



## EFFECTIVENESS OF TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN DEVELOPING THE LANGUAGE SKILLS OF L2 LEARNERS

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### **Abstract**

*L2 acquisition is a highly complex process. 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. A task is a work plan. It is a plan for learner activity. 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. This article will focus on the Task Based Language Teaching approach which is one of the learner focussed methods for language teaching especially for ESL learners.*

**Key words:** *L2 Acquisition, learner activity, Task Based Language Teaching Approach, ESL Learners.*

English as second language has been taught in most of the schools in the country but in spite of all the training and emphasis given for English, we find that most of the student at the undergraduate courses are not competent in the communicative skills and apparently end up without a job because of this factor. Hence language skills at the undergraduate courses have to be given much importance and it should be developed in an integrative manner so as to make L2 Learners competent enough for the job market.

The second half of the 20th century is known as the 'Age of Methods' as there emanated a plethora of language teaching methods for ESL learners as a result of the intensive research done in this area. Many realistic and useful language tools were also devised to enhance this process. Grammar Translation method also known as the classical method was probably the first method, followed by other methods like Direct method, Audio-lingual method, Suggestopedia, the Silent way, Total physical response, the Natural approach, the Communicative approach. Task Based Language Teaching is the latest trend in SLL approaches. This paper will focus on the Task Based Approach of language teaching and its effectiveness for learners at the tertiary level. A task is defined by Williams and Burden (1997:168) as any activity that learners engage in to process of learning a language'. Breen (1987: 23) defines a task as 'a range of learning activities from the simple and brief exercises to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem solving or simulations and decision making'.

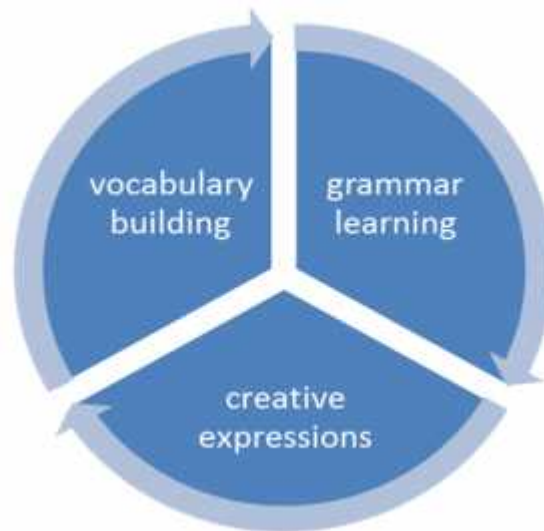
TBLT is an approach where students actively participate in communication tasks to learn the language in a more practical way and meaningful way and is also learner centred. Task based learning is a different way to teach languages. It can help the student by placing her in a situation like in the real world, a situation where oral communication is essential for doing a specific task. TBLT can also be integrated in the Curriculum of every Language Course so that it becomes an academic component or a requirement for the ESL learners. Curriculum which involves planning, implementing, evaluating and managing an educational programme should be developed in such a way that the learners find it very useful for their holistic development. Tyler says that 'a rational curriculum is developed by first identifying goals and objectives, by listing, organizing, grading the learning experiences and finally by finding means for determining whether the goals and objectives have been achieved' (BPCI, 1949,14) syllabus deals with the selection and grading of content for the learners whereas methodology refers to the selection and sequencing of learning activities.

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.

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 tasks 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.



Tasks should be designed for an integrative learning. Tasks should not be done just for the sake of doing it or just as a pastime activity for the teacher. Since it acts as a supplement for the chalk and talk method the teacher should take into consideration the composition of the students in a class and design a task which might be suitable for all the sections in a class and also design it to make it more inclusive and accommodative. While designing a task the goals and objectives of the task are to be spelled out very clearly by the teacher and it should also be briefed to the students. Task should be designed to teach vocabulary, grammar and also make the creative and enhance their cognitive ability. The figure given below emphasizes the need to give equal weightage for all the three aspects of language learning.



### **VOCABULARY BUILDING**

Vocabulary is a collection of words of a particular field, alphabetized and prepared for a specific purpose. It does not happen all of a sudden rather it is learnt gradually over the years based on the learner's interest and his culture. A study reveals that English speaking University graduates will have a vocabulary size of 20,000 word families. (Goulden et al. 1990: D' Anna, Zechmeister & Hall, 1991). We are able to identify certain vocabulary when it is spoken, written but we do not use it in our day to day conversation. This is referred as Passive or Receptive knowledge but if we are able to produce it in our conversation, it is known as Active or Productive knowledge.

Norbert Schmitt brings out two different degrees of knowing a word. "Being able to understand a word is known as receptive Knowledge and is normally connected with listening and reading. If we are able to produce a word of our own accord when speaking or writing, then it is considered productive knowledge." (VLT. 2000.4). Vocabulary building should be incorporated in the tasks that are designed for the learners. Some of the tasks that can be given to build the vocabulary of students are:

- Find the missing letter to make a complete word,
- Find the root word from the prefix, suffix.
- Match two words to make a compound word.
- Identifying Indian words used in English.
- Onomatopoeic words.
- Profession based vocabulary learning or register.
- Words denoting action, description words, words indicating time and place.

### **GRAMMAR LEARNING**

Grammar should be given equal importance. Students find Grammar learning to be more difficult than doing a communicative activity. Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam state that "For the most part, within the classroom, any mention of grammar causes the student moments of discomfort and sometimes even terror. Many teachers have tried to make grammar teaching a non-threatening, imaginative and useful activity within the English curriculum" (IJI, 2011). Hence grammar learning should be made easy for the students. Basic grammar should be incorporated in the task but not to make the students feel stressed out. Some of the grammar elements which can be added are:



- Fill up with suitable prepositions, articles.
- Activities on Imperatives.
- Learning Adverb of time and Manners and also creating own poem using adverbs.
- Activities on Reported Speech, Pronoun, Conjunctions and Voice

### **CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS AND COGNITIVE THINKING**

The third section of the task includes creative expressions of the learners which may be the result of cognitive thinking. Designing tasks based on pictures might be interesting and also make the learners think creatively. For example giving a picture and making them write a composition based on that and also giving a map and asking them to give directions to a friend to reach a particular destination might be interesting for students. This kind of an activity not only brings out the creativity in the learners but also brings out the cognitive ability of the learners. These activities are generally liked by all the learners as it makes them more imaginative and innovative. Including pictures in the pre task may act as a stimulus for the task. It motivates the students to be participative. Some of the picture based activities are:

- Matching pictures.
- Comparing two pictures.
- Identifying pictures on World Leaders and identifying their leadership qualities.
- Identifying the Social Activists and speaking about their selfless service.
- Picture based Poem Writing.
- Map Reading and giving directions.

Apart from the pictures there are other activities which bring out the creativity in students. They are mind mapping, reading a story and rewriting it, imagining a conversation between Cartoon characters, Slogan Writing, Poster making, Documenting from Newspapers, Creating advertisements, preparing flow charts and other activities.

The duration for a task should be one hour. The first five minutes might be allotted for the teacher to explain the goals and objectives of the task, the next ten minutes for the pre task which serves as a warming up activity. Thirty minutes will be allotted for the task. When the task is performed by students the teacher monitors and observes the students. The next ten minutes will be allotted for the students to give the feedback or for making a quick presentation and the last ten minute will be allotted for the teacher to give his or her feedback to the students and also to assess if the goals of the task have been met. Based on the assessment tasks can be modified or improvised based on the needs of the learners.

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