



RESEARCH PAPER

Enhancing Speaking Skills of ESL Learners through Task-Based Language Teaching: An Analytical Study at BS Level in Rahim Yar Khan

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ABSTRACT

The current study focuses on the issue of task-based language teaching (TBLT) effectiveness in developing speaking skills among the ESL students of the Bachelor of Science (BS) level. The study was quantitative and the data was gathered on 300 undergraduate students on both the public and private institutions in Rahim Yar Khan. The data were obtained by the use of 30-item Likert scale questionnaire aimed at the measurement of speaking confidence, fluency, classroom interaction, and speaking anxiety, and the scores of speaking performance of learners. The SPSS was used to perform descriptive statistical analysis. The results indicated that the learners who received task based oral instructions posted an improvement in their oral interactions, confidence and oral communication skills compared to learners who were taught using the conventional teaching methods. The conclusions of the study are that task based language teaching is a good teaching method in acquisition of speaking skills at undergraduate level.

KEYWORDS Speaking, ESL, BS Level, Communicative Competence, Task-Based Language Teaching.

Introduction

One of the fundamental skills that are needed in the second language learning is oral communication. The undergraduate English education program in the Pakistani ESL environment has been culturally oriented on the grammar, reading, writing skills and the oral communication skills have been sidelined. As a result, the undergraduate learners have been feeling anxious, lacking confidence, and having poor speaking abilities, despite their long time learning English language. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is based on communicative language teaching and focuses on using the authentic tasks resembling the real communication. TBLT promotes the utilization of language in achieving communicative exercises opposed to focusing on individual grammatical elements. In this study, the focus is on the application of TBLT in developing speaking skills among the students of the fourth year at Rahim Yar Khan institution of higher learning but in the ESL program.

Literature Review

The Idea of the Task-Based Language Teaching.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a communicative technique of language teaching, which focuses on meaningful tasks as a central learning unit. In contrast to the

conventional methods of language teaching, where the focus is laid on the grammatical structures and the use of controlled practice, TBLT prompts the learners to use language as an instrument to solve specific communicative tasks. According to Ellis (2003), a task is defined as an activity where the main focus is on the meaning and the language in which the target language is aimed at achieving something like a solution to a problem, passing on information or opinion. This definition emphasizes the practical and useful nature of use of language in TBLT. TBLT has theoretical foundations based on the study of second language learning with reference to the interaction and communication theory. Prabhu (1987) argues that the acquisition of languages is best achieved when learners are involved in problem solving activities that emphasize on meaning as opposed to actual grammar lessons. Another point Long (2015) makes concerns the significance of interaction during the task activities to the negotiation of meaning and language development.

When applied to the ESL situation in Pakistan, where English is not much used outside of the classroom, TBLT provides learners with an opportunity to acquire English communication skills within the classroom. The thesis underlines the criterion of task-based learning in closing the gap between theoretical and actual knowledge of the language, and TBLT is one of the most suitable teaching methods due to the need of BS-level students to speak English, both in academic and professional spheres (Ahmed and Rao, 2012).

The Task-Based Language Teaching Characteristics.

Task based language teaching is distinguished by a number of characteristics, which make it different to older methods, which are teacher-centered. What is different about it is that it focuses on the student. When it comes to TBLT classes, learners are actively involved in activities that are related to communication, but instructors are more of facilitators rather than rigid information providers (Willis, 1996). This change puts students in a better position of control and it makes them more responsible on the way they employ the language. The other important characteristic is that we emphasize on real talk. Activities are designed in such a way that they simulate circumstances that may be experienced in real life such as conversations, arguments, orations and how to resolve problems. These tasks encourage the use of language as it is generally spoken since they involve the learners discussing meaning, expressing thoughts explicitly and collaborating with fellow learners (Willis and Willis, 2007)

The paper also points out that TBLT emphasizes fluency during the task accomplishment. Students are not afraid to speak out freely and do not fear being immediately corrected, which reduces anxiety regarding speaking and increases confidence. Correctness is again considered in terms of the responses and deliberation of performance to ensure a good combination of being well understood and correct use of language structure (Skehan, 1998; Horwitz et al., 1986).

Basic Concepts of the task-based language teaching

The most prominent concepts of teaching language through tasks lie in the aspect of conversational ability and the way individuals learn language in the mind. One of the concepts is the placing of emphasis where one is communicating. Students solve problems in preference of effective conversation to perfect grammar. This main principle is consistent with the views of Ellis (2003) who argues that meaning-based exchanges lead to better language learning. Another important concept is that weaving in language structure in the conversation flow. TBLT focuses on speaking fluently without neglecting accuracy. As Long (2015) mentions, it is possible to concentrate on the exact elements of language to be

added spontaneously when doing a task or immediately after its completion, and this does not interrupt the communication.

The approach allows the students to observe and internalize language patterns in the context of situations of relevance. Another tenet of TBLT is student independence. Tasks encourage selection of options, finding solutions and collaboration by the students thereby increasing motivation and independent learning. Activities are typically ranked in easy-to-difficulty progressions that allow gradual development of thinking and language skills (Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996).

Techniques Used in Task-Based Language Teaching

The techniques aid in increasing speaking opportunities. They also urge friends to support one another and reduce the concerns about being judged poorly. According to what is written in the document, team work is particularly effective in large classes of English as a Foreign Language. The reason is that people are able to speak less there (Ali and Pathan, 2017). Unless students possess, or require information that others possess, activities where information is asymmetric, and jobs where a problem should be solved, lead to the exchange of information between students. They should also reach a consensus on what things are like and arrive at the same conclusion. Such jobs result in speaking freely and speaking with one another. It requires that to become more proficient in conversing with others. Repeat of these techniques causes the students to desire speaking more and improves the overall speaking capacities in general (Nunan, 2004; Ellis, 2003).

Introduction of Task-Based Language Teaching

Being a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) implies that lessons do actually pay attention to what something means. In order to achieve an objective of talking to people, the students rely on the language they are learning. They do not simply observe single grammar rules that are isolated. As an actual practice, TBLT prioritizes students conversing with one another and collaborating. It also emphasizes application of the language in real life context. The teacher plays more of a role of a person who demonstrates the way. Investigations inform us that courses with the help of TBLT observe greater engagement among the students. The language is also more used by them and students also feel more confident. The results of looking at normal scores and special tests in the form of numbers reveal that students taught by TBLT perform better. They impart those that are taught the common methods, primarily in regard to speaking with fluency and communicating ideas effectively. Evidence of various researches point to the positive aspects of TBLT in the context of the quality of speaking and the desire to speak among learners. The research involving set tests and straightforward mathematics demonstrates apparent increases in grammar, the knowledge on how to talk to people in social contexts, and good strategies of individuals who complete TBLT. According to surveys, quite a number of students believe TBLT to be more amusing and convenient. This will ensure they remain attentive in classes and achieve improved learning results. Nevertheless, effective TBLT should prepare teachers. They must also have effective methods of handling the class and ensuring that it is compatible with the school curriculum. There is still too little training and excessive attention to tests to effectively use TBLT.

Material and Methods

This paper adopted a non-test, number based approach to examining the relationship between Task-Based Language Teaching and the quality of speech of BS level

ESL students. The study controlled normal teaching practices without altering anything with regard to the teaching style.

The sample population consisted of 300 BS level ESL students of three government and privately run schools in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan. They were picked randomly. According to the classroom events, the students were divided into two groups: those who were taught through task-based and those who were taught through regular teaching.

A 30-item Likert scale survey was employed to achieve the information. It tested a sure-footedness of speaking, speaking flow, participation in the classroom and worrying about speaking, as well as speaking skill scores. The information was examined using SPSS. The answers were summed up with simple statistics such as counts, percentages, average, the most common score, and the middle score. The test conducted by Bartlett was to determine whether the data spread was equal or not and t-tests were done to compare the scores of the parties in terms of speaking.

Data Analysis

The results presented in Figures 4.1 to 4.10 indicate that task-based teaching is beneficial to the speaking of ESL students at the college level. Numerous students claimed that their self-belief, talking with others and desire to participate in speaking activities improved with the help of such tasks as group talks, teamwork and language games. Although some differences were found with age and sex, majority of the people believed that task based learning was more effective in comparison to not applying it. The results reveal that task-based activities are more effective than the outdated practice based on grammar to develop talking skills in ESL classes.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Speaking skills using task-based activities regularly

Gender	Age	Class	BS	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total
Female	17- 20	Class	BS	24	48	7	16	95
	21 - 24			31		16	15	62
Male	17- 20	Class	BS	32	7	8	7	54
	21 - 24			70	7		16	93

Table 1 shows that a clear majority of students, regardless of gender or age group, believe that their teachers regularly use task-based activities to teach speaking. Overall responses indicate significantly higher agreement and strong agreement compared to disagreement. This suggests that task-based teaching is visibly present in ESL classrooms at the BS level. In particular, male students aged 21-24 showed stronger agreement than younger learners. This result reflects the generally positive acceptance of task-based pedagogies among ESL undergraduate students.

Table 2
Storytelling activities lessen my anxiety about speaking incorrectly

Gender	Age	Class	BS	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	7	56	8	24	95
	21 - 24			24	8	22	8	62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	30	8	16		54
	21 - 24			46		32	15	93

Table 2 presents various views on how much storytelling helps lower the fear of speaking. Many students said they agreed or strongly agreed. However, quite a few people disagreed, particularly the younger students. Older boys showed more agreement. This

means they felt less worried when they told a story. This change points to storytelling maybe working better for some groups of people.

Table 3
Task related actions positively affect learners' speaking assurance.

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	24	48	7	16	95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	39	15	8		62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	31		16	7	54
	21 - 24	Class	BS	39	14	40		93

Most people surveyed of all genders noted greater belief following task based teaching methods. Young male learners specifically shared firmer consent compared to female learners. Even though some neutral plus contrary views appeared, common consent surpassed dissent. This result backs up how well task related actions work for raising speaking assurance.

Table 4
Class group discussions encourage me to use English more

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	23	56		16	95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	15	16	23	8	62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	16	16	15	7	54
	21 - 24	Class	BS	54	7	24	8	93

Table4 shows that group discussion in the classroom moderately increases the frequency of students' use of English. Overall, a positive trend was observed, with slightly more respondents saying "I agree" and "I strongly agree" than disagreeing. Older male students showed the strongest agreement, suggesting that they were more responsive to group discussions. However, the presence of neutral responses reflects different levels of engagement. In general, group discussions are a supportive but not always effective strategy for promoting English language use.

Table 5
Task-based learning is more effective than grammar-focused instruction for improving my speaking skills

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	15	48	8	24	95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	32	8	7	15	62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	31		16	7	54
	21 - 24	Class	BS	46	15	8	24	93

Table5 shows a clear preference for task-based instruction over grammar-oriented instruction to improve speaking skills. The majority of students of all ages agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Older students of both genders showed higher agreement and ratings of communication approaches associated with maturity. Disagreements were relatively low, reinforcing the perceived limitations of traditional grammar-based methods. These results provide strong evidence that task-based learning is a more effective approach for language development.

Table 6
Real-world activities more appealing than textbook exercises

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	11	60	7		95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	31	15	8	16	62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	16	24	16	7	54

21 - 24	Class	BS	62	15	40	16	93
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Table6 shows that overall, there is a slight preference for real-world activities such as role-playing and interviews over manual exercises. Older male students expressed a preference for real-world challenges the most. In contrast, younger female students showed more disagreements and different learning preferences. Despite these differences, agreements did not significantly outweigh disagreements. The results show that authentic activities are generally attractive, but not all students prefer them.

Table 7
Creative tasks make learning English more enjoyable

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	15	56	8	16	95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	31	8	15	8	62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	23	15	16		54
	21 - 24	Class	BS	46	8	31	8	93

Table7 shows that creative tasks have a positive impact on students' enjoyment of learning English. Most students agreed or strongly agreed that creative activities are fun. Creative tasks are generally considered effective in increasing student participation.

Table 8
Assignments in groups or pairs improve my ability to communicate in English

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	13	50	8	24	95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	31	16	15		62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	15	16	16	7	54
	21 - 24	Class	BS	64	21	8		93

Younger learners had more mixed responses, indicating different levels of comfort with collaboration. Neutral responses suggest that not all students benefit equally from group work. Nevertheless, the overall trend favors collaboration as beneficial for developing communication skills.

Table 9
I am more inclined to engage in speaking tasks during language games

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	23	56		16	95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	16	15	24	7	62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	32		7	15	54
	21 - 24	Class	BS	53		24	16	93

Table9 shows the strong propensity of learners to solve speech problems when using language games. The "agree" and "strongly agree" responses far exceeded the disagreement between the two sexes. Male students had particularly strong positive responses, indicating that their motivation was increased through the playful task. This result suggests that language games can effectively improve learner participation.

Table 10
My interaction in English improves when teachers use collaborative tasks

Gender	Age		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total	
Female	17 - 20	Class	BS	15	56	8	16	95
	21 - 24	Class	BS	47		8		62
Male	17 - 20	Class	BS	8	8	16	7	54
	21 - 24	Class	BS	63	8	22		93

Table 10 points out that working together really helps learner talking in English. Most people who answered felt that this statement was true or really true. This was true

more so for older students, both male and female. Few people disagreed. This makes the good effect of teamwork stand out more. Some people were neutral, which means they like to interact in different ways. All in all, the findings prove that doing tasks together helps learners talk more in English class.

Conclusion

The results of this research provide a good evidence that task-based teaching is indeed beneficial in terms of teaching BS level ESL students to speak. When considering the information presented in Figures 4.1-4.10, it is observable that the majority of the students believe that task based things are effective in increasing the extent of confidence they are certain about speaking, talking in the classroom, their motivation, and their willingness to speak. Activities such as role playing, storytelling, class discussion, collaborative tasks and language plays were quite useful in de-fearing speaking and getting the students to actually use English at school.

Although it could be seen that there were some slight variations between age and gender groups, particularly with the younger students who were more neutral or disagreed, the overall trend was quite evident with strong preference of task based learning over old practices that dwell on rules of grammar only. The students between the ages of 21 and 24 were more optimistic when it comes to talking and collaborating. This gives an implied indication that the older and more capable of dealing with school work, the more responsive people are to real work-based teaching methods. A combination of these results affirms that task based teaching establishes a friendly environment that is learner centred and which contributes to real talking taking place and makes college ESL students easier to improve their communication skills.

Recommendations

The study findings indicate that we ought to include the task based language teaching in the college English classes on a regular basis. It will assist in improving speaking skills. The teachers should be challenged to deploy group work and exercises that require discussion. This incorporates the activities such as group speaking, role play, reading aloud and language games. This will involve more students and make them less concerned with speaking. Teacher training programs should provide practical training on how to construct and use such task-based activities effectively. We also require a good combination in which tasks which involve smooth talking receive some additional assistance with feedback on the same task to ensure that there is no lack of correctness as well. Future research might adopt various types of research or studies in the long run to further investigate how TBLT is working in long term on the aspect of talking skills in different ESL environments.

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