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RESEARCH PAPER

Teaching English to Undergraduate ESL Learners through Task-Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the communication abilities of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, with a specific focus on a Pakistani university context. The research critically evaluates the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approaches still prevalent in Pakistani English language education, highlighting their limitations in fostering effective communication skills. Drawing on the literature review, which underscores the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing speaking abilities, the study employs qualitative action research involving thirty-five undergraduate students. The action research involves two phases of data collection first phase sets the ground to plan action cycle based on task based approach. The research instruments used in the study are interviews, non-participant observations, and a diary to collect data on students' experiences and perceptions of TBLT. The results indicate a noticeable improvement in students' communication abilities, particularly in speaking skills. The researcher, following Willis's TBLT paradigm, designs and implements task-based activities in the classroom. The findings suggest that students engaged more actively when presented with context-based tasks, and their willingness to use English outside the classroom improved. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the efficacy of TBLT, aligning with previous research on its positive impact on motivation, self-confidence, and language proficiency. Recommendations include further exploration of TBLT across various educational levels, assessing its long-term effects, and investigating alternative methods for assessing language proficiency within a TBLT framework. The study provides valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and researchers seeking to enhance language teaching methodologies, especially in EFL contexts.

Introduction

The most essential aspect of human existence is language. Language exposes the world to our ideas, opinions, thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Wang, 2011). A universal language was required to enable Communication among all people living worldwide as demands and time progressed, and people began to connect. English met the objective because it was the only language spoken by everyone on Earth and had achieved the status of a world language (Crystal, 2003).

Since the 15th century, several methods of teaching languages have been developed, such as the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual method, communicative language education, and task-based language instruction, all of which have demonstrated their value for language advancement within the confines of their respective fields. Among the abovementioned techniques, task-based language instruction became popular in the 1970s. The task-based method was first suggested by Prabhu (1987), who also highlighted the importance of TBLT for language development. Scholars, educators, innovators, and syllabus designers have shifted toward a task-based approach to instruction in language teaching in recent years (Nunan, 2003; Ellis, 2009; Rambe, 2015). The task-based language method emphasizes speaking naturally occurring language in pairs or groups and encourages learners to share ideas (Nunan, 2004). Practice, ongoing activity, and exposure are all necessary for language learning. They were making good notes. The sheer volume of grammatical rules and vocabulary will not Be applied in practical settings; they can be overly helpful. That's why language professors frequently provide tasks to their students and converse in class while adhering to "task-based" education rules.

In Pakistan, English is taught under peculiar, out-of-date settings that are far from suitable. GTM and PPP, which date back centuries and do not fit the requirements of ESL pedagogy, are still in use. The following are some areas where the English teaching program is weak:

- Most teachers are unaware of the different purposes for which they teach English.
- To help their kids pass the test. They are unconcerned with the truth.
- English language understanding Following the Grammar Translation Method
- Emphasizing the memory of abstract grammatical rules through rote learning.
- Neither the teachers nor the students have paid attention to the language's communicative aspects.

Those who wrote the required texts. English is only taught as a subject for exams, with no emphasis placed on the language's use as a tool for Communication. It exhibits a lack of Planning that has gone into implementing this teaching-learning scenario in Pakistan (Habib, 2013). Teachers' first goal is to help students pass exams and demonstrate their knowledge. Language proficiency is not given importance by either the teacher or the students. Educators don't stay in View the purpose of learning a language and how to use English effectively. Single vocabulary terms and grammar rules are the main subjects of most English language training. Anjumn et al. (2019) claim that traditional training is the critical factor contributing to students' inability to use language in real-world settings effectively.

According to Tawil (2018), successful language acquisition happens when students are involved in real-world task activities in the classroom and are exposed to real-life scenarios. The task is a crucial component of TBLT since it facilitates engagement and Communication. Speaking skills have been developed using a variety of assignment kinds. These task categories include:

- Pair or group tasks: Students are split into groups of two or more people.
- Information gap challenges, in which one student already knows something and the other　must learn it;
- Open and closed activities: both structured and unstructured tasks in which conversation is exchanged;

- Opinion and reasoning gap activities, which require students to communicate their opinions and ideas about a subject after being presented with it;
- A problem-solving exercise requires students to analyze a situation and devise a solution.
- Social interaction exercises include task-based role-plays and interview tasks, in which students act out various roles in various contexts.

Famous SLA researchers (Ellis, 2014; Long, 2016) and renowned ELT teachers have defended TBLT as an innovative, successful approach to teaching ESL. The learners' self-confidence increases after a number of performances, presentations, and reporting exercises. The learner is more important in the learner-centered language instruction (TBLT) method. PPP is not a teacher-oriented paradigm (Ellis, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007). Since they control the setting in TBLT, ESL students can complete instructional tasks in ELT courses. It is considered the most effective language learning approach and is one of the most modern techniques (Ellis, 2014; Long, 2016). Along with instructors and students, our study assists textbook authors and publishers in developing books based on output-prompting exercises for enhancing L2 speaking and writing abilities (Ellis, 2009; Fukuta, 2016). Since the majority of occupations throughout the world demand the ability to communicate effectively in English, students who receive more excellent instruction in productive skills would profit.

Literature Review

Communication is the spoken or written exchange of ideas between individuals. Fluency and accuracy are two ways that Communication is viewed in this study. The former refers to using language correctly and without reservation, whereas the latter discusses using grammatically and phonologically appropriate words. It is referred as a "learn by doing" strategy involving the teacher and the students. Speaking happens with a listener around because the listener reacts to the speaker's Communication Jahan and Shakir (2022). Oral Communication (OC) was characterized by Byrne (2012) as a two-way process involving the producing skills of speaking and the receptive skills of understanding. It is thought to be beneficial for enhancing learning.

According to **(**Albino 2011), oral language is significant as a helpful learning tool and a crucial communication tool that gives us power in our daily lives. Speaking and listening are two aspects of oral Communication that he values. He explained that good verbal English communication skills involve speaking and listening. We use oral language throughout our lives, which is likely our most important instrument for Communication. Both combine their skills and aid in one another's development. Another claim Brown (1994) made was the convergence of speaking and listening. Because hearing can be indirectly enhanced by merging it with saying, skills are referred to as oral communication skills. Communication is primarily about meaning. Rahman (2010) deemed it symbolic because it includes gestures, symbols, and spoken words. After all, symbolic action is not just verbal Communication. According to him, the two communication agents, Sender (S) and Receiver (R) are involved in this interactive process.

The idea and methodology of task-based language learning were initially brought to the world by Prabhu (1987). In Bangalore, India, Prabhu began his new project to teach Communication. He initially used this strategy in secondary school and then spread information about its usefulness and efficacy. According to Prabhu (1987), structure-based courses even provide unacceptable after extensive remedial re-teaching. The United States of America (USA) chose to implement Task-Based Learning and move its language institutes to the early 1980s-based Approach (TBA). Teshome, Tadesse and Getachew

(2017) noted that using TBA to a level of practical effortlessness L2 proficiency and failure. Professors and well-known figures from all across the world are currently Institutions that use TBLL curricula and task-based language learning programs. Government agencies in America have acknowledged the effectiveness of utilizing the TBLL approach, genuine sources, and their own opinions; learners can study a second language with reasonable proficiency and speed up speaking. These institutes contend that using this strategy for a relatively short period can improve students' ability to analyse. Lever and Willis (2004) added detail by asserting that learners can deal with the meaning system of the circumstance in more explicit terms. Despite being far from perfect grammar and lexicon, second language (L2) speakers are influential. Several studies, including those by Prabhu (1987), Nunan (2004), and Ellis (2003), urged scholars to switch from traditional approaches to language learning to task-based ones. According to these researchers, language is acquired more successfully when it is utilized to transfer messages and is taught using the TBLL syllabus design. They, therefore, recommend an increased focus on TBLL.

The effect of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on the motivation and speaking ability of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners was investigated by Diaz et al. in 2023. The study focuses on a sample of sixty college students with an A2 level of English proficiency, ages 17 to 21. Using Zoom meetings and the Flip app, a task-based strategy was put into practice that included a variety of speaking themes. To gather information, a survey with Likert-scale questions was used to gauge how motivated and how the students felt about the assignments. The findings show that students are highly motivated to speak English in the classroom, participate in group activities, and advance their English-speaking abilities. Students did, however, express comparatively less enthusiasm to use English outside of the classroom. The results also show that students have good opinions on language tasks and activities, highlighting how well they work to encourage motivation, self-assurance, vocabulary growth, and communication abilities. These outcomes are consistent with the tenets of task-based language instruction and highlight the value of establishing a collaborative and encouraging learning environment. The study adds to the body of knowledge on TBLT and offers guidance to educators and curriculum designers on improving EFL students' motivation and speaking ability.

The effects of implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT) in Pakistani university classrooms are examined by Jahan and Shakir (2022). The study examined how TBLT affected the acquisition of the four fundamental English language abilities: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. A case study was created to assess the impact of TBLT on university-level language acquisition. Pre- and post-tests were administered to examine the variations between the student groups in the experimental and control groups. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) 2.0 using the T-test and ANOVA. Including all four language abilities in the exercises piqued the students' attention, improving the results. Compared to speaking, students' reading, writing, and listening improvements were more significant. With tiny variations in speaking abilities, the control and experimental groups' findings were reasonably similar. Applying TBLT in university-level language courses met students' basic requirements and fostered an atmosphere conducive to learning language skills with comprehension.

According to Martínez Cabezas (2022), an action research study was conducted in a public school to ascertain the effect of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the speaking abilities of tenth graders. A teacher's notebook, surveys, and non-participant observation checklists were the data collection tools used during the diagnostic stage. The information gathered was analysed, and it was found that participants had trouble producing the target language orally. After the action stage was put into practice came the diagnostic stage. Six workshops that comply with the TBLT phases made up the

programme. Pretests and posttests were employed in the educational intervention to gauge the study's effectiveness. A pre-task, a task cycle, and the language Focus phase were all elements of TBLT workshops (Ellis, 2003). The results point to TBLT's efficacy in improving the speaking abilities of tenth graders. Results show that critical oral presentation elements were significantly enhanced, including grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation.

The goal of Safitri, Rafli, and Dewanti (2020) is to enhance students' speaking abilities in the English Department. According to the interviews conducted to gather preliminary information on the students' speaking abilities, the students' insufficient language proficiency was the primary cause of their speaking difficulties, which made them hesitant to talk. The several speaking exercises that helped the kids talk were unfamiliar to them. They lack speaking techniques and rely on writing to communicate thoughts. Task-based learning was modified for one-semester courses through an action research project to benefit the students. In this study, fifteen third-semester students took part. The information was gathered via the pretest, post-test, interview, and observation outcomes. The results show that using task-based learning aids students in improving their speaking abilities for the three measured indicators: vocabulary, accuracy, and understanding. By engaging in various activities during the three learning phases — pre-task, task-cycle, and form focus — the students can finish the tasks. They are successful in acquiring confidence and honing their speaking abilities. Students can assess their learning through group projects and pair work.

Material and Methods

This study's creation used the qualitative action research methodology (Wallace, 1998). In this way, action research allows educators to collect and evaluate information to determine how instructional methods affect students. Similarly, action research enables the investigator to engage with the educational setting to gather data on students' perceptions (Burns, 1999). According to Kemis & McTaggart, (2007) the researcher can identify the primary problems in the educational context and explore potential solutions. According to Cohen (2012), this strategy has countless advantages. For example, combining experience with logic works well to find the truth.

According to Wallace (1998), action research is a subfield of research defined as the process of responding to questions by rationally using a variety of evidence forms. The author says that action research causes concerns or problems in instructors' professional practice. Similarly, Kemmis et al. (2014) highlight the difference between people engaging and functioning in different environments to experience every aspect of the research process. It aims to enhance procedures and their surroundings. Because it brings all the participants together and gives teachers fresh opportunities to evaluate their pedagogy, try out novel approaches, and improve their enactment in English lessons, the action research technique is deemed satisfying.

Thirty-five male and female undergraduate students enrolled in the English Department's Communion Skills course and participated in the project's execution. They were motivated to advance their proficiency in the target language; thus, they consented to participate in this study. Learners were aware of how poor their English was and would need to put in intentional hours of study to improve it. From the outset, the researcher informed them that they would be required to participate in interviews and that their performance would be evaluated using speaking rubrics to determine the effectiveness of the ongoing intervention. In addition, a third party observer would be present in the classroom to assess the student's performance at various phases of the activities. They

understood that following the study project's intervention in the school context, they may improve their English proficiency.

Student interviews provided the means of gathering information from the various points of view of the participants during the reconnaissance stage. Students were allowed to voice their opinions about the foreign language acquisition process. They discussed the engaging activities they had participated in and the ones they had not. They also discuss the assignments they believed to be more critical to their learning process. At last, they contemplated the proficiencies that require enhancement to elevate their present standing.

During the action phase, the investigator utilised interviews, a non-participant observation checklist, and a diary to record field notes. The teacher collected data using these three devices from three distinct perspectives, triangulating the data to provide a detailed analysis. Its objective was to evaluate the intervention's effect on the students.

Every workshop's performance, scenarios, and activities were recorded in a journal that the researcher filled out. The teacher shared the facts he saw throughout the classes. He then coded every phenomenon he had collected from the diaries to determine how successful the intervention had been. Journal collected information on how to enhance students' speaking abilities.

There was a non-participant observation checklist during the action phase. The performance of the students and their responses to the tasks that were suggested in each class were evaluated by the external teacher. Also, he provided the researcher with input about the elements that students require. Should concentrate on improving speech output. The superficial observer evaluated the student's performance in the target language in vocabulary expansion, pronunciation, interaction, and grammatical use. The observer, who was not a participant, gathered data on how TBLT affected the communication abilities of the students.

The researcher interviewed students after the action phase. Students shared their impressions of the procedure and the exciting assignments. Students also compared the tasks they completed to those they had already completed. It offered crucial information needed to evaluate the task efficacy. Based on this, the investigator responded. The second study topic looked into how students perceived and experienced learning using a task-based method.

Results and Discussion

The study was directed by two aims that the researcher set: first, to understand learners' experiences and perceptions of utilising a task-based approach in English language classes, and second, to develop learners' communication abilities using a task-based approach. The study's conclusions show that students' communication abilities have improved noticeably. Even if the first cycle did not show any signs of improvement. Nevertheless, the researcher enhanced student abilities through activities by implementing the appropriate adjustments to the teaching technique.

This investigation's task-based learning English communication skills were taught orally through the application of lessons. The lesson plans were created using Willis's (1996) task-based learning paradigm. Examples of most aspects of a study in the oral English communication skills classes include pupils comprehending how to execute activities, distinguishing between different sorts of tasks, or understanding what the instructor taught. The investigator observed that students typically struggled with

communication assignments and had trouble articulating their thoughts clearly and concisely. It became clear from the analysis of the reconnaissance interviews that the lack of exposure to and use of the English language outside of the classroom was the cause of this. Similar conclusions have been drawn from reconnaissance by Safitri, Rafli, and Dewanti (2020), Cabezas (2022), and Sang and Loi (2023).

The researcher created an action plan based on the reconnaissance results. The lesson plans were developed using Willis's (1996) task-based learning paradigm (refer to Appendix A). There are six categories of activities in Willis's (1996) framework: listing, sorting and ordering, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. In this study, all kinds of functions were employed. There are three stages to the task-based learning paradigm. Pre-task, task cycle, and linguistic emphasis are listed in this order.

The educator's contemplations Following the implementation of the task-based learning method, learners had the chance to investigate and use the English language in context through situational activities. Students were encouraged to utilise Language creatively through the activities they were expected to complete since task-based learning is student-centred. Task-based learning made it easier for pupils to practise their English in a classroom without worry. Ellis (2010) asserts, drawing on Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, that giving students the chance to negotiate meaning helps them receive intelligible input and speeds up the process of learning a second language (L2). Improvements in students' speaking abilities, particularly in their interaction skills, might also be attributed to using certain task types, such as dialogues, opinion gaps, reasoning gaps, knowledge gaps, and so on, which called for students to share information. Because the emphasis was on fluency and message delivery, mistakes made while practising the language were accepted as usual. As a result, students felt comfortable expressing their opinions without worrying about receiving criticism for their errors.

Upon closer inspection, the task-based paradigm appears to be the opposite of the conventional presentation, practice, and production (PPP) session. Students begin the class with the work at hand rather than having the teacher oversee it all with authority. After the students complete the assignment, the teacher calls attention to its language and modifies the students' work accordingly. Students also reported that task-based learning was enjoyable, stimulating, and challenging. It allowed more reserved and timid students to express themselves more honestly. These results are consistent with those of Albino (2019), Majeed and Memon (2021) Cabezas (2022), who discovered that following a task-based approach, pupils increased speaking correctness in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary, as well as fluency.

The study's second goal was to comprehend how students saw and experienced developing their communication abilities using a task-based method. The study's findings imply that students have a favourable attitude about using the task-based method in language instruction. The pupils claimed that they were allowed to use any language instead of practising a single pre-selected item. The pupils felt free to utilise the language without any restrictions since they had a far more diversified exposure to it, which was entertaining and inspiring. The pupils found this more motivating since they sensed that using the language to do the job would bring the lesson to a close. For them, this was an interesting activity.

According to the participants, student engagement in the classroom increased when the teacher chose engaging discussion topics. It aligns with Bhandari's (2020) research. Teachers feel that when a task is connected to students' experiences and real life,

it becomes relevant for them. Students' communication abilities can be enhanced by assigning them worthwhile assignments. Additionally, the pupils claimed that the teacher used engaging techniques to teach speaking. (Fakhira, 2021; Bano et al., 2023; Diaz et al., 2023) report that students who were taught with the TBI experienced a significant amount of language work, either individually, in pairs, or in groups, which significantly impacted the development of their speaking performances. These findings corroborate the study's findings. Students got to practise utilising the language to explain their meaning when they were introduced to the assignment work. Additionally, the students showed enthusiasm using a task-based approach, enjoyed learning in an interactive setting, and had a positive outlook on tblt.

Conclusion

The application of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in an English language classroom was investigated in this study, along with its effects on students' speaking abilities and opinions of the method. According to the survey, TBLT significantly enhanced students' communication abilities, particularly fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary expansion, and grammatical application. Even if success was not immediately apparent, changes to the teaching approach eventually made it easier to make progress. Overall, the study shows how practical total body language training (TBLT) can be in enhancing the teaching and learning of the English language, especially regarding speaking abilities. With this method, students may improve their confidence, motivation, and language skills to utilise English in various real-life scenarios**.**

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study it is recommended that future researchers explore the impact of task-based language teaching across various educational levels, ranging from secondary schools to university classrooms. Investigate the potential differences in outcomes and effectiveness at different stages of language learning. Investigate the long-term effects of task-based language teaching on learners' language proficiency, communication skills, and overall language development. Assess whether the benefits observed in short-term studies are sustained over an extended period. Research alternative and innovative methods for assessing language proficiency and communication skills within a task-based language teaching framework. Consider a range of assessment tools that align with the dynamic nature of communicative language learning.

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