

Task-Based Learning for Enhancing Employability Skills among Students

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ABSTRACT

English language learning plays a vital role in equipping students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for employability. The acquisition of linguistic and communicative competence makes a student proficient in achieving all the four aspects of language, such as phonology, pragmatics, semantics and syntax, using it appropriately in all social situations including the workplace. To be an expert in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing is the most challenging task for non-native learners and a systematic approach is essentially needed for language learners to master these skills. The term 'communicative competence' covers all modes of competence including both social and grammatical competence. Communication will also encompass non-verbal behaviour. Grammatical competence can be achieved by mastering the structure of the target language, whereas communicative competence can be achieved by mastering the structure of the language as well as the conventional rules for social behaviour. Task-based learning is very helpful in fostering communicative competence and confidence in students to acquire the language.

Introduction

When there are many approaches to English language teaching, one of the best approaches is the Task-Based Approach, which has been successful over the years. Every language teacher realizes the importance of learner-centered and flexible approach and the demand for Communicative Language Teaching which helps to understand the language in context and to use it in real life situations. The advantage of the task-based approach, according to its advocates, is that during the task the learners are allowed to use whatever language they have, freeing them

to focus entirely on the meaning of their message. This makes it closer to a real-life communicative situation. In a task-based approach, the focus of classroom activities is on tasks, and ultimately on meaning. Task-based learning offers the student an opportunity to do exactly this.

Task-Based Learning

The primary focus of classroom activity is the task and language is the instrument which the students use to complete it. The task is an activity in which students use language to achieve a specific outcome. The activity reflects real life and learners focus

on meaning; they are free to use any language they want. A traditional model for the organization of language lessons, both in the classroom and in course-books, has long been the PPP approach (presentation, practice, production). With this model individual language items (for example, the present tense) are presented by the teacher, then practised in the form of spoken and written exercises (often pattern drills), and then used by the learners in less controlled speaking or writing activities. The main advantages of TBL are that language is used for a genuine purpose meaning that real communication should take place, and that at the stage where the learners are preparing their report for the whole class, they are forced to consider language form in general rather than concentrating on a single form (as in the PPP model). Whereas the aim of the PPP model is to lead from accuracy to fluency, the aim of TBL is to integrate all four skills and to move from fluency to accuracy plus fluency. The range of tasks available (reading texts, listening texts, problem-solving, role-plays, questionnaires, etc) offers a great deal of flexibility in this model and should lead to more motivating activities for the learners. Learners who are used to a more traditional approach based on a grammatical syllabus may find it difficult to come to terms with the apparent randomness of TBL (Task based Learning), but if TBL is integrated with a systematic approach to grammar and lexis, the outcome can be a comprehensive, all-round approach that can be adapted to meet the needs of all learners.

Task is defined as a range of work plans

which facilitates language learning from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as problem-solving and decision-making through activities working in a group. Language in a communicative task is seen as bringing about an outcome through the exchange of meanings. Finally, Ellis (2002) defines task-based learning as follows: 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 whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. The skills almost everyone needs to do any job are the skills that make specific knowledge and technical skills fully productive. Without employability skills, it is highly difficult for an individual to achieve and progress in rewarding jobs.

To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can involve productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes.

Pre task stage

In the *pre-task stage*, the teacher explores the topic with the class and may emphasize supportive words and phrases, helping students to understand the task instructions. The students may be allowed to see and hear other people doing the same

task. During the Task Cycle stage, the students carry out the task in pairs or small groups while the teacher monitors from a distance. This cycle gives them speaking and writing contact with opportunities for students to learn from each other. The learners then plan how they will tell the rest of the group what they did and how it went, and then they report on the task either orally or in writing, and compare notes on what has happened. The task cycle also gives students opportunities to use whatever language they have, both in private and in public, and makes them free to express whatever arises in their mind even if it has errors. In the language focus stage, the learners observe and talk about exact features of any listening or reading text which they have looked at for the task and the teacher may present some form of preparation of specific language features which the task requires.

Identify	Compare	List
Analyze	Match	Evaluate
Do you know it? Can you use it?		

Performance tasks build on earlier content knowledge, process skills, and work habits and are strategically placed in the lesson or unit to enhance learning as the student "pulls it all together." They are an integral part of the learning and an opportunity to assess the quality of student performance. When the goal of teaching and learning is to know and use, the performance-based classroom emerges. In the beginning, most performance tasks should fall at the short end of the range. Teachers find that many activities they are already doing can be shaped into performance-learning tasks.



Figure 1: Performance Tasks

Vocabulary is viewed as a major part of language proficiency as it allows learners to use the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Most students lack the vocabulary needed in many real life situations, for example, at job interviews. This may be due to poor motivation, insufficient practice, and ineffective ways of learning vocabulary. It could therefore be argued that the traditional vocabulary teaching technique in use, to some extent, is not an effective way to help students to communicate in English. Hence, it was important for the teachers of English at this college to stimulate students to learn vocabulary to improve the students' vocabulary gain. A different approach in teaching vocabulary to arouse students' interest in learning vocabulary needed to be considered.

Task Activity on Vocabulary

Students are advised and arranged in a group to perform a word task and coin new words to learn.

Worksheet 1

Read the following to understand what 'attitude' means.

Our behaviour varies according to time, situation and people. The way we react to situations, things and people is called 'Attitude'. Attitude is an amalgamation of emotions and thought process which may be either positive or negative. To become successful and happy in life, sometimes we may have to change our attitude. This is called life response.

I. Write down nine words to describe you, choosing from the list below.

.....
.....
.....
optimistic	sensitive	determined
pessimistic	distrustful	stubborn
sympathetic	kind	competitive
unsympathetic	forgiving	broadminded
understanding	generous	enthusiastic
narrow-minded	jovial	revengeful
critical	tolerant	insensitive
trusting	intolerant	cheerful
appreciative	patient	gloomy
friendly	impatient	earnest
serious	casual	humble
jealous	careful	careless

Worksheet 1.1

What will you do in the following situations? Choose one of the given options or, if you think your reaction will be different from all of these, write it down in the blank space provided:

1. You present your project work, and two of your classmates criticize it. You will:
- a) Cry, get angry and stop talking to them.

- b) Accept everything they say.
c) Ignore all that they say.
d) Examine what they say and review your project.
e)
2. You are standing in a queue at a cinema house. Somebody jumps the queue. You will:
- a) Tell the person in front of you to fight him.
b) Tell him firmly and politely to stand in the queue.
c) Pull the person and put him/her in the queue.
d) Shout at him at the top of your voice.
e)
3. You are sitting on a bus, and an old man gets in. There are no vacant seats. You will:
- a) Ask another passenger to get up and offer him a seat.
b) Turn your face away.
c) Move a little so that he can share your seat.
d) Get up and offer him your seat.
e)
4. You have found a purse with some money on the road. You will:
- a) Pick it up and put it in your pocket if nobody is around.
b) Ignore it.
c) Try to trace the owner to hand it over to him/her.
d) Hand it over to the police.
e)

Task Activity on Tenses: (e.g., Present tense)

Students are asked to answer these questions:

1. What time do you get up?
.....
2. How often do you exercise?
.....
3. How do you go to classes?
.....
4. What do you do at weekends?
.....
5. Do you live in a house/flat?
.....

(For past tense)

1. Did you come yesterday?
.....
2. How much money did you spend last month?
.....
3. Where did you go on holiday?
.....
4. Did you receive an email from recruiter?
.....
5. Was he a postman?
.....

These questions will be asked by the partner in pairs so that a student can write the answers on the worksheet given; later the answers will be spoken and performed as an activity in front of the classroom.

Task Activity on Interviews

Task Activity 1:

Routine tasks, background and basic needs
Introducing yourself: Your name, place, education (in brief) and family (in brief).

Task Activity 2:

Speaking about people: Favourite teacher; Best friend; Comparing you with a movie star; Interesting sports person.
Interesting books you have read (any 4)

Task Activity 3

Students are divided into 4 pairs forming one group. Any three students among them are given the role of HR personnel and the rest of them are interviewees. Assigning the tasks among the students, as an activity, not only gets fruitful output but also removes fear and builds confidence among them.

- a) What are your career goals?
.....
- b) What is your short-term goal?
.....
- c) What is your long-term goal?
.....
- d) Which is your greatest strength?
.....
- e) Give three adjectives about you.
.....

According to Tobin, "Soft skills give us the tools with which to take stock of our situation, take control of our development, and take responsibility for our future." Engineering graduates are not industry ready because of lack of communication skills. To prepare students for the best communication practice, and to face the industry needs, it is necessary to involve them through the tasks. Although some students had difficulty with the task, it is suggested that teachers can provide their students with clues also with the best possible chance for them to practise their English skills and help them in attaining a degree of cultural insight. In comparison to a prescriptive approach, where learners practise only the language that has been presented by teacher or found in a textbook, a task-based approach allows the learners

to process and react to language in an unscripted natural way that more commonly reflects what happens in a real communicative event and involves giving the best output.

The teacher/associate teacher should clearly give written feedback forms for self-assessment by students. In this way instructors should try to make the learners autonomous which will not only boost their confidence in English, but also develop their personality. In this entire process they will develop techniques of cooperation, voluntary contribution and leadership qualities. If students are confident in such higher order soft skills apart from competence in their core engineering subjects, employability in

the private sector is achievable.

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