



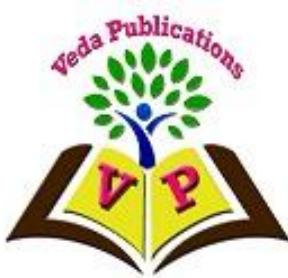
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TEACHING LSRW SKILLS THROUGH ARUN JOSHI'S 'THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS': AN EXPERIMENT IN TASK-BASED TEACHING

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ABSTRACT



Literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore. A Literary text can be very effectively used in an English language class to help develop language competency because it is considered valuable authentic material which is not fashioned for the specific purpose of teaching a language. The teacher of English therefore has the freedom to use it as s/he sees fit, to suit her/his students. Literature can be used in the classroom because it leads to cultural and language enrichment and enables personal involvement. This paper presents an experiment conducted by the presenter to assist undergraduate students of a government college in Mangalore city to facilitate the acquisition and improvement of English language skills through tasks designed on Arun Joshi's "The Strange case of Billy Biswas". The tasks involved selecting chapters from the novel, writing dialogues on them and then enacting the written short play in front of the class.

Keywords: English Language, Task-Based Teaching.



English is the language of the globalised world. It is an 'exploding language' in the world of 'information explosion' and a window to access the growing fund of knowledge in science and technology. English is also used as a vehicle of communication within one's own culture and social context. The popularity of English medium schools in the country proves the importance of English. However, the sad reality is that a student even after 8-12 years of studying English does not gain confidence to speak even a few sentences independently though s/he may have scored 70-80% marks in the University examinations.

In post-independent India, several recommendations on learning through purposeful, concrete and realistic situations were made laying stress on the need to make the process of learning, learner-oriented or enquiry-oriented so that learning could help the learner in solving problems, foster self-learning and involve the learner in creative and divergent thinking. Unfortunately, teaching methods continue to be teacher oriented and examinations revolve round the student's ability to memorize resulting in high marks but low competence. Task-based language teaching could be an effective solution to this problem.

Task based language learning is a modern method which marks a pedagogical shift from teacher-oriented to more learner-oriented teaching. N.S. Prabhu (1987), the pioneer, believed that the development of competence in a second language requires not systematization of language inputs or maximization of planned practice, but rather the creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication. David Nunan (2004) defines task as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand as a communicative act in its own right. Task-based teaching can be very effectively used to teach the given syllabus. Grammar, vocabulary, essays, poems, plays and novels can be efficiently

employed to improve competency in English. Literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore. A Literary text can be very effectively used in an English language class to help develop language competency because it is considered valuable authentic material which is not fashioned for the specific purpose of teaching a language. The teacher of English therefore has the freedom to use it as s/he sees fit, to suit her/his students. Literature can be used in the classroom because it leads to cultural and language enrichment and enables personal involvement. This paper presents an experiment conducted by the presenter to assist undergraduate students of a government college in Mangalore city to facilitate the acquisition and improvement of English language skills through tasks designed on Arun Joshi's "The Strange case of Billy Biswas". The tasks involved selecting chapters from the novel, writing dialogues on them and then enacting the written short play in front of the class.

HYPOTHESIS

This experiment was based on the hypothesis that task-based language teaching can be very effectively used in an English language class to explain a literary text, in this case a novel, to improve comprehension, develop language competency and actively involves students in the process of learning.

The experiment was carried out in the II B Com class and was part of internal assignment. The aim was to introduce a teaching methodology which was learner-centred and provide an opportunity to students to develop their Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills in English in a way that would give them a sense of fulfilment and the effects of which could be perceived and assessed and which would help them improve their otherwise poor confidence with regard to the English Language. The paper presenter had conducted task-based teaching in the past few years where the tasks not only improved the confidence of the students with regard to English vocabulary and usage but in the long run also helped them perform better in their semester exams.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To build confidence in students that they *can* be proficient in English



- 2).To improve comprehension of the novel prescribed as text in the syllabus.
- 3) To persuade students to treat English as a communication tool and not just as an end product.
- 4) To show them that English is fun, useful and attainable.
- 5) To offer an experience of a wide range of English language in a non-threatening setting and keep corrections to the minimum.
- 5) The most important objective was to show that change in teaching pedagogy will boost the acquisition of English language skills among students.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The greatest advantage of task based learning is that students obtain a deeper sense of understanding into what they gain through the process of learning because the student is able to see the fruit of hard work at the end of it in more practical ways than the marks that they score in the traditional method of learning. In a task based learning classroom vocabulary is exposed and improved in a real-world situation, rather than as words on a list. In addition, the feeling of being an integral part of their group also motivates students to learn in a way that the prospect of a final examination rarely manages to do.

THE TASK

One of the choices given to the students of II BCom as part of internal assessment this semester was to choose a chapter from 'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas', write dialogues on the story in the chapter and enact it in class.50 students chose this task while the remaining chose between presenting seminar papers on questions in the given question bank on 'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas' and presenting bibliography format (MLA) of 20 books from the college library. While the seminar presentations were individual tasks, the bibliography presentation and enactment were group tasks.

TEACHER ROLE

1. To present a sample or an example of how the task was to be carried out. This was done by showing students videos on how other

students in the previous years had carried out similar tasks.

2. To facilitate the carrying out of the tasks and offer suggestions only when sought.
3. To allot time and venue for the carrying out of the task
4. To allot sufficient time for the play enactment groups for dialogue writing and practice.

LEARNER ROLE

1. The learners as groups in case of novel enactment were first required to select the chapter for presentation.
2. The learners were required to read and understand the chapter and clarify any doubts regarding the carrying out of the task.
3. The learners would observe carefully the examples presented by the teacher
4. The learners in groups would first read their given text and then depending on the number of people in their group assign a character each to the members. In case there were more members they were given the freedom to create new characters without altering the essence of the story. Then as a group each member would contribute the dialogues, which were all noted down and copied by those enacting the characters. Then they would practice their roles during the assigned hours and finally on a stipulated day enact the newly created play.

OUTCOME

This task was a novel activity to the students. As they were given 3 choices they were able to choose the activity they were interested in. The participation of the students in the groups was complete. This task thrilled them as for the first time in their lives they were drafting a story or enacting in a play which was written by them. It was apparent that they had loved the task which involved them in speaking in English or acting in English without any reservations. Though their English was not always grammatically right, their efforts to find the most appropriate word by referring to the dictionary to



create meaningful sentences in English was a very satisfactory experience for both the teacher and the students. In addition, the students emerged out of this task with the satisfaction that they *can* speak, write and create in English.

It was indeed a wonderful experience to see Arun Joshi's novel discussed, analysed and presented by students instead of the one-way monotonous lectures that a teacher would otherwise use to explain this novel to students.

This experiment may therefore be considered successful as it proved that task-based teaching is an effective method of teaching English Language and Literature.

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