

The Effectiveness of TBL in EFL Learners' Performance in Pakistan

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Abstract:

The major concern of language teachers of Pakistan has always been to increase learner's motivation and performance during language classes. The current study is based on a new approach called task-based learning (TBL). This approach is applied to a typical classroom situation (Government Sector) in Pakistan. The main purpose of the implementation of task-based learning is to find out solutions for the certain problems i.e poor learner motivation etc. In this comparative study, EFL learners' opinions as well as language teachers' opinions, regarding the implementation of TBL in traditional language classrooms, are analyzed through questionnaire. The students of the fifth standard at primary level in GG P/S Banner Sharif, Muzaffargarh, Pakistan, are taken as learners of language class. The findings of the study illustrate that variety can be created for the learners by the implementation of TBL approach in Pakistanis EFL classes. Moreover, it makes their learning more effective as TBL tasks increase student's language performance by encouraging student's involvement during tasks based learning. The research organizers propose that Foreign/Second Language Learning is maximized only when students are put into a variety of challenging

tasks, provided with an anxiety free atmosphere, where they get opportunity to interact with their peers and communicate in a purposeful, meaningful context.

Key words: EFL learners, performance, Pakistan, task-based learning

1. Introduction:

The issue of how pedagogical tasks influence the learner's performance in language classroom is one of the most controversial and frequently investigated topics in the field of ELT. Willis (1996) recommends these tasks based activities as the core feature. He emphasizes that tasks provide a supportive methodological framework. It is often seen especially in Pakistan that the language teachers often face various problems. They remain in search of innovation in their classrooms. Student's lack of motivation to the lesson is the general cause of these problems.

This study focuses mainly on the effectiveness of TBL approach. It provides information regarding different techniques of TBL. The purpose of this comparative study is to assess the health of the implementation of TBL within the specific framework. Following research questions are the crux of the current study:

1. What is the effect of TBL on EFL student's classroom performance?
2. What are the students' experiences about TBL?
3. What are the students' opinions about a traditional classroom situation where learning is based on lecture method?

2. Literature Review

In recent years, TBL has acquired progressively more popularity in Pakistani language classrooms. In ELT, the task

based learning approach has been recommended as the most important feature. Prabhu (1987), Nunan (1989), and Willis (1996) have defined the term "Task" in a comprehensive way. These are discussed below in a sequential order.

In the development of TBL, Prabhu holds the first significant position. Awareness of the ELT world to TBL has been his main contribution. Prabhu (1987) describes a task as "an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process" (p.24). In addition to Prabhu, Nunan (1989) prefers the word 'task' as compared to the 'activity'. He is of the view that a task is "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" (p.10). He emphasizes that the use of communicative language can be seen where the learner gives least importance to linguistic structure as his primary concern is "meaning".

Besides Nunan, Willis (1996) argues that "tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (p.23). Moreover, Willis offers a TBL approach where in a supportive framework; the main focus of the lesson is the implementation of tasks. She is of the opinion that "the aim of tasks is to create a real purpose for language use and to provide a natural context for language study" (p.1). This study revolves round the "TBL Model" presented by Willis.

2.1 TBL Model

TBL framework consists of three basic conditions for language learning which are mentioned in a chronological order as follows.

2.1.1 Pre-task

Pre-task introduces the topic to the class, declaring the task activating topic – words and phrases.

2.1.2 Task Cycle

Task cycle provides a chance to the learner to use already known language so as to carry out the task. Then planning the reports on the task, it improves learner's language under teacher's guidance. Lerner experiences the language in use in Task Cycle which has three following components.

- a. Task:** To attain the goals of task, learners work in pairs or small groups. They can use whatever language they can master.
- b. Planning:** planning is the central part of the cycle, occurs between task and report. Here, the teacher plays a role of a language advisor or that of a language counselor or consultant. Learners maximize their learning opportunities by planning their reports effectively.
- c. Report:** Report stag upgrade and improve students' language naturally by enhancing stimulus. Learners, in the class talk about their findings, experiencing the realistic linguistic challenge “to communicate clearly and accurately in language appropriate to the circumstances”.

2.1.3 Language Focus

Language focus is a deep study of some particular features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle. “Learners examine the language forms in the text; look in detail at the use and the meaning of lexical items they have noticed” (Willis, 1986, p.75). Language focus consists of two following components.

- a. Analysis:** Analysis activities focus on the surface forms as learners have already become familiar with

meanings during the task cycle. These activities systemize learners' knowledge and broaden their understanding. Learners reflect on the language already experienced.

- b. Practice:** Practice activities are based on features of language. They have already occurred in previous texts and transcripts or in features that have just been dealt in analysis activities.

With the benefit of hindsight to the definitions, we can suggest the use of tasks in teaching as a supportive and beneficial method. After conducting research, the implementation of tasks in a language classroom context is apparent. A number of language teachers of Pakistan have studied the implementation of TBL and have advised using tasks in the language classrooms, emphasizing that the students' motivation rises through assigned tasks. On looking at the positive results that the use of tasks may bring about in the EFL classroom, it can be said without any hesitation that positive results can be gained by using tasks in the language classrooms of Pakistan.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Action research is the research of this comparative study. In ELT, action research has appeared as a popular research in Pakistan recently. In the Government sector of Pakistan, teacher education is usually based on traditional way of instruction. The typical education system does not emphasize on "student-centered" classrooms. The only reason behind this stance is teacher does not consider task based learning more effective. Unluckily, researchers carried the education out of the class until now.

However, Gibbs (1995) states that "educational development is to do with the intention of improving the

instructor's classroom practice". He further states that "carrying out an action research project contributes much to a lecturer's understanding of her students' and their achievements as a result of changing his/her conception of teaching ". Gibbs notes that "a change essential for sustained pedagogical development" (p.18). He holds that changes that are the result of an action research are always long lasting.

This study consists in an action research project. A new approach TBL is applied in an existing typical classroom of Pakistan. The purpose of the implementation of TBL is to enhance learners' performances. Questionnaires were used for the execution of this action research, to monitor and to evaluate the outcomes. According to Cohen and Manion (1980), "action research takes place when a single teacher, works with her own class as she feels the need to improve her teaching/learning experiences". To support the action research, diaries were used throughout the study.

3.2 Context

The present research was carried out at Government Girls Primary School Banner Sharif, Muzaffargarh, Pakistan, where English is not the source of instruction and Urdu is the students' first language. The examined Students were 63 of different ages like 10 to 13 years. Their EFL learning was made specifically task-based for a trial period of two weeks.

3.3 Instrumentation

The instruments for this study were questionnaires. The questionnaires were made by the researchers. Munn and Drever (1990) are of the opinion that "when the participants respond to the same questions in the same way, the answers become more reliable". Nunan (1989) states that questionnaire is an important tool to investigate any aspect of teaching/learning process. Teachers groom their classroom

practices and enhance their experience by analyzing these questionnaires.

3.4 Data Analysis

The main source for data collection was the questionnaire for the students and teachers of the research group. The questionnaire was consisted of three sections. In the first section demographic questions were included; second section covered the questions, determining the views of EFL learners about English lessons and their attitude towards the foreign language before the implementation of TBL model in their class.

The third section was consisted of questions inquiring the effect of Task Based Learning on EFL student's classroom performance, their opinion about TBL and how they compare their traditional class activities with TBL activities.

As discussed in the literature review, if students are motivated by a teaching approach, they will achieve better outcomes. Given the disengaged nature of the students at GG P/S Banner Sharif, Muzaffargarh, Pakistan, it was hoped that TBL would provide a boost of motivation and accelerate the learning of English language in Pakistan.

The data collected was first coded and then statistically analyzed. The results were interpreted in terms of percentage and bar graphs.

Statistical Analysis

Following findings are based on the rating which has been derived from the given scale.

i.e. SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, N: Neutral, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree

Section A

Section A is based on teachers' profile.

Section B

Sr.#	Specifications	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Students generally feel stressed in English class.	-	-	2 %	4 %	94 %
2	Students generally are unable to comprehend instructions in English.	-	-	1 %	2 %	97 %
3	Students have difficulty memorizing new vocabulary of English.	-	1%	2%	8%	89%
4	Students show less interest in learning based on tasks.	-	-	-	3%	97%
5	Results show the effectiveness of task based learning better as compared to the lecture based method.	96%	1%	3%	-	-

Above rating shows that the tasks based learning reduce students' stress in English class. They not only comprehend instructions given in English rather they increased their vocabulary through cartoons or role plays. Majority of the students took keen interest in learning based on tasks. Generally, the effectiveness of task based learning is far better than the effective of lecture based learning.

Section C

Sr.#	Specifications	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Students feel motivated while participating in simulations, role-play and other activities in English class.	99%	1%	-	-	-
2	Students' performance during task based activities was better than the lecture based lesson.	94%	2%	3%	1%	-
3	The level of stress during English class reduced during task based language classes.	93%	4%	3%	-	-
4	Students learn vocabulary better through cartoons and role-plays.	98%	2%	-	-	-
5	Lecture based lessons help better in achieving the language teaching objectives.	-	1%	3%	8%	88%
6	Task based classes helped students to understand the functions of language better.	93%	5%	2%	-	-
7	Task based learning improved students skills i.e innovation creative writing etc	99%	1%	-	-	-
8	Lecture based learning is comparatively costly than the task based learning. So is strongly opposed in Pakistani classroom.	-	3%	5%	7%	85%

9	Task based learning contributes in the development of the social skills of the students more than the lecture based learning.	95%	2%	2%	1%	-
10	Pakistani teachers recommend task based learning as the most effective learning for the students.	96%	3%	1%	-	-

The findings of section C prove that Students feel motivated while participating in simulations, role-play and other activities in English class. Students' performance during task based activities was better than the lecture based lesson. The level of stress during English class reduced during task based language classes. Students learn vocabulary better through cartoons and role-plays. Task based classes helped students to understand the functions of language better. Task based learning improved students skills i.e innovation creative writing etc. Task based learning contributes in the development of the social skills of the students more than the lecture based learning. In other words, Pakistani teachers recommend task based learning as the most effective learning for the students.

4. Findings

The findings of the comparative study indicate a remarkable change in the attitude of learners towards English language, their motivation level and their performance in English after the use of TBL in their classrooms. It was evident from the data collected both from teachers and students of the research group. According to the Lightbown and Spada (1993), "communicative need is a factor that defines motivation in second language". The findings of the study reveal that in Pakistan, these disengaged students had negative feelings regarding English language and English classes. They used to feel stress using English language in the traditional classrooms where they hardly got a chance to be engaged in a purposeful communication. However, the data of the teachers indicate

that these EFL learners showed a higher degree of motivation and interest during TBL activities.

A large number of students rated their TBL classes as interesting and showed a desire for this pedagogical strategy to be followed throughout the academic session. Majority of the students were of the view that they have actually learnt the use of English language through communicative activities of TBL and rated role play and simulation as the most helpful activities in learning English language in a context.

Willis (1981) suggests “a good friendly interaction between a teacher and the learners as rapport (p.188)”. She also describes that “when there is rapport, it becomes enjoyable for students and the teacher to study together”. By the implementation of TBL, the framework of lesson was completely changed. A number and variety of tasks used in class that increases Students’ motivation as well as their participation in the lesson.

The findings of the study also reveal that students learnt vocabulary of English language better through watching movies, clippings, listening and acting out a dialogue than the traditional book reading.

5. Discussion

The presented comparative study analyzed the role of TBL in the performance as well as motivation of EFL learners in Pakistan. In the light of the findings of the study, we can conclude that both the teachers and the students were highly satiated with the use of TBL in EFL classrooms of Pakistan.

Moreover, it is evident that students feel highly motivated when engaged in activities and language learning is maximized by its use in a meaningful context. It is suggested that in Pakistan, the foreign/second language teachers must use a variety of activities and incorporate technology/media in order to enhance the learning and to keep the students’ interest

in the foreign language. Further, this use of media leaves an imprint in the audio-visual memory of the learners and hence, helps to memorize and provides an aid to understand the usage of any item of the language.

Further, we can conclude from the findings of the study that students do not like to be part of a disengaging traditionally teacher-led language classes. In Pakistan, EFL learners feel stressed in such classes where no attention is given to the learners' style and choice. They do not like the teacher-centered passive classrooms where they hardly get any chance of speaking and sharing their views. Students discard the traditional lecture method of teaching and want to be engaged in task based projects and explore language.

It was quiet obvious that the students felt a change in their classroom after an obvious change in the teaching style of the teacher. Though the students were not familiar with the concept of TBL which became the main cause of this change yet they stated that their teacher gave them different tasks to create opportunities for practice and effective learning.

Students have positive views regarding TBL. They showed a desire of working in groups instead of working alone. They suggested that in language classroom, interaction should be paid more emphasis. This interaction must not be with an individual but among the group.

Carrying out the findings of this comparative study, we can conclude that students' performance and motivation is directly proportional to teacher's positive attitude towards the students. Foreign/Second Language Learning is maximized when students are put into a variety of challenging tasks, provided with an anxiety free atmosphere, where they get opportunity to interact with their peers and communicate in a purposeful, meaningful context.

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Questionnaire

Section A:

Name: _____

Designation: _____

Name of School: _____

Region/Area: _____

Age Group of the Students: _____

Group No (Students): _____

First language of the students: _____

Note: Kindly read the following statements carefully and rate them on the given scale:

SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree N: Neutral D: Disagree SD: Strongly Disagree

Section B

Sr.#	Specifications	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Students generally feel stressed in English class.					
2	Students generally are unable to comprehend instructions in English.					
3	Students have difficulty memorizing new vocabulary of English.					
4	Students show less interest in learning based on tasks.					
5	Results show the effectiveness of task based learning better as compared to the lecture based method.					

Section C

Sr.#	Specifications	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Students feel motivated while participating in simulations, role-play and other activities in English class.					
2	Students' performance during task based activities was better than the lecture based lesson.					
3	The level of stress during English class reduced during task based language classes.					
4	Students learn vocabulary better through cartoons and role-plays.					
5	Lecture based lessons help better in achieving the language teaching objectives.					
6	Task based classes helped students to understand the functions of language better.					
7	Task based learning improved students skills i.e innovation creative writing etc					
8	Lecture based learning is comparatively costly than the task based learning. So is strongly opposed in Pakistani classroom.					
9	Task based learning contributes in the development of the social skills of the students more than the lecture based learning.					
10	Pakistani teachers recommend task based learning as the most effective learning for the students.					