

TASK -BASED LEARNING OF ENGLISH

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Received: 30 Apr 2023

Accepted: 03 May 2023

Published: 05 May 2023

ABSTRACT

Handling language classes for engineering students is a tough challenge. Inculcating an interest in the nuances of the language and motivating students to be enthusiastic learners is what every language teacher aims at. Learning of a language is a continuous activity that demands the use of various tools and resources. Learning can neither be confined to the four walls of a classroom nor be imparted wholly through books. Theoretical lectures on grammar and syntax of a language can never ensure complete language learning or reach out to learners effectively and enable them to be articulate. Language learning will yield the desired results only when learners employ a language productively in various situations and contexts. It is activity-based learning that will make language learning complete and effective. This paper seeks to discuss how through task based activities English language teaching and learning can be made efficacious and enhancing o the learners.

KEYWORDS: *Nuances of the Language, Continuous Activity, Activity-Based Learning, Use of Various Tools*

INTRODUCTION

Handling language classes for engineering students is a tough challenge. Inculcating an interest in the nuances of the language and motivating students to be enthusiastic learners is what every language teacher aims at. Learning of a language is a continuous activity that demands the use of various tools and resources. Learning can neither be confined to the four walls of a classroom nor be imparted wholly through books. Theoretical lectures on grammar and syntax of a language can never ensure complete language learning or reach out to learners effectively and enable them to be articulate. Language learning will yield the desired results only when learners employ a language productively in various situations and contexts. It is activity-based learning that will make language learning complete and effective.

Task-Based Versus Conventional Learning

In a conventional mode of teaching and learning, the focus is more on the teacher, who decides on the subjects and imparts the same to the learner. Though this method is widely used in the class rooms, there are constraints that make the learning to be tedious and ineffective. The constraints are: a) lessons being restricted to books and b) learners being passive learners with minimal participation. Unlike a conventional classroom, where learning is confined to books and the lesson is predetermined by the teacher, in a task based approach, the lesson is based around the completeness of a task and the language used is assessed by what happens as the learner completes the task. The language used is based on the needs of the learners, and hence it decides the lessons that are to be included rather than the decision of the teacher.

As the very name suggests, task based learning uses language to perform meaningful tasks both within outside classrooms like (like attending an interview, seeking an audience with a doctor, calling customer service, attending a call).

Language is used as an instrument to complete and fulfill task. Any activity given to learners to facilitate learning of a language is called task. The task uses language to achieve a specific outcome. The tasks reflect real life situations and learners focus on meaning and are free to use any language they want. Playing a game, solving a problem, sharing information or experience are some task-based learning methods. The aim of task-based learning is to learn and use a language. Tasks generate own language, create opportunities for language acquisition. Learners use the tasks assigned to them to employ English in classrooms as they use their own language. Task based learning offers ample scope for learners to communicate freely using their own language. For example, when learners are assigned some tasks, they perform them either as pairs or groups using the resources of language. The teacher monitors the participants, provides encouragement and offers feedback. The language used by the learners in each task is assessed and feedback is provided by the teacher.

Role of Teachers in Task Based Learning (TBL)

Being catalysts, teachers act as facilitators in the language learning process. English being the secondary language for most learners, it is an onerous task to teach the language in its entirety to non-native speakers. Language teachers need to make the class room sessions participative and inclusive by providing the students a slew of activities and making them to use English effectively to accomplish their tasks. Task Based learning develops the fluency of learners' and instills confidence in them. The outcome of TBL lies in the completeness of the tasks rather on the accuracy of the language. Learning will become complete and full-fledged only when learners become major stakeholders and get involved in various activities like participating Group Discussions, debates and so on. Task based learning ensures that learners get the practical knowledge of using a language to accomplish a given task. Classroom activities will boost the learners' self-confidence and make them self-assured to acquire the necessary language skills.

Advantages of Task Based Learning

Task Based learning is more learner-centric rather than a teacher-centric one. The learners will be able to communicate meaningfully and sensibly when made to take part in group activities. TBL will offer ample scope for building on and improvising the practical skills of using a language, including vocabulary skills. When made to interact with their peers, the learners will tend to lose their inhibitions and mingle freely. They will be able to learn a language at their own pace without any pressure and accomplish the tasks. TBL exposes the learners to the finer aspects of the language like lexical patterns, collocations and so on. The learners will get to employ English in different ways without any constraints i.e TBL ensures no control over the language. Depending on the situations and contexts, the learners will be able to employ relevant language.

Structure of Tasks

Willis in his book, A Framework for Task Based Learning classifies the task structure into: Pre-Task, Task, Planning, Report, Analysis and Language Focus. In the Pre-task stage, the teacher defines the topic and asks the learners to engage in activities. In the Task stage, the learners are supposed to perform the tasks either in groups or in pairs in the classroom and report it to the class on how they had completed the task and reached conclusions. In the third stage, the teacher analyses the language features of the tasks and provides the feedback on the learners' performance during the reporting and modifications. While the task performed by the learners provides fluency, the task feedback provides the accuracy of the task. A right balance between fluency and accuracy should be maintained.

Activities for Learning a Language

The ability to use a language effectively in different contexts is possible only when the learners involve themselves and participate in classroom activities such as extempore, role plays, debates, discussions and the like. Through these activities, the learners get to understand the language, and how it is used in various contexts. These activities can energize the learners, improve their self-confidence and hone their soft skills too. The teacher in such a situation becomes a facilitator and a supervisor. Activities like field survey, interviewing people, group discussion, organising events, reporting, and role plays go a long way in sharpening communication skills.

Class room sessions will become monotonous and sluggish if learners have no role in them. When assigned a task (example a conversation with a friend), the learners use English as a medium to accomplish the task of conversation. They will get to comprehend the language, learn new words and effectively employ the language in different situations. Without the involvement of learners, it will be difficult to make the learners understand and absorb the finer aspects of the language. Language learning will become effective only when the teachers engage the learners and make classroom sessions interactive and inclusive. By assigning various activities and allowing the learners to participate in them, the teachers instil confidence in them; enable them to work both as a team and as individuals and thereby helping them indirectly in learning a language. Involvement of learners in the classroom will go a long way in making them to communicate in myriad situations with ease.

Classroom Activities as Tools for Language Learning

Some of the advantages of using classroom activities as tools are: a) the learners will learn the know-how of using a language b) flexibility- they can learn at their own convenience and pace c) they can learn according to their level of understanding and devoid of any pressure d) they will develop their vocabulary skills. These activities can motivate, stimulate and enhance the language skills of the learners. Debates, discussions, presentations, role plays and so on provide autonomy for the learners and make them creative and lateral thinkers. The activities are more “learner-centric” than “teacher-centric.”

Role Playing

Role playing is one of the effective methods for language learning. It encourages creativity and thinking skills, lets the learners’ develop and practice language skills in a congenial and conducive ambience. It creates motivation among learners and ensures the participation and involvement necessary for language learning. When learners are made to enact/take up different roles, they will get to understand the language and employ it according to the role that they play. For example let’s take the case of a patient seeking an appointment with a dentist or an employer interviewing an employee, or a student enquiring about a course in a college and so on.

Use of Resources in Language Learning

A language cannot be learnt overnight. It is only with the aid of resources that a learner can understand and master a language. Employing a language, especially English, to perform a host of activities like attending a call, answering a query, striking a conversation with somebody and so on will go a long way in improving one’s linguistic proficiency. Participating in Group Discussions and debates will improve learners’ fluency and speaking skills and enable them to articulate their ideas on social issues with confidence. Field surveys when taken up will enable learners to interact with a

wide range of people, thereby polishing their interpersonal and language skills. Taking part in mock interviews will help the learners to get a feel of interviews and how to speak effectively during interviews.

CONCLUSIONS

The process of acquiring a language is a step-by step one that calls for the involvement of all stakeholders, including teachers and learners of a language. Only when the learners participate effectively by utilising various resources the outcome will be efficacious and fruitful. The ambience for language learning should be “congenial and friendly” so that the outcome would be fruitful and productive. It is indeed outcome-based learning of a language that would yield the desired results with the learners becoming “linguistically competent.” To make language teaching and learning fruitful, teachers ought to use tasks/activities in the classes to the optimum so as to make the learners grasp the nuances of English and use it effectively and confidently in various real time situations and contexts.

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