

Task Based Language Teaching: A Simple Method for Language Teaching and Learning



Anup Denzil Veigas, David Wilson

Abstract: Task based learning is an effective and prominent language teaching tool. The development of a modern, innovative language teaching and learning method is helpful and essential. There are lots of changes taking place in today's classroom context and syllabus design. Challenges have increased and innovative methods of teaching and learning have become mandatory to build the requirements of the technologically advanced learning world. Task based language teaching or the TBLT method is one among the effective ways among many others to cope up with the classroom challenges especially, because of the mixture of students from various backgrounds, influence of regional languages and fear or lack of command over the English Language in terms of fluency, usage and articulation. All these are just some of the challenges that a language teacher has to face in a classroom set up. Though it's impossible to satisfy all the needs and requirements, the process of innovation in teaching and learning can bring it close to satisfaction. This paper emphasises on the importance of TBLT activities and its innovation in teaching of a specific content designed for a course. An attempt has been made by suggesting a few tasks that can be taken within a classroom. Small innovative activities when adopted for the teaching purpose can result in amazing outcome. The result will be the students' improved performance and improvement in their LSRW skills. In order to get the results the experiment was conducted among the selected students from two colleges of Mangaluru, divided on rural and urban basis. Pre test and post test was conducted and the results were arrived at through tabulation. Tasks were generated taking their present syllabus as the benchmark. So that practically it would help them to understand better and save the class time. 20 hours in total where spent for the exercises.

Keywords: Communication, language acquisition, LSRW skills, syllabus, task-based learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Task based language teaching is a teaching learning pedagogy of the 20th century that changed the process of language teaching. When a classroom context is taken, there is a structure in the form of syllabus and a textbook, but this alone is insufficient or cannot be taken as a reliable benchmark to achieve fulfilment in the language teaching and learning process. There are many other factors that govern the learning outcome, they are: (i) The classroom atmosphere and the target situation. (ii)

The learner's needs and the exposure they receive. (iii) The influence of the regional accent and their mother tongue. (iv) The language learning skill or acquisition and the development towards perfection. (v) Development of the basic LSRW skills through existing syllabus. (vi) Effectiveness of activities and the tasks developed within the context, to emphasise on

group learning. This task based language teaching method is popularly known as TBLT. The following method is one, where teaching happens through tasks in the target language. This is a confidence building teaching learning method, where the student gets more learning experience through tasks. Topics of general nature and those prescribed in the syllabus are taken and small tasks are devised, then the students are divided into groups and execution of these tasks is done. Students who are defiant and hesitant in the English subject can be beneficiaries of the following method of teaching. Students who are from the regional medium generally lack confidence and due to this they end up with poor performance among their peers sometimes it can lead to disappointment and shame. Through the strategy of effective language learning one can excel not only in the English language but even in other subjects where English has a dominant hold.

If we try to focus on the word 'task' it can simply be defined in the following terms as, the word 'task' on the basis of language classroom is a complex idea, because it is a psycholinguistic rationale which is based on language pedagogy (1).

Haberman makes a reference to the traditional linear paradigm of PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Performance) (2).

Task Based language teaching and learning has to test and measure the proposed qualities of learning as Ayers puts it:

"Standardized texts can't measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgement, commitment, nuance, goodwill, ethical reflection or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes. What they can measure and count are isolated skills, specific facts and functions, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning". (3).

According to Skehan .P. a task is taken to be an activity in which: (i) Meaning is primary. (ii) There is some sort of relationship to the real world. (iii) Task completion has some priority and (iv) The assessment of task performance is based on terms of the task outcome.

According to Breen, task means "any structural learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task". (4).

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Widdowson H.G (5) in his article “Explorations in applied Linguistics” says the syllabus is a framework the syllabus is simply a framework within which activities can be carried out: a teaching device to facilitate learning. It only becomes a threat to pedagogy when it is regarded as absolute rules for determining what is to be learned rather than points of reference from which bearings can be taken Breen M.P (6) in the article “Process syllabus for the language classroom” puts his definition any syllabus will express however indirectly certain assumptions about language, about the psychological process of learning .Any syllabus will express—however indirectly—certain assumptions about language, about the psychological process of learning, and about the pedagogic and social processes within a classroom. J.P.B Allen (7) puts his views on curriculum as curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational program. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that’s subpart of curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught

David Nuan (8) in his book Syllabus design (1988) also continues his views on curriculum and syllabus model as he broadly classifies the types as following. Here he makes an attempt to capture the various strategies and models of design so that it is helpful to bring out the concept of design let’s look at the different classification made by him regarding the notion of syllabus:

- Product-oriented syllabus
- Analytic and synthetic syllabus
- Grammatical syllabuses
- Functional-notional syllabuses
- Analytic syllabuses
- Task-based syllabuses

Deborah DeZure (9) in her article- Constructing Syllabi that Integrate New Approaches to Instruction: A Balancing Act(1999) Published by the Faculty Centre for Instructional Excellence Volume 8, No.2 puts forth her opinion on the syllabus and how it becomes a document between the teacher and the learners she tries to argue that there are certain key critical issues that must be kept in mind. Curriculum and syllabus are like legal documents which is a contract with the students. It’s a standalone document that clarifies the aspects of the course. It must be flexible and must not be pages of rules and regulations. Its success is governed by the impression it makes.

Jack C. Richards (10) in the article “Curriculum Approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central, and Backward design” published in the year 2013 speaks about the development and implementation of language teaching programme that can be approached in several different ways each of which has different implications for curriculum design. He proposes three curriculum approaches and describes and compares them as-Forward design, Central design and Backward design Janice Yalden (11) in her article “ syllabus design in general education : options for ELT” published in the journal book “General English Syllabus Design”(1984) by the British Council speaks on the importance of English Language Teaching and says how

a syllabus designer takes the role on behalf of the teacher and learner. She says designing course material is a challenge because of time availability, resource and target language. She also points out on the construct of syllabus as a directive approach that is the learner must have idea of content other factors like educational background, age, type of programme and a host are just general factors. Karl Krahnke (12) in the following article “approaches to syllabus design for foreign language teaching” (1987) makes a remarkable presentation as he puts this idea- Language teaching has its identity when aspects are considered based on the content of teaching as second or foreign language. Methods of teaching are discussed but content is not. Syllabus is considered to be of three types- structural, situational, notional\functional. But here they are divided into six patterns and not combined and each type is evaluated. These approaches have been useful in getting language students to learn new language. Actual teaching programme requires awareness of strength and shortcomings.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study focuses on the task based learning. The secondary data related to the study was through electronic media and print media which included the newspapers, articles related to the particular topics in magazines and journals. The primary data was collected using questionnaire and interview method. Researcher has conducted Task Based Learning Activities in different schools. The research took place at two Degree colleges in Mangaluru, one was a urban college and the other a rural college. The respondents included first year degree students a total of 150 students, who were divided into 90 boys and 60 girls. They were divided based on the medium of instruction, mother tongue, urban and rural background etc. The selection was based on a heterogeneous background and a whole class itself was selected they were a mixed group of students with some academically weak but others were quite good in their performance. Before the beginning of the selection process the students were given the required input and they were advised to be frank in their approach to the questions. In order to develop confidence they were also given a chance to revise and look back into the prescribed syllabus. The confidentiality of the respondents response was assured and the students were provided a pre-test and a post-test with separate questionnaire and question papers that was administered to the participants. After administering the TBLT method of teaching, exam was conducted. Results showed that TBLT was an effective teaching learning outcome in language learning. The TBLT method consisted activities based on Prose, Poetry, Grammar and vocabulary this was taken from the prescribed syllabus itself. This was done in order to save time because about 20hours were spent on the activity and also it would help students to know and understand the subject matter better as it was already prescribed in the syllabus.

IV. EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS

After selecting the samples, a pre-test was conducted for the students.

This was done in order to understand the standard of students and the attitude they possessed towards the prescribed syllabus and also to understand their level in the academics. The pre-test also helped the researcher to select the topics which were of an urgent need, and it helped in the selection criteria.

A. Background of the Student:

This considers the particulars about the student. The study was based on the gender, area of stay, medium of instruction and their native language.(Table-I)

Table -I: Population division on the basis of Gender, Area, Medium of Instruction and Native Language

Gender	Male-90				Female-60			
	Urban-58		Rural-32		Urban-45		Rural-15	
Medium	En-g-43	Ka-n-15	En-g-19	Ka-n-13	En-g-36	Ka-n-09	En-g-05	Ka-n-10
NL								
Tulu	14	05	10	06	10	04	03	04
Konkani	14	06	04	04	15	02	01	02
Kannada	06	-	02	01	04	01	-	01
Byari	09	04	03	02	07	02	01	03

Source: Field Study

Table -I represents the basic information on the total number of students, taken for the research study. A Sample size of 150 students was selected preferably from two different colleges in which males were 90 and females were 60. A pre-test was conducted and the results were tabulated, which are shown in successive tables. A questionnaire was also circulated which had some basic questions on the concept of skill based learning. The urban and rural division was made based on the residential details supplied in the questionnaire as some were within city limits and others were from the outer areas. The division of students shown in the table are based on Kannada and English medium, Kannada is a language instruction medium in Karnataka, Dakshin Kannada district up till their SSLC, even in PUC there is a choice to write their core subjects in the Kannada language (as they find it difficult especially the Kannada medium students to adopt to the subject vocabulary, this is one of the reasons that many fall back in their performance or adopt a fear towards the English language). NL stands for the native language or the native tongue which they converse either in their home or among their friend’s circles. The number of males was further divided as urban 58 and rural 32 so also for the females urban 45 and rural 15. In the urban section there were a total of 58 students in which 43 were from English medium and 15 studied in Kannada medium. Among the urban students 14 had Tulu as their native language, 14 had Konkani as their native language, 6 spoke Kannada as their native language and remaining 9 spoke Byari. Similarly among the Kannada medium students 5 of them spoke Tulu as their native tongue, 6 spoke Konkani, None had Kannada as the mother tongue and 4 had Byari as their native language.

Among the 32 rural male students, 19 studied in English medium whereas 13 studied in Kannada medium. In the rural English medium students 10 of them spoke Tulu as native language, 4 of them spoke Konkani, 02 spoke Kannada and 03 spoke Byari. Among the 13 Kannada medium students 06 had Tulu as their native language, 04 had Konkani, 01 spoke Kannada as the native language and 02 of them Byari.

Among the samples of 60 females 45 of them are from the urban belt and 15 from the rural belt. In the urban set up 36 studied in English medium whereas 09 studied in the Kannada medium. The language preference was, 10 of them spoke Tulu, 15 of them spoke Konkani, 04 had Kannada and 07 of them had Byari as their native language. Among the urban Kannada medium students 04 spoke Tulu, 02 spoke Konkani 01 Kannada and 02 Byari as their native language. Finally among the 15 rural female students 05 were from English medium and 10 were from Kannada medium out of which 03 spoke Tulu, 01 spoke Konkani, none had Kannada language preference and 01 had Byari. In the rural Kannada medium female students 04 had Tulu, 02 had Konkani, 01 had Kannada and 03 had Byari as their language preference.

B. Sample structure for TBL Activity:

Fig (1) displays the sample structure for Task based learning activity. This sample structure (13) considers three stages. They are Pre task stage, Task cycle stage and Post task stage

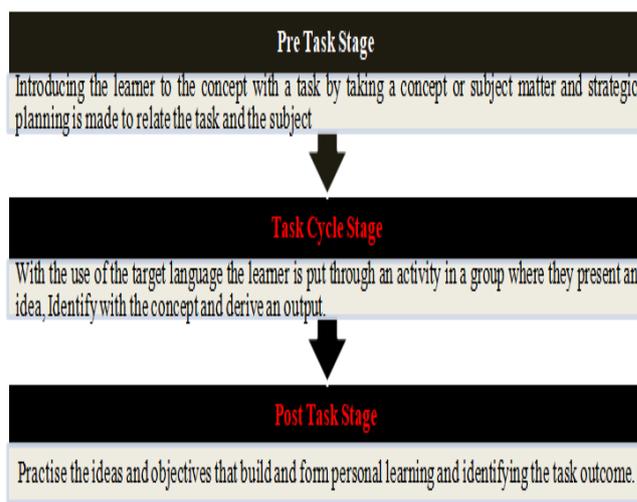


Fig-I: Sample Structure for Task Based Learning Activity

The above figure I- is explained with the following example which was conducted in the classroom.

Task: Quiz.

Pre-task

Ask students to identify a number of sentences from the text or any reading material and ask them to write it on a notebook. Have a quick Brain storming on the types of tenses and their usage and on the activity task as well. A short video could also be played or a presentation too could be done. Let the students get hands on knowledge with the subject being taught.

Task Cycle

Split the class into groups of 3-4 with an equal group of smart and weak learners so that the weak learners don't suffer anxiety or fear. A select group of combined learners makes learning and the learners safe and good spirited. Every student will bring out the selected sentences from their text or reading materials and place them as tasks for the opponents.

Post Task.

Each of the group selects a sentence and puts it to the opposite group to solve and identify the appropriate tense forms. New sentences can be selected and each right answer can be given points and at the end the group with highest points can be declared winners.

C. Comparative Analysis of Pre Test and Post Test

The following table and explanation gives an idea about the pre test and post test scores. Pre test is the test conducted before introducing task based learning method and post test is the test conducted after the task based learning was conducted. There are four separate tables for male and female of rural and urban area.

Table -II: Comparison of pre-test and post test results urban male students

Marks	Pre-test	Post-test
>40	08	03
41-50	14	08
51-60	17	15
61-70	19	25
71-80	-	07

Source: Field study

From table -II we can get the following result, the total number of male students from the urban background was 58. In the pre test 08 students scored below 40 marks, about 14 students ended up getting marks between 41-50, around 17 students scored between 51-60 and 19 students scored in the range of 61-70.

These same group of students after being put under the task based language teaching process showed up progressive result. Only 03 students scored less than 40 marks, 08 students scored between 41-50. 15 Students scored between 51-60 and 25 of them scored in the range of 71-80.

Table-III: Comparison of pre-test and post test results rural male students

Marks	Pre-test	Post-test
>40	10	03
41-50	05	06
51-60	10	13
61-70	07	08
71-80	-	02

Source: Field study

From table -III we can deduce the following results. In the pre test 10 students scored less than 40 marks. 05 Students scored in the range of 41-50. 10 Students had a scoring between 51-60 and 07 students scored in the range 61-70. No students were able to get above 70 marks.

From the post test, we can get the following results; only 03 students scored less than 40 marks in the post-test, 06 of them scored in the range 41-50. 13 Students scored in the

range 51-60 and 08 crossed the range of 61-70 and 02 students were able to score above 70.

Table -IV: Comparison of pre-test and post test results urban female students

Marks	Pre-test	Post-test
>40	10	06
41-50	12	08
51-60	16	19
61-70	05	08
71-80	02	04

Source: Field Study

From table-IV the following outcome can be concluded , the total number of females from the urban setting were 45 and in them 10 scored less than 40 marks, 12 students scored between 41-50 marks, and 16 students scored between 51-60 marks, around 05 of them scored between 61- 70 marks, and 02 of them scored between 71-80 marks.

Similarly having a look at the post test results we can infer that only 06 students scored less than 40 marks, 08 of them scored between 41-50 marks, 19 of them scored between 51-60 marks , 08 of them scored between 61-70 marks and 04 of them scored 71 and above marks.

Table-V: Comparison of pre-test and post test results rural female students

Marks	Pre-test	Post-test
>40	06	03
41-50	07	05
51-60	02	05
61-70	-	02
71-80	-	-

Source: Field Study

From table -VI we can get the following outcome, there were 15 female students who were from the rural background, 06 students scored less than 40 marks. Around 07 scored between 41-50 marks and 02 of them got marks between 51- 60.

The post test results show about 03 students got less than 40 marks, about 05 students got in the range of 41-50. Around another 05 of them scored between 51-60 and finally 02 of them scored in the range of 61-70.

The comparison of pre test and post test gives a positive result. The students who have scored less in the pre test have got good marks in the post test. This shows that the understanding of concepts by students will be more effective only when there is a task based learning in the educational institutions.

V. CONCLUSION

The task based learning approach is the ability of performing the task rather than teaching of rules, regulations or grammatical function. This method has gained success and grabbed attention among a lot of researchers all around the world, hence this could be one of the effective tools in language teaching and learning. Thus designing the present syllabus in the following innovative method could be more organised and help students to perform better. This could also be an effective method especially to classrooms where there are mixed group of students.



The activities that were conducted showed more accurate results not only in the improvement of the performance but also in the approach shown by the students especially to gain, participate and present more actively in tasks designed for the purpose. The major reason for the success of TBLT in classroom teaching can be attributed to designing and implementing of the tasks so that the students are put into a context and they are forced to critically think in the particular context.

They are forced to think appropriately in the situations and through this they are more serious and systematically aware of the contextual requirement. TBLT method generates opportunities, ideas and experience and at the end of the experimental study many students who were hesitant to speak also turned up to tell about this new experience. This type of learning gives way to opportunity and experience because in an ordinary classroom context the teacher or the instructor is the sole person who engages in learning but the students are deride of the opportunity for any follow-up, hence the slow learners will never make an attempt to utilise opportunities or make use of the opportunity. In TBLT the students are divided into smaller groups of small number and hence each group is given a task or opportunity to face the external classroom situation this automatically makes each person involve in the task. The concept of TBLT is more effective because of the three major principles of THINK, APPLY and SOLVE, every task that is designed needs a thinking approach to solve a specific task, a word may have multiple meanings but it must be applied appropriately with the context, any random word cannot make the context, hence if a person is not able to supply an appropriate word then he has to not only think but also analyse on his failure for not being able to do the task, this is not possible in a classroom context. Hence TBLT can be considered a more effective way for improvising language problems in a mixed group. The major problems and drawback on task based teaching method is that the students are not aware about the teaching approach of tasks and most of them have never gone through such learning. Lack in availability of resources, textbooks and materials, time limit, large number of students these were other problems that were challenges. The redesign and rework of the materials could always make task based learning a solution to problems of language learning. The teachers have also a role to play by updating themselves into this method and another major hurdle is to devise an appropriate task in that context. Task based learning could be taken up by subjective teachers in order to design tasks and syllabus that will be effective tools that considers the learners needs.

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