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English Language Teaching and Tasks

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Abstract:

With the globalization in all the fields, it is necessary to bring changes in learning experience. Every learning experience can be more effective when it is enjoyable and learner-centered. To learn English as a second language can bring changes in learning experience and evaluation when it involves tasks aiming at enhancing communication skills of students in English. Communicative approach is a new way to teach and learn English as a second language. In communicative classroom the chief focus is learning experience through tasks. Here the teacher facilitates and provide opportunities to the learners to communicate in the target language i.e. English. Learning the language by doing tasks provides a new experience to the learners. The present paper is focusing on different tasks for teaching English.

Keywords: Communicative Approach, Communication Skills, ELT-English Language Teaching, English as a Second Language, Target Language, Tasks.

1.0 Introduction

Our language is our principal means of making sense to our experience and communication with others. It's an inseparable aspect of our personality. We communicate with others every day whether we just say 'hello' or have a long conversation, or whether we give or follow instructions or whether at home or at the shop or workplace. Communication is a tool for everyday life-Everyone uses it every day and language makes it a whole lot easier. According to Mukalel (1998) language is for communication, "Communicability is the essence of human language. Any utterance, any discourse, as we may call it, takes place in a context where at least two individuals must be present."

Since language is a learned form of behavior, its teaching should start early. Since language is a habit, sufficient practice should be given to children to acquire and confirm language habits. Drills are very much useful and should form a very important feature of methods of teaching. In short, language is a tool to express ourselves. After all language is a means of communication. A person uses the language in social context to express his feelings and experiences.



1.2 A Shift in English Language Teaching and Learning and Approaches

According to Rao (2006) *Special needs to be paid in the study of English ...world knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace ...India must not only keep up this growth but should also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose study of English deserves to be specially strengthened. Learning of English may be facilitated in the upper primary or secondary stages considering that this would be needed as a 'library language' in the field of higher education and consequently a strong foundation in the language will have to be laid at the school stage.*

The role of English in our lives has got much importance. English is the International Language and is one of the most popular and most spoken in the technology world. We need to know English language in order to study any science subject or any computer language. English is very much important in our life. It is necessary in each and every field. If we know English, we never feel tongue tied in front of others. It's a widely spoken language. People take pride in speaking English. If we don't know English, we will lag behind the others. It is the need of the hour. Today we can't deny the importance of English in our life. To anyone who lives in an English speaking country, it is of vital importance. Language is always very important, because it is the means of communication. If you cannot speak the language of a place, it will be very difficult to communicate with the people.

Nowadays English has become the need of time for everyone. English language teaching today is thought with a new perspective. Now it's going beyond the ordinary classroom. It's no longer a matter of teaching structures of the language rather it's about teaching the use of English language in the real life like situations. With the change of time, teaching approaches have been changed. From structural approach to communicative approach many changes have been occurred in the presentation of lesson to the setting of the classroom. Students are learning the language in different set up with the use of multimedia and computer software so the role of a teacher is also changed. Language in its two forms written and spoken is for the expression. Classroom transaction is inherently controlled by different approaches. English language teaching as a second language demands efforts with the new trends in teaching learning process. Now the curriculum and textbook is designed based on communicative approach. So the primary aim of the English language teaching is for communication and functions so that students can use the language in context and the role of the teacher is to be a facilitator not the master of the classroom.



After independence, structural approach was followed in English language teaching. Grammar Translation method was used and structures of the target language was taught, but with new trends and approaches, the structural approach is replaced by the communicative approach. It is focusing on the communicative competence of the students. It has been accepted and promoted and classroom atmosphere has been changed. In communicative approach, fluency is focused and students are the center of teaching learning process. To develop communication skills is the aim of the approach and to achieve this aim various activities, tasks, and teaching learning material as well as technology are used.

1.3 Communicative Approach and Tasks

English language teaching as a second language requires tremendous efforts from teachers. From independence to the present day English language teaching at the secondary school level has gone a drastic change in the matter of textbook approaches in Gujarat. There are many approaches to teach English language. Presently English language teaching as a second language in Gujarat is based on communicative approach. 50% of classroom transaction is expected in English. The lessons are designed to develop communicative competence of the students through tasks. Task based language teaching is advocated and promoted. Task based approach to English language teaching is a novel way to learn the language. Many linguists have given the definition of tasks. Task based teaching and learning is becoming popular day by day and focuses on social communication and day-to-day functions of communication. The aim of the task is to create language use and provide natural context.

1.3.1 Tasks

According to Ellis(2003), a task has four main characteristics:

1. A task involves a primary focus on (pragmatic) meaning.
2. A task has some kind of 'gap.'
3. The participants choose the linguistic resources needed to complete the task.
4. A task has a clearly defined, non-linguistic outcome.



Long (1985) gives the definition in a broad sense: *A task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, etc. In other words, by „task“ is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in between.*

Skehan (1998) suggests five defining criteria. A task is an activity in which a) meaning is primary b) there is some communication problem to solve c) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities d) task completion has some priority e) the assessment of the task is in terms of outcomes.

In a word, a task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whatever that correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed.

Prabhu (1987) defines a task as 'An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was considered a task'

As Nunan (1989) says, A task is as "an activity (or technique) where students are urged to accomplish something or solve some problem using their language. Preferably, this activity is open-ended; there is no set way to accomplish their goal".

Nunan (1991) outlines five characteristics of a task-based approach to language learning:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts (teaching materials) into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.



According to Willis (1996), a task is a goal-oriented activity with a clear purpose. Doing a 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.

Richards (2006), defines some of the key characteristics of a task:-

1. It is something that learners do or carry out by using their existing language resources.
2. It has an outcome which is not simply linked to learning language though language acquisition may occur as the learner carries out the task.
3. It involves a focus on meaning.
4. In the case of tasks involving two or more learners it calls upon the learner's use of communicative strategies and interactional skills.

On the basis of the above definitions, a task can be defined as a kind of process to be carried out by the learners to acquire learning experiences and to use the language in life-like situations with the help of authentic materials and interaction in the classroom process of learning the language. Various activities and information gap activities can be used in the task. A task must be interesting and meaning-focused so that the learners can accomplish it with full participation. The role of the teacher is to create atmosphere and facilitate the learners whenever and wherever necessary.

Task-based learning is advantageous to the student because it is more student-centered, allows for more meaningful communication, and often provides for practical extra-linguistic skill building. As the tasks are likely to be familiar to the students (e.g.: visiting the doctor), students are more likely to be engaged, which may further motivate them in their language learning.

1.3.2. Task Components

According to Nunan (1989), the definition of a language-learning task requires specification of six components: goals, input, activities, teacher role, learner role and settings.

1. Goals

Goals are the general intentions behind any given learning task. Goals may relate to a range of general



outcomes.

2. Input

Input refers to the data that form the point of departure for the task. In fact, input for communicative tasks can be derived from a wide range of sources. Hover (1986) suggests a list of sources, to name just a few, letters, newspaper extracts, memo notes, shopping lists, recipe, weather forecast, etc.

3. Activities

Activities specify what learners will actually do with the input which forms the point of departure for the learning task. Nunan (1989) proposes three general ways of characterizing activities: rehearsal for the real world, skills use, and fluency/accuracy. Activities are designed to develop basic language skills. Learners are encouraged to increase their language skills and to develop different communication skills. The activities focus the learner on how writers convey their aim through the function and organization of the text. Learners are taught to identify the function of the text by utilizing linguistic and non-linguistic clues. They are also taught to identify the essential organization of the text, whether it is through the expansion of a main idea, and/or whether it is organized in terms of chronological sequence, description, analogy and contrast, classification, argument and logic. Finally, learners are sensitized to the mechanics of schematization. They are shown how altering the order of elements in a sentence can alter the meaning. Activities which focus on meaning are designed to get learners to process the content of the text through the various types of non-linguistic and linguistic responses they might make to the text. The activities have two different aims:

1. To make students active in the reading process by presenting them with decision-making activities (e.g. drawing a diagram with the information given in the text, solving the problem, completing a table which reorganizes the information).
2. To devise activities which are as natural as possible, i.e. as close as possible to what one would naturally do with the text (e.g. answering a letter using the information given in that letter, completing a document, comparing several texts, etc.)

Activities focusing on assessing the text are designed to get readers to go beneath the surface of the text, as it were, in order to judge it and evaluate it. Here readers are required to differentiate fact from opinion



and to identify the writer's attitudes, intentions and biases.

4. Teacher's and learners' roles

“Role” refers to the part that learners and teachers are expected to play in the carrying out learning tasks as well as the social and interpersonal relationships between the participants (Nunan, 1989).

Learners' roles are closely related to the functions and status of the teacher (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Giving the learners a different role, such as greater initiative in the classroom, requires the teacher to adopt a different role. The teacher is no longer a passive recipient and implementer of other people's syllabus and methods but an active creator of his or her own materials, classroom activities and so on.

The teacher should be the facilitator of the material and the atmosphere and the designer of the task. Then s/he should be the observer and guide. Students may find difficulty in what they should do and how they can perform during the task.

5. Settings

“Settings” refers to the classroom arrangements specified or implied in the task, and it also requires consideration of whether the task is to be carried out wholly or partly outside the classroom. Settings will be an important factor influencing roles and relationships. Whether the task is on individual, pair, group, or the whole class basis decides the relationship between learners or between the teacher and learners.

1.3.3. Tasks to develop communication skills

According to Prabhu (1987), there are three main categories of task; information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap.

Information-gap involves a transfer of given information from one person to another – or from one form to another, or from one place to another – generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. Reasoning gap involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns. Opinion gap involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation.



Task-based learning is advantageous to the students because it is more student-centered, allows for more meaningful communication, and often provides for practical extra-linguistic skill building. Here are some tasks to develop oral and written communication skills of the students in English. They are greeting, agreeing disagreeing, introducing, giving instructions, requesting, making inquiring, giving directions, advising, expressing positive and negative feelings, suggesting, giving an opinion, and complaining.

Task 01 agreeing and disagreeing

Goals- to develop language skills in general and speaking and writing in specific

To make the students able to express their opinion

Input – video clip and text about natural calamities

Activities- to watch a video clip or read the given text about natural calamities and to present the observation and opinion about agreeing or disagreeing the situation and reasons for their opinion about the video or text in written as well as oral form in pair

Teacher's role- to provide material to develop skills i. e. video clip or text and stationary, to be a facilitator, to observe students

Students' role-to work in pair and complete the task by following teacher's instructions

Setting- pair work, in the classroom

Task 02 spot the difference

Goals- to develop critical thinking, speaking and writing skills

Input- spot the difference pictures, dictionaries

Activities- to observe pictures and find out differences and express their views in written as well as oral

Teacher's role- to present pictures and

Students' role- to work in pair, watch the pictures and think critically to find differences, to use the



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dictionary if necessary

Setting- pair work, in the classroom

Summing up

This paper focuses on the importance of the tasks in English language teaching and learning. A task is a means of using the language. Tasks in ELT are for the development of communication skills of students who are learning English as a second language.



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