

Benefits of Task-based Language Teaching Method in Developing ESL Students Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Task-based language teaching alludes to a communicative approach in which it is grounded on the utilization of real-life and pedagogical tasks as the central element for language instruction. Hence it has become an important topic in the field of second language acquisition in respect of fostering process-focused syllabi and developing communicative tasks to enhance learners' use of language. This study aims to provide researchers and educators with the compositions of evidence gathered in previous relevant papers on ESL learners' challenges in speaking English and exploring the benefits of Task-Based Language Teaching for ESL learners' speaking skills. The result of this study indicates that with the usage of TBLT, teachers are exposed more towards the variation of communicative tasks that cater not only for students' needs but also enhance their creativity through the diversity of tasks that draws out the student's utmost capability.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, ESL, Speaking Skills, Challenges, Teaching Method, ESL Learners, English Classrooms, Competencies.

Introduction

In this globalization, the English language has become a bridge for people around the world to connect with each other. Due to its influence, it is frequently used in various settings, especially at schools. Nowadays, teachers are urged to prioritize the usage of English medium while communicating with their students at schools. This is because the ability to speak fluently can be a great representation to show the students' success in learning a second language (Nunan, 2001; Jyothi & Pushpa, 2020). However, there are some students who are not able to converse in English as they face challenges in comprehending the context of the conversation due to insufficient amount of English proficiency. According to Gabriel (2017), some of the students lack vocabulary and they are facing difficulty in uttering clear sentences in English. Hence, in helping the students to polish their speaking skills, teachers are

encouraged to use different types of teaching methodologies to help the students to become more proficient and fluent in English. One of the teaching methods that can be implemented is the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an advanced version and more profound elaboration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Haniyeh et al., 2022). TBLT promotes communication skills using a second language through the completion of specific tasks given during the English lessons. According to some researchers, students can improve their speaking skills if they are frequently exposed towards interesting and engaging language-learning activities at schools (Masrom et al., 2015; Sabet et al., 2014; Mark, 2020). By applying various tasks that can invoke students' communicative skills, teachers can have a better opportunity to observe the student's academic performance during the lesson too. Therefore, this study needs to be conducted to encourage the teachers and aware them of the usage of Task-Based Language Teaching during English lessons as this method provides many positive outcomes for the students.

Research Objectives

This study aims

1. to identify the challenges faced by ESL Learners in speaking English.
2. to explore the benefits of the Task-Based Language Teaching method in developing the students' speaking skills.

Speaking Skills

Speaking ability is a skill that may be developed through language learning which involves using language to communicate verbally in varied contexts. Most language learners consider speaking to be a crucial skill in learning a second language, and their proficiency in oral communication is assessed to determine how well they are learning a language (Nunan, 1998; Numan, 2001). According to Chaney (1998) in Rahimy & Safarpour (2012), speaking is the process of creating and exchanging meaning within the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, which is significant in language learning and teaching as learners must acquire the ability to speak in a variety of communicative contexts. Moreover, the ability to communicate with people and convey thoughts as well as feelings also requires speaking skills, which are among the most crucial abilities that can be obtained as an individual. In fact, the most crucial aspect of learning a language for an ESL student is developing speaking abilities where many language students gauge their success based on how effectively they speak the target language. On the other hand, it might be very easy to feel that speaking skills can be quite intimidating or difficult towards most learners. It is certainly not simple as students should be encouraged to speak up as much as they can in class although they usually are quite passive in their language class. Therefore, teachers are responsible to create an entertaining and engaging lesson for the students to be able to communicate comfortably.

The Importance of English Speaking

The English language is now widely used worldwide as it functions as a lingua franca among nations. Even in nations such as Malaysia, where it is not considered the mother tongue, the language is still studied, spoken and understood frequently. Many industries such as education, medicine, engineering, business and tourism, heavily rely on the use of English when communicating. In addition, an increasing number of people are devoting time to learning English as a second language today. Hence, in reality, there is a possibility of two

random strangers communicating with one another in the English Language as their first choice of language. Since there are various native languages, the English language was designated as a replacement to create proper communication among each other (Saleh & Murtaza, 2018; Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). However, there are still students who are not aware of the cruciality of using the English language and since it is not compulsory to pass this subject, this specific language gets disregarded. Regardless of this situation, the English language still maintains its title as a global language that is majorly spoken by people around the world especially by educated individuals in Malaysia (Darmi et al., 2017; Aziz & Kahinathan, 2021). The ability to communicate efficiently in English may help an individual to build more connections and at the same time give them the opportunity to seek better paths in life such as bigger chances of being employed or getting accepted into many higher educational institutions. This shows that speaking in English is crucial for today's generation as it offers a variety of benefits in their daily life.

Learner's Challenges in Speaking English

Most students will experience difficulties or errors when they attempt to utter words, phrases or sentences while learning the English language and the ability to self-correct when these errors occur seems to be difficult for them. Therefore, their limited vocabulary leads them to often avoid speaking the target language. Due to this issue, they will instead express themselves in their mother tongue. As stated by Suliman (2014), the learners of the English language will continue to rely on their mother tongue for speech output. For that reason, the impact of their mother tongue is apparent as shown, among other things, by the learners' inability to communicate in English. Moreover, it was also found that students used their mother tongue translation techniques in addition to their spoken language to comprehend specific instructions.

Furthermore, the students are also anxious to speak in English due to their lack of motivation. This situation can also cause them to face many difficulties in expressing their thoughts using the targeted language. In the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), students' lack of motivation and enthusiasm to acquire and apply the English language in the classroom is a common challenge faced by English teachers as English is used and spoken primarily as a foreign language. (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). Hence, the speaking confidence and fluency of students, according to some researchers (Masrom et al., 2015; Sabet et al., 2014), would increase if they participated in active and collaborative language learning activities.

Similar to psychological factors such as anxiousness, the shyness of an individual also limits them to engage with others in the targeted language. Bowen (2005); Robby (2010) contend that some shy learners are quiet by nature, which is one of the causes of the issue for them to speak in another language. Since most of them find speaking English in front of their peers and teacher to be extremely nerve-wracking, the pupils in this situation tend to be hesitant and lack confidence. Additionally, Saurik (2011) notes that the majority of English language learners experience shyness when speaking the language because they worry about making mistakes. Likewise, they fear judgment and humiliation from their peers which leads to the fact that students' shyness is a reflection of how they view their own abilities. In this way, they fear that their friends will ridicule them for their poor English-speaking skills. As a result, focusing on this component is crucial if educators want to support their pupils in giving their finest speaking performances in class.

Task-Based Language Teaching

The implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching is an eye-opener for teachers to interpret the purpose of each existing task created for the students. According to Willis (1996), tasks are considered as an activity that have specific learning outcomes where it emphasizes the comprehension and exchange of meaning of the specific language. Furthermore, the researchers also believe that the task is a powerful tool to intrigue students' participation and enforces better usage of the targeted language in English classrooms (Willis & Willis, 2007; Jyothi & Pushpa, 2020). Through the usage of TBLT, teachers can have more opportunities to be exposed towards various communicative tasks that fit their students' needs and at the same time be able to polish their creativity skills by creating a diversity of tasks that can draw students' speaking ability.

Moreover, Task-Based Language Teaching encourages the application of a learner-centred classroom. As the world is evolving, educators across nations are urged to conduct an English classroom that suits 21st-century learning skills. This is to help the students to be more equipped in facing various challenges when they embark on the future. In order to achieve such skills, TBLT provides the students to learn how to use the target language through real-life tasks (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Mark, 2020). Through this implementation, students can be more comfortable and proficient in using the target language during their daily communication with other people such as their parents, teachers or classmates especially during their English lessons at school.

Nevertheless, as TBLT has been brought in as one of the teachings approaches decades ago, there are still quite a number of educators who prefer to use conventional pedagogy i.e. traditional teaching as their main teaching approach and may even reject TBLT. The reason why this approach may be neglected at times is that, in the context of second or foreign language classes, potential problems may arise due to the emphasis on fluency over accuracy. Therefore, at times, non-verbal cues such as body expression, intonations and even eye contact are overstressed, and precise utterance is considered not needed in some situations. Another view as to why TBLT may be avoided and criticized is due to the reason that certain countries have their syllabus predetermined. This means that teachers might have issues in formulating a task-oriented syllabus as they do not always have the chance and freedom to choose their own materials based on the needs of creating task-based programs.

Task-Based Language Teaching in ESL Classrooms

According to Ellis (2009), task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach to teaching English as a second language (ELT) that relies heavily on activities for both instruction and acquisition of the language. Since the 1980s, TBLT has gained popularity as one of the approaches to language teaching and learning that have undergone numerous focus and style shifts (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). As it focuses on students learning through tasks and activities rather than teachers teaching in the classroom, it naturally attracts both ESL and EFL teachers with this method. Moreover, the key to language learning is student-to-student interaction in the classroom by doing different stimulating activities where they would be able to use the language in communication. Generally, quite a few studies have revealed that a task-based approach leads to positive effects of an active and engaged classroom environment, as well as fluency, motivation and confidence in the use of the English language among students are all improved.

Furthermore, as stated in Mark's (2020) research article, a study by Saricoban and Karakurt (2016) has shown that students' listening and speaking skills have progressively

improved due to the frequent utilization of TBLT in English classrooms. When it comes to speaking, one should also acquire a good number of listening skills. Through this teaching method, it displays that students are able to polish two English skills that are beneficial for them to become more proficient in the English language. Not to mention that having the ability to use two English skills at the same time can give a positive influence on the students which motivates them to be more participative during the lessons (Sabet et al., 2014; Mark, 2020). As stated in the study conducted by Masrom et al (2015), Task-Based Language Teaching can create more students that are motivated to learn advanced vocabulary and grammar. Acquiring and learning various levels of vocabulary and sentences can also increase students' self-confidence in using the target language more frequently in the future. Hence, this method is beneficial for students to take their time in polishing their confidence and motivation in using the English language.

However, the implementation of TBLT in the classroom also comes with some difficulties as well. The first relates to teachers' insufficient knowledge of Task-Based Instructions (TBI), which prevents them from correctly implementing the strategy in their classrooms. Furthermore, TBI seems out of place in many cultures where traditional, grammar-based exams are preferred since it focuses on general communication abilities. Due to the task's potential to emphasize fluency over accuracy, TBI may also contribute to the issue of linguistic accuracy. Another problem is that students avoid communicating in English in the classroom due to the previous factors that have been mentioned earlier in this paper, anxiousness, shyness, and reliance on their mother tongue. The teacher's initial objectives and ideas that learning English involves applying it to communicate may be at odds with the students' excessive usage of the mother tongue (Richards, 2006; Meas, 2010). Therefore, educators need to ensure that they manage and organize the lesson well despite implementing any sort of approach in the classroom.

Contributions

This study effectively contributes to giving more insights to English educators around the world especially in Malaysia. In this 21st-century learning, educators are urged to be more creative in creating an engaging classroom. Identifying and exploring the challenges faced by ESL learners in speaking English can be one of the ways for educators to contribute to building a more impactful English learning environment. As suggested by Saragih et al. (2022), the effectiveness of TBLT can be retrieved through observation of English teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the teaching method. In this way, a more detailed result can be gained to show the cruciality of using TBLT in the English classroom. Despite the familiarity towards this teaching method, undeniably, there are some educators who are not used to applying this method during their lessons. Thus, this study can enlighten the teachers to explore the variety of task designs and increase their readiness towards the Task-Based Language Teaching method.

Conclusion

This study is aimed to explore the challenges faced by ESL learners in speaking English and at the same time how it can be improved through the usage of Task-Based Language Teaching. In this matter, a brief review of literature relating to speaking skills and Task-Based Language Teaching methods in ESL classrooms has been thoroughly conferred. According to the literature review, it has been proven that it is necessary to explore the benefits of TBLT, as it is displayed in some studies that some teachers are still in need of practice in using the

teaching method in their classrooms. As stated in a study by Jyothi (2020), the results present the value of examining different types of task-based instructions and their functions in encouraging students' interest in the English learning process.

Despite the positive impact of TBLT, many teachers are still struggling to find the most appropriate tasks to be used during their lessons. Hence, in the future, more studies should be carried out to further discover the factors that influence the student's needs which it would incorporate in the enhancement of the communicative task to be implemented in the classroom. Due to this reason, Mark (2020) suggested that teachers ought to be more rigorous when producing and applying the tasks in the classroom. In this way, the teachers and students can encounter and have more experience towards a variety of English communicative tasks in the future. Furthermore, Ellis (2009) highlights the attribution of a few prominent points for the effective implementation of task-based pedagogy which is the importance of adapting tasks to student's linguistic proficiency levels as well as how crucial a teacher's contribution in designing the task materials as the engagement when teaching a task-based course. In this way, teachers can have a better view of how to use the TBLT method accordingly in their English classrooms. Similar to previous studies in this field, this study also encourages more studies focusing on the benefits of TBLT for ESL students' speaking skills. By highlighting these areas, teachers can be exposed towards better activities and make use of the Task-Based Language Teaching method to its full potential. In conclusion, this study is vital to enlighten the teachers on the importance of TBLT in the education field as it not only helps to create engaging English classrooms but it is also effective to help the students in facing their speaking challenges and increase their speaking performances which can positively improve their English competencies.

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