



ACTIVE LEARNING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THROUGH TASK BASED INSTRUCTIONS

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Abstract

There have been so many language teaching approaches adapted according to the needs of the learners. One such approach is the Task Based Approach to Language Teaching which has become very popular due to its learner centred, learner friendly nature. By placing the learners in a real life situation language production happens in a very easy manner without much focus on the form and structure. To know the effectiveness of the task constant assessment and task modification based on the need is required. This paper focuses on the exploring the reasons on why this particular approach is used and what are the various 'tasks' that are given to learners so as to improve their communicative skills. The preparation of the various language tasks for both speaking and writing and also the task cycle are explained.

Key Words: *Task Based Language Teaching, Learner Centred, Task Cycle, Task Assessment, Language Production.*

English as a second language has gained prominence because of its extensive usage in all fields. Higher education is offered mostly in English and hence English has become much significant. But in reality the fluency of ESL learners in English has become an area of concern and also needs much attention especially with learners at the college level. This is an issue of concern because learners at this stage get themselves equipped with the necessary skills for their career and not possessing the basic communicative skills is a shortcoming which leads them nowhere in a very competitive world. There is always a lacuna in terms of the needs of a learner and the means of getting it. This lacuna has been addressed through the various researches in second language teaching and language acquisition especially with reference to the English Language.

It was believed that language learning was an intellectual and a highly complex process wherein an L2 learner had to memorize bilingual vocabulary and grammar rules. There is always a relationship between the kind of learning opportunities provided in a classroom context and the learning outcomes that they are likely to result in. It is recognized that individual learners' differences associated with such factors as first language background, aptitude, learning style, motivation and personality and social factors such as those that influence learners' sense of identity, result in marked differences in the rate of acquisition and the degree of success achieved. Language acquisition is also a very slow process and it had to be facilitated in such a way that it becomes very effective. Active learning of language has been proved to be more effective than the traditional lecture method of language teaching. Task based language teaching comes under the umbrella of active learning. When we see the functions of a language it is usually used to giving information, making requests, for giving commands, expressing one's own feelings and also to maintain a smooth relationship with all. Halliday (1994) explains three functions of language, the first function being 'ideational' which means communicating one's own experience of the real and imaginary world, second function is 'interpersonal' which is to establish and maintain relationships and the third function is 'textual' which is creating written and spoken texts. TBLT is an approach which is built around a series of graded tasks to suit the needs of the learners and it also minimises the learners' dependence on the teachers. This approach to language teaching unlike the traditional teacher centred grammar teaching approach and also the vocabulary based teaching focuses more on giving language tasks which places the learner in a 'real' world situation and demands the usage of language appropriate to the context and helps in the language acquisition process. This method encourages learning through discovery in a collaborative and an interactive manner.

Task based learning has the advantage of getting the students to use their skills at their current level to help develop language through its use. It has the advantage of getting the focus of the students toward achieving a goal where language becomes a tool, making the use of language a necessity. A task is planned and executed meticulously so that language acquisition takes place effectively. There is also a task cycle which has a pre task, during task and post task.

Tasks

A task is a structured work plan to facilitate the language acquisition of L2 learners where they learn a language by doing i.e. placing themselves in an imagined situation and learning language from that context. It is contextual language learning. This work plan takes the form of teaching materials or of ad hoc plans for activities that arise in the course of teaching. A task seeks to engage learners in using language pragmatically rather than displaying language. Tasks have been defined by so many researchers out of which the more popular ones are given below.

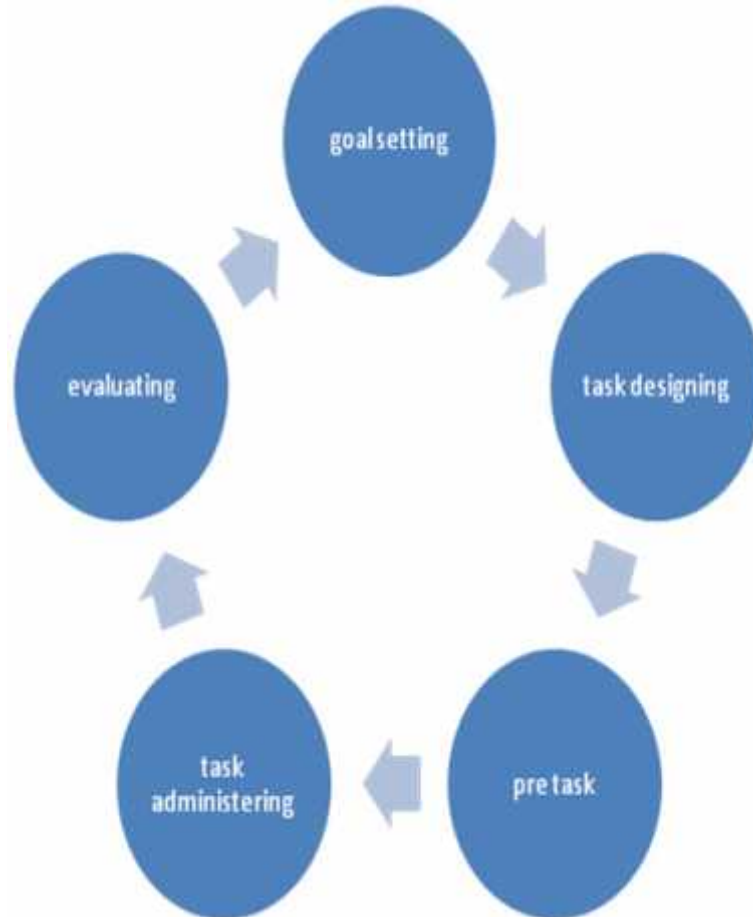
Breen (1989) defined task as 'a task is a structured plan for the provision of opportunities for the refinement of knowledge and capabilities entailed in a new language and its use during communication.' Crookes (1986) defines a task as 'a piece of



work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research'

Nunan (1989) defines task as 'a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in the own right.' Ellis (2003) defines a task as 'activities that call for primarily form focused language use'.

In an ESL classroom, focusing on the TBLT methodology, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator and the learner as an active participant in the language acquisition process. Goals are set by the facilitator based on which, tasks are designed, a pre task prepared, the approximate time is also set and then administered to the learners. Once the task is completed, a few minutes are allotted for evaluation of the task to see if the goals are met.



Task Cycle

Marion Parrott (1993) lists the various activities which can be administered to students. They are 'Reading, listening, watching, speaking, writing, drawing, ticking, numbering, teaching, matching, comparing, ordering, ranking, classifying, selecting, recalling, producing, recording, gathering data, putting forward arguments, adding'. Special care should be taken by the teachers when preparing a task.

Why using task based approach?

Tasks for SLA is an outcome of the various researches that have been conducted in tracking the second language development or language acquisition of ESL learners. TBLT became significant not only in the early descriptive research but also in the later theoretically based research. Very recently tasks have become a researchable topic in its own right. So we can assume that TBLT is

- A process where learners feel that they are not controlled by rules in language learning.
- A process where language learning is contextual and experiential.



- A process which is free from the stress of language learning and also becomes an enjoyable experience which is also motivating.

Meticulous planning of a task is essential so as not to waste time in the classroom. Before implementing tasks Communicative samples of a learners' language had to be sought on all four skills- LSRW and these samples are to be tested to find out how learners use specific linguistic features over time. Based on the analysis of the samples and from the facilitator's observations tasks have to be designed. A pre task should also be planned and designed which might introduce the learners to the task. When planning and designing the task the facilitator should think of its outcome and the kind of language learning that might happen with the learners. The goal should be set, tasks planned accordingly, tasks should then be introduced, the facilitator also observes the task being done by students without intervening and once the task is completed, evaluation should be done and the feedback should be given to the learners so that they take up the next task in a much improvised manner. The feedback of the learners should also be elicited so that the effectiveness of the task might be assessed by the facilitator.

There is a belief that TBLT as a method of language teaching is suitable only for improving the oral fluency of the learners, but on the other hand it can be used to develop all the four LSRW skills. Many tasks are integrative in nature. For instance if a cartoon is given for analysis, the learners observe, read the caption and also write or speak about the cartoon. They also listen to the others perception of the cartoon. Analysing the cartoon from their perception also enhances their cognitive skills.

The motivation level of the students as well as the facilitators is another area of concern while implementing the TBLT. Students can be classified as 'extroverts' and 'introverts'. Students who willingly participate in the task and draw the others to the task are called extroverts. They are the success of the task. The students who feel very shy to participate in a task and close themselves like a snail in its shell are introverts. Much attention had to be given to them by the facilitator to bring them into the task. They are a challenge for the facilitator. The teachers are referred as facilitators because they create a learning environment and do not directly involve in the traditional teaching method. They should also feel motivated to implement this approach to teaching and not consider the TBLT method as a waste of time and a mere pastime exercise. The real success of TBLT is only when it is incorporated in the curriculum of language teaching by all institutions whether it is in school education or college education.

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