



# SIGNIFICANCE OF TASKS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING & LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT:

This study demonstrates that tasks are an essential part of teaching English language. The paper also serves as an eye-opener to many issues on how a task-based and skill-based syllabus ensures a communicative or interactive approach of teaching. Through task-based teaching, it is explored that all the aspects of language like prose, poetry, grammar and vocabulary can be taught in an interesting manner. The paper tries to analyse that the various language learning skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing which are also enhanced effectively through the task-based method of teaching.

**KEYWORDS:** Tasks, Grammar, Language, Poetry, Prose, Skills, Vocabulary.

## INTRODUCTION:

Language learning in classrooms should promote the formation of positive attitude to language learning in general. It should form a good basis for learners in English language classrooms. English language learning should result in the acquisition of some appropriate elements of the actual language studied. The basis of Task-Based training method includes activity-based training. A task is 'an activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process' (Prabhu 1987).

Tasks should give meaning and purposeful learning. It must involve students actively. They must be designed in such a way so that it has clear language learning goals, coherence, and unity for learning. Using the language is the best way of learning to use it. Interaction between the students helps in the language learning process. Different kinds of communicative tasks can be used in order to teach the various skills of language like listening, speaking,

reading and writing. A task-based language teaching process can be used to teach the various aspects of a language such as grammar, vocabulary, poetry and prose effectively.

## TEACHING GRAMMAR

While teaching grammar, the tasks should be used as a central part of the students' learning process. Grammar is perhaps so serious and central in learning another language that various methods should be adopted which will focus student energy on the task of mastering and internalising it. Teachers can design simple to complex tasks for teaching parts of speech, tenses, subject-verb agreement etc which will keep the students engaged in the learning process.

The conclusions that students need to derive from grammar studies is that it is an important instrument of deductive reasoning. It cannot be denied that students learn to create strong arguments through different grammatical structures. Keyser conveys this idea through lesson plan examples that show how drawing distinctions in the English language enables students to "analyze and criticize statements which use this distinction implicitly" (Keyser, 44).

## TEACHING VOCABULARY

Vocabulary teaching is a lot more than just teaching words. It is appropriate to focus most classroom attention on teaching and practising the words that learners may need to use themselves, rather than just to understand. They should also be taught how to make educated guesses as to the meaning of an unfamiliar word by using clues from the text and from the formation of the word itself. Incorporating several tasks can do this.

Charts containing colourful pictures can be used in the classroom to make the students guess and learn new words by looking at them. This type of task is used by most of the language teachers. Vocabulary is seen as an essential component of reading proficiency' (Richards and Theodore, 38). In order to teach reading skills, various tasks can be designed by the teacher related to skimming and scanning of textbook materials in English language classrooms.

## TEACHING POETRY

Literature could include a modern poem, a song, lyrics etc. Students are still exposed to and entertained by lullabies and nursery rhymes during the most formative stages of their lives. This early conditioning clearly has an effect on our ability to play with language and to recognize and appreciate appealing patterns of sound, rhythm and wordplay in later life.

This becomes the background against which poetry based on lessons can be suggested for readers to play with, adapt and transform to meet the needs of teaching situation. Many tasks can be planned along these lines when a lesson based on a poem is taught to the students. Audio or videos can be used to teach rhymes or jingles. The students can

also be encouraged to write their own poems using their creativity. 'Poetry's task is to reconcile us to the world-not to accept it at face value or to assent to things that are wrong, but to reconcile one in a larger sense, to return us in love, the province of the imagination, to the scope of our mortal lives' (Alexander 2013).

## TEACHING PROSE

For teaching prose, fun way of teaching must be adopted. It helps them to realise that the process of learning a new language besides being cognitive is also affective. Tasks can make lesson planning easier. They can be inserted in the programme with very little preparation, especially if we have made materials that can be used more than once. Including tasks while teaching prose lessons help to control the rhythm of the lesson and get a group of unmotivated students to participate and be more receptive to the rest of the lesson. 'We can compare prose to walking, moving from one place to another on the surface of the earth, getting the world's daily work done' (Billows, 1961:233).

Now let us see how the four basic skills in English language teaching (listening, speaking, reading, writing) can be enhanced using in a task- based approach.

## LISTENING SKILLS

The first and foremost important skill in acquiring the new and second language is listening with understanding. She/he has to provide the students with plenty of listening experiences. Through tasks the learner is alerted to look for specific meanings, related to a task, which he/she must perform. This encourages them to listen selectively, extracting only information that is relevant to the task. The emphasis must be on tasks where the communicative purpose is practical, rather than simple interest or curiosity.

'Listening Skills helps in the learning of structure through the practice of patterns of sound, order and form, rather than by explanation' (Brooks 1964). A variety of listening tasks would enable students to become active listeners thereby providing situations that allow them to learn new words, pronunciation and grammatical structures.

## SPEAKING SKILLS

Language is best learned when the language is used in an unconscious way. The stress is on communication as a means to the mastery of the language. It is not English for communication but English through communication. Different aspects like, stress, intonation, gesture and body language also convey a lot of meanings in speech. These should lead on to free communicative tasks.

The students can be given simple topics and can be encouraged to speak. The reason for inability of students to speak in English can be due to lack of practice. Another inhibiting factor is the teacher's insistence on accuracy. In

the initial stages, fluency is more important than accuracy and the student must be encouraged to experiment and use whatever language he/she has learnt. It is also important to choose topics that students will like and situations that they will find worthwhile.

Speech was regarded as the basis of language, and structure was viewed as being at the heart of speaking ability. 'Our principal classroom task in the teaching of English structure will be the oral practice of structures. This oral practice of controlled sentence patterns should be given in situations designed to give the greatest amount of practice in English speech to the pupil' (Pittman 1963:179).

## READING SKILLS

There is relationship between reading and other language skills such as listening, speaking and writing, especially the last skill for written English is to be utilized for developing reading skills. The ability to understand the written language will be the most useful skill for them. Like the listening skill, reading is also a receptive skill. Ultimately the cultivation of reading ability will make students love the English language itself.

As Nunan (1988:256) writes, 'We interpret what we read in terms of what we already know, and we integrate what we already know with the content of what we are reading'. The tasks framed for reading should integrate the learning of spellings and grammar of the language along with vocabulary.

## WRITING SKILLS

Students must know the differences between mother tongue and English alphabet. Students must learn the patterns of English alphabet. From the patterns, they learn the small letters and their joiners in Italic writing. Introducing the students to a number of tasks and exercises that would motivate writing practises can enhance the writing skills of the students. The teacher can teach various strokes of writing to the pupils. The students must be told that legibility, speed and beauty form the characteristic features of a good handwriting. Giving free writing practises will also encourage them. Students must be motivated to make use of the cursive writing textbooks.

It is seen that task provides opportunity for a meaningful and purposeful learning. It involves students actively. They are designed in such a way so that it has clear language learning goals, coherence and unity for learning. The various types of tasks discussed in this chapter helps in the second language classroom by creating situations where the students want and need to communicate.

Writing is seen as a process of encoding carried out with a reader in mind. The overall organization is considered in relation to audience and purpose (Hedge 1988). Sometimes, students might not write with a reader in mind but they should understand the purpose of writing tasks in the classroom. The formation of words and linking of words in a sentence is the focus of writing for English language learners.

## Conclusion

This study exemplifies that tasks are an integral part of teaching English. No longer are exercises the mere accompaniment to the explanation of a concept, which is given through words; tasks have become the basic vehicle for explanatory work. Through task-based teaching, it is clear that all the aspects of language like prose, poetry, grammar and vocabulary can be instilled in the students without their awareness of learning a new language. It is seen that the various language learning skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing are also enhanced effectively through the task-based method of teaching. Task-based teaching has been proved to be successful in the recent years by most of the English language teachers. The student becomes the center in the teaching process. Therefore, when a task-based teaching is adopted, the teaching is learner directed. This makes the students feel that they are very important which boosts their morale and improves interaction amongst themselves and with the teachers.

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