

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR COMMERCE STUDENTS- A TASK BASED APPROACH

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Ajitha S Pisharady¹, Dr. J G Ravikumar², TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH
FOR COMMERCE STUDENTS- A TASK BASED APPROACH,-- PalArch's
Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(9). ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Business English, Commerce, Tasks, lessons, language, skills.

ABSTRACT

Globalization has made English language learning a necessity. Efficient English language communication is essential for professional development. It is one of the most needed employment skills. Though all the language skills are important, the aural and oral skills are neglected in classroom. The reasons for these remain the prescribed text book and exam pattern. Listening and speaking skills form the major part of language learning. Those are the skills which are very important in the job market. Enhancing these skills is the main aim of the English classes at all levels. Through task-based approach, the researcher expects to enhance the aural and oral skills in the Commerce students. The study explores the possibilities of tasks and text book content to practice real life communication to enhance professional English. In this frame, the tasks suitable for the selected lessons are suggested, concentrating on task sequencing in an increasing difficulty level and to meet the demands of the language skills to be enhanced in the graduate students. The findings of the research show that the lessons in the text book could be imparted through Task Based Approach to develop the listening and speaking skills. The limited time frame for a semester is the limitation to implement the Approach to teach the lessons included in the text book. The study suggests ideas to overcome the limitation and include task-based teaching using the text book.

Introduction

Learning a language is very important. Language is for communication. Communication means sharing the information properly. The way of communication could be different depending on the person, place, situation and the matter communicated. Learning to communicate effectively is the key to get a business or lose a business. That is what Business English classes teach. The regular

classrooms could be Business English classes too. The main point is that students must be trained to interact with others. They must get involved in real life communication. That is possible with Task Based Approach. The base of TBA is natural, purposeful communication.

Based on the social- interactional view of language and second language acquisition theories, Task Based Language Teaching has come out as a popularly adopted contemporary language teaching model that takes “task” as the main teaching and organizing unit of language courses. A pedagogic task is designed for creating real context of language use by involving the learners in a process of purposeful and meaningful language production which is essentially different from the mere display of pre learnt language items. Thus, it is characterized with the inclusion of a context to be acted upon, an outcome to be reached, a meaningful purpose to be pursued by the learners. The present study explores the possibilities of including “Tasks” in the General English text book of first semester Commerce stream to enhance the listening and speaking skills of the students. The paper explains about Task Based Language teaching, its advantages and its limitations as per the analysis of the text book.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RELATED STUDIES DONE

Various studies are done to understand the effectiveness of TBLT in developing the language skills. The researcher explored the literature on Task Based Language Teaching to know the fundamentals of the approach. Understanding Task Based Approach is important for the success of a language program.

According to Ellis, (2018), Task Based Language Teaching is teaching and learning a language to complete open-ended tasks. He believed that Task Based Language Teaching is learner centred approach that offers content oriented meaningful activities.

Nunan, (1989) says that, Task Based Language Teaching is a teaching approach “which involves a piece of classroom work which helps learners comprehend, manipulate, produce or interact in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.” According to him, Teacher has to use the text appropriately to build up tasks.

Willis & Willis, (2007) support the idea that Task Based Language Teaching is a learner centred approach where the learners learn the target language through self-motivated, task- based and project-based group investigations. TBLT Classrooms must provide authentic language practice.

Skehan, (2003) states that in Task Based Language Teaching, language learning turns into “a process that involves opportunities for learners to contribute in communication, where making meaning is primary.” He quotes Breen and tells that Task Based Language Teaching could refer to any structured language – teaching activity which has a specific objective, proper content and particular working procedure and a variety of outcome for the learners who carry out the task.

Task Based Teaching and Learning according to Ellis (2018), follow a learner centred philosophy and the learning happens by using the target language to complete “open- ended tasks”. The theory is supported by the research done by Murad & Oqlah Smadi (2009) where the effectiveness of task based approach is tested on the development of speaking skills in EFL students. The research is

quantitative in nature and proves that speaking skills can be enhanced through task based approach.

Kazeroni, (1995) says that task can mean anything. it can designate language -learning material developed to be used in the classroom just as it can label whatever a living human being does. Tasks are learner centred or language learning - centre. The paper analyses some problems related to TBLT. According to the researcher, the teacher and student roles are not seen as that of organizers of the tasks. The paper concludes by giving the suggestion that multidimensional curriculum focusing on different parameters might resolve some of the problems posed by TBLT. It also suggests further study on text-based tasks.

Huang (2015) investigates whether the TBLT will have positive effect on students' study motivation and language proficiency. The study was conducted as an action research using questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation. The analysis showed positive perception of the students towards TBLT. The study reported that TBLT aroused the study autonomy in the learners and improved their language skills. The study suggests teacher to be a task designer based on the expectations of the curriculum.

We could conclude from all these explanations that Task Based Language Teaching is a learner- centred approach that involves teaching and learning of a target language through meaningful activities, with specific objective and outcome. The review suggests blending of learner needs, text and the tasks. Tasks can be both independent or text based. As per the review, the texts are prepared with a common focus and it cannot be neglected. But, the text does not cater to the development of all the four skills. So, task-based approach could be followed to bring in a notable achievement in the English classroom. Thus, the present study is focuses on the effectiveness of integrating tasks with the prescribed text to develop the listening and the speaking skills in the first year BCom students.

CONCEPT OF TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Principles of Task Based Language Teaching start with the note of freedom to the learners to learn at their pace and what they need to learn with very less intervention from the teacher. The teacher's role is primarily to design the instructional materials. David Nunan's list of seven principles sound very practical and applicable.

David Nunan (2007) has listed out seven principles for the Task Based Language Teaching: Scaffolding, task dependency, recycling, active learning, integration, creation and reflection.

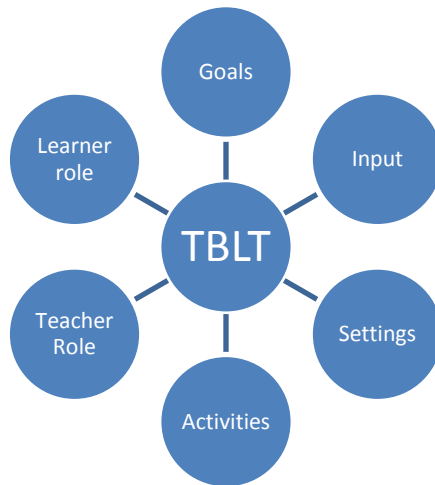
From this, we could conclude that task is the basic unit of task-based language teaching and this approach must involve learner centred activities that are designed with the focus on needs of the learners. As the learners learn by doing, errors must be permitted and motivation must be maximum. Though meaning is the main focus, form must not be neglected.

Task being described as the basic unit, let us try to understand what are the components of a task. A lesson plan will include a task sequence to bring out the expected result. Each task must be framed with an expected outcome. "A task" if conducted for no reason or with no learning intention, cannot be called a task. It will be only an activity which might lead to task. To design a structured pedagogic task,

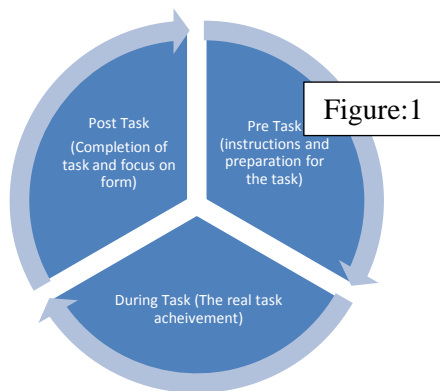
we must concentrate on the components of the task.

COMPONENTS OF A TASK AS PER DAVID NUNAN

According to David Nunan, the components of a classroom task are Goals, input, settings, activities, teacher role and learner role. All these put together with a purpose forms a task based class. A task based class would have three phases – Pre task, During Task and Post Task phases



Task phases as Explained by Experts



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The thirty students, the subjects of the study, were the first year BCom students of a reputed institution in Bengaluru. The College is situated in a partially rural area and most of the students who enrol for the BCom course come from the rural background. These students are not exposed to English language for real time communication and has never got an opportunity to use the language other than for writing the examination. Their career aims are high and for that they require to enhance their communication skills in English. When the students register for the Undergraduate course, they have a fair idea what career they are aiming at. They

need to develop their language skills and are even ready to take up classes after the college hours. The aim of the English language class is to develop the LSRW skills. Instead of focusing only on reading and writing, if we could integrate the text with tasks to develop listening and speaking too, then, the classroom would turn communicative and the purpose will be served. Though the theories expect the development of all the skills, listening and speaking seems to be neglected. Not many studies are done on the tasks to enhance the aural and oral skills. Those studies done on TBLT discuss independent tasks and do not integrate text book. So, the researcher planned to conduct a study on task inclusiveness while teaching the lessons in the prescribed text book.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To design text dependant tasks to develop the aural and oral skills in English in the first year BCom students
- To determine the effect of tasks in developing the aural and oral skills in English on the first year BCom students

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study followed the experimental method. The thirty students from the institution were selected randomly from a population of 250 students of first year BCom. The researcher met the thirty students and had an informal talk with the 30 students. Explanation about the process of the study was given and a written consent was taken from them. This ensured that the subjects know about the research process and also put forth that the participation was voluntary. As the next step, a questionnaire to collect the basic profile of the learners was shared. The questions here dealt with their demography, attitude towards learning English and understanding of listening and speaking skills. Then, a pre test was administered to test the listening and speaking skills in the learners prior to the intervention. The material for the test was borrowed from “IELTS Test Builder” which was collaboratively used with the questions prepared by the researcher herself. There were 20 items in listening and speaking which were awarded one mark each. Then, the learners were taught three lessons from the text following task-based approach. The researcher had identified and designed 10 different text dependant tasks for the classes with the focus to develop the listening and speaking skills in English. The intervention classes were done for 15 days including the task repetitions whenever required. After the intervention classes, a post test was conducted to measure the progress of the students in the areas of listening and speaking. The test was in the same pattern as the pre-test. An evaluation was done using the google form to check the students’ acceptance of the tasks.

ASSESSMENT OF THE TESTS

Listening Test had 20 questions that tested the students’ different kinds of listening skills. The answers were marked in a worksheet provided and the marking was done twice to check the reliability. Speaking test had four parts and two were intended to complete a dialogue and framing a dialogue in the written format. Two were face to face talk with the examiners. Two examiners marked the students for their vocabulary, accuracy and cohesion. The purpose of having two examiners was

to maintain the reliability and validity of the test.

The comparison of the pre-test and post- test marks showed the effectiveness of task intervention to develop the aural and oral skills in English. Paired T Test was used to check the significance and then, the Effect size was calculated using Excel.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre test and post test marks of the listening skills test in favour of post test
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre test and post test marks of the speaking skills test in favour of post test

LESSON PLAN: TBLT

The present plan for the intervention classes strictly followed the rules of TBLT. Each task had three phases. The pre task was more or less a brainstorming session where the day's task was introduced to the learners. Here, even the vocabulary that the learners would encounter was discussed. The main task focussed on developing listening or speaking skill in particular. Ten tasks were selected for the purpose of the study. The tasks followed the pattern of simple to complex. It started with the simplest gap filling task and ended with a formal presentation. Task repetition was done wherever required. The table below gives a gist of the lesson plan for the intervention classes. The feedback taken using google forms after the classes to understand the students attitude towards the tasks showed that they enjoyed the task based classes than the usual lecture method. More complex the task, more the learners were involved and enjoyed. The power and energy in the youth is unimaginable. So, the teachers must know the capability of the learner and provide them with challenging, competitive tasks in the class.

Table :2

LESSON PLAN			
SL. NO	MAIN TASK	FOCUS	DETAILS
TASK 1	Information Gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening for specific information 	Work sheet with incomplete information is provided and students fill it up while listening to the lesson.
TASK 2	True or False	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discriminative listening 	Listens to the audio and completes the worksheet simultaneously, each answer being chose as true or false.
TASK 3	Dramatization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathetic listening 	Work as a group, listen to the poem and dramatizes the lesson
TASK 4	Recitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public 	Work independently. Listen to the

		speaking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing vocabulary 	lesson, uses similar words to write a poem following a different theme. Recites the poem written by self to the class
TASK 5	Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical listening 	Work in group. Listens to others and contributes to the topic of discussion.
TASK 6	Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to the main idea • Framing appropriate questions 	Listen to the lesson, Work in pairs and frame appropriate questions to elicit the expected answer
TASK 7	Mind Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive listening 	Listens to the lesson and compiles a mind map including all the information
TASK 8	Jigsaw Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative communication 	Each group reads a part of the lesson. Each person in the group will be assigned with each part of the paragraph. The ideas of each one's reading is shared and discussed
TASK 9	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Talk 	Works in pairs and prepare questions and answers for a formal interview
TASK 10	Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal presentation 	Work in groups and prepares a Power point presentation based on the lesson.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Hypothesis I stated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre test and post test marks of the listening skills test in favour of post test. The paired T Test was conducted to test this hypothesis. The table below shows the findings:

	No. of	Mean score	Std. dev	T Value	P Value	Remark

	participants					
Pre-Test	30	10.33333	3.345976	2.41368	0.022335	Significant
Post-Test		13.03333	3.027467			

The table proves that the value is significant. P- value less than 0.05 shows a positive significant difference.

The Effect Size was calculated for this hypothesis using excel. The following formula was used. According to Cohen's theory, if the value is less than or equal to 0.2, the effect is small. If it is more than 0.2 but less than 0.5, then the effect is medium. If the value is greater than or equal to 0.8, the Effect size is High. The Effect size is calculated using the given formula.

Cohen's formula for Effect Size is

$$d = (M_2 - M_1) / SD_{\text{pooled}}$$

M_2 = Mean of the post test

M_1 = Mean of the pre test

SD_{pooled} =

$$\sqrt{((SD_1 + SD_2) / 2)}$$

Where,

M_1 = Mean value of the Pre test scores = 10.2

M_2 = Mean value of the Post test scores = 13.03333

SD_1 = Standard Deviation of the Pre test scores = 3.027466

SD_2 = Standard Deviation of the Post test scores = 2.83333

Cohen's D (Effect Size) for Listening Test					
$M_1 - M_2$	$SD_1 + SD_2$	$(SD_1 + SD_2) / 2$	SD_{pooled}	$d = (M_2 - M_1) / SD_{\text{pooled}}$	Effect Size
2.95973	5.987197	2.993598286	1.730202	1.637574	Very high

- Thus, Hypothesis I, which stated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test marks of the listening skills test in favour of post-test must be accepted.

Comparison of Speaking Test Marks (Pre Test Vs. Post Test)						
	No. of participants	Mean score	Std. dev	T Value	P Value	Remark
Pre-Test	30	10.66667	2.724376	3.47652	0.00162139	Significant

Post-Test		13.7	3.195309			

M_1 = Mean value of the Pre test scores = 10.66667

M_2 = Mean value of the Post test scores =13.7

SD_1 = Standard Deviation of the Pre test scores= 2.724376

SD_2 = Standard Deviation of the Post test scores= 3.195309

Cohen's D (Effect Size) for Speaking Test					
$M_1 - M_2$	$SD_1 + SD_2$	$(SD_1 + SD_2/ 2)$	SD_{Pooled}	$d = (M_2 - M_1)/ SD_{pooled}$	Effect Size
3.03333 3	5.919685	2.959842314	1.720419	1.763136	Very high

- Thus, Hypothesis II, which stated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test marks of the speaking skills test in favour of post-test is accepted

The results show that there is significant effect after the task intervention in the listening skill and speaking skill of the learners. So, if the text is combined with appropriate tasks, then, the development of language skills can be promoted naturally. The examination pattern already requires the students to read and write the text and the tasks are sure to enhance their listening and speaking skills too.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Task Based Approach can be used to enhance the communication skills of the students at the tertiary level. Tasks have to be designed selectively. Learners' need has to be analysed before designing the tasks. Collaborative tasks are sure to enhance the professional language in the students. Vocabulary enhancement is also possible while working with the peer. While encouraging text book teaching and learning, real life communication must not be forgotten in the class. Literary imagination and purposeful learning for the career must go together in the classroom. English for specific purpose must be encouraged

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was limited to the selected students of BCom. This could have been extended to different courses.
- The intervention classes were conducted only for 15 days
- The focus of the research was only on the enhancement of the two skills – listening and speaking.
- An interview with the students or teachers could have brought in better results

Conclusion

English language classrooms must be rejuvenated with real life tasks. Language is for communication and so, interaction tasks must be encouraged in English language classes. Students must be provided authentic language learning space. Appropriate tasks as per the purpose of the students will surely serve the purpose. Tasks must be integrated with the texts prescribed for the study to keep up uniformity. Though the time consumed might be more, Task Based Instruction has its own advantages. The classroom might go noisy but, the students learn and enhance the vocabulary, intonation, pitch, etc. That could be a challenge for the teachers to assess the students in a Business English Class. But the progress can be reflected by explaining the differences in the use of vocabulary before and after the Business English class. The present study recommends task inclusiveness in the English Class to enhance language skills required for the career. Practice makes man perfect and Language is better acquired than learnt or taught. Students of all levels enjoy working together and getting engaged in various tasks. Hence, English Classrooms must be made authentic communication enhancement sessions where students look at professional development.

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