

# IMPACT OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG ENGINEERING STUDENTS: A TRY-OUT

<sup>1</sup>Saranraj L & <sup>2</sup>Ebenezer Sam Paul R

<sup>1&2</sup>Assistant Professor of English, MepcoSchlenk Engineering College, Sivakasi

Email id: saraniyc@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to explore the learners' interest in task-based learning amongst rural engineering students in private technical institutions. A convenience sampling technique has been used in this study. The data for this study was observed through classroom observation methods from sixty-one first-year engineering students irrespective of all domains. The findings of this study revealed that task-based language learning is one of the best alternative methods for effective L2 learning. In addition, the alternative method promotes learner autonomy and creates interest in learning the second language through various classroom activities.*

**Keywords:** task-based learning, observation, L2 learning, tertiary learners, motivation

## **Introduction**

Task refers to any activity that requires a student to do something related to what he/she has learned previously. To promote second language learning, Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been developed in 1980 (Shabani et al., 2014). The objective of this study was to engage the students with tasks, related to what they have learned and made the learning experience learner-centric. Prabhu (1987) delivered that "task is an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought". L2 learning is nothing but "arising from particular tasks that students do in the classroom" (Cook, 2010). Nunan (1989) described that "task-based learning is a classroom work, which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language". Crooks (1986) defined TBLT as "a piece of work or activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work or used to elicit data for research". "Task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective" (Bygate, Skehan, and Swain., 2013).

The majority of L2 learners feel that conventional language learning practices are ineffective and monotonous. Therefore, to find an alternative method in language learning, tasks/activities were carried out in the classroom based on the learning materials. Through these tasks, students can work together, creating an interactive atmosphere in the classroom.

As the learners have minimal exposure to the language, simulation of real-life situations in classroom pave way for effective learning.

### **Literature review**

Active learning is more effective in comparison with passive learning as it emphasizes action through exercises. The major features in task-based learning are a) involves reality in language use, b) focuses on meaning, c) engages cognitive process and d) enhances communication in the target language. Krashen (1982) stated that the "Input hypothesis" is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'. "According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses when he/she receives second language 'input' that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. For example, if a learner is at a stage 'i', then acquisition takes place when he/she is exposed to 'Comprehensible Input' that belongs to level 'i + 1'. We can then define 'Comprehensible Input' as the target language that the learner would not be able to produce but can still understand". This study is carried out based on the input hypothesis.

Attar et al., (2010) proved that the traditional method failed to foster communication skills in the second language. Whereas Task-based learning brings the real situation and creates an effective learning environment in the classroom. Similarly, Suntharesan (2014) carried out an experimental study to promote the communicative competence of L2 learners by using task-based language teaching. The results proved that tasks in the language classroom create motivation and avoid monotony among learners. Littlewood (2007) described that interactive learning is more effective than a teacher-centered approach as it helped the learners to be active and independent in the classroom. It is essential for the learner to understand the importance of self-initiation in the learning process. Ruso (1999) carried out a study with fifty-five students who learn English as a Foreign Language at tertiary learners'. The result revealed that task-based learning creates interest and improvements in their classroom. In addition, Chen et al., (2019) carried out a study to measure the effectiveness of the TBLT method and assessment intensive reading amongst first undergraduate English major students. The Mixed research method (Questionnaire & Semi-structured interview) was used in this study. The result showed that there occurred phenomenal changes amongst Chinese English learners and benefited the Chinese learners to accelerate English learning process.

An experimental study with sixty Iranian EFL learners on the effect of task-based learning has been carried out. The result revealed that learners who are engaged in task-based learning showed remarkable improvement in learning than the controlled group (Tabrizi, 2011). Furthermore, Chua et al., (2020) applied a mixed research design to identify the impact of TBLT amongst 52 non-native Mandarin learners. The result exposed that TBLT increases the learning level as well as their motivation. Kiernan et al., (2004) examined that the experimental study of cell phones

in task-based learning proved very effective among EFL learners. The result revealed that there is improvement among learners' communication skills outside the classroom. In contrast, AkbarnetajShoob et al., (2019) carried out an experimental study between TBLT and TBILT (Task-based Interactive Language Teaching) among 320 University students for 20 periods. The result showed that TBILT group learners are more proficient and viable to complete the task than the TBLT group. Even though the learners have different educational milieu, they have an intention to achieve proficiency in the second language (Pandian, 2002; Ismail, 2011). In addition, a classroom observation is "developmental rather judgemental" (Willams, 1989). This study is done with students from a rural background and focuses only on the observation technique.

### **Objective**

The major objective of this study is to examine the effects of task-based language learning among tertiary level rural technical students and the impact it has on the level of motivation.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The research design for this study is a qualitative research design. Non-probability and Convenience sampling method has been used in this study. The first year B.Tech students from the private technical institution from various disciplines participated in this study a total of sixty-one students participated in this study. All the participants were native speakers of Tamil (regional) language, but they have started learning the English language from the first standard onwards. All the participants in this study scored less cut-off marks in the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination. The participants were thirty-one female and thirty male between the age group of 18 to 21. As Reed & Bergemann, 2005 have suggested classroom observation acts as "the bridge between the worlds of theory and practice" and hence it is used as instrumentation for this study.

#### **Data Collection**

The researchers gave language tasks in the classroom and observed the performance of the learners through observation field notes. The duration of the process was twenty-five hours. The following tasks as given as activities:

- Word games
- Chinese whisper
- Train sentences
- React to the command
- Word building

- Storytelling
- Jumbled sentences into a paragraph
- Memorable day in your life
- Describing an object
- Group Discussion

The students were able to acquire basic knowledge of the tasks and their expressions. It also increased the confidence level and critical thinking.

## **Results and discussion**

Observations were made through 25 hours of classes with various tasks among sixty-one L2 learners. The researchers observed the performance and behavior of the students during the initial session and after the continuous assessment of tasks. On the first day of the class, researchers discussed the role and importance of tasks in learning a Second Language. To motivate the learners in the language class, word game was played as a group activity. The researchers give a word and ask the learners to come up with a new word and that too with the last letter of the given word. The result of this activity revealed that most of the learners used only basic vocabulary rather advanced one. Similarly, the Chinese whisper was given as a task to the learners. The researchers divided the class into two groups and a separate sentence was given to each group. They were asked to whisper the sentences to the person sat next to him/her. The last person in the classroom was to say the sentence aloud, which was entirely different from what the facilitators gave. This activity revealed that the students want to use their own words if they had forgotten the original word.

Apart from the group activities, individual activities were also given to the learners such as storytelling, a memorable day in your life, react to the command, etc. The researchers observed the learners' performance in each activity. It was found that most of the learners had a positive attitude towards learning the language but they felt nervous to communicate their ideas. Similarly, tertiary students felt nervous, while speaking inside the classroom (Saranraj et al., 2016). After continuous tasks, there is slight improvement found among the students and they were trying to overcome the anxiety. The activities through video games (Chang, 2017) and virtual learning engage the learners to work in a collaborative manner and do activities efficiently, it helped to reduce the learners' anxiety (Saranraj et al., 2016). From the overall result the L2 learners showed active participation in task-based language learning and there is a prominent difference observed between the initial and the final day activities.

## **Conclusion**

TBLT activities engage learners in simulated real-life scenarios. As it was done spontaneously in the classroom learners participate with improved levels of

motivation and they were able to enrich their vocabulary without memorizing. The students who listen to these activities also enrich their language skills naturally, by just observing the situation and using the appropriate word with the help of the facilitator. This study is limited to the observation method and rural technical students. This observation method could extend to an experimental method for further enhancement of the students' performance in language learning.

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