

Activity–Based Language Teaching: Ways For ESL Students’ Better English Language Learning

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Abstract - Teaching English in the non–native context is a challenging task. Task-based learning is an overall approach to language learning that views the tasks that learners do as central to the learning process. It has the advantage of getting the students to use their skills at their current level. English language skills can be developed through its use. It has the advantage of getting the focus of the student toward achieving a goal where language becomes a tool, opportunities are provide to use language freely and flexibly in the expectation that this will consolidate what is being learned and extend its range of applicability. Students gain greater confidence in using the language during such activities. It is a way to bring real world experiences into the classroom by focusing on practical language skills. This paper aims to explore ways of setting tasks in the classroom and to understand how activity – based learning increases learners’ motivation, interest, and performance and active L2 acquisition process.

Keywords - TBLT, Language Skills, activities, Tasks, Performance, SLA

ACTIVITY–BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: WAYS FOR ESL STUDENTS BETTER ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

English plays a vital role in the present scenario as a Second Language and it is a tool for many opportunities that waits for the fresh graduates. Learning English needs constant training and practice. One of the most challenging tasks constantly facing language teachers is how to create the interest and to stimulate the imagination among students so that they can be more motivated to learn. Innovative process of learning should to be explored. In order to capture the interest among students, the teacher can plan activities in the classroom. Early accounts stressed that input was the key factor. The important thing for teachers was to provide high quality and ‘tuned’ language input. Learners should be exposed to language which is varied in form and which is at the edge of their comprehension with careful processing. Given this, the learner's language system would automatically develop without language-focused instruction (Krashen 1985).

Task – Based Language Teaching TBLT has increasingly achieved popularity in recent years and has been recommended as a way forward in English Language Teaching (ELT). It is an overall approach to language learning that views the tasks “that learners do as central to the learning process. The learning process is seen as a set of communicative tasks that are directly linked to the goals”. Nunan (1989) defines a task as “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form”.

He suggests that in all definitions of tasks, one can see communicative language use where the learner focuses on meaning instead of linguistic structure. The term “task-based” certainly covers many different interpretations. So it defines as “a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include functional English i.e. greetings, painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, ordering, requesting, inviting, apologizing, and information sharing, making presentations, and taking part in meetings, interviews, and negotiations etc.

Nunan (1991) outlines few characteristics of a task-based approach to language learning:

- To focus on the tasks of exchanging meaning.
- To require active participation by a learner.
- To emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- To introduce the authentic texts (teaching materials) into the learning situation.
- To provide opportunities for learners to focus not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.
- To enhance the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- To link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Tasks can be analyzed according to the goals, the input data, the activities derived from the input, the settings and roles implied for teacher and learners. Nunan (1989) graphically depicts a way to analyze the various elements of tasks such as goals, input, activities, roles and settings.



TBLT can be easily used at Undergraduate Level. It can be creative and to simply think of a way to turn text reading into a task for the students.

- Ordering and sorting
- Maps
- A brainstorm activity
- A small exercise (close, cross word etc.)
- Picture description
- Opinion exchange tasks
- Problem – Solving
- Class notes
- Puzzles
- Quizzes
- Sharing personal experiences
- Matching exercise with new and difficult vocabulary from the text
- Debate
- JAM
- Group Discussion
- Mingle activities
- Role play
- Pair work etc.

Task-Based Methodology

Task-Based Methodology Framework (Adapted from Willis, Jane 1996 A Framework for Task-Based Learning, Oxford: Longman)

Willis (1996) contributes to the use of tasks in language classroom. According to Willis (1996) “tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome”. Furthermore, Willis presents a TBLT approach where tasks are used as the main focus of the lesson within a supportive framework. She holds that “the aim of tasks is to create a real purpose for language use and to provide a natural context for language study”. The TBL framework consists of three main phases, provides three basic conditions for language learning. They are pre-task, task-cycle and language focus.

In a preliminary activity, the teacher can introduce and “explores the topic, the situation with the group and highlights useful words and phrases”. Tasks may be of various kinds which include brainstorming, Using pictures, mime, ranking exercises, and problem – solving, providing vocabulary, by watching a video clip, or by looking at a text. Useful words and phrases can be highlighted at pre-task. It is up to the facilitator to decide how much language work he/she thinks will be needed by the learners but it is necessary to remember that the purpose of using a piece of material is as a pre-task.

The previous stage will have been leading up to this stage by fully preparing learners both ideologically and linguistically for the task. This part of the task cycle offers learners the chance to use whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task and then to improve their language under the teacher’s guidance while planning their reports on the task. Task Cycle offers learners a holistic experience of language in use. This task cycle will mirror as closely as possible an authentic undertaking of the participants whether the task is performed, displayed, recorded, conducted as a group, or carried out in small groups the focus will be on successful realization of the task. Learners produce or perform or present their tasks. There are three components of a task cycle:

Learners use whatever language they learn, working simultaneously, in pairs or small groups to achieve goals of the task. At this stage the emphasis is on spontaneous, exploratory talk and confidence building within the small group.

It comes after the task and before the report briefly to the whole class how they did the task and the result was, forming the central part of the cycle. The teacher’s role here is that of a language adviser. The emphasis at this stage is on clarity, organization, and accuracy for presentation. Learners plan their reports effectively and maximize their learning opportunities.

It is the natural condition of the task cycle. In this stage learners report the either in written or oral form. So the report stage gives students a natural stimulus to upgrade and improve their language. It presents a very real linguistic challenge to communicate clearly and accurately in language appropriate to the situation.

It allows a closer study of some of the specific features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle. While the task is being carried out, the teacher needs to make notes on the following:

- Can any vocabulary be added?
- Are there any structures that caused misunderstanding or confusion?
- Are there any phrases which could have been expressed differently?
- Can any of the language have been used to better effect?

After the task has been completed, participants look at structures, accuracy, complexity of language and vocabulary etc. Language focus has two components at this level:

a) Analysis

Analysis activities draw attention to the surface forms, finding the words’ and phrases meaning related to the topic. Learners have already become familiar with during the task cycle and

so help them to systematize their knowledge and broaden their understanding. Evaluation of the task will provide solution to these types of question: Was it useful? Was it enjoyable? It provides useful information for teachers when planning further tasks.

b) Practice

Practice activities are based on features of language that have already occurred in previous texts and transcripts or in features that have just been studied in analysis activities. They help the students to remember new phrases and patterns from texts or transcripts of task recordings.

To conclude, the Activities-based language learning is rewarding, intrinsically interesting, and educationally beneficial. It is perhaps one of the most innovative teaching methods because it uses a wide range of tasks to develop communication skills among the students. Using variety of activities in learning is a popular method. Students gain greater confidence in using the language during such activities. They get involved in the task, because the tasks give the feeling of real life situation.

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