

DESIGNING CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT TASKS FOR PROMOTING STUDENTS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE AND AUTONOMY¹⁾

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Abstract: *Designing Convergent And Divergent Tasks For Promoting Students' Speaking Performance And Autonomy.* The present study was aimed at exploring whether convergent and divergent tasks resulted in different students' speaking performance and investigating which one of task between convergent and divergent was able to optimize learners' autonomy. This research was conducted to 42 students of Muamalah majoring at Raden Intan Islamic University in 2016/2017 academic year. To collect the data, the researcher administered speaking test (reliability of pre test convergent: 0.97403, posttest convergent: 0.89481, pretest divergent: 0.95714, posttest divergent: 0.99058) and gave questionnaire. Then data were analyzed quantitatively. The result showed that there was no significant difference between convergent and divergent tasks on students speaking performance in term of complexity and fluency except accuracy. In addition, divergent task was better for promoting students' autonomy rather than convergent task. Therefore, the researcher recommends English teacher/lecturers use convergent and divergent tasks since they give benefits to students.

Keywords: convergent task, divergent task, speaking performance

Abstrak : *Perancangan Tugas Konvergen Dan Divergen Untuk Mempromosikan Kinerja Berbicara Serta Kemandirian Siswa.* Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi apakah antara tugas konvergen dan divergen menghasilkan kinerja berbicara siswa yang berbeda dan menyelidiki manakah diantara kedua tugas tersebut yang mampu mengoptimalkan kemandirian siswa. Penelitian ini dilakukan kepada 42 mahasiswa jurusan Muamalah Universitas Islam Raden Intan pada tahun akademik 2016/2017. Untuk mengumpulkan data, peneliti memberikan tes bicara dan membagikan kuesioner. Kemudian data dianalisis secara kuantitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tidak ada perbedaan yang signifikan antara tugas konvergen dan tugas divergen pada kinerja berbicara siswa dalam hal kompleksitas dan kelancaran kecuali akurasi. Selain itu, ditemukan bahwa tugas divergen lebih baik dalam hal mengoptimalkan otonomi siswa daripada tugas konvergen. Oleh karena itu, peneliti merekomendasikan agar guru bahasa Inggris / dosen sebaiknya menggunakan tugas konvergen maupun tugas divergen selama tugas tersebut dapat membantu siswa untuk mengoptimalkan kinerja berbicara serta kemandirian mereka.

Kata kunci: kinerja berbicara, tugas divergen, tugas konvergen

INTRODUCTION

In the context of learning English, getting success in speaking becomes an essential target for learners. It is an important skill for English foreign language learners. Therefore, they take many language courses in different institutes to improve their speaking abilities. In fact, Alisyahbana (1990), Nababan (1985) and Tomlison (1990) cited in Yufrizal (2007) expressed their dissatisfaction about the ability of Indonesian Students in English. It means that they are not good enough in all skills in English including speaking. It might be caused by many factors including ineffective teaching methods and low of autonomy as it was supported by study of Mineishi (2010) which did a research on East Asian EFL Learners' Autonomous Learning and Learner Perception, and takes as its focus the autonomy of adult EFL learners in Japan. Findings of this study showed that teachers should develop their teaching methods appropriate to promote less successful learners' autonomy in the classroom and there are some necessity to develop a new framework of Japanese adult EFL learners' autonomy.

Related to teaching methods, Task- Based Language Teaching (TBLT, Long,1985) cited in Rahimy (2014) is considered as an approach to language teaching which attempts to produce native- like accuracy within a communicative classroom, in which task is the unit of analysis. It has strengthened the following principles and practices. They are a needs-based approach to content selection, an emphasis on learning to

communicate through interaction in the target language, the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation, the provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself, an enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning and the linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom (Nunan, 2004, p.1).

In relation to Task based language teaching, tasks become essential part that are used in teaching activities. Convergent and divergent tasks as one suchtypology of task which are derived from concepts of knowledge formation become essential and important to be investigated.

In addition, there have been many studies focusing on the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching including research about convergent and divergent tasks.

The first study was done by Marashi and Sizari (2015). They investigated the comparative impact of convergent and divergent task on EFL learner's writing and motivation. The results led to the rejection of the first null hypothesis, thereby demonstrating that the learners in the convergent group benefited significantly more than those in the divergent group in terms of improving their writing. The second null hypothesis was not rejected, however, meaning that the two treatments were not significantly different in terms of improving the learners' motivation.

The second study was done by Nezhad and Shokrpour (2013).

They aimed to explore the influence of the cognitive style, convergent/divergent thinking, on reading comprehension performance through convergent versus divergent task types. For this purpose, 93 Iranian EFL students who were 18-26 and studied at the B.S. level at University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences were selected. Results indicated that the best results were achieved when divergent thinkers of the divergent task type group answer referential, and multiple-response items whereas the worst results were obtained when convergent thinkers in the convergent task group's performance on multiple-response items was used as the criterion for reading assessment. Results also showed that a task-based course of instruction through convergent or divergent tasks causes the participants to have respectively lower or higher gains on the divergent thinking test

In relation to autonomy, the number of studies dealing with autonomy and EFL learning success is limited but autonomy in language learning has been the topic of many researchers and practitioners for a few decades. Xu(2009) reported a survey of the autonomous L2 learning by 100 first-year non-English-major Chinese post-graduates via the instruments of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview after the questionnaire. It attends to address the following research question: to what extent do Chinese postgraduate students conduct autonomous L2 learning? It was found that the overall degree of the postgraduates' autonomous English learning is not satisfied as expected. Much needs to be done in order to have a deeper insight into

the essence of the learner autonomy and make contributions to the realization of learner autonomy for postgraduates.

In addition, Godrati, Ashraf and Motalebzadeh, (2014) conducted a study related to TBLT and autonomy. This study employed an experimental method in which two classes of Iranian Intermediate students of Kish Institute of Science and Technology in Bojnourd, Iran were chosen and instructed by the same teacher as experimental and control groups. Eighty subjects, selected from 230 students based on their scores in PET test and Learner's Autonomy in Language Learning Questionnaire, participated in the study. The results supported the fact that task-based speaking activities had positive effect on improving learners' autonomy in experimental group.

In accordance with those previous studies above, it can be inferred that the using of convergent and divergent tasks could benefit the students' English performance. However, those researchers just concerned on the difference result of using convergent and divergent task on students' english performance in term of writing and reading. In the present study, the researcher would like to investigate the difference result of using convergent and divergent tasks on students' speaking performance and autonomy.

To know whether that the use of convergent and divergent tasks result in different students' speaking performance in term of complexity, accuracy, fluency and which task is able for optimizing students' autonomy the researcher conducted a study with the following proposed

research questions: (1) Do convergent and divergent tasks result in different students' speaking performance in term of complexity, accuracy and fluency? (2) Which one of task is able to optimize learners' autonomy?

METHODS

The present study used quantitative approach. The researcher applied *Two Groups Pretest-Posttest Design*. This research was conducted to 42 students at two classes of the 3rd semester of college students at Muamalahmajoring in Raden Intan Islamic University in 2016/2017 academic year in the odd semester. Each class consists of 21 students. The first class was taught through convergent task. The second class was taught through divergent task.

To collect the data, the researcher administered speaking tests (pretest and posttest) and questionnaire. After the data needed were collected, they were coded and counted in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. To analyze students' speaking test, the researcher used *Independent T-test* computed through IBM SPSS Statistics 23. Related to questionnaire, the researcher adopted it from Zhang (2000). It consisted of 15 items.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question, the researcher compared results of speaking test in term of complexity, accuracy, fluency between convergent group and divergent group. The results were as follows.

Table 1
Group Statistics of Complexity

	GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
COMPLEXITY	1	21	.6045	.11660	.02544
	2	21	.5967	.05859	.01279

Table 2
Independent Samples Test of Complexity

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
NILAI Equal variances assumed	3.441	.071	2.616	40	.012	.11381	.04351	.02588	.20174

Equal variances not assumed			2.616	35.065	.013	.11381	.04351	.02549	.20213
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Descriptive statistics reported that the convergent group (M = 0.6045 SD = 0.12) had a slightly higher mean on the posttest of students' speaking complexity than the divergent group (M = 0.5967, SD = 0.06). Table 2 reports the results of

the independent samples t-test which sig 2-tailed = 0.784 > 0.05 represented that there was no a significant difference between convergent and divergent tasks on students' speaking complexity.

Table 3

Group Statistics

	KELOMPOK	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
NILAI	KELOMPOK A	21	.8524	.11144	.02432
	KELOMPOK B	21	.7386	.16533	.03608

Table 4

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
NILAI	Equal variances assumed	3.441	.071	2.616	40	.012	.11381	.04351	.02588	.20174
	Equal variances not assumed			2.616	35.065	.013	.11381	.04351	.02549	.20213

In relation to accuracy, the result showed that the convergent group (M = 0.85 SD = 0.11) had a slightly higher mean on the posttest of students' speaking accuracy than the divergent group (M = 0.74 SD =

0.165). Table 4 reports the results of the independent samples t-test sig 2-tailed= 0.012<0.05. It indicated that there was a significant difference between convergent and divergent tasks on students' speaking accurac

Table 5
Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
FLUENCY	Equal variances assumed	.559	.459	.094	40	.926	.78095	8.32727	-16.04909	17.61100
	Equal variances not assumed			.094	39.867	.926	.78095	8.32727	-16.05085	17.61275

In the case of fluency, the result showed that the independent samples t-test sig 2-tailed = 0.926 > 0.05. It indicated that there was no significant difference between convergent and divergent tasks on students' speaking fluency.

To answer the second research question, the researcher compared results of pre test and post test questionnaire between convergent group and divergent group in term of autonomy. The results were as follows.

Table 6
Group Statistics

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
21	2.9270	.56486	.12326
21	3.2508	.33260	.07258

Descriptive statistics reported that the divergent group (M = 3.25 SD = 0.33) had higher mean on the posttest of students' questionnaire than the convergent group (M = 2.93 SD = 0.56). Table 5 reports the divergent task is better in promoting students' autonomy than convergent task.

The result above indicated that convergent and divergent task attained significant different result in students' speaking performance in term of accuracy although there were

no significant different in term of complexity and fluency. However but the researcher might state that convergent is better than divergent in term of speaking performance by considering mean of convergent that is so slightly higher than divergent task although it was not significant.

The finding of this research was in line with study of Marashi and Shizari (2015). Although it is not almost the same, both of findings showed that convergent task had better result than

divergent task. This study was an attempt to investigate the comparative impact of convergent and divergent condition tasks on EFL learners' writing and motivation. Sixty female intermediate EFL learners were selected from among a total number of 90 through their performance on a sample piloted PET and further homogenized in terms of their writing and motivation. Based on the results, the students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups with 30 participants in each. Both groups underwent the same amount of teaching time during 18 sessions of treatment which included using divergent tasks for the first group and convergent tasks for the second. A posttest (the writing section of another sample PET) and Gardner's Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (used also earlier for the homogenization) were administered at the end of the treatment to both groups and their mean scores on the test were compared through independent samples t-tests. The results led to the rejection of the first null hypothesis, thereby demonstrating that the learners in the convergent group benefited significantly more than those in the divergent group in terms of improving their writing. The second null hypothesis was not rejected, however, meaning that the two treatments were not significantly different in terms of improving the learners' motivation.

In addition, the differences between study of Marashi and Shizari (2015) and this present study were in skill and significant of the result. The previous study investigated the effect of convergent and divergent task in

writing skill but the present study investigated the effect of convergent and divergent task in speaking skill. Moreover, the result that was shown in previous study was discussed in term of general but the result that was discussed in present study was in term of specific aspect of speaking performance (complexity, accuracy and fluency). On the other hand, both of those studies showed that convergent task was better than divergent one but in present study it was found that the differences between convergent and divergent in term of complexity and fluency were not significant. It might be caused by many factors.

Related to convergent task, as cited in Godrati (2014) notes and as reconsolidated in this study, some of the merits of convergent tasks are that they clarify what is to be learned and also facilitate the acquisition of the various language skills and components. To this end, the researchers clearly observed in the course of the study that instruction through convergent tasks provided learners with more successful language learning by paving the grounds for their further involvement and participation.

One highly probable factor which culminated in the convergent group achieving better results in speaking was the fact that the procedure was spelled out in a step-by-step modality and also structured such that it guided the students specifically as to how they should proceed with the task. In both groups, the classroom activities of this study were designed commensurately with the required information exchange; thus the tasks could not be completed unless the

learners exchanged the information required to achieve the single outcome in the convergent group. This, however, was not the case in the divergent group and perhaps lay the foundation for higher achievement in terms of writing in the convergent group. In addition, convergent tasks led to the production of more words and utterances and involved taking the different pieces of a particular topic and putting them back together in an organized, structured, and understandable manner.

On the other hand, the finding of this research contrasts with study of Nezhad and Shokrpour (2013). In their study, they aimed to explore the influence of the cognitive style, convergent/divergent thinking, on reading comprehension performance through convergent versus divergent task types. For this purpose, 93 Iranian EFL students who were 18-26 and studied at the B.S. level at University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences were selected. Being within the same range of reading performance, they were given the Torrance Divergent Thinking Test and were assigned to two groups so that there were roughly equal numbers of divergent and convergent thinkers in each. Next, the two groups took the Nelson's reading comprehension test to ensure initial reading ability homogeneity. The experimental and the control groups then received treatment in the form of task-based instruction through either divergent or convergent tasks respectively over a period of one semester.

To assess the reading comprehension gains of the participants at the end of the

treatment, four types of reading multiple choice items, i.e. simple factual, referential, inferential, and multiple-response items, were used. The collected data were analyzed through Multivariate ANOVA, using SPSS software. Results indicated that the best results were achieved when divergent thinkers of the divergent task type group answer referential, and multiple-response items whereas the worst results were obtained when convergent thinkers in the convergent task group's performance on multiple-response items was used as the criterion for reading assessment. Results also showed that a task-based course of instruction through convergent or divergent tasks causes the participants to have respectively lower or higher gains on the divergent thinking test

Related to finding about learners' autonomy, it showed that divergent task was better for promoting learners' autonomy than convergent task. It is in line with study of Swan (2005, p. 382) cited in Marashi and Sizari (2015) which states that divergent task allows independent works which individuals can perform differently according to their cognitive styles and which might lead to different outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In line with the results and discussions above, the researcher draws the conclusions as follows: (1) Both convergent and divergent tasks provide students a comfortable learning environment that allow students to overcome stress or fear

and speak or have discussions with others. Therefore, it is possible for them to produce complexity and words fluently. On the other hand, convergent task provides enough input for learners. But it does not lead more output. They learn better by examples and refer to their prior knowledge for deciding on a single solution rather than brainstorming and try to find different solutions for a problem. They are asked to work in collaboration with others toward the same outcome. It does not provide learners opportunity to produce more words. So it is possible for learners to attain better accuracy. They are able to avoid provoked error in their speaking performance. (2) Divergent tasks encourage students to have various outcome options with possibly more than one goal. In addition, questioning in divergent tasks enables students to raise questions with more than one correct answer. In this case, collaborative work is not required. Furthermore, types of tasks allow independent works which individuals can perform differently according to their cognitive styles and which might lead to different outcome.

By considering the conclusions above, the researcher proposes some suggestions as follows: (1) In line with the result that showed there were no significant different results in students speaking performance in term of complexity and fluency except in accuracy. The English teachers/lecturers are recommended to use both of convergent and divergent tasks for optimizing students' speaking performance since they give benefits to students' speaking performance. (2) In relation to result of students' autonomy,

divergent tasks are mostly recommended to be used in the class. (3) In the process of teaching using convergent and divergent task, students find some difficulties. Further researcher should focus on their difficulties or problems in the classroom.

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