

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS AT A DISTRICT IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract: *Task-based language teaching is an acceptable method of teaching learning process proposed by Prhabu in 1987 and has been effectively used since then. However, in order to see the applicability of this method in English learning in the Pakistani context, research is needed to know the perceptions of teachers' teaching at secondary school level in the government schools of District Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The objectives of this research paper are to explore the general perceptions of the English teachers, the effectiveness of TBLT and their suggestions. In order to achieve the objectives of this study mixed questionnaire was administered to 16 English teachers at secondary schools in the urban area of district Mardan. Data were analyzed using mean, mode, standard deviation and frequency. It was found that TBLT is more effective than a traditional language teaching methodology. The study highly recommended the use of TBLT for English teachers teaching at secondary school in Pakistan students for English language learning skills.*

Keywords: Language Teaching, Methodology; English Language, Perceptions of English Teachers, Pakistan

Research Area: Social Sciences

Paper Type: Research Paper

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is an internationally recognized language. Due to its use and need of education achievements many struggles are carried out across the world, especially in the developed countries. The English language is a means of communication and interaction throughout the world. The importance of the English language is recognized everywhere. Due to its advancements and basic requirements, English language in Pakistan is a part of the syllabus from class 0 to the entire academic career. It is even helpful in one's future prospects. In Pakistan, the English language is taught as a second language. The subject of English is compulsory for all stages from class 0 to graduation.

There are four skills in the English language i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking that are needed to be developed for competency over the English language with regards to its applicability. For the learning of English language, various efforts have been made by researchers, curriculum developers and the government in Pakistan from time to time. The government of Pakistan has launched various education plans for the improvement of the education system in which English language learning is given prime place.

Keeping in view the advancement of English language learning the task-based instruction is a step towards getting competency over the language. This has been a successful teaching methodology of learning of the English language as the previous researches have shown its applicability and usefulness. The learning of English language mostly depends upon the teaching methodologies. Teaching methodology and a conducive environment is required for language learning.

Task-based language teaching has been used since the 1980s. The English language teachers are concerned about various methodologies to be adopted for better understanding of the English language where the target language is learned as a second language or for EFL/ESL. The continuous efforts of the teachers and policy makers have made considerable changes with the passage of time due to which the teaching of English language has become students' center rather than teacher centered (Gong & Luo, 2003). After Prabhu has introduced the Task-based English language techniques the method has given wide range by various researchers and termed the method more effective for second language learners across the globe. In the beginning, this approach was only for communicative purposes but now with advancements, it has been used in the field of sociolinguist, psycholinguist and in the theory of second language acquisition. Relevant academic work has been published by well-known researchers such as Breen, Candlin, Long, Nunan, Ellis, Willis and Skuhan. Similarly, various countries such as China, Hong Kong, US, Canada and Singapore use Task-based language teaching.

TBLT is students centered language teaching. Previous researchers were of the opinion that Task-based language teaching is effective as in this method all students are involved in activities. TBLT includes the various procedure, goal and objectives as well as it supports content-based and meaning-based task rather than linguistic forms (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Murphy, 2003, Skehan, 2003, Littlewood, 2007)

The purpose of this research article was to investigate the general perceptions of the English teachers, the effectiveness of TBLT and their suggestions. In order to know the perceptions of English teachers and their suggestions mix questionnaires were distributed among them. The data were collected and analyzed accordingly and the results and recommendations have been highlighted in the forthcoming discussions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Task-Based language teaching is used as a methodology of English language teaching across the globe. In the term Task-based Language Teaching, 'Task' is a keyword, which is used widely in different meanings. The term 'Task' has been presented by various researchers with various definitions; for example, Richards, Platt and Weber (1985), Long (1985), Prabhu (1987), Nunan (1989), Willis (1996) and Skehan (1998). The definition of the term 'Task' has been simplified in the 21st century by Ellis (2003). However, 'situations, activities, target results, meaning and language' the term has in-depth. The task in research refers to the task doing activity in English by the students in the classroom.

Task-based language teaching is known in various terms as task-based teaching approach, task-based learning, task-based instruction, task-based language learning, task-based English learning etc. Task-based language teaching is adopted in this research study because it is related to the teaching of English language in Pakistan. Task-based learning can be used in teaching and learning process of any subject as it is mainly concerned with activities carried out by the students and most importantly it is effective in learning of English language because the learners automatically use the language while busy in activities (Frost, 2007).

The word task-based language teaching is commonly used in China by the English teachers. The definition of task-based language teaching in '*English Curriculum Standard*' of China as quoted by Shuai Feifei & Li Chenzhi (2013) is given below;

“Learning is motivated by solid learning task according to Task-based Language Teaching, accordingly, learning process is characterized by finishing tasks, and that effects of teaching are evaluated instead of test scores, rather by presenting the results of tasks given to the students. Students must be compelled that English should be learnt by doing which they may realize. The language proficiency of students should be developed by using the newly-learned language to do things. The students must be guided in such a way that they realize, that the objective of language learning is, to use it (Chen, 2003, pp. 95–96)”.

According to Long (2015), the work which is undertaken for oneself or others is called a task. This task can be free of cost or some reward. The task is defined by Swain (2001), as activities that focus on meaning while using language. Researchers have termed the word task in various meanings which may be helpful in real-world or some time useful for pedagogical tasks and a task which is planned properly Nunnan (2004), Ellis (2003).

The role of a teacher is very important in task-based language teaching process. It is not even possible without a prominent role played by the teachers. TBLT can only be successful with the involvement of English teachers. Language learning is a process in which the learners and teachers actively participate in-class activities. Therefore the role of teachers in implementing TBLT cannot be denied Nunnan (2004), Willis (1996).

Task-based language teaching is an approach towards communication based performance. This method improves the communication skills of an individual due to which it is necessary to be implemented in a government school for overall language performance of students. This method is highly in practice in China for improvements of the speaking skills of the learners. Researchers have declared TBLT more effective method of teaching of English language. Zee Zhang (2007) has noted various factors responsible for weak performance in the learning of the second language. He divided students in different categories in terms of language learning of Chinese students. These factors are; students, teachers, course books, and environment related which cause failure in students' learning of the second language. The same classification was also made by Zheqing Kong (2009).

Therefore, TBLT is given weightage to improve the speaking skills of Chinese students. In task-based language teaching the students are the main focus. The task or activity should be designed, arranged in such a way which meets the goal and objectives of students' learning situations. The task must include, students, teachers' role and procedure that can help in improvements of students' language performance Nunan (2011).

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study aimed to investigate the English teachers' perception of secondary school at district Mardan a city in Pakistan, to know the effectiveness and applicability of Task-Based English language teaching and suggestions according to their perceptions about TBLT.

4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were as under;

1. To know about the general perception of English teachers teaching to the students at the secondary level in a government school in district Mardan, KP, Pakistan
2. To investigate the effectiveness of TBLT in government schools in district Mardan, KP, Pakistan, at the secondary level

3. To explore English teachers suggestions and their recommendations about TBLT in government schools in district Mardan at the secondary level

4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the purpose of data collection was as under;

i. Population

- a. All male government schools in district Mardan, KP, Pakistan
- b. All English teachers teaching to secondary school students of a government school in district Mardan, KP, Pakistan

ii. Sample

Simple random sampling technique was used for taking sampling. 16 English teachers of secondary schools of government in district Mardan were randomly selected.

iii. Instruments

Mix questionnaire was administered to all randomly selected English teachers of the government schools in district Mardan for data collection (L.R. Harris & G. Brown 2010).

iv. Delimitation

The study was delimited to district Mardan only for the purpose of easy access and time constraints.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Perceptions about Task-Based English Language Teaching (TBLT)

5.1.1 Table

S.no	Statement	M	SD	%
1	Task-based language teaching is helpful for students.	4.43	.51235	100
2	I plan to teach as much English as possible while using an activity.	4.37	.50000	100
3	Task-based teaching is interesting in itself.	4.75	.44721	100
4	The task-based teaching excites students' curiosity.	4.37	.50000	100
5	Task-based teaching is fun for me.	4.37	.50000	100
6	Task-based method needs to be used regularly.	4.12	.98107	100
7	The task helped me extend myself.	4.8	1.0000	100
8	The task allows me to control what I am doing.	4.43	.5000	100
9	While carrying out a task in the class, it absorbs one what is going on.	4.43	.51235	100
10	While doing something creative aroused one's thoughts.	4.43	.51235	100

The Mean Score= 1.00 --- 1.50 = Strongly Disagree

The Mean Score= 1.51 --- 2.50 = Disagree

The Mean Score= 2.51 --- 3.50 = Undecided

The Mean Score= 3.51 --- 4.50 = Agree

The Mean Score= 4.51 --- 5.00 = Strongly Agree

5.2.1 Interpretation of table

The table shown above highlights the responses of the questionnaire administered to the selected secondary school English teachers in district Mardan, a city in Pakistan. There were 10 items total as closed-ended questions. As per given scale, the respondents agree to item number 1, which states that 'Task-based language teaching is helpful to students'. The respondents agree to teach as much English as they plan while using TBLT shown against

item number 2. The respondents strongly agree to the statement that task-based teaching is interesting as shown in item number 3. The respondents are agreeing to the statement shown in item number 4 that task-based increase students curiosity. The respondents also agree to item number 5 that task-based teaching is as fun for them. The respondents agree to the statement to use task-based method regularly which is shown as item number 6. The respondents are strongly agreeing to the statement, 'This task helped me extend myself' which is shown against item number 7. The respondents are agreeing to item number 8. The respondents are agreeing to item number 9 which states that 'when doing this task, it is totally absorbed in what one is doing'. Similarly, item number 10 also show the respondent agrees to the statement, 'this task aroused one's imagination'.

5.2 The effectiveness and suggestions of teachers teaching English as a subject/language to secondary school students of using TBLT

The following questions were asked from all selected English teachers as these questions were the part of mix questionnaire in order to know their opinions about the effectiveness of TBLT and their suggestions. The thematic analysis is given as under in response to each question. Separate responses have not been mentioned here but the most frequent statements are being mentioned against each question.

1. Have you ever used TBLT method in your class?

Maximum response of the selected English teachers to this question was that they use TBLT in classrooms, however, only three teachers use the method rarely.

2. Do you like to use TBLT as an English teacher?

All the selected English teachers responded that they like to use TBLT.

3. What do you think TBLT will be effective in a government school in District Mardan?

Maximum teachers responded that TBLT will be effective. Out of the total 40% teachers responded that it will be effective if planned properly.

4. In your opinion is it possible that TBLT will be followed regularly?

Maximum number of teachers responded that TBLT is time consuming. They were of the opinion that it is not possible to be followed regularly.

5. Do you think your students will find TBLT interesting?

Maximum number responded that TBLT is interesting.

6. Would you like to recommend TBLT for English teachers teaching to secondary school students?

All English teachers responded that it will be effective for secondary school students if the class is not overcrowded.

7. Will TBLT be effective in government schools?

Maximum teachers responded that TBLT will be effective while 20% were of the opinion that TBLT is not too much effective due to overcrowded class

8. Do the textbook that you are teaching has enough information for TBLT to be used?

All selected English teachers responded that there is not enough information for using TBLT in government textbook only one person replied that there are few activities in the English textbook.

9. Please put forward your opinion about effective English language teaching methodology?

Both methods, traditional plus activity-based teaching both will be effective. Training is required for TBLT.

10. Please suggest whether TBLT may be followed in government schools? Recommend if this method is not possible in a government school?

Maximum number of selected English teachers responded that time, resources, facilitation and overcrowded classes are the main limitations for using TBLT. They all suggested that the government should follow to implement TBLT in government schools but it is not possible in overcrowded classes.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the basis for the findings after analysis of the data, the result shows that task-based language teaching is needed to be implemented in government schools in district Mardan, Pakistan. The questionnaires were administered to all English teachers in government schools in district Mardan. Their responses revealed that there is a much need for TBLT for language improvements for the students of secondary schools in government schools in district Mardan.

It is worth mentioning to discuss that various questions were asked to explore the teachers' perceptions about TBLT and its effectiveness in government schools. Additional information was also received to the researchers that challenges to the use of TBLT in government schools include, time management, overcrowded classes and lack of proper training. The same questions were also asked in the previous research but here the responses were different than the previous researcher received (Baris Kasap, 2005). The findings pertaining to use of TBLT were positive as pointed out by the previous research but this research study pointed out findings in terms of the responses received from the selected English teachers different from the previous studies. Therefore, the study brings another dimension in the use of TBLT in government schools in district Mardan a city in Pakistan.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to explore the general perceptions of the English teachers, the effectiveness of TBLT and their suggestions. In order to find out these objectives, mix questionnaires were administered to 16 English teachers of district Mardan secondary randomly selected schools. The data was collected and analyzed by applying mean, mode, standard deviation and frequency. In response to the closed-ended questions in a mixed questionnaire, the teachers' perceptions were investigated. According to the data collected from the closed-ended questions that 100% percent teachers find TBLT helpful for the students. They all agree to the questions from item no 01 to item number 10. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation which was concluded that all teachers of government schools in district Mardan agree with task-based language teaching.

Similarly, open-ended questions as part of the mix questionnaire were asked. The data collected from the open-ended questions were organized and analyzed thematically according to the frequency that occurred. Maximum responses were that TBLT is very important for all

students of government schools in district Mardan. Their responses informed the researcher that TBLT is effective but on the other hand this method is not regularly carried out due to the overcrowded classes. Some were of the opinion that it is time consuming but the maximum responses received that they all like to use TBLT. All teachers except one informed the researcher that there is not enough information to use TBLT in the English textbooks of secondary school students. In response to their suggestions and recommendation about TBLT that due to overcrowded classes, lack of facilitation, proper training and management it is not possible to use TBLT in classrooms. On the basis of the information gathered from the mixquestionnaires administered the English teachers of the government schools in district Mardan the following recommendations are put forwarded for the implementation and effectiveness of TBLT in government schools in district Mardan, a city in Pakistan.

- The English teachers may be provided with enough informative materials to use TBLT in government schools.
- The curriculum designer may allocate time and separate classes per week for improvement of English language skills while using TBLT.
- Since overcrowded classes are a big issue to the government schools, therefore the strength of the classes at the secondary level may be minimized for better learning situations.
- Maximum responses received that the prescribed English textbook at secondary school level has not enough information for use of TBLT, therefore the English text book may be revised and maximum activities may be included as to meet the challenges to English language learning at secondary school level in district Mardan.
- Since this study was delimited to district Mardan only, therefore further research may be carried out in other districts in Pakistan.

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