# Teaching of Vocabulary: Task-based Approach

M. Srilakshmi
Professor of English, Dr. DVR & HS College, MIC College of Technology,
Kanchikacherla, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

E-mail : tripuranenisrilakshmi568@gmail.com

M. Kiranmai
Asst. Prof. of English, Aditya Engineering, Kakinada, East Godavari Dist.,
Andhra Pradesh

E-mail : tripuranenisrilakshmi568@gmail.com

***ABSTRACT***

*This paper mainly focuses on teaching vocabulary to ESL students within the framework of task-based language teaching, focusing on engineering students in Andhra Pradesh. Two homogenous groups of students of III B. Tech. ECE-branch participated in the investigation as an experimental group and a control group. For assessment a teacher-made test was administered. For the control group, technical vocabulary was taught using the traditional approach, and for the experimental group, technical vocabulary was taught using the task-based approach. A post-test was administered to the students at the end of the session to find out the impact of the task-based approach on the experimental group. Result analyses evidenced that the task-based approach was more effective in teaching technical vocabulary compared to the traditional method.*

**Keywords:** *task, task-based language teaching, traditional approach, ESL*

## Introduction

India is one of the countries where one can find a large number of learners who learn English as their second language. Teaching English as a global language has become relevant and significant for such teaching gives a large number of global opportunities to ESL learners in India. In the state of Andhra Pradesh the mushrooming of engineering colleges has posed a serious challenge to language teachers in improving the communicative ability of students. With more English as second language students entering the classroom of engineering colleges it has become inevitable for the teachers to implement special instructional practices so that they can be successful. Mastering of English primarily as a tool for communication like speaking appropriately

without fear in different contexts and writing for various purposes is the need of the hour. So changes in the teaching methodology are inevitable and preparation of materials that would equip the students to effectively cope with the changing trends to strengthen their ability is essential.

Appropriate use of language consists of appropriate grammatical structures and appropriate vocabulary. Particularly when it comes to communication, one can communicate with vocabulary more readily than with grammar. A good command of words and the competence to use the right word to express a specific idea is a pre-requisite in the speech and writing process. Generically, vocabulary is defined as the knowledge of words and word meanings. More explicitly, we use vocabulary to refer to the kind of words that students must know to read increasingly demanding text with comprehension (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005). It is something that enhances and strengthens over time. A stock of good words enables us to paint a rich picture and equips us with instruments with which one can hone ones speaking skills. Also good vocabulary enables one to make fine distinctions between things so that one can exactly say what they mean and be clear while exchanging ideas and making a conversation.

## Statement of problem

To aid the learners learn vocabulary, various approaches, procedures and methods have been deployed over the years. Technical students are quiet aware of the necessity to enhance their vocabulary as well as boost their competence in communication. Though new methods and approaches are found, majority of the techniques used by teachers to teach vocabulary are still traditional where the teacher mainly concentrates on the translation of technical text without much focus on interaction among the students. Hence the focus has now shifted to task based teaching of vocabulary. Innovative tasks which promote interaction among the students will definitely enhance vocabulary skills in students.

## Research question

This study was particularly designed to find out the impact of task-based teaching of technical vocabulary on ESL learners in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The following research question was proposed with regard to the objectives of the study:

Q1. In an ESL setting will there be any differences in the performance between the students who are taught vocabulary by a task-based approach and the students who are taught vocabulary by a traditional method?

## Review of Literature

Task-based Language Teaching

Richards and Rodgers (2001), state that task-based language teaching is an approach which purely employs the use of tasks as the prime unit of instruction and planning in the teaching of language (p. 223). According to Nunan (2004) task is a prime element in designing syllabus, assessing learners and classroom teaching (p. 1). As per the view of Ellis (2003), task holds a principal place in present second language acquisition (SLA) research and language teaching (p. 1). Willis (1996) says

that tasks are always activities where an outcome is achieved by using the target language for a communication purpose (p. 23). Richards and Rodgers (2001) passed few assumptions which underlie TBLT. He says that language is primarily a means which makes meaning and this meaning is very important. This was referred by Skehan (1998), in his definition. Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that TBLT focuses on interactional, functional and structural models (in some cases) of language. According to Skehan (1998) believes that Structural model should be considered when we deal with task complexity. When it comes to the theory of learning, Richards and Rodgers (2001), state that both input and output necessary for language acquisition are provided by tasks and adds that task, activity and achievement are motivational (p. 228). Language learning for sure needs motivation. Brown (2000) argues that with proper motivation it is easy in second language learning to claim that a learner will be successful (p. 160).

**Vocabulary**

For Engineering students technical associations are paramount which demand good language fluency and clarity of thought. In the present day scenario where majority of students are ESL in Engineering colleges, students find it difficult to gain access to a particular thought in the target language as they spend much of their time in their mother tongue which is their first language. One of the main reasons for this is poor vocabulary. It was found that students taking university courses identified vocabulary as a major hindrance in academic writing tasks (Leki &

Carson.1994).Wilkins (1972) said that without grammar very little can be conveyed but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (pp.111-112). Particularly when ESL learners try to acquire good expression and fluency in English, it is paramount for them to develop more productive vocabulary. Vocabulary learning is successful when it involves lively participation that goes beyond theoretical or definitional knowledge. As per Stahl and Kapinus (2001) when children 'know' a word, they not only know the word's definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts. Stahl (2005) said that vocabulary knowledge is knowledge and the knowledge of a word not only entails a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. According to Richards and Renandya (2002) vocabulary is a primary component of language proficiency and gives much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 255).

Enhancing vocabulary through Task-based learning:

"Tasks …..are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome and tasks generally bear some resemblance to real life language use. So, task-based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language teaching."(Skehan 1996 b:20)

It is believed that vocabulary learning depends on involving students in different tasks that make them to understand the meanings of words and engage in realistic

and purposeful communication. Even research has proved that one remembers new words much more easily if one thinks about them in relation to ones' own experience and uses them in a context that is meaningful.

English vocabulary expansion is exciting but it also demands the attention and involvement of teachers and students alike. By using tasks teachers can retain a higher level of student engagement as the words are learnt from the context not from the lists.

This is an empirical study and is based on data collected from students from an engineering college named Devineni Venkata Ramana and Dr. Hima Sekhar MIC College of Technology in Kanchikacherla, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

### Methodology

The study was carried out in an Engineering College in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. This is an experimental study hence the data collection and analysis is quantitative in nature. However, when students are involved – the study cannot be carried out wholly in a controlled environment. There are certain aspects that affect the results/ outcome of the study.

### Procedure

The study was carried out at the beginning of the semester. The participants were divided into two groups as control group and experimental group after being homogenized as per their competence in general vocabulary. After grouping a teacher-made pre-test regarding their technical vocabulary knowledge was conducted. Two different approaches were applied to teach technical

vocabularies to the participants. The participants in the control group were taught technical vocabulary in a traditional manner i.e., study the text, translate and answer some non-task-based comprehension questions at the end. For the experimental group the same text with some task-based exercises were used. Finally a post-test was conducted to find out the probable differences between the performances of the two groups.

### Sample

Two tasks were designed to make students involve

**Participants**: III B. Tech. students of Electronics and Communications Engineering Branch

**Sample Size**: Two sets of students are chosen with 30 students in each set. All the students belong to the same branch and section to avoid the differences in the levels of understanding.

### Vocabulary

25 vocabulary words highlighted in a passage are picked and the same passage is used for both the sets of students.

### Execution

**Stage-1**:

For both the groups

The selected passage is given to the students with the vocabulary words highlighted. The meanings of the vocabulary words are given at the end of the passage. Students are asked to read the passage and based on the meanings given at the end are asked to

comprehend. Now a pre-test is conducted.

**Stage-2:**

For the control group

Teacher explains the meanings of the words to the control group in the traditional manner explaining the meaning with examples and asking the students to note down.

For the experimental group

**Task -1:**

The teacher writes the vocabulary words on the board and then describes the meaning of one of them. Referring to the passage given students in group should guess which word is described and say aloud the correct one.

**Task-2:**

Fill in the blanks

Two students are formed as a team and the teacher gives list of words followed by blanks. Discussing with each other students complete the task.

**Task-3:**

Re-Writing sentences

The group is divided into teams with 4 members in each. A sheet is given which consists of sentences with the meanings of the target vocabulary. Now student 1 takes the sheet and reads a sentence which has meaning of one of the target vocabulary word. The remaining students should rewrite the same sentence using the target word directly. The sheet is rotated until all the sentences are done. At the end students check the answers.

For Ex:

Sentence given in the sheet which the student reads aloud:

The worker escaped without intimation with a weeks' pay.

What the others have to write:

The worker absconded with a weeks' pay.

**Task-4:**

Students are divided into teams with four members in each. Now they have to develop any theme of their choice using all the words. After the theme is ready, one after the other each team has to come forward and read what they have written. It can be a story, a concept, a paragraph etc. The remaining teams will listen to the various usages of vocabulary contextually. The teacher and the remaining teams can interfere and correct mistakes if any during presentation.

**Stage 3:**

Now a post test is conducted to both the groups. The question paper is the same for both the groups. The average percentage of the pre test and post test marks of both the control group and experiment group are compared.

From the comparative chart shown above it is revealed that learners in the experimental group who have been taught vocabulary through task-based language teaching outperformed the learners in the control group who have been taught vocabulary through traditional approach.
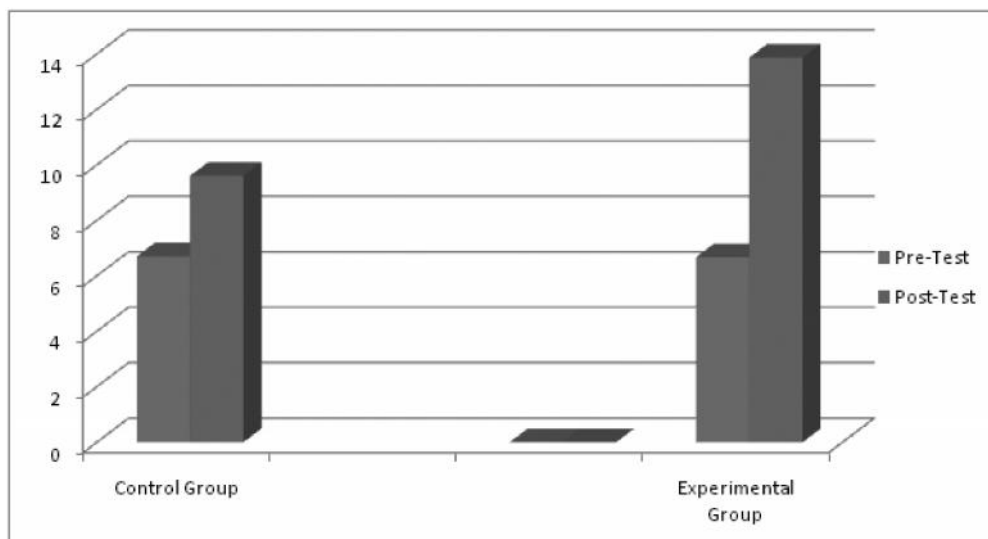
For the control group the difference of average percentage of marks between the pre test and post test was 2.9%. For the experimental group the difference of average percentage of marks between the pre test and post test was 7.2%. In the experimental group the learners acquired a good command of vocabulary taught and the competence to use the right word according to the situation. Also it was found that while performing tasks, learners' interaction improved as language use and language learning took place simultaneously. Besides feedback from the teacher, learners receive feedback from the team members. The existence of such a feedback provided a more relaxing and less threatening condition for learning foreign language.

**Conclusion**

From the above study it is revealed that changes in the teaching methodology are inevitable and preparation of materials that would equip the learners to effectively cope with the changing trends to strengthen their ability is essential. Vocabulary learning enhances by involving students in different tasks that make them understand the meanings of words and engage in realistic and purposeful communication. Especially by using tasks teachers can retain a higher level of student engagement as the words are learnt from the context not from the lists.

**References**

Abdullah Sarani & Leila Farzaneh Sahebi (2012). The Impact of Task-based Approach on Vocabulary Learning in ESP Courses. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 5, No. 10; 2012, ISSN 1916-4742  E-ISSN 1916-4750.

Batters, J. (1986). Do boys really think languages are just girl-talk? *Modern Languages,* 67(2), 75-79.

Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principle of language learning and teaching.* New York: Pearson Education.

Choudhury, A. (2010). Teaching vocabulary in the ESL/EFL classroom: central pedagogical issues. *MJAL Journal,* 2(4), 306-316.

Cubillo, P., & Brenes, C. (2009). Using task-based instruction in ESP course in the computer center at the University of Costa Rica. *INIE Journal of Costa Rica University*, 9(1), 1-25.

Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ellis R. (2003). *Task-based Language Teaching and Learning*. Oxford, OUP.

Farrell, P. (1990). Vocabulary in ESP: a lexical analysis of the English of electronics and a study of semi-technical vocabulary CLCS Occasional. *Journal of Trinity College,* 10(3).

Gibbs, J. (2001). *Tribes: A new way of learning and being together*. Windsor, CA: Center Source Systems.

Howatt, A. (1984). *A history of English language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kashefian, S., & Maarof, N. (2010). A study of the use of language learning strategies among students in Iran. *Malaysian Journal of ELT research*, 6, 195-233.

Nito, R. (2004). Vocabulary & ESP: Teaching Business Vocabulary. Retrieved 25th October 2011, from http://www.scribd.com/doc/46984761/ESP

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching.* Cambridge University Press.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667336

Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second language pedagogy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667305

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching.* Cambridge:

Cambridge university press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190

Robison, P. C. (1991). *ESP today: A practitioner's guide.* UK: Prentice Hall International Ltd, Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning.* Harlow: Longman.

Skehan, P. (1998a). Task-based instruction. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 268-286.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500003585

Yarahmadi, M. (2011). Gender differences views on problem-solving reading strategies in L2 a case study of Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of basic and applied scientific research*, 1(12), 2633-2634.

Zare, P. (2010). An investigation in to language learning strategy use and gender among Iranian undergraduate language learners. *World science journal,* 11(10), 1236-1247.