

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING: AN ANALYSIS**

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This paper studies the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in English language teaching. L2 users of English can get maximum benefit after getting education through TBL methodology. The prime focus of the paper is on the teaching methodology of TBL in classroom setting and the benefits and disadvantages associated with this teaching method.

Keywords: *Activity-based learning, Pedagogy, Teaching English*

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INTRODUCTION

English in India is gaining more and more impetus day by day. It is the most widely used medium for international communication all over the world. A debate has developed over which approaches to constructing, planning and implementing lessons are more effective and operative. Task or activity based approach is an analytical approach introduced by N. Prabhu. It describes principles of task based teaching and how tasks are related to communicative language teaching. Traditional, accuracy-focused lesson planning is here to stay, but it is increasingly finding itself sharing attention with Task-Based Learning (TBL). Task-Based Learning is characterized by various factors: a focus on fluency, a high degree of learner autonomy, review of previously learnt language, and the importance of relevancy. Relevancy can be established through sharing, group presentation, and the use of authentic materials.

Task-Based Learning is the activity where learner is actively engaged in a particular task. It can be teacher driven - with direction from an instructor - or learner-driven with the learner having freedom to explore. It facilitates learning by students to develop their natural intelligences, and provides an ambience where students can explore and inquire in their own styles at their own pace, which results into students growth and helping them towards being responsible citizens excelling in fields of their choice. This article at some length presents an overview of a Task-Based Learning Approach (TBLA) and highlights its advantages over the more traditional Present, Practice, and Produce (PPP) approach. Task based teaching and learning is teaching and learning a language by using language to accomplish open-ended tasks. Defining TBL strategy, David Noonan says:

Learners are given a problem or objective to accomplish but are left with some freedom in approaching this problem or objective (2).



Tasks and activities focus on achieving a goal. It may be practical or logical with the emphasis on using known language to reach the end. Therefore, learning is not completing the task, but suggests how one can complete the task. Activity-based learning describes a range of pedagogical approaches to teaching. It focuses on the learning based on doing some hands-on experiments and activities.

TASK-BASED LEARNING (TBL): AT A GLANCE

The activity-based learning provides an optimum learning environment where learning becomes joyful and long-lasting; it is a goal-oriented activity with a clear purpose. Communication task involves achieving an outcome, creating a final product that can be appreciated by others. Tasks can be used as the central component of a three-part framework:

- Pre-task – Introducing the theme and the task itself.
- Task cycle – Carrying out the assigned task (from planning to completion).
- Language focus – Reviewing the language and language practice.

The task cycle gives speaking and writing exposure with opportunities for students to learn from one another. It also gives students opportunities to use whatever language they have, both in private; where mistakes, hesitations, and approximate renderings do not matter so long as the meaning is clear and in public; where there is a built-in desire to strive for accuracy of form and meaning.

PRESENT PRACTICE PRODUCE PARADIGM (PPPP)

During a preliminary teacher training course, most teachers become accustomed with the PPP Paradigm. A PPPP lesson would progress in the following manner:

- Presentation: The teacher presents an item of language in a clear context to get across its meaning first. This could be done in a variety of ways: through a text, a situation building exercise, a dialogue etc.
- Experimentation: Students are then asked to complete a meticulous practice stage, where they may have to repeat target items through harmonic and individual drilling, fill gaps or match halves of sentences. All of this practice aims at students to use the language correctly and helps them to become more comfortable with it.
- Production: This is the last stage sometimes called the 'free practice' stage, where

students are given a communication task such as a role play and are expected to produce the target language and use any other language that has already been learnt and is suitable for completing the task.

THE PROBLEMS WITH PPPP

Even though it sounds quite rational but teachers using this method will soon encounter problems with it:

Students can give the impression that they are comfortable with the new language as they are producing it accurately in the class. Often though a few lessons later, students will either not be able to produce the language correctly or even won't produce it at all. Students will often produce the language but overuse the target structure so that it sounds completely strange or unnatural (Attar 61).

Students may not produce the target language during the free practice stage because they find they are able to use existing language resources to accomplish the task. For many of us, learning can simply be means of information processing, facts recalling, critical thinking or accumulation of knowledge. But all these are considered to be alternative concepts. For learning, meaningful learning takes place through activities with equal participation from both the parties. Activity allows the learner to build up a mental model of whatever information he/she could grasp. Such ways of learning leaves a blue print for the entire lifetime.

Task based instruction with proper lesson plan promotes better understanding of a lesson and students learn the lesson by practicing the task themselves if carefully followed. In order to teach a language more effectively moving towards the goals of proficiency, it is necessary for the prospective teachers to be conversant with the theories, approaches and methods of teaching, (i.e. what should be thought and how it should be thought).

USE OF VIDEOS

Videos can be valuable classroom tools if they depict interesting, authentic scenarios in which relevant English is used. Effective videos should grab students' attention; they may do this a variety of ways. Students will be interested in videos that are aesthetically pleasing, present useful information, deal with pertinent social topics, have engaging characters, and are short in duration (viewing breaks should be given every two minutes). It is also important to consider authenticity when choosing a video, and this principally means that teachers must



not overuse speeches, lectures and monologues. ESL/EFL students may encounter these types of discourse in real life, but they are far more likely to spend time in informal, conversational settings. Finally, teachers should choose videos that use suitable, level-appropriate language. Video selection affects ease of task completion and the degree to which students will be engaged in the task. It is assumed, for all of these activities, that the teacher will allow students multiple viewings of short video clips early in each class. Regularly limiting the viewing segments to two minutes seems a bit dogmatic, but it is certainly preferable to overwhelming students with ten consecutive minutes of viewing time. For most of the activities, students should be at the pre-intermediate (or above) level. Unless otherwise stated, it is assumed that these activities will be executed in pairs, or small groups, so as to maximize students' talk time.

STEPS TO USE THE ACTIVITY- PEDAGOGICAL VIEW

Experience, Reflection, Application, and Consolidation (ERAC) is the key to perform the activities with organized manner of planning. We must know all these steps in detail:

- E- Experience: In activity based teaching, experience term symbolizes a new experience or a new challenge, new environment, preparing to get attached with the further topic or situation but obtaining it in a deep attachment with the surrounding environment and objectives of the topic.
- R- Reflection: - It means thinking over the problem and reflecting the views of the students who are thinking over the challenge produced by a new experience. Experience reaches more deep in this step and thinking is enhanced by a series of sharp questions over the challenge.
- A-Application: - Application symbolizes the part in which the students learn by doing and sharing their views with the whole group. Teacher is supposed to be an observer here who directs the students to right path by adding some useful tips but not by imposing any conclusion. Students must be given an opportunity to accept the new terms after keen scrutiny with their own consolidation.
- Consolidation: - The final step of the activity based teaching is consolidation or making any conclusion. It symbolizes that the student has reached to the objective for

which the activity was designed and organized with clear indication that the aims of the curriculum are also fulfilled under this step.

STAGES OF ACTIVITY-BASED LEARNING

There are three stages of activity base learning:

- **Pre-task:** Task activating topic with related words and phrases are given to the students in the class room.
- **Task Cycle (TC):** Learners are given the chance to use whatever language they know to carry out the task and then to improve their language under the teacher's guidance while planning their reports on the task. TC offers learners a holistic experience of language in use. Following are the 3 components of a task cycle:
 - (a) *Task:* Learners use language they master, working simultaneously, working in pairs or small groups to achieve goals of the task.
 - (b) *Planning:* planning is done before the report is prepared. The teacher's role is that of a language adviser. Learners plan their reports effectively and maximize their learning opportunities.
 - (c) *Report:* is the final stage of the task cycle. In this stage learners project their findings in the class room. So the report stage gives students a natural stimulus to upgrade and improve their language. Linguistic challenge to communicate clearly and accurately in language appropriate to the circumstances emanates in this stage.
- **LANGUAGE FOCUS:** J.A.Willis specifies that it is the study of some of the Specific features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle. Learners examine the language forms in the text and look in detail at the use and the meaning of lexical items they have noticed. Language focus has two components: (a) *Analysis:* Analysis activities draw attention to the surface forms, realizing the meaning learners have already become familiar with during the task cycle and help them to systematize their knowledge and broaden their understanding. Instead of the teacher presenting language to learners as new analysis activities, learners reflect on the language already experienced.(b) *Practice:* These activities are based on features of language that already occurred in previous texts and transcripts or in features that have



just been studied for analytic activities. Using tasks in teaching is a popular method and the implications of these tasks in a classroom context are subjects to research. Motivation of students' caliber rises through assigned tasks. EFL classroom provides variety of tasks in class giving positive results.

ADVANTAGE OF ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING

- Activity based learning appeals to those who enjoy learning via performing action. However, not all participants are active learners. Some learners are more reflective and like to observe, while others enjoy theorizing and thinking about concepts without any practical work. Activity based learning does work for those who are actively inclined.
- Activity based learning can be fun and motivate not only those students who are entertaining, exciting, instantly gratifying and who would otherwise be lost because of their poor attitude but also will help in engaging people with introvert attitude, as team learning activities give them an opportunity to mingle with other participants to share their side of learning, hence evolving the session into a win-win situation for the entire participating audience.

This type of instruction does not come without its disadvantages. It takes long-term planning for it to be successful. Tasks to be taught must have a basis before engaging the learner. Without planning and basic knowledge of the subject to be addressed, the learner would lose interest and become dormant in the discussions that lead them into levels of learning.

DISADVANTAGE OF ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING

- Activity is just part of learning. Without reflecting on the activity; thinking about it in certain ways to make a theory; testing that theory again etc. the active learning will have very little lasting value. In these scenarios the activity will be mundane and nothing in particular will be gained from it. Active learning should be balanced with other less concrete experiences.
- By focusing on activity to make learning fun can actually hamper those students who would make good progress without it. So it becomes instructor's responsibility to identify such population and use them to

other's benefit by giving them key leadership roles in the activity.

CONCLUSION

Activity based instruction, by nature, has its advantages and disadvantages which are utilized to evaluate how its use fits in the classroom setting. The advantages delved on the benefits that the stakeholders of the educative process (the teachers and the students) get from the application of activity based instruction in the classroom, the disadvantages are identified as results of improper planning and implementation of instructions. Task based teaching together with communicative language teaching, offers a wide scope to learners to learn to communicate, it creates a real purpose for language use and language study. The purpose of task based class is to stimulate students to learn language use, activating whatever language the students have, providing learning opportunities to them.

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