

Task-Based Language Teaching Intervention to Improve English Speaking Performance: A Case Study of Secondary School Students in Mardan (Pakistan)

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Abstract

This study explores the significance of English proficiency in Pakistan, focusing on District Mardan and the challenges students face in speaking English fluently due to ineffective teaching methods. The study investigates the potential benefits of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving English speaking skills among secondary school students. The research aims to understand the perspectives of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers regarding integrating TBLT into the existing English Language Teaching (ELT) framework. English language teachers from government schools were the participants in the study. The data collection method consists of questionnaires for English teachers. Thematic analyses were employed to analyze qualitative data, ensuring a comprehensive investigation of English language teaching in government secondary schools focusing on TBLT as a teaching methodology. Many of the teachers were in favor of TBLT. The study's results revealed TBLT as an effective method of improving English language speaking skills at the secondary school level. Findings show that the education department should promote task-based teaching methodologies in public and private section institutions.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, TBLT, Secondary School Students, ELT, ESL Learners.

Introduction

In a globalized society, English proficiency is essential, and in Pakistan, it is crucial for official communication and education (Zahore, 2018). The ability to speak English fluently is a gateway to success. An individual can express their views without any hesitation with competency over the target language. It is a life desire of students to speak English fluently, especially at the secondary school level. English plays a vital role as a way of communication with the world. In Pakistan, the English language is a medium of instruction in schools and offices, which everyone wants to master. English language is taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan from grade 1 to graduation.

The government of Pakistan initiated measures to improve English language education, particularly in government schools, by applying educational emergency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Educational Emergency KPK, 2013). However, students in Pakistan, especially in District Mardan, need help speaking English fluently due to ineffective teaching methods (Munir, 2019). It is assumed that English language teachers in Pakistan may only partially support the current ELT (English et al.) system due to its limited focus on speaking skills and examination-oriented approach (Zafar, 2015).

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There are four basic skills of the English language, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Among them, all speaking skills are given preference as it give a good impression to an individual, especially in the field of education and offices. Speaking skills are essential as they are used as a means of communication with foreign countries. Researchers support the importance of speaking skills. According to Richards (2008), mastery of English language speaking is a priority at the secondary school level. A secondary school student actively participates in conversation and competitions because of his/her ability to express in the target language.

Speaking skill is active as it gives chances to an individual to express themselves easily. Speaking skills develop other abilities of an individual, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, etc. For better communication, students are taught all these to improve their speaking skills. Speaking skills are associated with real-life situations. It is used in daily interaction, and most importantly, speaking fluently in the target language is the first impression of an individual. Owing to its wide range, the importance of English language speaking skills must be recognized. Efforts have been made from time to time in Pakistani ELT to improve students' ability in the English language. According to the National Curriculum 2006, courses in English Books have been revised for better communication skills.

However, TBLT can be an effective method of teaching the English language, which is a gap for the present research study. The traditional method, i.e., GTM (Grammar Translation Method) of teaching, does not fulfill the student's ability, especially in speaking performance, compared to TBLT, which is based on activity and practice. Therefore, the researcher in this study tried to know the views of the practicing English teachers at the secondary school level for the implantation of TBLT in government secondary schools in Pakistan.

This study aims to explore the opinions of English language teachers about implementing TBLT at the secondary school level. Moreover, the study answers the research question, "What are the opinions of English language teachers about implementing TBLT at the secondary school level?" further sections present a discussion on the literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion at the end of the paper body.

Literature Review

English Language Learning (ELL) in Pakistan refers to acquiring proficiency in the English language within Pakistan's educational and sociocultural environment. In Pakistan, English is often learned as a second or foreign language, and its acquisition is crucial due to its role in education, business, and communication (Mansoor, 2018). Teaching English language speaking skills involves instructing students on effectively expressing themselves in spoken English. It includes activities that improve pronunciation, fluency, and communication competence (Brown & Yule, 1983).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an instructional approach grounded in language acquisition theories. It emphasizes the importance of using meaningful tasks to promote language learning (Ellis, 2003). TBLT is an educational approach where language learning is centered on the completion of real-world tasks, fostering language acquisition through problem-solving and communication (Willis & Willis, 2007).

The goals of TBLT are to enhance language proficiency, encourage learner autonomy, and develop communicative competence through engaging learners in authentic language use (Nunan, 2004). A task in TBLT is a specific activity or assignment that learners undertake to achieve a communicative goal. Characteristics of tasks include being goal-oriented, involving information gaps, and requiring negotiation of meaning (Willis & Willis, 2007). Tasks serve as a means to

facilitate language learning by providing a context for learners to apply their language knowledge and skills purposefully, leading to language development (Skehan, 1998). Task frameworks are structured guidelines or templates that educators use to design and implement tasks effectively within TBLT (Willis & Willis, 2007). Tasks in TBLT include authenticity, interaction, communication, and a focus on language form and meaning (Skehan, 1998). Task kinds refer to the tasks employed in TBLT, such as information gap tasks, opinion exchange tasks, and decision-making tasks (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Teachers' and students' views on English Language Teaching (ELT) refer to their perspectives, attitudes, and opinions about teaching and learning English, which can influence instructional practices and outcomes (Borg, 2003). Empirical studies in TBLT involve research that uses data and observations to investigate the effectiveness, impact, and outcomes of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in natural educational settings (Skehan & Foster, 1999).

The above discussion indicates that the task-based teaching methodology significantly impacts English language learning. However, there needs to be more literature available in the case of Pakistan, especially case studies for learners of English as a second language. Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature.

Research Methodology

This research paper explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving the English proficiency of secondary school students in Pakistan. The study follows a qualitative research method and employs an open-ended questionnaire as a research instrument to collect qualitative data. It focuses on assessing students' oral communication skills and the impact of TBLT on language proficiency. Qualitative data was obtained from teachers' questionnaires. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, obtaining qualitative data analysis. The research was conducted in government secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The sample included 50 ESL practicing English teachers. The chosen school, Government Higher Secondary School in Mardan, is a convenient sample due to accessibility and cost considerations. The participants are fifty English Teachers teaching secondary school students in district Mardan. Qualitative data is collected through teachers' questionnaires.

Findings and Results

The findings of the study are presented according to the research questions.

The research questions (What are the opinions of English language teachers about implementing TBLT at the secondary school level) have been answered to determine the existing ELT scenario in Pakistan as well as to introduce TBLT for the improvement of speaking skills of Pakistani secondary school students. The data sequence to answer the research question is analyzing the data from the Questionnaire for the teachers.

Questionnaire for the Teachers

A teacher questionnaire was created to answer the research question. The study included a teachers' Questionnaire, and a purposive sampling technique was used for secondary school English teachers. 50 English teachers were recruited using a questionnaire.

All of the survey's most critical questions related to Pakistani's ELT landscape.

- 1- English language teaching methodology (Item No. 8, 11, 18, 20)
- 2- Environment in E LT classroom (Item No. 3, 5, 7, 10 and 12)
- 3- Medium of instruction (Item No. 1, 4 and 15)

- 4- Opinions about existing Language teaching and Pakistani examination system (Item No. 2, 6, 13, 14, 16 and 19)
 5- Suggestions for effective language pedagogy (Items 9, 17, and 21)

Thematic Analysis of the Teachers' Questionnaire

There are five main themes of the English teachers' Questionnaire, as elaborated below;

Table 1 Themes of Questionnaire

Theme-1	Theme-2	Theme-3	Theme-4	Theme-5
English Language Teaching Methods	Classroom environment	Medium of instructions	of Existing examination system and ELT in	Effective Language Pedagogy improving

Many Pakistani educators emphasize teaching youngsters' English grammar and memory (Nawab, 2012; Shamim, 2008). The current study's data gathering phase found the same for English as a foreign language teaching technique. Most respondents said GTM was Pakistan's best English language education method in Pakistani ELT classroom setup, which is the second key topic. Most educators argued that the absence of student agency in ELT classrooms renders ESL students' passive learners. The teacher typically talks more than the pupils combined. The third issue was teaching language: just 10 of 50 teachers used English in class. 65% of Pakistani instructors cared more about students completing assignments than teaching language skills. The fourth subject was educators' opinions on Pakistan's exam system. Seventy-five percent of instructors said the existing English language teaching (ELT) and assessment system promoted memorization over critical thinking. 7 Pakistani educators said the existing evaluation method measured students' ability in all four language skills. Topic 5 discusses how teachers improve English proficiency. The respondents suggested refocusing the curriculum, giving students additional speaking practice, and educating instructors in effective language pedagogy to improve students' English language skills.

Findings for Research Question

The questionnaire asked instructors, "What are the opinions of English language teachers about implementing TBLT at the secondary school level?" Part one of the teachers' questionnaire is a closed-ended survey based on a Likert Scale from strongly disagree to agree (1-5), and part two is open-ended questions about TBLT implementation in Pakistani ELT and teachers' familiarity with the methodology. Most ELT teachers used GTM and did not know about TBLT. GTM, the leading English language teaching method, hindered instructors from adopting their suggestions to improve Pakistani ESL students' speaking abilities. They also argued that the Pakistani test system focuses too much on memorizing.

The questions asked in the questionnaire were answered by teachers who showed dissatisfaction with the exam system and ELT environment and the fact that most are ignorant of TBLT.

The present research is comprised of research questions, i.e., What are the opinions of English language teachers about implementing TBLT at the secondary school level?

The constructivist-based TBLT approach to language education is learner-centered and experimental (Ellis, 2009; Hu, 2013; Wang, 2011). ESL students employ linguistics without grammar instruction (Ellis, 2014; Robinson, 2011; Willis & Willis, 2007). TBLT has been beneficial in international EFL and ESL contexts (Benson, 2016; Carless, 2009; Fukuta, 2016;

Hakim, 2016; Muhammad & Rashid, 2015). This research confirmed the effectiveness of TBLT as a method of English language.

Discussion

The main objective of the study is to improve the existing ELT scenario in Pakistan regarding English language speaking skills in government schools at the secondary level. The researcher has been a part of the academia for the last thirteen years. It attempts to introduce TBLT in the Pakistani English language teaching system, among other things, by establishing TBLT through empirical evidence. It is expected that this research will contribute to enhancing the scenario of ELT in Pakistan. It will also benefit the students and the English teachers in the learning teaching process. The study will also assist and support the related stakeholders of the ELT system in the country. English language in Pakistan is taught as a subject. Students and teachers consider it a way to success in examinations. The findings of this study will enhance the standard of English language teaching in Pakistan after incorporating TBLT like other countries already reaping the benefits of TBLT (Mohammadi & Rashid, 2015; Fakuta, 2016). This work could be a guideline for experts in curriculum and syllabus as well as managers and textbook boards to publish a textbook for students at the secondary level with the TBLT approach (Nawab, 2012) asserts that the current system of examination is based on memorization thus memory-based examinations does not produce the desired results for ELT (Zafar, 2015). The findings will help the decision makers to roll with powerful skills of language, i.e., speaking skills. It is imperative to design new books that can help teachers and students to practice instead of memorization of abstract rules for language skills.

The present research is beneficial for both the teachers and students, being the main stakeholders of the ELT business in the country. This study will assist the English language teachers with large size classrooms. If teachers are well aware of TBLT, they can make groups or pairs of students in the class as well as conduct seminars and involve students in different tasks or activities, for example, problem-solving tasks or decision-making. (Zahor, 2018) argues that TBLT facilitates teachers because the current customary ELT methods demand the teachers to focus on students with more work. In contrast, the main disadvantage of the prevailing TBLT setup is that it considers the students merely silent listeners.

Based on the findings of the present research study, TBLT is a compelling method for improving secondary school students' English language speaking performance, in which students perform tasks inside the class in an ELT classroom. Students should be given a task in the English language classroom. It has been found while answering the research question in the current research that TBLT is more effective than the other teaching methodologies. TBLT is more student-centered than the teachers' centered. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to use the TBLT methodology for effective English language teaching.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the questionnaire administered to the English language teachers, the study summarizes its goals, outcomes, and research question: Most English language instructors in Mardan were dissatisfied with the test procedure and ELT results. Most instructors were dissatisfied with the curriculum, and they needed to be more relaxed with the ELT syllabus to concentrate on alternative methods. Thus, TBLT may help students learn English.

The learner-centered approach of TBLT made secondary school pupils feel calm and motivated. The experimental ESL students used their existing linguistic resources to learn English via constructivism-based experiential learning. During experimental instruction, most students were

interested in TBLT tasks. Hence, TBLT may be helpful for secondary school English language acquisition. English language instructors felt rushed to finish the curriculum, leaving little time for classroom activities. English instructors rush to finish the yearly test syllabus. The present research study concludes that a TBLT framework needs to be adopted for secondary school students to improve their English language speaking skills. Since there is no time allocated for English language speaking performance in the existing class duration, it is concluded that a separate class may be arranged for English language speaking in which the TBLT framework can be adopted, as it was found in the teacher's response to the questionnaire.

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