

Enhancing Oral Communication through Task Based Language Teaching: An Experimental Study on Under Graduate Students

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Abstract

A number of approaches to second language teaching have been projected since the nineteenth century. In spite of these changes within the background of second language teaching task-based language teaching (TBLT) remains to be a prevailing approach in language classrooms. However, several English language teachers be deficient in full awareness on what TBLT is and the way it is expeditiously implemented in their individual classrooms considerably in Asian classrooms that uses the most current language teaching and learning. An experimental study has been conducted to find out the effectiveness of Task Based Approach in teaching oral communication skills to college students. Based on the prescribed text book task based platform was constructed to teach for the first year students. An oral performance test attended by an assessment heading was administered. Fifty students were taken for the study and they were divided into two groups. Twenty five students representing the experimental group planned two units exploiting the task based program while twenty five students signifying the control group studied the same units following the Teacher's instruction. Data were analyzed and Results exposed that there were statistically substantial differences found between the control and the experimental group. These results supports to utilize task based learning in teaching English as a second language Improvements.

Keywords: Oral English Performance, Teaching English, Task Based Language Teaching

1. Introduction

The Task-based approach emerged in teaching foreign and second language. It emphasizes that teaching must be accompanied with real life tasks and goals. The main objectives of Task-based approach are learners should actively participate, cooperate and communicate when performing the task. Second language learners do not like their teacher's method of teaching in the language class. Lecturing time is not motivating students since they do not like to be in passive in class. Many EFL learners cannot excellently use English in conversation or correspondence with others. It introduced a new eclectic model for teaching English for the second language which is different from traditional teaching method and it helps teacher to introduce new vocabularies and sentence formation. When students are involved in enthusiastic environment their interest on learning is so effective. So they suggest that teachers should allot those environments for the operative classroom atmosphere. In proposes that Task based approach is the substitute approach to solve the barriers in teaching English for second language learners which help learners to learn the language by tasks and activities. In stated that teachers should have the confident that task based language teaching provides the atmosphere for healthy learning process with minimum effort. In has advocated that these activities and task playing a dominating role to get the significant outcome for second language learners which comprise learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language.

2. Different types of tasks**Focused tasks**

These tasks are designed in such a way that the learners grasp the targeted feature. They focus on form while implementing the task. Listening tasks can be devised this way where a specific feature of language is presented to the learners. Listening tasks can also be considered as non-reciprocal tasks. Reciprocal tasks are the ones that require the learners to interact or in other words reciprocate. Focused tasks are designed in three major ways

Structure-based production tasks

Structure-based production tasks are designed to elicit a particular target language feature or structure. For instance in tasks like Picture difference, picture sequencing, picture drawing etc. Question forms are elicited. Tasks like exchanging travel itinerary, the simple present tense or future tense are elicited.

Comprehension tasks

Comprehension tasks are based on the assumption that language acquisition takes place as a result of input-processing. The learners are required to pay conscious attention and notice the linguistic form that is presented as input and based on the responses made by the learner in the input phase a task is given.

Consciousness-raising tasks

Consciousness raising tasks are designed to cater to explicit learning. They are meant to develop awareness at the level of understanding and not merely noticing. The learners are required to talk about language, they are asked to frame their own grammar rules. Unfocused tasks are based on a theory which says that learning is an implicit process which cannot be influenced directly through instruction. According to the theory of implicit learning, practice must involve learners in authentic communicative activity and is based on the strong version of communicative language teaching (Howatt, 1984 as cited in Ellis 2009). Studies claim that structured tasks and tasks based on familiar information tend to produce higher accuracy and tasks which push learners to reach a justified conclusion tend to produce more advanced language. Studies also show that if planning time is given to learners before actually taking part in the task, it leads to greater complexity and giving learners a post- task activity after an interactive task, like asking them to write about their own performance leads to greater accuracy (Skehan, 2002). The use of tasks will give a clear and purposeful context for the teaching and learning of grammar and other language features as well as skills.... All in all the role of task- based learning is to stimulate a natural desire in learners to improve their language competence by challenging them to complete meaningful tasks (CDC 1999:41 as cited in Nunan 2004 pg 13, 14).

3. Phases of Task Based Language Teaching

Though the phases of TBLT have been named differently depending on framework of the researchers, main actions and objectives of these phases remain nearly the same. In general, Task based language teaching include three stages- pre task, during task and post task which are discussed in the following section.

Pre-task

The pre-task phase works as an introduction for the topic to be taught in class and the tasks as well. It can be considered as the warm up activity to start the class interestingly. Here, the students get the opportunity to recall things that they know about the topic and also get an idea about what will be expected from them at this stage (Abraham, 2015). The purpose of this phase is to prepare the students to perform the task in such ways that will promote language acquisition. Teacher in this phase might support students in performing a task which is similar to the task that they will perform in the during task phase. Also, engaging students to designed activities and strategic planning of the main task performance for preparing them to perform the upcoming task (Izadpanah, 2010). Moreover, in most cases, it is teachers who control the timeline of classroom activity decide how much time will be spent to each item on the agenda, how long a particular whole-class discussion will take, and how much time will be devoted to the performance of a particular task. It is teachers, too, who get to decide to which extent a focus on meaning and a focus on form will be balanced and which particular forms will be highlighted, practiced, or covered explicitly (Breen, 1989). Long (2015) argued that in a task-based approach, teachers should firstly be guided by an analysis of the students' second language learning needs rather than the syllabus before selecting the contents and determining the focus of the actual session select content and determine the focus of actual lesson activities.

During Task

The next stage is called the during task phase in which the teacher plays an active role. In this stage tasks come to life. It can be divided into three parts starting with the task itself, followed by its planning and finally the report stage. The task-as-work plan (Breen, 1989) in this stage turns into a task-in-action and a task-in-interaction. Van den Branden (2009) emphasized that tasks in this stage do not necessarily determine learning. It is the intensity and quality of effort students put in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and also coping up with the situation demands they are exposed to which will determine the learning from TBLT. Also, the mental activity that students engage in while working with tasks and the verbal interaction will leave an impact in this regard. In this phase, teachers have some to pay a significant role.

The teacher remains a crucial interactional partner in task-based language classrooms, by taking the role of motivator, organizer (making sure that students know what they are expected to do and organizing different aspects of task performance), and, last but not least plays the role of a conversational partner and supporter who can feed the language-learning according to needs of different students in a different ways (Van den Branden, 2016, p. 168-169).

In this stage, the teacher should also produce a wide variety of questions, cues, and prompts to elicit learner output. Providing feedback on the students' written and oral output is also an important aspect of this stage. Feedback may come in different shapes, including explicit corrections, recasts, confirmation and clarification requests, metalinguistic comments, extensions, and elaborations incorporating a focus on form in the meaning-oriented work that the students are doing.

Post Task

This is the final stage and it allows a closer study of some of the specific features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle. After the performance of tasks, teachers use the post task stage to look back on the students' performance focusing on forms to foster learners' language accuracy and complexity. In this stage, teachers are expected to assess students' task performance and language development through standardized, official tests or tests included in their syllabus. However, teachers might also design tests themselves following task based language teaching or by observing and evaluating of students' task performance during class on the basis of their assessment and the feedback that they have provided before. Here, teachers are expected to use meaningful tasks for the assessment purpose and evaluating whether students have performed according to the task rather than focusing on specific linguistic forms with a view to providing feedback to the learner for facilitating language improvement (Long, 2015). Also, task repetition aids the shift of focus on forms as it is often difficult to acquire the rules rather than memorizing it for shorter periods.

Language teachers and learners feel, behave, and interact differently from day to day, and the language and tasks they work on vary, making every lesson unique. Global prescriptions and proscriptions, therefore, are unwarranted and doomed to failure. Teachers will have lesson plans, but they will need to react differently in real time to situations as they arise (Long, 2015, p. 326).

Researchers have indicated that reading skills are strengthened when the prior knowledge is activated (Pritchard, 1990). Moreover, a pre-reading discussion is suggested as it provides the learners with an opportunity to see what they know about the topic that is about to be taught and what other peers know about it as well. It facilitates as "anticipated guides which contains a series of provocative statements with an intention to challenge the students' knowledge and beliefs about the content of the passage (Dubin & Bycina, 1991, p.202). Also, vocabulary plays a significant role in the reading process and so it is very important to include the culture of vocabulary in teaching reading. However, basic vocabulary should be taught explicitly and the students should be able to guess the meaning of the less frequent vocabulary from the context. Furthermore, the teacher can ask the students to make prediction about the topic that they are about to learn in the classroom because it motivates them and

stimulate their interest for reading. Also, video clips and pictures related to the text can be shown to the students before reading the text to help them anticipating and increase their curiosity.

4. Statement of the Problem

Learning to speak English language is not an easy process. Second language teachers and learners find speaking the most challenging language skill; therefore this skill is frequently abandoned or poorly trained in the English classroom. English teachers tend to use drilling patterns, reading texts and writing tasks but rarely have their students involved in speaking activities. Students who pursue diploma courses face difficulties in learning English because they are used to rote learning. Majority of students are from regional medium and they have less exposure to the language. The curriculum has given more importance for writing than speaking. Though they have practical knowledge in their field of specialization, they lack in language proficiency. So they struggle a lot to express their ideas when they go for industrial visits and interviews. As researchers and industrialists have stated there is an urgent need to bridge the gap between what they learn and what they need.

5. Research Questions

Task-based research has been primarily motivated with the productive tasks, particularly speaking tasks. Tasks can include any of the four language skills. The following two research questions are framed to bring out the effectiveness of using TBLT in improving the oral communication of the first year college students.

1. Does TBLT help learners develop their oral fluency?
2. Do the tasks and activities improve students 'interest in the language classroom'?

6. Methodology

St. Jude's College was chosen for the experimental study. This study involved 50 students from St. Jude's College in Thoothoor, who had just completed their first semester. A pre-test was conducted to check the language proficiency of the students. The questionnaire encompassed two sections: Section A includes choose the correct option relating to articles, prepositions and conjunctions), section B contains match the followings, fill in the blanks and spot the error. After evaluating the pre-test, the total number of respondents was divided into two groups. 25 students were taken up for the experimental study and other 25 students were for control group. Activities and tasks were given for experimental group. Students were briefed on the purpose of the study and instructions relating to the activities were given.

7. Activities Used in this Study

The activities given below are conducted for the experimental group in order to attain the language proficiency.

- a. Just a minute – L2 learners have to speak for a minute on their own for the given topics.
- b. Introducing Each other- Learners have to introduce their friends
- c. Train Story- L2 learners should tag a story one by one
- d. Things in Common- Learners should pick the related card which has same meaning
- e. Describe a picture- L2 learners should describe a picture which is shown to them. Based on

the activities used in the classroom, a post-test was conducted for the both control and experimental groups. Similar pattern of pre-test questionnaire has been used in the post test with various new examples. The marks scored by the experimental and control group was analyzed by using SPSS (statistical package for the social science) software and the results interpreted are as follows. 6. Results and Discussions

8. Findings

- After trying different activities in the classroom, students showed improvement in their listening skills, which was obvious in their active participation in the classroom
- The students were able to express their ideas very confidently.

- A Statistical technique (paired sample T- test) was used to analyze and interpret the data

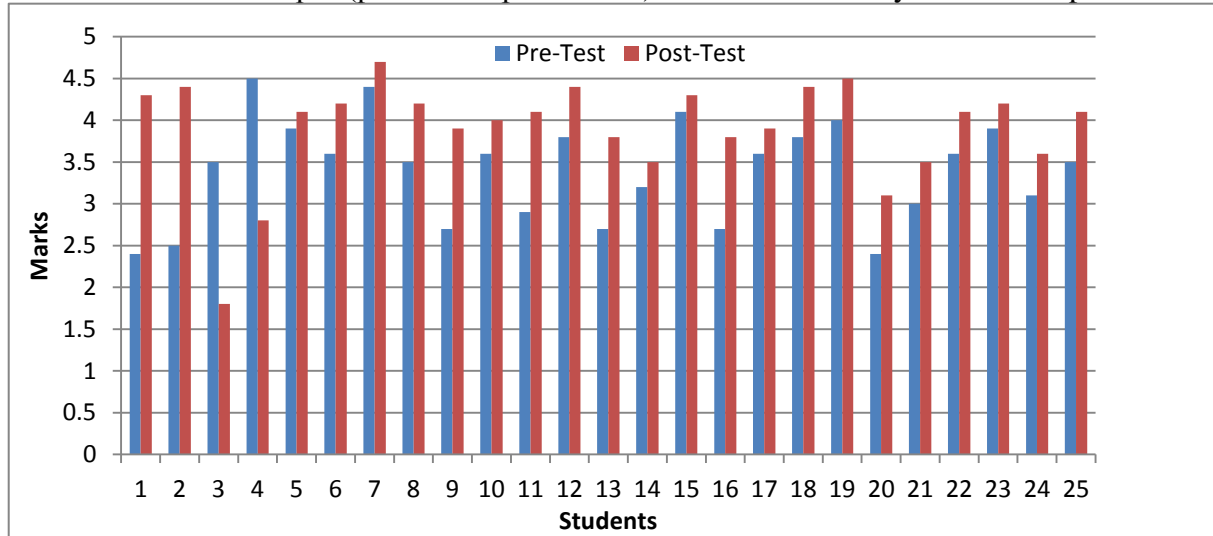


Figure1. Difference between pre-test and post-test marks of experimental group

Results in the Table showed that there is significant difference found between groups. The outcomes stated in the Table 1 showed the operative impact of task based instruction on teaching the speaking skill. As shown in Figure 1, the X axis represents the total marks and Y axis represents the number of students participated in the experimental study. Similarly there is a growth in post-test when compare to pre-test scores. Task-based instruction provided learner with opportunities to implement English language contextually, to explore it with situational activities. As task based learning is student centred, students were stimulated to use language inventively through the tasks they were asked to complete. Errors and mistakes while practicing the language were measured natural as the emphasis was on fluency and message assigning. Hence, students were allowed to prompt their ideas without anxiety of being reproached for making faults. Similarly, task-based learning exploited with the experimental group learners offered them chances to learn while doing. Language learning should create a happy environment; “Learning by doing” is not a new idea though it considered as traditional method it enhances the cognitive appointment of learners. Studies have proved that teaching through tasks, games and activities always plays a significant role in language teaching.

Table 1. The values of paired sample T-test

	Mean	SD	Sig
Experimental-Pre-test	19.20	4.55	0.000
Post test	21.72	3.85	
Post-test Control Group	18.84	2.30	0.006
Experimental Group	21.72	3.85	

9. Conclusion

Task based teaching method is very effective than the traditional teaching method, because students were so interested to participate in group work like developing a conversation and playing language games. They spontaneously come forward to achieve the language outcomes. This method is applicable and even effective for the moderate and slow learners because it taps their curiosity in learning something new. When students are involved in group activities they feel more comfortable to express their thoughts and ideas when compared to other teaching methods and that too with minimum effort.

The following recommendations are presented:

1. The content of the English textbook of the first year should be reassessed and task based learning activities must be included in teaching English as a Second Language at college level
2. Oral skills must be given utmost importance because it provides a strong framework for their future career.
3. English teachers should use real life situations in the classroom for developing the students' oral proficiency.

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