

English Language Teaching

Approaches and Methods

Edited by
Prof. Jaydipsinh K. Dodiya



ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Phone: 23281029, 23244664

Email: sarupandsonsin@hotmail.com

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The Impact of Task-Based Language Teaching:
A Study at Secondary Level in West Godavari
District of Andhra Pradesh

T. Akkiraju & K. RatnaShiela Mani

ABSTRACT

The paper is an attempt to present the purpose, procedure and the findings of the quasi-experimental study conducted as a part of my research on TBLT. The study explores the impact of TBLT on improving the English-speaking skills of secondary level students in comparison with that of Traditional Methods of teaching English besides conducting a random sample study of the English teaching practices at secondary level in West Godavari District. The study concludes that TBLT is more effective than Traditional methods in improving the speaking skills of secondary level students.

Introduction

English is a language of opportunities in all walks of life. In the third world countries like India, English speaking skill is a great asset in social contexts. Across all academic settings, it is a necessary and useful skill for the students to

showcase their talent. However, it was only after the introduction of the New Education Policy (NEP) in the 90s that the importance of oral expression in English was highlighted in the classroom. On the other hand, traditional practices of English teaching like Grammar-Translation Method which give little scope for speaking skills continued in the country. The benefits of modern approaches like Task-Based Language Teaching in improving speaking skills are not realized at all academic stages and in contexts.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT is a 'direct descendant' of the Communicative Approach which emerged as a critical response to the limitations of structural approaches. TBLT belongs to the stronger version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which claims that since language is learnt and acquired through communication, it not only activates the existing knowledge of the learner but also develops the language system itself (Howatt, 1984: 279). TBLT approach aims at second language teaching by engaging learners in 'meaningful tasks' which create opportunities for interactive communication and negotiation of meaning. It proposes to use tasks as the central unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. The primary principle of TBLT is that language learning is nurtured by creating contexts for the learners to use language instead of teaching the language in discrete parts (Ellis, 2009: 222). The principal features of TBLT are:

- Focus on learning how to communicate and interact in the target language.
- Bringing authentic texts into the classroom situation.

- Creating opportunities to concentrate on language and learning process.
- Recognizing the learner's personal experiences as significant contributing elements to classroom learning.
- Linking classroom learning with language use in real-life situation (Nunan, 1991: 279).

Willis recommended a sequence of activities – pre-task, task cycle and post-task – that form the whole procedure of a task in a TBLT class (1996: 56-57). Usually, pre-task includes introduction and instructions while task cycle constitutes task execution, planning, and report. Exposure to model tasks, language focus, and practice are the common features of post-task phase. The present study followed Willis' task framework in designing tasks for the teaching intervention.

Rationale for the Study

In an age of communication, the growing importance of speaking skills in English cannot be overlooked at any stage of education. Particularly, secondary education plays a crucial role in students' lives and provides a number of opportunities to improve speaking skills. Nevertheless, it was observed that the students pursuing their secondary education in English medium from Government schools often fail to communicate in English, even for the basic needs. A significant reason for this situation at secondary stage, particularly in Andhra Pradesh, is the lack of emphasis on speaking skills in the English teaching-learning process. The students have neither practice in, nor evaluation for, English speaking skills. This lack of due focus

on improving speaking skills in English at secondary stage invariably affects the students' performance in the immediate academic setting and in higher education as well.

The present study intends to explore how far TBLT can help in improving the English-speaking skills of secondary students since a review of the research studies on TBLT reveals that it is more effective in improving speaking skills than traditional methods. Among the studies reviewed, there are a few full-length studies on the effect of TBLT on improving the speaking skills of secondary level students too. Torky (2006), Murad (2009), Albino (2017), and Sudeepthi (2013) explored the impact of TBLT on developing the speaking skills of secondary level students and noticed that the students who were taught through TBLT improved their speaking skills in English significantly.

Aim and Purpose of the Study

The aim of the present study is to explore the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching approach on improving the English-speaking skills of the secondary level students in comparison with that of traditional methods and to prove its advantages for both teachers and students at secondary stage. The purpose of the study is to enhance the speaking skills of secondary level students by creating awareness about the effectiveness of TBLT approach among the English teachers at secondary level and ultimately extending its benefits to the students.

Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To identify the problems associated with the teaching and learning of English-speaking skills at secondary level in Government High Schools of West Godavari District.
2. To explore the impact of TBLT on improving English speaking skills among Secondary Level learners.
3. To investigate whether TBLT is more effective than traditional approaches in developing speaking skills.

Procedure of the Study

The study was conducted in three phases: preliminary study, pilot study, and main study. In the preliminary study, data was collected from a random sample of forty-six English teachers on classroom practices. A random sample of forty-six students were also administered a questionnaire aimed at understanding the students' attitudes to learning English, and interest in speaking activities. As a part of the preliminary study, a speaking skill test with ten questions was also conducted to fifty students for assessing their English-speaking skills. After obtaining positive results for TBLT in the pilot study, the main study was taken up.

The main study was conducted as an experiment on a sample of ninety students, following *Pretest Posttest Control Group Design*. The sample students were randomly selected and assigned to two groups with forty-five for each. A common pretest was administered to the students of the two groups in order to evaluate their English-speaking proficiency in terms of *Grammar and Vocabulary*, *Pronunciation*, and *Interactive Communication* which are the

three criteria for assessment from Cambridge English: Assessing Speaking Performance – Level A2 which is one of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels described by the Council of Europe (Cambridge English, 2011: 2). It consists of eight communicative tasks. The entire pre-testing process was audio-recorded, and the students' oral performance was transcribed. Later, using the quantified data, the statistical analysis was performed through *Z-test*.

For the teaching intervention, seven lessons including prose and poetry were selected from the prescribed English textbook *Our World Through English* (Director of School Education, 2017). In the backdrop of the selected lessons, ten tasks were designed on the model of Willis's task cycle (1996: 56-57) with the objective of developing the students' speaking skills in English. The students of the experimental group were engaged in the tasks designed for this purpose, whereas the students of the control group were given regular teaching through traditional methods for a period of forty-five days. At the end of the teaching program, a common posttest was administered to the students of the two groups for verifying and assessing the effect of TBLT in comparison with that of traditional methods on the learners' speaking skill, and the results were analyzed with the help of *Z-test*.

Analysis and Interpretation

In Table 1, *Z* calculated value $|z|$ was compared with *Z* critical value and found that *Z* calculated value is less than *Z* critical value in all the criteria. This reveals that there is no statistically significant difference between the pretest scores of the control group and experimental group

TABLE 1
Pretest Means of Both Groups

Assessment criterion	X_1		X_2		Comparison	Result
Grammar and Vocabulary	8.111	3.128	8.755	2.813	$ z = 1.027 \leq Z_c = 1.96$	N.S.
Pronunciation	9.066	3.466	9.111	3.027	$ z = 0.066 \leq = 1.96$	N.S.
Interactive Communication	8.466	3.448	8.844	3.412	$ z = 0.523 \leq = 1.96$	N.S.
Overall performance	25.644	9.397	26.711	8.805	$ z = 0.556 \leq = 1.96$	N.S.

(N.S. = Not Significant)

TABLE 2
Pre and Posttest Means of Experimental Group

Assessment criterion	X_1		X_2		Comparison	Result
Grammar and Vocabulary	8.755	2.813	26.644	2.985	$ z = 29.258 \geq = 1.96$	S
Pronunciation	9.111	3.027	19.977	3.415	$ z = 15.973 \geq = 1.96$	S
Interactive Communication	8.844	3.412	24.422	2.878	$ z = 23.411 \geq = 1.96$	S
Overall performance	26.711	8.805	70.977	8.287	$ z = 24.558 \geq = 1.96$	S

(S = Significant)

in relation to the criteria *Grammar and Vocabulary*, *Pronunciation*, *Interactive Communication*, and also the overall performance.

In Table 2, Z calculated value $|z|$ was compared with Z critical value and found that the Z calculated value is greater than Z critical value in all the criteria. The analysis revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest means of the experimental group, indicating that the English-speaking skill of the students of the experimental group significantly improved from the pretest to the posttest, obviously due to the teaching intervention through TBLT.

The students of the experimental group had a different learning experience in the TBLT classes they attended during the teaching intervention. They showed great enthusiasm in speaking activities as if they were participating in such kind of tasks for the first time in the English class. The analysis reveals that the students improved their accuracy in terms of grammar. In the pretest, they displayed a very limited control of grammatical forms and tense patterns. They used 'womens' and 'sheeps' in place of 'women' and 'sheep'. They often missed 'be' forms in their speech. They used isolated words, broken phrases, and familiar word groups instead of full-length sentences. They frequently switched over to their mother tongue or mixed both. Majority of the students failed to frame correct question forms. The following examples reveal the students' poor basics in grammar and their inability to continue in English:

Introducing oneself

- Yuhitha/9th class/no class/four. My father name is

- Nagaraju. My mother name is Venkatalakshmi. My brother name is Mahankali.
- My name is Suresh/9th class English medium/Play games/Four members. My mother, my father, my sister ... *nenu* (I).

Talking about favorite festival

- *Deepaavali (Diwali)*. Crackers *kaalchukovachhu* (we can fire crackers).
- Christmas. Christmas is a very good. Christmas is a nice festival.

Talking about a friend

- Revathi. Good girl. No pending works. Silent girl.
- Satish. *Manchigauntaadu* (nice boy). *Buddigaauntaadu* (good boy). *Chalamanchivaadu* (very nice boy). 9th class. *Baanechaduvuthaadu* (He studies well).

Spotting the differences between two images

- Nehru is cap, Gandhi is no cap. Nehru is hands spect, Gandhi is hands books. Nehru is ... shirt. Gandhi is no shirt. Nehru is cap. Gandhi is no cap.

Describing the activities in the pictures

- Student is...these students is pledge. These students is lunch. These students is reading. These young girls and kabaddi. Young girls and go to houses.

Asking questions about the picture

- Satish. What are ... How many plants? How many

houses? How many women? How many goats and buffaloes?

(Source: Primary Data)

Nevertheless, in the posttest, they showed a good degree of control of grammatical forms, especially tense patterns and the use of 'be' forms. They continued to speak in English, though there were minor mistakes noticed. They improved in framing questions also. The examples below show their improved performance in grammar:

Introducing oneself

- My name is Yuhitha. I am studying 9th class. My school name is ZPHS School, Chinamiram. My mother name is Venkata Lakshmi. My father name is Nagaraju. My brother name is Mahankali.
- I am Danduri Suresh. I am studying 9th class English medium. We are four in our family. My father is a farmer. My mother is a homemaker. My two brothers are studying. My hobbies are drawing and singing.

Talking about a favorite sportsperson

- My favorite player is Sehwag. He is a great batsman. He made 24 centuries in tests. He is retired now.

Talking about the school

- Our school is ZPHS School, Chinamiram. Our head master is John Babu sir. We have 20 teachers. We have 500 students. We have a small ground. We have three buildings. Our teachers are very good.

Interviewing a favorite film star

- My name is K. Satish ... my favorite cine star is Prabhas.
- Who is your first heroine?
- What is your first film?
- What is your next film?

(Source: Primary Data)

Their engagement in the accomplishment of the designed tasks during the teaching intervention helped them improve their control of grammatical forms. Their vocabulary base was also widened as they were engaged in the teaching program based on TBLT. In the pretest, sometimes, they could not respond to the questions for lack of English words, or used mother tongue. Some of them used Telugu equivalents 'topi', 'kallajodu', 'kallu', 'meka', 'thaapeemestri' etc. in place of English words – cap, spectacles, eyes, goat, and mason. But in the posttest, they noticeably improved their vocabulary and properly responded to the contextual needs. They used relevant nouns and descriptive adjectives where required. For example:

- (Introducing) Hi sir! I am Varshini. I am studying in 9th E/M. We have 4 members in my family. My father is auto driver. My mother is homemaker. I have one sibling.... I have one sibling. My hobbies are playing games, reading book and watching TV.
- (Talking about a sportsperson) My favourite sportsperson is Sania. She is from Hyderabad. She was born in Hyderabad. She is a famous tennis player. She got many medals for India.

(Source: Primary Data)

The students improved their skills in interactive communication too. They developed strategies to sustain communication. In the pretest, they faced difficulties in maintaining simple exchanges. Often, they looked for prompts or switched over to the mother tongue. However, in the posttest, they were able to maintain simple exchanges, using conversational techniques and strategies like back-tracking, pausing, self-correcting, and using cohesive devices. They did not look for assistance, and restrained themselves from switching over to the mother tongue. They took time to respond but continued the dialogue. The following expressions show some of the strategies and devices employed by the students:

- *(Talking about a goal)* My...I want to become a doctor...I serve the poor people.
- *(Giving directions to a friend)* You see...you can see PP road. You turn right side/ First, you take right. Go for five minutes. Stop at Abhiruchi hotel. Then, turn left.
- *(Talking about the school)* My school name is...our school name is ZPHS, Chinamiram.
- *(Talking about a sportsperson)* He is very sincere and hard man.... I mean hardworking.

(Source: Primary Data)

The students showed improvement in pronunciation too but in comparison to the other two criteria, less improvement was observed in pronunciation because it requires more specific efforts and longer duration of teaching program to achieve improvement in pronunciation. In the pretest, they did not display any control over phonological features. The influence of the

mother tongue was conspicuous in terms of pronunciation, accent, and intonation. They pronounced 'r' apparently even in the words where it is silent. Though English words end in consonant sound, the students pronounced them like Telugu words which mostly end in vowel sound. They added a long-drawn 'uḍ' or short 'u' sound at the end of certain words. For example:

- (Talking about a festival) Christmas is very nice *anduu* (*and*)so many friends. *Andu* (*and*)happiness.
- Christmas (strongly pronouncing 't') Christmas I *liku* (*like*).

(Source: Primary Data)

In the posttest, they showed some observation of intonation patterns, and their pronunciation of words improved to a considerable level. There were sincere efforts to improve the accent too. Finally, the output from the teaching program was impressive, and the improvement in the students' English-speaking skill from the pretest to the posttest was quite encouraging.

In Table 3, Z calculated value $|z|$ was compared with Z critical value and found that Z calculated value is greater than Z critical value. The analysis proved that the difference between the posttest means of the two groups of students in relation to the criteria *Grammar and Vocabulary*, *Pronunciation*, *Interactive Communication*, and also the overall performance is statistically significant. The English speaking proficiency of the students in the experimental group significantly improved after the teaching intervention.

TABLE 3
 Posttest Means of Both Groups

Assessment Criterion	X_1	X_2	Comparison	Result		
Grammar and Vocabulary	8.066	2.976	26.644	2.985	$ z = 29.567 \geq 1.96$	S
Pronunciation	9.044	3.238	19.977	3.415	$ z = 15.584 \geq 1.96$	S
Interactive Communication	7.488	3.493	24.422	2.878	$ z = 25.099 \geq 1.96$	S
Overall performance	24.6	8.852	70.977	8.287	$ z = 25.657 \geq 1.96$	S

(S = Significant)

Findings of the Study

Through the present study, it was found that:

- The students of both control and experimental groups possess nearly the same level of speaking skills in English before the teaching intervention began.
- The students of the experimental group improved their speaking skills in English from the pretest to the posttest due to the treatment given through TBLT.
- TBLT was more effective than traditional methods in developing the speaking skills of the students.

The findings of the study are in congruence with the previous studies conducted by Torky (2006), Murad (2009), Albino (2017), and Sudeepthi (2013) who had undertaken full-length studies on the students of Secondary Standard.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the teachers who follow TBLT approach in English language teaching can improve the speaking skill of their students very effectively as it was illustrated through this quasi-experimental study. The teachers who can design tasks appropriate to their lessons and contexts are sure to receive better results than those who conform to the traditional methods. Thus, the present study identified the gaps in the teaching and learning of English-speaking skills at secondary level of education in the Andhra Pradesh context. By conducting an experiment on the impact of TBLT, it showed to the teachers and the students the benefits of adopting Task-Based Language Teaching approach in teaching and learning of English-speaking skills.

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PHONES: 23281029, 23244664

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