



BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES IN TBLT IMPLEMENTATION

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ANNOTATION: The article is devoted to the study of the advantageous and disadvantageous sides of implementing TBA in FLT process. In fact, a whole lot of techniques, methods and approaches have been in vogue in the field of second language teaching but every method and approach has its own advantages and disadvantages, and so is the case with task based learning approach. The research has been done in the area of task-based learning and various techniques are suggested to improve vocabulary, automaticity of learning and ultimately the performance of learners in developing their language abilities.

Keywords: task-based language teaching, cognitive competence, language structures, language form, automaticity, experiential learning

Task based language learning offers a lot of advantages as it is communication based and allows the learners to transfer previously acquired knowledge to new communicative contexts (Nunan,1989). It encourages the learner to emerge as a language user. It intends to engage the language learner in a meaning focused language usage (Breen 1989 as cited in Ellis, 2009).

a) Task based learning helps learners to interact spontaneously: Learners are free to use whatever vocabulary and grammar they know. For instance, a role play requires the learner to use language freely. It gives learners chance to try out what ever language they already know and it also gives learners a chance to notice and benefit from others expressions and thereby builds their level of confidence gradually. The cognitive competence as well as the communicative competence of the learners is developed as they perform a task. Learners' attention is drawn towards problem solving instead of focusing on isolated language structures. It encourages the learners to be more ambitious.

b) Automaticity: Automaticity for language learning is defined as a more efficient, more accurate and more stable performance. (segadowitz,2003 as cited in Rider, I .et al 2007). It is also argued that automaticity leads to near native performance. Research in the fields of cognitive psychology and second language acquisition suggests that automaticity is achieved by using language rules in a creative manner in an authentic communication situation (Dekeyser, 2003 as



cited in Rider et al 2007). Task based language learning paves way for automaticity. Cognitive theories of language suggest that practicing in real life situations is helpful in achieving automaticity of linguistic knowledge (Johnson, 1988 as cited in Ellis, 2009).

c) Task based learning gives language learners opportunity to learn vocabulary. Usually teachers explain vocabulary in a pre-task and learners are not involved, words taught that way are easily forgotten so it is beneficial for the students if the teacher thinks of creative ways to involve students in the pre-task. Some of the options suggested for improving vocabulary are predicting words related to the task title or topic, and building words into a word web by way of brainstorm, cooperative dictionary search and by matching list of words with a list of definitions (Newton, 2001). While performing the task a glossary helps but it is observed that it does not allow the learner to practice vocabulary and therefore such words are not retained whereas words inferred through active processing were learnt better (Hulstijn, 1992, as cited by Newton, 2001). An interactive glossary is better than a marginal glossary. Interactive glossary is where the learners interact. The teacher needs to put in extra effort in preparing an interactive glossary. It is also worthwhile to encourage learners to negotiate meaning of new instead of relying on an external source. Though the question on the quality of vocabulary gained through group work occurs, it is observed that learners made impressive progress. It is also claimed that vocabulary learning occurs incidentally as learners take part in cooperative task based interaction. After performing the task if the learners are encouraged to keep a record of new words and revise those words and also if they analyze the new words in different contexts and in different ways it will reinforce their learning of vocabulary. "The teacher needs to ensure that, through tasks learners are given opportunities to meet and explore new vocabulary without direct teacher assistance, and to use this vocabulary to meet meaningful task goals (Newton, 2001).

d) Provides essential conditions for language learning: Language learning does not happen without motivation exposure, and opportunities to use the language. Task based language learning encourages learners to use language purposefully and in cooperation. Learners get a chance to negotiate turns to speak and also try out various communication strategies. Task based learning creates conditions which enhance language learning spontaneously. It prepares learners to use language in the real world (Andon, 2010).



e) Maximizes scope for communication: Task based learning provides conditions that allow learners to assimilate what they notice and understand while performing the task. By participating in the task learners not only acquire new language items, but also make use of language they have acquired recently. Tasks allow learners to acquire and assimilate language items that they readily notice and understand. It allows the learners to transfer their previously acquired knowledge creatively to new contexts of communication. It engages learners in purposeful communication and gives chances to learners to try out various communication strategies and equips the learners with language for public use.

f) Experiential learning: Experiential learning is said to form an important conceptual basis for task-based language teaching. The learners' immediate personal experience is taken as the starting point in this approach. It is argued that intellectual growth occurs as learners take part and reflect on the sequences of the tasks. The active involvement is considered central to this approach and therefore the approach is learner centred. It is in contrast with the transmission approach of education in which the learner acquires knowledge passively from the teacher.

Experiential learning has diverse roots in different disciplines. Psychologist David Kolbe pulled the diverse strands together from social psychology, humanistic education, developmental education and cognitive theory (Nunan, 2004).

Weaknesses of TBL approach:

a) Task Difficulty: Although the difficulty of a task can be estimated from the performance of learners, the factors that actually contribute to task difficulty are studied so that it is useful to integrate and sequence the tasks in language teaching syllabus. "The cognitive load and clarity of the goal of the task, code complexity and interpretive density of the language to be used were some of the criteria considered in establishing the level of difficulty of a task" (Candlin, 1987 as cited in Tavakoli, 2009). Task difficulty is also defined in terms of i) code complexity which includes vocabulary load, redundancy and density. ii) communicative stress which comprises of time limits, time pressure, speed, number of participants. iii) cognitive complexity which consists of cognitive familiarity comprising of familiarity of the topic, familiarity of the discourse genre and familiarity of the task itself and cognitive processing which includes information clarity and sufficiency of information given (Skehan, 1998 as cited in Tavakoli 2009).



b) Mismatch between the learners' and teachers' perception: Studies indicate that the same classroom event is often interpreted differently by the teachers and learners

(Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The learners identified the following factors for task difficulty

i) Cognitive demand: Difficulty in understanding the task, requiring more time or more attention and resources.

ii) Linguistic demand: vocabulary or structures the learners did not know.

iii) Clarity of pictures / story: Visual clarity and conceptual transparency without ambiguity.

iv) Amount of information: Both an overload of information and a paucity of information were undesired.

v) Task structure: The way information was organised.

vi) Affective factors: Liking a picture story or being able to relate to it would make it more enjoyable, if not easier.

Whereas on the other hand teachers attributed age, gender, cultural background and the level of language proficiency as factors that affect the task performance of the learners. Some of the teachers considered the presence or absence of background information in a picture story as a factor that influences the task performance of the learners (Tavakoli, 2009).

Studies show that teachers and learners interpret the same classroom event differently. There is a mismatch between what the teacher instructs and what the learners perceive. It indicates that there is problem in the language teaching and learning process. This can increase the gap between 'input and the learner intake' (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

c) Authenticity of tasks: When we look at the definitions of a task, some of them suggest that a task has to be a real world activity. But there are tasks like describing a picture to someone else so that they can draw the picture, identifying the differences between two pictures, telling a story based on pictures etc. which are unlikely to occur in real life situations. Though the authenticity of such tasks is questioned by some, it is argued that the interaction that takes place while performing these tasks is useful while performing real world tasks.

d) Outcome: one of the characteristic features of a task is that it results in a clear outcome. 'A specified objective' is an essential feature of a task (Crookes, 1986, as cited in Ellis, 2003). But



many a times it is possible to achieve a successful outcome of a task without actually achieving the aim of task. For instance in tasks like spotting the differences between pictures the learners may complete the task without using any language. At times there may not be any pedagogic importance to the outcome of task, what matters is the linguistic and cognitive processes involved in the task.

e) Linguistic deficiency: Learners who are beginners with no linguistic resources find it very difficult to take part in a task. Especially in speaking tasks like role play or describing the differences learners may find it very challenging and strenuous to continue the conversation. They may not understand what the task demands and they may find it hard to make themselves understood while taking part in the task. Ultimately the learner might be de motivated to perform the task and may even lose confidence in himself / herself.

f) Learners' perception: The learner purposes are said to be distributed on a continuum between achievement orientation and survival orientation. If the learner perceives that a task is related closely to his/her needs, they tend to adopt an achievement orientation. Whereas on the other hand if they do not perceive the relevance of the task they adopt survival orientation and put in minimal effort and use the simplest strategy to perform the task.(Breen, 1989 as cited in Murphy, 2003).

g) Learners' needs neglected: Most of the language learners have specific needs. People learn a second language or foreign language, so that it is of some use to them. A new language is learnt for a variety of reasons and not all learners need the same kind of tasks. One particular task may interest a few learners belonging to a particular gender or cultural background, but it may not be of interest to the others.

h) Diverse classes: A class consists of learners with different talents, learning styles and motivation levels. Therefore the tasks prescribed may be relevant for a few learners and for others it may be too difficult and for some others it may be too easy and they may feel that it is a waste of time to perform the task (Skehan, 2002). It is difficult to cater to learners with different levels of previous knowledge at the same time. Learners with low level of knowledge might find the tasks too ambitious and at the same time learners high level of understanding might find the tasks too easy and boring. Research shows that the varied interpretation of the same task by the learners



frustrates the teacher (Wang 1996 as cited in Ellis, 2003). It becomes difficult for the teacher to monitor the tasks performed by the learners at the same time whether it is pair work or group work.

i) Fundamental issues unresolved: Tasks as core activities do not seem to resolve the fundamental issues of language expansion or the correctness of language used. The open-ended oral pair work and group work tasks only seem to improve oral production fluency. Immediate assimilation of the unfamiliar language features introduced in the pre-task phase is also unlikely. Involving all the learners in a task becomes problematic in a heterogeneous class and also when the task is inappropriate to the learners (Littlewood, 2004).

j) The restricted nature of task based learning: This critique does not completely dismiss task based teaching but points at the limitations that are inherent. Six prominent functions of a language are cited in article namely 1) Referential function in which language is used to convey information. 2) Emotive function where language is used to express feelings. 3) Connotative function where language is used to influence the actions of another person. 4) Phatic function where language is used to establish, discontinue or prolong communication or check whether it took place or not. 5) Meta-lingual function where language is used to communicate about the language code. 6) Poetic function where language is used to draw attention to the form (Jacobson, 1960 as cited in Ellis, 2009). Ellis argues that most of the tasks are referential in nature, Role-play tasks can be designed to impart the emotive function and tasks like describing a picture perform the connotative function.

ii) Cultural relativity of task-based teaching: This critique is socio-political in nature. It refers to the cultural and contextual constraints that are problematic in implementing task-based learning. It is argued that “The content of many of the tasks that figure in both research and language teaching materials implicitly espouse the cultural values and norms of the western English-speaking world” (Ellis, 2009). It is observed that the classroom practices used in Task-based teaching and the examples given are all culturally loaded. Some of the tasks are said to be inappropriate in the non-western world. As a form of teaching task based teaching is in conflict with cultural contexts like in China where learning is not perceived as a collaborative and



experimental activity and for them benevolence and respect to the teacher student relationship is considered important.

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