020) and are essential in building active speech acts. Communication strategies of negotiation, cooperation, and oral mediation are fundamental for developing oral interaction (Jamshidnejad, 2011; Liu & Kinginger, 2021; Ou & Gu, 2020; Wang, 2019), along with linguistic factors such as accent, rhythm, intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and creativity of speech (Halliday & Greaves, 2008).

Despite the significance of spoken language exchange, Indonesian students in EFL classrooms still face difficulties in producing fluent speech (Abrar et al., 2018; Manurung, 2015). Thus, there is a need to

encourage the improvement of their oral language exchange skills, especially interactive, productive, and mediation skills. Although communication strategies and linguistic factors are fundamental to developing communicative competence in students (Grant, 2011; Shi & Lei, 2021; Vonkova et al., 2021; Yip, 2020), there are still gaps in the literature on effective strategies and linguistic factors that can be used to improve students' spoken language proficiency, particularly among Indonesian students in EFL classrooms.

This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by using oral assignments in EFL classes to enable Indonesian students to develop their communication strategies and linguistic factors for interactive competence and productive aspects of spoken English. The study contributes to the identification of effective strategies and linguistic factors that can be used to improve Indonesian students' spoken language proficiency in EFL classrooms by observing the students' oral language exchange and reflecting on the audio recordings as a resource in oral language teaching.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the development of effective strategies and linguistic factors for improving Indonesian students' spoken language proficiency. By focusing on Indonesian students' progress in spoken English, this study provides a unique perspective that contributes to the existing literature on spoken language exchange in EFL classrooms. Moreover, the use of oral assignments in EFL classes as a means of developing communication strategies and linguistic factors for interactive competence and productive aspects of spoken English is a novel approach that adds to the existing literature on the subject. The findings of this study have important implications for language educators and policymakers in Indonesia and other countries with similar contexts. By identifying effective strategies and linguistic factors for improving students' spoken language proficiency through a task-based approach, this study offers practical recommendations for language educators seeking to enhance their students' overall oral proficiency in English. Furthermore, the study's focus on Indonesian students provides a unique perspective that contributes to the existing literature on spoken language exchange in EFL classrooms.

In conclusion, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature on effective strategies and linguistic factors that can be used to improve Indonesian students' spoken language proficiency, particularly in EFL classrooms. Through the use of oral assignments and a task-based approach, the study seeks to enable Indonesian students to develop their communication strategies and linguistic factors of interactive competence and productive aspects of spoken English. The study's findings and recommendations have important implications for language educators and policymakers seeking to enhance their students' overall oral proficiency in English, both in Indonesia and other countries with similar contexts.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Spoken Language Exchange

Spoken language exchange is a form of communication that involves spoken language and is characterised by negotiation of meaning, interactivity, and two-way contextual communication (Beltrán-Planques & Querol-Julián, 2018; Haselow, 2012; Herazo, 2021). It occurs naturally and involves linguistic and textual differences when compared to written language. These differences can be seen at various linguistic levels, including the phonetic and phonological levels, which are characterised by the nature of spoken language; the lexicogrammar level, which is shown by the complexity of dealing with situations, speakers, modification of themes, and modalizations to show the attitudes of speakers; and the semantic level, which is indicated by a variety of contexts and constructions that contain verbal registers and certain interaction tone patterns.

It is essential to recognise and reproduce the principles of speech phonetic integration to have good skills in spoken language exchange. Thus, the teaching and learning of languages should not be separated from the interactions that occur between subjects. Learning a language goes beyond the production of a set of language sounds, and oral communication only occurs effectively when the language acquisition process is focused on the integration of discourse and the development of students' phonetic competencies (Chang, 2019; Olmstead et al., 2021). In the field of oral communication, phonetic and productive interactive skills should fulfil a fundamental role in the characterisation of spoken codes and their active use by students. The skills cover pronunciation, discursive, cultural, and strategic dimensions of the speaker, in other words, the dimensions of communicative competence which help their integration through both specialised and strategic phonetic skills (Dias et al., 2021). Phonetic skills in spoken language exchange are specifically and strategically in accordance with productive, perceptive, mediating, and interactive skills (Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2021).

In summary, spoken language exchange is a natural form of communication that involves negotiation of meaning, interactivity, and two-way contextual communication. It differs from written language and involves various linguistic levels, including phonetic and phonological, lexicogrammar, and semantic levels. To have good skills in spoken language exchange, being aware and carrying out the principles of speech phonetic integration and develop phonetic competencies are crucial. Phonetic skills in spoken language exchange are specifically and strategically in accordance with productive, perceptive, mediating, and interactive skills.

## 2.2 Productive and Perceptive Skills in Oral Language Exchange

Productive and perceptive skills in language refer to the adequacy of linguistic factors such as paradigmatic units, syntagmatic units, and variants of stylistic skills in linguistic, discursive, and cultural skills (Flege et al., 1997; Kissling, 2014). Mediation competition involves the ability of speakers to make connections between multiple codes, contexts, and interlocutors, creating a shared space for communication. In this study, oral mediation is not just seen as a communicative activity but also as an interaction strategy that enables students to intervene in their discourse. Effective communication is achieved through the mobilization of various phonetic competencies and the use of negotiation, cooperation, and mediation strategies. The choice of spoken codes used in communication can vary depending on the environment and the interlocutors involved (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005). Thus, productive and perceptive skills in spoken language exchange are multidimensional phenomena that require a comprehensive understanding of communicative competence.

Other factors may come into play during spoken language exchange, including methodological, visual, playful, motivational, and affective components in the language teaching-learning process (Bautista-Vallejo et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2020). Learning a foreign language can be structured through various exclusive spoken assignments, such as reception, production, interaction, and mediation. Reception involves providing students with information that is delivered as verbal input, which should be shared in a meaningful, understandable, and high-quality way among speakers. Production stimulates speech through contextual activities, while interaction has a multi-directional relationship that involves all participants. Mediation allows for discursive intervention between interlocutors, creating a bridge for effective communication. These linguistic activities work best when stimulated through task-based approaches.

## 2.3 Task-Based Approach

A task-based approach is a teaching method that focuses on developing communication skills through various tasks (Afshar, 2021; Willis & Willis, 2007). In terms of spoken language exchange, these tasks can be provided at the beginning of a class as initial tasks, and at the end as final tasks. During the initial tasks, students can engage in discussions related to the previous activities of spoken language, pronunciation, negotiation of criteria, and boundaries. These discussions can lead them to make decisions and seek information to prepare for the next activities of spoken communication. On the other hand, final tasks serve as an evaluation of the training both in terms of content and form. Throughout the course, students can be motivated to perform a diverse set of tasks to acquire the resources, knowledge, skills, and competencies required to achieve the course objectives.

Using a task-based approach can facilitate students' participation and transform typical language instructional exercises into meaningful learning activities. In-class interactions are an essential component of this approach, and students' participation can have a positive impact on their learning outcomes, increasing their insights into the subject matter (Moser et al., 2022). Furthermore, student participation can promote their interest in and interaction with the learning process. Thus, scholars recommend the task-based approach to improving students' spoken language skills (Sun et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

## 3. Method

This study aims to examine the communication strategies and linguistic aspects of 50 students attending the Phonetics and Phonology course at the English Education Department, Universitas Bandar Lampung, during oral language exchanges. The study uses a descriptive research design (Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Dikilitas & Reynolds, 2022; Gall et al., 2014).

Data was collected by recording the students' oral language exchange at the beginning and end of each task-based action during a four-month period, resulting in 36 hours of recorded data. The initial recordings

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involved dialogues where students discussed their previous experiences of learning spoken English, while the final recordings captured communicative exchanges during the course. The researchers utilised audio recordings, class diary entries, and self-assessment questionnaires as sources of data.

To analyse the data, the researchers employed PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink, 2021) to examine the communication strategies and linguistic aspects of the students' oral mediation, including intonation, fluency, rhythm, and pronunciation. The analysis also included an acoustic analysis of the data. The extracted data was assessed using a numerical scale from 1 to 5, as specified in Table 1.

The researchers also took qualitative notes on the strategies of communication observed during oral interactions and the linguistic factors of the students' oral production. The study specifically focused on the communication strategies of negotiation, cooperation, and oral mediation. While the study is limited in scope to students at a specific university, the findings will contribute to a better understanding of communication strategies and linguistic aspects in spoken language exchange in EFL classrooms.

Table 1. Numerical scale 1-5

Scale	Description
1	There has been no effort on the part of the students in executing the strategies and the factors that constitute interaction and oral production in English.
2	There has been slightly effort on the part of the students in executing the strategies and the factors that constitute interaction and oral production in English.
3	The students have made an effort, but returned to produce segmental and suprasegmental features that shape their mother tongue, Indonesian.
4	The students have made more efforts with less segmental and suprasegmental features that shape their mother tongue, Indonesian.
5	The students have made an effort to develop the strategies and factors of interaction and oral production in English.

#### 4. Results

The results section presents the findings of the study that examined the communication strategies and linguistic aspects of 50 students attending the Phonetics and Phonology course at the English Education Department, Universitas Bandar Lampung. The study collected data through recorded oral language exchange at the beginning and end of each task-based action during a four-month period.

The initial tasks were recorded when the students discussed their previous learning experiences. Through these recordings, as seen in Figure 1, it is observed that in the oral interaction, the students have made an effort to negotiate (Scale 3) and cooperate (Scale 3) in oral interaction. There is negotiation in the communicative exchange of students, although they need to refine this strategy further, so that they are fully capable of taking turns talking, debating and persuading their interlocutors.

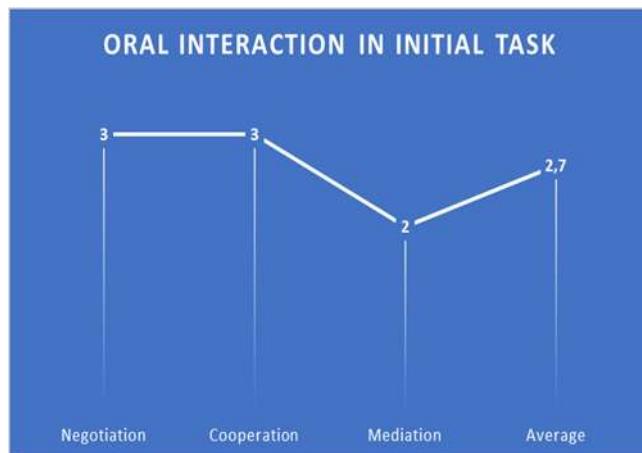


Figure 1. Oral Interaction in Initial Task

Students have attempted to submit relevant, but not always concise, information. That is, they fail to contribute to all opportunities for a smooth conversation. Unfortunately, there has been slightly effort by the students in developing the oral mediation strategy (Scale 2). Students have not yet achieved developing an oral mediation strategy, as exemplified in the following excerpt 1 of the student's speech (ST-5 means Student 5).

"e... very good strategy that I had strategi yang sangat baik when I went to learn English was... em... to look for websites with contents in English about things that I liked, for example, food, sport or about e... about important knowledge I can learn from another country. It is easier than reading a book."

**ST-5**

This student has translated English words into Indonesian in the speech such as "very good strategy" ~ strategi yang sangat baik, "important knowledge" ~ pengetahuan yang penting, "I can learn" ~ yang saya bisa pelajari. In that way, the interlocutors understood him more easily. This means that the student may have difficulties in expanding their oral mediation strategies, e.g. paraphrasing the content or replacing the words directly in English instead of using or translating the contents in Indonesian. The average of the oral interaction of the students has been 2.7 meaning that there was an interaction oral despite we found that they have difficulty in using the strategy of mediation.

Regarding the oral production, it is observed that the students have made an effort to carry out the pronunciation of the segments in English, but then they have re-transferred various linguistic factors of Indonesian, as illustrated in Figure 2. The students have not been able to develop the aspects of intonation (Scale 3), fluency (Scale 2), and rhythm (Scale 2).

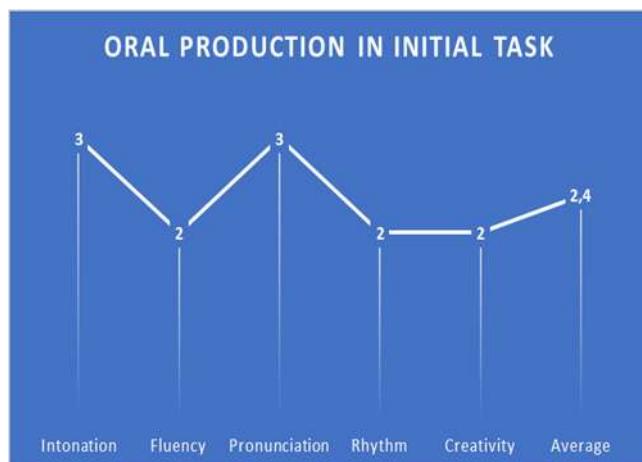


Figure 2. Oral Production in Initial Task

In general, students have tried to display interrogative and declarative intonation, but then they reproduced it the way they do in Indonesian. They have extended vowels before the end of certain words and stopped at inappropriate positions in word groups in their speech. As a result, they have difficulty grouping and accentuating words and following rhythms like English. Most of the students have not expanded the proposed topic in their oral production, have not added new ideas, nor have they outlined different ways to express themselves verbally. Students have not been pictured looking for new oral communication strategies. Thus, we considered that they have not developed their discursive creativity (Scale 2).

In their pronunciation (at the segmental level), the majority have made an effort (Scale 3) to pronounce English vowels and consonants. But then they have returned to produce features of Indonesian speech sounds. For example, they pronounce the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ instead of voiceless dental fricative /θ/ for the English word “thanks” (Figure 3). They also pronounce the voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/ instead of voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ for the English word “voice” (Figure 4).

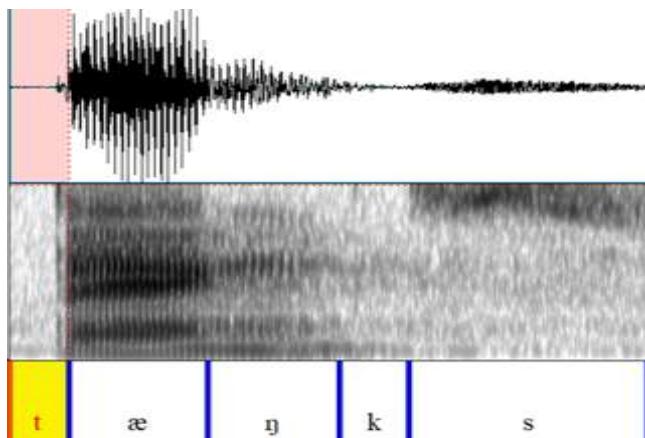


Figure 3. Pronouncing /tæŋks/ instead of /θæŋks/ for the English word “thanks”.

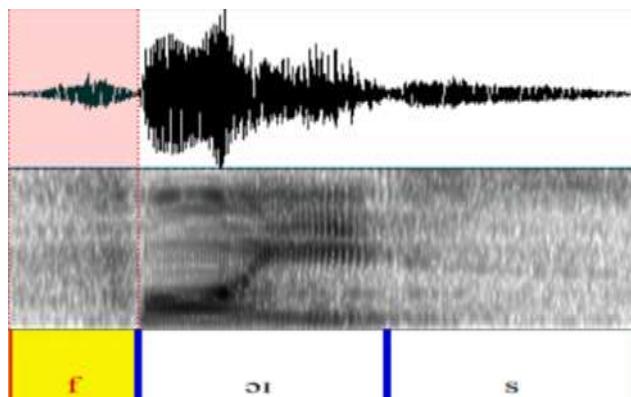


Figure 4. Pronouncing /fɔɪs/ instead of /vɔɪs/ for the English word “voice”.

The students have learned to repair their speech several times throughout the task. Therefore, it has been considered that they have tried to approach the pronunciation of the segments in English, although there have been those transfer features. The average oral production in the initial tasks has been approximately 2.4. We considered that the development of linguistic factors in their oral production has not been enough to generate a fluent oral discourse, since there has been interference of Indonesian in the oral production of the students.

The final tasks were recorded while the students were giving their expressions to their classmates. In their speech, we observed that the students made more effort to negotiate and cooperate when carrying out the oral interaction, but they have not been able to perfect the mediation strategy, as shown in Figure 5. On most occasions, the students made an effort to negotiate (Scale 4) with the interlocutors. They have cooperated (Scale 4) adding relevant information in their communicative exchanges.

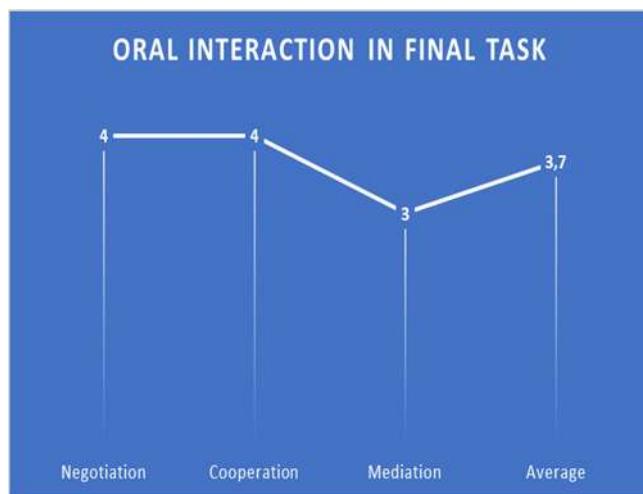


Figure 5. Oral Interaction in Final Task

Regarding their oral production (Figure 6), it was found that the students have made an effort to pronounce the segments in English. It is observed that the students have had difficulties in producing their speech fluently (Scale 3). In general, they have transferred features of intonation from Indonesian. The interrogative melodic contours have sounded very flat and have made some vowel and consonant characteristics different from English. However, they have tried quite hard to produce the emphatic intonation. This implies an advance, if we compared it to the initial task. The index of effort in the intonation factor has risen from 3 (initial task) to 4 (final task).

Regarding the rhythm of speech, the students have presented some vocalisations and pauses in their speech thus interfering with its fluency. However, they have shown effort little more when adjusting the word stress and the structuring of the words compared to the initial tasks. The index of effort in the rhythm factor has risen from 2 (initial task) to 3 (final task). In addition, as far as creativity is concerned (Scale 2), they still have not shown traits of discursive unpredictability. They have not introduced many innovations in developing their oral activities. Regarding pronunciation, at the segmental level, the majority have made an effort (Scale 4) to pronounce English segments. They produced English pronunciation with less prosodic features shaping their mother tongue, Indonesian. Most of the students have managed to repair their pronunciation during the final task.

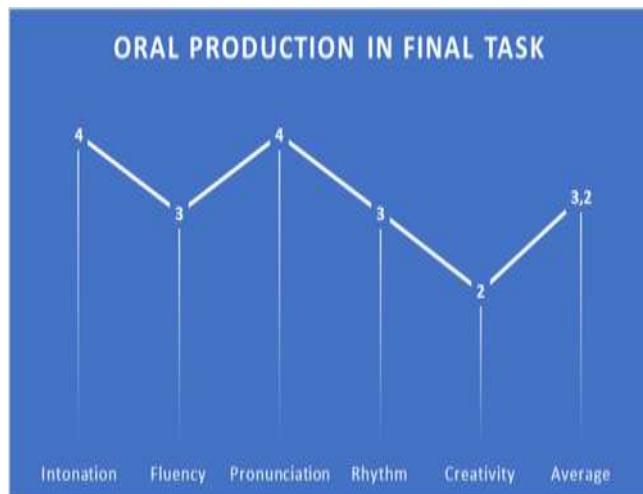


Figure 6. Oral Production in Final Task

The general average of oral production has been about 3.2. In other words, the students have made an effort to maintain a good pronunciation at the segmental level, have presented advances in linguistic intonation and rhythm of speech, but have had difficulty developing the other linguistic factors that shape

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to its productive competence. By comparing the initial task and the final task, it has been considered that the students have made progress, i.e. the general average of oral production has risen from 2.4 (initial task) to 3.2 (final task).

After converting the means of oral communication strategies in percentage (Table 2) with formula (1), it has been found that the negotiation, cooperation and oral mediation have increased 20%. And when contrasting the oral production in initial and final tasks, it also has been found that the intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and rhythm have increased 20%. But there is no increase in creativity (0%).

(1)

$$\frac{n2 - n1}{5} \times 100 \%$$

where:

n1 = the scale score in the initial task (from 1 to 5)

n2 = the scale score in the final task (from 1 to 5)

Table 2. Comparison of Initial and Final Task

Scale 1 – 5			
	Initial (n1)	Final (n2)	Increase (%)
Oral interaction	Negotiation	3	4
	Cooperation	3	4
	Mediation	2	3
	<b>Average</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.7</b>
Oral production	Intonation		
	Fluency	3	4
	Pronunciation	3	4
	Rhythm	3	4
	Creativity	2	3
	<b>Average</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

The results show that there a development of the students' oral interaction when the negotiation, cooperation and oral mediation have increased (20%) from the initial task to the final task. For their oral production, there is also a development when the intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and rhythm have increased, except for the creativity. It should be noted that in the course of phonetics and phonology, the students got the training of the production of English segmental features, melodic curves and accents. Therefore, the training can help highlight intonation, fluency, pronunciation and rhythm factors.

Overall, the findings indicate that in the initial tasks, the students made an effort to negotiate and cooperate in their oral interaction, but they had difficulties developing oral mediation strategies. The students also struggled with aspects of intonation, fluency, and rhythm in their oral production, and they transferred features of Indonesian speech sounds. In the final tasks, the students showed improvement in their negotiation, cooperation, and oral mediation strategies, as well as their intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and rhythm. However, they still struggled with creativity in their oral activities. Therefore, the study suggests that training in phonetics and phonology can help improve students' oral communication skills in English. However, the findings also highlight the need for further development of oral mediation and creativity strategies among EFL learners.

## 5. Discussion

The learning process can be developed through student interaction because students learn when they share ideas to form their own knowledge based on what they have learned. Through the task-based approach, students can participate to expose themselves and practice their knowledge together with other students through oral interaction. Student interaction can manifest the process of social relations between students and can be useful in the learning process. With verbal interaction between students, empathy can also emerge with other students. Interaction is fundamental to learning a foreign language because this process requires a lot of practice with other people. In fact, through oral interaction, students can practice with their peers (Arifin, 2017; Chien et al., 2020; Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018).

In the study, there are developments in the students' oral interaction and oral production in English. In oral interaction, there is a development of negotiation, cooperation, and mediation. In oral production, there is a development of intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and rhythm. In addition, there is a decrease in Indonesian interference in their spoken English. We observe that the decrease is found for the interferences of the Indonesian in the strategies of negotiation and oral mediation. With more tasks aimed at perfecting the interaction orally, we believe the students could develop the strategies better (Maldonado, 2016; Nakatani, 2005)

However, students seem to make less effort to intervene in the spoken code both in the interlocutor, as well as in their own interlanguage. Then, it is necessary to include training tasks that underline aspects such as paraphrase and self-repair of oral discourse. Because the students' creativity does not develop, it is necessary in the future study to discuss predictors of the students' willingness to communicate such as employing interpersonal projection as a strategy to increase their creativity (Meihami, 2022; Yang & Yin, 2022), using other activities such as drama to encourage creative engagement of the students (Nanda & Susanto, 2021) along with their learning on utilising good speech articulation and prosody (Susanto, 2016) in their spoken language. In addition, students' creative self-efficacy can be applied related to mastery beliefs and student performance approaches (Beghetto, 2006). And also the application of learning methods that implement student project activities in class can be an option to provide opportunities for students to actively participate in improving spoken English skills (Nuninsari et al., 2020)

It should be noted that they were part of a wider investigation in which a set of research instruments (class diaries, audio recordings and self-assessment questionnaires) were used. Further, in their self-assessment questionnaire, the students were invited to reflect on their level of motivation, learning process and level of mastery of spoken English. This reflection is positive, because most of the students answered that their level of motivation increased. In fact, they still need to improve their learning process (reducing the interference of Indonesian accent, rhythm and intonation in English) and level of mastery of several components of spoken language in English (creativity, intonation, fluency, rhythm, pronunciation and especially vocabulary).

The assigned tasks in our study actually allow students to carry out effective communicative exchanges with the interlocutor. It can also allow students to approach the context of natural speech in English. These tasks have been successful in promoting the students' oral interaction. With the tasks, students have interacted with their interlocutor and they are motivated to speak in English. Students' interactions with different classmates can be expanded to associate social networks with several tasks that allow diversification of communication spaces and access interlocutors who have more mastery of English (Ito, 2019; Tokunaga, 2021), thus, requiring them to develop creativity when expressing themselves in English.

Although there are limitations regarding sound analysis in the classroom due to the low audio quality, we still consider the sound recording very important for the development of this study. We observed and extracted voice data through objective criteria that could explain the students' progress in the acquisition of their oral interactive and productive skills in English. Audio recorders may be enabled to develop more spontaneous dialogues when the students have managed the device from their mobile phones. Today, there are various applications available on mobile phones (Begum, 2011; Cui & Wang, 2008; Hwang & Chen, 2013; Hwang et al., 2014; Kim & Kwon, 2012), which make voice recording better and easier for language learning.

In the context of the current pandemic, activities in oral interaction and production in English for students have become a bigger challenge. The existence of rules regarding social distancing has changed the way individuals relate to each other and this has an impact on the emergence of the use of virtual learning media. Teaching English during a pandemic may follow a hybrid format (Hamid et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021). Thus, it is necessary to consider the needs and interests of students, interlocutors who can be involved and the application of an evaluative approach. A way is needed that allows students to look for alternatives to expand their communication strategies and thereby develop their oral interactions and productions.

In terms of its novelty and significant contribution, this study provides insight into the use of task-based approach in developing oral interaction and production skills in English among Indonesian university students. It also highlights the importance of student interaction in language learning and the role of sound recording in measuring progress in spoken language skills. Thus, the novelty and significant contribution of this study lie in its investigation of the effectiveness of task-based approach on Indonesian EFL students' oral interaction and production in English. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the importance of interaction and creativity in the learning process, especially for foreign language learning. The study also highlights the potential use of mobile applications to enhance language learning and to facilitate the collection of data for further analysis.

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In conclusion, this study suggests that task-based approach can effectively enhance Indonesian EFL students' oral interaction and production in English. However, further research is needed to investigate the predictors of students' willingness to communicate and to develop their creativity in foreign language learning. Additionally, the use of mobile applications can be considered as an effective tool for enhancing voice recording and facilitating language learning, especially in the current pandemic situation. Finally, the study emphasises the importance of interaction and creativity in the learning process, and recommends the implementation of learning methods that encourage student participation and engagement in class.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that the task-based approach can effectively promote students' oral interaction and oral production skills in English, resulting in the development of negotiation, cooperation, mediation, intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and rhythm. However, the study also found that students make less effort to intervene in the spoken code, indicating the need for training tasks that focus on aspects such as paraphrasing and self-improvement of oral discourse. Moreover, the students need to continue improving their learning process and mastery of spoken English, especially in areas such as creativity, intonation, fluency, rhythm, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the concept of oral interaction and production and their implications for foreign language teaching. Further research is recommended to investigate predictors of students' willingness to communicate and to explore innovative approaches to enhance their spoken English skills

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