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TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING –AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY TO PROMOTE
LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In outcome based learning, a methodical approach in language teaching has become incontestable. Language teaching should be learner-centered and needs immediate reinforcement, and therefore, the main objective of it is to support the learners to acquire basic language skills, where they can judge the accuracy of their language through self-assessment and self-evaluation. However, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an effective teaching strategy which will accentuate the involvement of the teacher and the learner in classroom ambience. It is an undeniable fact that language, with its unprecedented role in communication, is learnt through practice and implementation, so activities which involve learners in the classroom are vital to accelerate learning process. "Task based language teaching (TBLT) refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching". Richards and Rogers (2001:223). Keeping in view of the purpose of communication, meaningful tasks should be designed where learners use language as instrument to augment their learning. According to Nunan (1989:10), task is a 'classroom activity 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 paper emphasizes the authentic use of language through meaningful tasks. It presents an overview of the Task Based Language Teaching focusing on a few tasks which alleviate the complexities in the use of language and make learners enthusiastic partners in interaction. The paper also delineates the feasibility of refinement of language through persistent feedback through which access to reach the goal of language learning is possible.

Key Words : Learner-Centered Teaching,Self-assessment,Planning

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of language teaching is to impart requisite skills to students to use language judiciously in communication. A considerable attention is needed from teachers and learners to perform this most challenging task with inordinate patience and commitment. What, in fact, is happening in teaching the

language is; teachers arrive to a conclusion that by teaching the individual components of a language, they have helped the students to learn its accuracy and students, at the same time, derive satisfaction from doing certain exercises and decide themselves that they have mastered the language. This is exactly where the objective of language teaching will miserably fail and a new strategy is constantly in demand to fulfill its purpose. Therefore, a methodical approach in teaching the language is necessary to help the learners to become potential and efficient users of the target language.

Classroom is an array of learners who possess different capabilities, goals and levels of interest. Its primary purpose is to accelerate the process of learning, irrespective of the individual disparities among the learners. The activities which the learners do in a classroom should be appealing to enhance their interest to learn and influence their minds. According to Ellis, instructional tasks are important components of language learning environment, and hold a central place in the learning process. Task Based Instruction (TBI) provides a platform with a learning context where learners obtain plenty of opportunities to perform diverse tasks focusing more on the communicative use of language than on its accuracy in language classrooms. Therefore, it is viewed as a model of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), where meaningful communication is regarded as the primary characteristic of language learning. (Richards & Rodgers,2001;Willis,1996). Now-a-days, immense significance is attached to the usage of tasks and they are viewed as the basis for the language instructional approaches. (Coder,1981 cited in Ellis,2000; Crooks, cited in Richards and Rogers,2001).

Objectives of Task-Based Language Teaching

- 1) To get the students familiarized with what task based language learning is
- 2) To examine the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing the basic language skills of students
- 3) To observe students' attitudes while they are performing the activity
- 4) To put emphasis on language forms and vocabulary.
- 5) To extract students' opinions regarding the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in language classroom.

Task Based Language Teaching

Language is used for the purpose of communication. Global existence is dynamic because of the persistent correspondence through language. Proper communication is defined as the proper use of vocabulary in properly constructed sentences. Hence, the major components of a language are grammar and vocabulary. When these components are taught to students, undoubtedly, they acquire profound knowledge about their usage, but in the absence practice that knowledge does not help them. In order to be responsible and accountable for effective learning outcomes, the only way for the teacher is to accept the students not as 'language learners' but as 'language users.'

The aim of teaching must be to generate interest in students and orientate them towards learning. Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach in which communicative tasks play a vital role and in which students enjoy much lee-way to focus more on meaning than on the enervating grammar rules, pronunciation and stress. Richards and Rodgers (2001;223) states that: "Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching." According to (Harmer, 2007; 71), Task-Based Instruction makes the performance of meaningful tasks central to the learning process. Therefore, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is viewed as another model of Communicative Approach. Nunan (2004:4) states: "A task is a piece of class work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form."

A task is nothing but an activity specially designed for the purpose of promoting learning process. It should help the learners to attain their learning goals. The features of a task are:

1. It exhibits its relevance with the prevailing situations in social life.
2. It involves communication
3. It emphasizes more on meaning than on language acquisition.
4. Its goal is to expedite the process of learning.
5. It allows needful focus on grammar.

Curriculum is most commonly designed keeping in view of teaching and learning objectives to be achieved. According to Oxford (2006:97), the goals of a task consist of; 1) focus on meaning, (grammatical structures are learned by students unconsciously without being discussed.) 2) focus on forms (Students are taught certain forms of a language when communication breakdown happens) 3) focus on forms (introducing specific language items to students before they are used) For example, the teacher has designed a task to help students learn the specific use of 'beside' and 'besides'. Before the students are given this task to perform in the classroom, the teacher explains the meaning of the words and difference between them by providing authentic and familiar examples

Limitations in Traditional Method of Teaching.

1. The pedagogue plays the major role and makes himself/herself the focal point in the classroom.
2. There is lack of students' contribution
3. Stereotyped and cumbersome exercises are given to evaluate the comprehension of students
4. It generates disinterest and apprehension among the students that language learning is a herculean task

Role of a Teacher in Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

In the process of teaching, both the teacher and the taught enjoy equitable share, and therefore, both of them should adhere to their roles and work with enthusiasm to carry out this task. The pedagogue should be keen about establishing the learning ambience in the classroom, where the students feel free to disclose their problems for appropriate solutions; maintaining rapport with students to gauge them by their attitude and determining the tasks which would faster learning the target language.

"Learning by Doing" is the main stay of Task Based Language Teaching. Task-Based Language Teaching suggests a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered learning (Mao, 2012). Students should be encouraged to participate in classroom activities which are useful to them to refine their communication in real life. Skehan (1996) expounds that the tasks designed should manifest their relation with the real world. Therefore, adequate focus on meaningful and useful tasks is the predominant part of Task Based Language Teaching.

Phases of Tasks

The use of the language changes in accordance with the situations in social life, and therefore, the inevitability of designing the tasks which would improve the pragmatic skills of students and involving them in classroom activities to strengthen their language competence; are the elements of paramount significance in Task Based Language Teaching. It is for this reason, in current process of teaching; this approach has gained worldwide popularity with its prime focus on the acquisition of the functional abilities in learning. Breen (1989) asserts that a task will function as an effective and productive activity when it is adaptable to variations in learners' performance.

Task-Based Language Teaching is not just preparing the tasks for implementation in the classroom; it is a methodical approach to be followed in a systematic and a sequential order to witness the optimum learning outcomes. It is commonly done in three phases; starting with testing the background knowledge of students, proceeding to examining the behavior of students while they are performing the task and ending with the

assessment of learning outcomes. These three phases are common in Task-Based Language Teaching. Ellis (2003) identifies these tasks as 'pre-task', 'during-task' and 'post-task'.

Pre-task phase

This phase is regarded as the motivator. (Dornyei,2001).In this phase, teachers invite the attention of students towards the task they are going to accomplish by asking them a few relevant questions to elicit responses. By doing this, the teachers will get informed regarding the cognitive levels of students and this assessment will endeavour them to invent new tasks to promote learning. According to Ellis (2003) and Lee (200), it is essential to frame a task before implementing the task since it helps the students predict the outcome of the task and how they should perform it. During this phase, students recollect their previous knowledge and prepare themselves to perform the task to be done. In order to perform the task, the teachers will provide the students with necessary learning material which consists of essential vocabulary items and phrases. This phase of task does not include explicit teaching of language and vocabulary items. Most alluring part of this phase is, there is sufficient allocation of time to students to design proper planning to perform effectively for the successful completion of the task. When learners are allotted time, they feel at ease to decide by themselves what vocabulary items and linguistic forms of language are to be used to accomplish the task.

Any task is given for a specific purpose. It is teachers, who prepare the tasks, keeping in view of the areas of learning, where the learners are found weak and expect support. Therefore, tasks may focus on enhancing the vocabulary, improving the accuracy and accelerating the fluency. So learners, at this stage, need guidance from teachers to be informed exactly about their strategic planning to produce appreciable outcomes of the task.

During - task phase

In this phase, students perform the given task either in groups or individually. The teacher meticulously observes the students and does not disturb them by intervening to correct the errors in forms. Students are allowed for no-holds-bar discussions with their peers to exchange knowledge. This phase supports the students to gain a lot of information through interaction. It depends on the teacher whether to give sufficient time to learners to complete the task. Lee (2000) states that limited time tasks will determine how skillfully the learners use the language to complete a task. On the contrary, Yuan and Ellis (2003) argue that the unlimited time tasks will strengthen the accuracy of learners. However, the teacher, being aware of the abilities of learners, is the sagacious decision-maker in this aspect. At the end, the students prepare a brief report on the way they have completed the task and its outcome and present it before the class. The teacher gives feedback on the report without publicly correcting the errors in it. Commonly, students neither wish to be chastised for their inadequate knowledge nor accept any open descriptions of their wrongs, and if this happens, they undergo a lot of insufferable apprehension, which ultimately leaves them diffident. In order to extricate the students from the feeling of diffidence and edginess, the teacher, with affability, suggests for improvement.

Post – task phase

This phase is regarded as accuracy-strengthening phase. In this stage the teacher evaluates the presented reports of students to adjudicate the accuracy of language in them. Some language focused tasks, based on the texts students have already made in their reports, will be given to students to analyze the language forms in them. This is followed by an explicit explanation of rules to make the learners aware of the errors in the tasks they have already completed. Briefly, this phase is the concluding part of 'During –phase' (Willis,1996). Students are given an opportunity to repeat the task to exhibit better performance. The teacher's explanation of the language rules strengthens their awareness of rules, which in turn, trains them to evaluate their previous tasks in order to avoid the errors in the tasks which are given to be repeated. This phase provides an opportunity to learners to upgrade themselves with self-evaluation, self-assessment and self-monitoring. (Ellis, 2003)

Advantages of Task-Based Language Teaching

There are umpteen methods, strategies, and approaches invented, suggested, debated and implemented in teaching - learning process. What that is ultimate in teaching-learning process is to make students efficient users of a language. Any strategy will be ineffective without the out and out involvement and participation of students in learning process. A method, in which the learners receive primary attention with entire focus laid on them, is undoubtedly successful in producing the desired outcomes. Task-Based Language Teaching is learner-centered in which learners are provided opportunities to learn by performing activities in language classroom. Richards and Rodgers assert that: "Tasks are believed to foster process of negotiation, modification, rephrasing and experimentation that are at the heart of second language learning." The salient features of Task-Based Language Teaching are:

1. It is learner-centered.
2. It allows emphasis on the needs of learners
3. It augments the interest of learners and improves their self-worth.
4. It is supported by empirical evidences
5. It promotes interaction and brainstorming
6. It supports the learners to overcome their deficiencies, like nervousness, introvertedness, etc., by involving them in doing the activities.
7. It builds rapport between the teacher and the learner
8. It supports self evaluation and self monitoring
9. It allows language focused instruction
10. It provides an access to teachers to invent new variety of tasks.

Task-Based Language Teaching in Reading

To read is to understand. Comprehending the text involves; understanding the vocabulary, analyzing the language forms, judging the purpose of punctuation marks; and finally, unfolding the ambiguity in the text. With the advent of communicative approach in teaching, the responsibilities of a teacher have changed as it accentuates the need for learner-centered approach in teaching. Instead of explaining the text, the teacher supports the students to read and comprehend the text by themselves by asking certain thought provoking questions to help them analyze the text from umpteen perspectives, surmise the gist of it or predict the meanings of unfamiliar words used by the author of it. Though the process is initially slow and makes the teacher feel despondent, it generates vitality in students with its objective to make them independent learners.

Pre-task phase in Reading

The teacher should primarily realize the degree of complexity in the text in order to design reliable tasks which would meet the needs of the students. As the first step, the teacher creates congenial and flexible environment in the classroom for the learners where they feel comfortable and relaxed to focus on learning. Secondly, the teacher motivates the students by asking some relevant questions which provide them clues to predict the topic area. The students feel encouraged when their knowledge is activated through a lot of brainstorming activities. When the students are not familiar with the topic, for example, "Education and Spirituality" the students may not have deep knowledge about spirituality, the teacher has to provide them with the material highlighting the useful words and phrases to promote their comprehension. The students will go through the material to aid themselves to complete the task. Pre-task phase is important, as its emphasis is on motivation, which later leads to preparation for the task.

During-task phase in Reading

The teacher divides the students into groups and later gives them handouts to perform the task. The students can write the answers either in the space provided for answers in the handouts or can write in their notebooks. The teacher monitors the students while they are doing the task to ensure their understanding of the topic. The teacher does not intervene either to correct the errors in their language or to help them by disclosing the appropriate answers. According to the guidance of the teacher, the students apply a specific reading strategy to accomplish the given task. In necessary conditions, when the students are totally baffled by the task, the teachers are bound to offer explanation to support the students to overcome this impediment. Throughout this task great emphasis is put on the understanding the meaning and preparing a report on the findings.

Post-task phase

In Task-Based Language Teaching, reading class receives attention towards grammar. Before the task begins, essential grammar rules are introduced to students to improve language proficiency. The teacher carefully evaluates the reports of students which consist of their responses to the tasks they have completed. The evaluation is done focusing on grammar and usage of vocabulary. If the reports of students are found erroneous, the teacher will highlight those unacceptable sentences and help the students recall the grammar rules by which they can correct the errors in the sentences by themselves. For example, if the students have written, 'India has got independence in 1947', the teacher will ask them to recall the rule when Present Perfect Tense is used. This will help the students to correct the error in their sentence.

CONCLUSION

The use of Task-Based Language Teaching accelerates the process of learning. It inculcates interest in students to learn and increases confidence in them. As it encourages students' participation in learning activities, they realise their potential and proceed with greater enthusiasm. The approach is very effective with its tremendous features to improve the communicative ability and language proficiency of students.

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