Using Innovative Methods for developing the Sub-skills of Interactional Competence of Regional Medium Learners

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Abstract

The study 'Using Innovative methods for developing the sub skills of Interactional Competence of regional medium learners' is an intervention study, to make learners interactive using Boundary Signalling Devices like (Opening, Transition and closing procedures) and Role Patterns. This study attempts to explore the problems of regional medium learners in speaking English, and to provide them a solution by developing the sub skills of Interactional Competence which are the integral aspects of oral skills. Teaching speaking through TBLT is quite possible if learners are taught and oriented properly with an effective methodology. TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) requires teachers who create task- based materials in addition to the main syllabus. The role of teachers is to facilitate students' learning with the help of tasks. They should create student-friendly atmosphere for successful learning. Teachers should equip learners with the armour of learning techniques, so that they can help themselves from the danger of poor learning. This intervention study proves that TBLT method enables the learners to interact well , using boundary signalling devices and role patterns. The findings of the study show that TBLT is a proper methodology to develop Interaction Competence in regional medium learners.

Keywords: Boundary signalling devices, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English as second Language (ESL), Interactional Competence, Task-based Language Teaching.

Introduction

TBLT is one of the best innovative methods in language teaching. It is an offshoot of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and is widely being used as a methodology which would yield good results in language classrooms. It is also one of the recent trends in language teaching scenario. It became well-known by N.S Prabhu when he was working in Bangalore, India for his Bangalore project. He observed that students could learn languages easily with the help of tasks.

Other contributions to TBLT

The prominent scholars who have done research in TBLT are Teresa P.Pica and Michael Long, Rod Ellis, David Nunan, Dave Willis and Jane Willis, Jon Larsson, Jeremy Harmer are the major contributors to Task-Based Language Teaching. David Nunan in his book, 'Task-Based Language teaching 'gives a detailed description of what is Task-based Language Teaching. Its major components like an empirical basis for Task-based Language Teaching and also the assessment of Task-based Language Teaching are also mentioned in the book. Nunan's book on Task-based Language teaching is a groundbreaking work in TBLT research. Rod Ellis' work on Task-based Language Learning and Teaching is another great contribution to Task-based research. Ellis' tasks in SLA and language pedagogy, tasks, listening comprehension, and SLA, tasks, interaction, and SLA, designing task-based language courses are some of the integral concepts of Task-based Language Teaching.

Why do we need Task –based Language Teaching?

We need TBLT because it advocates learning through the meaningful tasks and promotes co-operative learning in the students. It highly emphasises the authentic use of a language

in real-life contexts. It appreciates the active role of students in classrooms. It encourages language learning through the active involvement and engagement of students in tasks. Tasks necessitate second language learning and language acquisition is quite possible through tasks. The language input through the tasks is realistic and would promote language learning very easily. Tasks are believed to foster processes of negotiation, modification, rephrasing, and experimentation that are the heart of second language learning. (Sato, 1988).Through tasks   language chunks can be taught to learners while they are actively participating in the tasks. So, while the learners are completely immersed in doing tasks, they would pick up the chunks of language and would use them in their real life situations. Unlike the other traditional methods, TBLT do not penalize students based on grammatical and other language errors instead create conducive language ambience in such a way it is quite student-friendly and interesting.

Purpose of the study

The reason behind selecting regional medium learners as the subjects of my study is that there are more regional medium learners in our state than the students who are seeking English medium education. These learners form major part of education in the society. The regional medium learners are also the disadvantaged learners who are denied of having good quality education .Though they are blessed with good aptitude for language learning, they are not provided a quality education and hence they lack good language abilities. In order to assist these learners in language learning through an effective methodology, the study task-based language was designed for developing the skills of interactional competence.

Procedure of the study

The study was conducted for a period of 20 days to see the impact of Task-based Language learning on regional medium secondary school learners(class x) at Zilla Parishad   school in Andhra Pradesh. There are three stages in the procedure of the study: 1. Pre-test stage, 2. Intervention stage and 3. Post-test stage. In the beginning days of the study, students were made to introduce each other before the class in order to make them active and

engage their minds in the tasks. Each student was given a chance to come forward to speak about his/her interests. While students were introducing themselves, much information was gathered about their current level of communication skills and interests regarding English language learning.

Pre-test stage

In this stage students were given pre-test simple tasks in order to assess the desired or specified objectives, without providing them with any information of how to do tasks in the pre-test. The participants were not given any instructions also. Students were divided into pairs and groups and were given pair and individual tasks. The sub skills like Role Patterns and Boundary Signalling Devices were aimed to be developed in the learners.

Pre-test tasks

All the pre-test tasks were given for 5 days. They were narrative tasks and role play tasks. The narrative tasks were given for developing boundary signalling devices and situational or role play tasks were given to develop role patterns in students.

Intervention stage

Intervention study was done for a period of 5 days. Students were taught and instructed about the tasks in this stage. The mistakes that were done by the students in the pre-test task were corrected by the researcher during the Intervention study: Example of the Intervention study was: The participants failed to do role pattern tasks in the pre-test stage which was given to them. During the intervention study they were taught how to deliver dialogues contextually, taking turns in a conversation. They were sufficiently trained in such a way that they performed post-test tasks well. For developing role patterns, students were taught to make vocabulary on their own depending on the roles, use contextual conversations, use appropriate vocabulary, comprehension signals like "Uh....huh....hmmm", intonation patterns for pragmatic effect, body language and use of formal and informal language. For developing boundary signalling device, students were taught comprehending the text, marking beginning, middle and end procedures in a story. During the intervention study, students were facilitated with sufficient guidance, how to

express their biographical information descriptively and without any anxiety and frustration but with confidence. There was no time limitation for the intervention study. More time was spent on it. Both mother tongue and English were used in the intervention study for making students comprehend the teaching, task and other instructions during the intervention.

Post-test stage

In this post-test stage, students were not given any instructions or help for performing tasks. Students' confidence level was tested; they were not motivated at this level, but were left to their own abilities while performing tasks. There was no hesitation, anxiety and fear in students during post- test stage. There was a great development in the performance of students in the post-test.

Tools

To identify the problems faced by the regional medium background learners in a   language class, to get the desired facts and data about their deficiency of effective language communication, to develop a suitable strategy of teaching to help the learners to develop the interactional competence with the sub skills as part of Interactional competence, the following tools were used. They are: 1. Field Notes 2.Questionnaire and 3.Semi-structured interview were employed.

Results of the study

Role Patterns

It is observed that role patterns have been developed in students' role play tasks after intervention study. Before this study, students participated in role play tasks without showing   up any role patterns in their tasks. They were instructed of role patterns like intonation, proper exchange of dialogues and other patterns. A change was marked up in students after Intervention study. For example the minimum percentage of marks in post-test was 25% and in post-test the maximum percentage of marks that he scored is 66%.

It is noticed that there was a great improvement in their performance during post-test; it seems that they have grasped the rules of Roles and Patterns of participation related to a given context. It is observed that there was a great difference in the performance of

students in Role-Relations. It can be said through an observation that students enjoyed the roles of a teacher and a student. The reason might be that they are situations in real life context. Comprehension signals like "uhh.....hmmm", body language, good intonation patterns were developed in the role patterns tasks.

Boundary signalling devices

The Sub skill Boundary Signalling Devices like (Opening, Transition and closing procedures) is developed in the learners through TBLT. Students could possess that skill right now, after they were taught how to develop boundary signalling devices. As they were given, clear instructions during intervention study, all the boundary signalling patterns like comprehending the story, able to initiate a story and narrating with beginning, middle and procedures. After Intervention Study the story was understood by the participants with all the boundary signalling devices and they themselves started marking all the appropriate boundaries of the story. The lowest score in the pre-test was 18% whereas in the post-test the maximum   score is 75%. It is quite understood that boundary signalling devices are developed in students through TBLT.

Conclusion

 It has been found that the sub skills of Interactional Competence have been developed among the regional medium learners through TBLT. It has been proved that it is quite possible to develop all the language skills of speaking, writing, reading, listening through TBLT, which is one of the siblings of CLT. It has also been proved that TBLT can fetch tremendous improvement in the language learning of students. It was made possible in regional medium context with the help of several factors like the intervention study, motivation and creating student- friendly atmosphere, which was free from tension and any other language related stress issues. The study addresses the problems of the language learners in language learning and interacting with the other students. The problem has been provided with a solution and that it is possible for learners to interact well and speak language with confidence if they are given enough practice with the tasks. Therefore regional medium learners need not be thought upon as the learners who can never develop

their language interaction if provided with the right teaching with effective methods in suitable language learning environment.

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