

Task Based Approach: An Approach to Develop Writing Skills in English of Engineering Students Leads to Effective Communication Skills

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Abstract : 21st century students are expecting an educational system that works for and with them. The teaching-learning process is shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered through innovative teaching-learning techniques. With the advancement of technology and globalization, communication skills in English language, as a life-long learning skill is an essential component in engineering education as an employability skill. Communication is one of 11 key outcomes designed by Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). Listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) are considered as four basic language skills, contributed major role in developing communication skills in English language. Though all skills are equally important, writing is the stepping stone in verbal communication yet difficult to acquire without knowledge or mastery on the remaining three skills.

Currently teaching-learning process is shifted from chalk and talk to the implementation of various approaches based on cooperative and collaborative learning and integration of Information and Communication Technology in English Proficiency class. Some effective approaches are computer assisted language learning, mobile assisted language learning, technology enabled language learning, project based, problem based & puzzle-based language learning, flipped classroom based language learning, and task based language learning. The present paper aims to study the effective implementation of Task based approach in English language classroom to develop writing skills of F. Y. B. Tech students with other 21st century life skills by implementing various tasks-based activities as per need analysis of learners in order to ensure their active participation. Total 50 students were enrolled as an experimental group. The impact of selected approach was evaluated using quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative assessment was based on rating method whereas the qualitative was based on rubrics. The findings revealed that there is significant improvement not only in the writing skills of experimental group students but also listening, speaking, and reading skills, leading to effective communication skills in English Language.

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1. Introduction

With the advancement of technology and globalization, communication skills in English language as a life-long learning skill is an essential component in engineering education. It is one of the employability skills in today's competitive era. From language aspects, it is considered as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The foundation of developing communication skills in English is based on LSRW skills. English or communication skills classroom has scope for various experimentations by implementing active learning techniques effectively to get the desired results. There is huge transformation in English classrooms as compared to traditional classrooms due to use of active learning techniques to get desired outcomes. Currently role of ICT is also increased to make students enable to listen, speak, read, and write in English effectively. The main techniques to be implemented in English classrooms are jigsaw, flipped classroom, think-pair-share, computer/ mobile assisted language learning, modified reciprocal teaching (Kadam & Sawant, 2020) and so on. These all are active learning techniques based on cooperative and collaborative approach. Task based language teaching (TBLT) is one of the best approach in English classroom which itself is based on tasks or activities planned and implemented. The challenging task is active participation of all students. Writing is the skill to communicate desired set of information in specific written forms with language aspects. Writing has various layers including formal and informal mode. The main focus of writer is to make the content understandable by the reader. The objective of any language classroom is to get the learners use the language for effective communication. The present work is novel in the context that we have implemented task based activities in English classroom. In this research the emphasis is given on learners and the tasks they involved in. The outcomes show that this strategy is successful from the viewpoints of both student learning and faculty instruction. This approach gave the students liberty to think and write while encouraging them to use the English language outside the classroom. The strategy implemented on students of various learning abilities providing them with a range of learning opportunities. Task-based learning improves the desired course outcomes by creating learning environment in the classroom and engages students in the learning process.

2. Literature Survey: Task Based Language Learning

Task based approach in English classroom is widely used approach, reflected in increasing communicative competency of learners as it is based on planned tasks, an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought (Prabhu, 1987) or activities focusing on communicative competency rather than linguistic competency of students. Prabhu (1987) explored the meaning of tasks in language learning. Willis categorized tasks to be implemented in classroom. Breen (1987) contributed to the definition of tasks in language classrooms. To implement this approach, the teacher has to transform his role from teacher to coach, facilitator, or instructor as 'student' is at the center. This approach provides learners with authentic and meaning-based materials, real life communicative activities and motivating feedback (Hadi, 2013). It is the platform in the form of various opportunities to be performed by students as per tasks designed. It is based on 'learning by doing' or 'communicating by demonstrating' where learners are involved in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language (Bygate, Swain, & Skehan, 2013). According to Saranraj & Paul (2020), Task based approach involves reality in language use, focuses on meaning, engages cognitive process and enhances communication in the target language. According to Nunan (2004), pedagogical tasks involve communicative language use in which the user's attention is focused on meaning rather than grammatical form. Norris (2009) points out those theoretical and empirical underpinnings for good teaching are integrated in TBLT with a due attention on learning outcomes in the form of "tasks" (Norris, 2009). Shantha & Mekala (2017) focused on oral communicative competency through tasks in engineering context and the present paper is also contributing in engineering classroom.

3. Objectives & Methodology

The main purpose of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of Task based approach on writing skills of F. Y. B. Tech students leading to enhance communication skills in English.

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- To implement task based approach for English Proficiency course.

· To study effect of task based approach on the improvement of LSRW skills of students.

A. Experimental set-up

The Task based approach was implemented for First Year B. Tech students for English Proficiency course having 2 credits. The plan was made for four weeks because the course has 2 two-hour sessions per week in the timetable. The researcher formed two group having 50 students each which is the combination of interdisciplinary practical batches to carry out the research to get the desired outcomes. Batch A is selected as an experimental group and batch B as the control group where we used traditional mode of teaching

B. Implementation

The researchers gave tasks in the classroom and observed the performance of the learners. TBLT requires a certain amount of previous knowledge and the success is based on organization of task with proper planning and its execution. The authors applied three steps based on stages suggested by pedagogical research for this study. The pre task stage is used to aware students about the task and provide necessary information related to the assigned task. In the implementation or during task stage the students performed or worked on the assigned task as per instructions received and it is followed by post task which is allocated for communicative activities with repeat or reflect on the same. The intervention of current study was carried out in main three phases with different specific objectives. The role of teacher is transformed to coach, mentor, facilitator, or instructor as per task requirements including peer assessment and ensuring learner's active participation.

1. Task No. 1: Vocabulary Building and Creative Writing

Pre Task: The researcher announced the activity and informed students to select 30 words from Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) word list which are unknown to them with their meaning. This task was carried out in 2 simultaneous lab sessions.

During Task: In actual implementation phase students were instructed to prepare 30 sentences (one sentence per word) by using the selected words. The students were free to use the selected word in any form, i.e. noun, adjective, verb, and so on. In the next

part the instructor selected 15 words randomly from individual student's list of 30 words. As a creative writing task, every student was asked to prepare a meaningful paragraph by using the words tick marked by the instructor and present the same in front of the whole class. This task encouraged students' creative thinking as they were unaware of the second task of writing. The time limit provided for paragraph writing was of 50 minutes followed by 2 minute individual oral presentations.

Post Task: Peer assessment was included as post task. Students exchanged their write up with batch mates and assessed the writing as per the parameters announced: use of English language, correct form of selected words, content, and organization with logical continuity. At the end, teacher gave feedback to all students about their writing style, language, and grammar concepts, and informed them where they need to improve in their presentation.

Findings: Students actively participated in this task by selecting words. Students' enthusiasm showed their active participation as drafting paragraph by using randomly selected words is challenging for them though they tried their best resulted in meaningful paragraph. This task enhanced creative thinking of students which is reflected in vocabulary development and paragraph writing. Through these activities students made the correct use of English language.

2. Task No. 2: Story writing and Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the oldest task to develop oral communication. Here the authors modified storytelling to story writing and storytelling focusing on both oral and written communication in English language.

Pre Task: The researcher announced the activity to students and demonstrated the same with the help of 2 to 3 students. This task was conducted for 2 lab sessions having a total 4 hours duration. The first part of the task was a group task, followed by individual storytelling activity. Groups of 5 students each were formed. Total of 10 groups were formed. Students were informed about the assessment criteria.

During Task: This phase is divided into two parts, group task in the form of story writing and individual task as storytelling. In the story writing phase, the author dictated 12 words to students and allotted

genres (types) such as horror, mystery, comedy, magical, romantic, fantasy, suspense, family drama, fairy tale, and travelogue etc. group wise to create the story. The groups brainstormed on the given words and genre. After several discussions they create the story in written form, and the time allotted was 1hr. followed by individual storytelling within 5 minutes. The role of instructor was to motivate the students and whenever needed guide them.

Post Task: The students were assessed as per predesigned rubrics and guided accordingly to reflect on their performance. The students were instructed to submit the revised write up of story with a one-page report on whole activity including their feedback.

Findings: This is the modified task resulted in idea generation through brainstorming with enhancement in writing skills as students worked on different genres which is different than technical writing and students explored on vocabulary building and grammatical accuracy. In addition to it the task also gave exposure to oral communication as students enjoyed storytelling to whole class with proper tone and confidence. Overall the outcomes of the activity are in the form of improved listening, speaking in the form of storytelling, and writing skills.

3. Task No. 3: Brain storming and Paragraph Writing

Pre Task: The instructor formed 10 groups of 5 students each and one student from each group was assigned as a leader to coordinate the task. The detail information about the task was given to students. The students were instructed on 'how to do the brainstorming?' The time allocated for this task is 2 hrs.

During Task: The researcher announced 10 topics for technical paragraph development. The brainstorming was conducted in two phases. In the initial phase, students were informed to think individually on the given topics and note down the topic wise points on journal page. It required 30 mins. Then in the group phase, students were asked to sit in groups already formed. Each group was given a single topic from already shared topics and asked to discuss the topic among group members and compile common discussion points. The leader was the initiator, compiler, and concluder by reading common discussion points of group brainstorming phase. The time allocated for this phase was 30 minutes followed by individual paragraph writing on the same topic.

The students wrote the paragraph by their own using the points discussed in groups. Once all the students completed their task, they were asked to give oral presentation of their paragraphs and other group members shared missing points if any after active listening. Total 50 minutes were assigned for the same.

Post Task: The teacher listened to the paragraph presentation and reflected on the same. Peer assessment was carried out by group members. The same group students were asked to circulate their write up in group for assessment. The author provided the common parameters for assessment e.g. organization, key sentence, clarity, use of language, vocabulary, and impact of discussion. The students shared their feedback at the end of the task.

Findings: The activity mainly focused on writing skills. Through brainstorming at individual and group level students explored their thought process, team work, confidence building, and interpersonal communication skills. Broadly speaking the activity focused on four language skills listening as students listened to their friends' paragraphs, speaking skills in brainstorming phase, reading skills while reading the paragraph and writing as final submission of paragraph. Through peer assessment students cleared that though they discussed all points in group but everyone's write up was different as per thought process, writing style, use of vocabulary, grammar, and organization, etc. Fig.1 shows some photographs while conducting brainstorming and storytelling sessions.



Fig.1: Some Glimpses During A) Brainstorming And B) Storytelling Session

4. Task No. 4: Puzzle based learning

Vocabulary is the foundation of communication skills in English language. According to Wilkins, "without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (1972). And this task is based on same thought process. The author implemented puzzle-based learning to enhance the vocabulary of students which

indirectly reflected in improved speaking and writing skills in two sessions.

Pre Task: The researcher provided cross word puzzles for solving so that students get aware about the task. After exercises the teacher announced the task in class and demonstrated one with students.

During Task: This is the individual task. First of all teacher asked to collect 20 unknown words with its meaning individually. Then teacher compiled all words collected by students and provided list of 20 words randomly to all students to prepare the cross-word puzzle. This process required half an hour. The students were asked to refer dictionary for better understanding. The time allotted for this task was 1 hr.

Post task: The researcher evaluated the puzzles and gave feedback to students. For better vocabulary learning the students were announced to interchange their puzzle with classmates and all students were informed to solve the puzzle and use those 20 words to prepare meaningful paragraph with suitable title. The post task was carried out in 30 minutes.

Findings: Puzzle based learning resulted in vocabulary building as it's not limited for one puzzle, students tried to solve other students' puzzles in cyclical way. While creating puzzles this activity reflected in higher order thinking skills. At the end students applied the newly learnt vocab to make meaningful paragraph which is resulted in creative writing skill. The author implemented puzzle-based learning to enhance the vocabulary of students which is resulted in improvement of writing skills.

5. Task No. 5: Think-Pair-Write-Share

To make the classroom more engaging which was resulted in gaining interest of students to perform in front of whole class with confidence, the author implemented think-pair-write-share as a cooperative learning technique to work on four basic skills (LSRW) of students. The topic selected for this task was Barriers to communication and how to overcome the same. This task emphasized on student's active communication and participation as a positive response from students. The author modified Think-Pair-Share in Think-Pair-Write-Share to focus on writing skills of students.

Pre task: This action research was carried out in four phases 1) thinking 2) pairing 3) writing, and 3)

sharing. The activity was conducted for 1 lab session having 2 hours duration. The author prepared the pairs of students randomly and announced the activity.

During Task: The students were announced the topic Barriers to communication and how to overcome the same with real life examples. In think phase every student asked to think individually on the given topic and note down points related to the topic. The time allotted for this phase was of 10 minutes. The thinking phase was followed by pair phase where students shared what they thought in thinking phase with partner/ pair assigned by instructor within 15 minutes. This phase plays vital role as it built confidence of students, sharing with pair resulted in interpersonal skills namely speaking and listening which are the backbone of effective communication skills in English. Write phase was based on first two phases. Here individual student prepared write up based on thinking and pairing phase within 15 minutes. Finally, in share phase every pair gave the oral presentation of maximum 3 minutes on given topic in front of whole class.

Post Task: The discussion with feedback was held after every pair presentation. The activity was followed by peer assessment. Students shared their write up with peers and assessment was carried out on the basis of already defined parameters: content, use of language and grammar, selection of vocabulary, and overall presentation. Finally, the teacher shared feedback of write up and motivated students to improve writing skills.

Findings: The successful implementation of think-pair-write-share in class is reflected in active participation of every student. The activity encouraged students to interact with peers and this is the outcome of cooperative learning technique where students showcased active listening and speaking, reading and writing with group dynamism.

4. Assessment

The effectiveness of Task based approach has been investigated by both qualitative and quantitative assessment methods. Qualitative assessment was carried out task wise on the basis of already defined and shared rubrics including common parameters such as preparedness and organization of content, oral communication, active participation, confidence level, team work, time management, presentation and writing skill including content, accuracy, grammar,

style of writing. Rubrics were shared to students during pre task phase of every task. The qualitative assessment is based on active participation of students through demonstration of active listening, oral presentations, reading, and writing skills. The assessment was done at 4 levels from level 1 to level 4 in ascending order. After completion of the evaluation of all tasks, marks were combined and mapped with course outcomes.

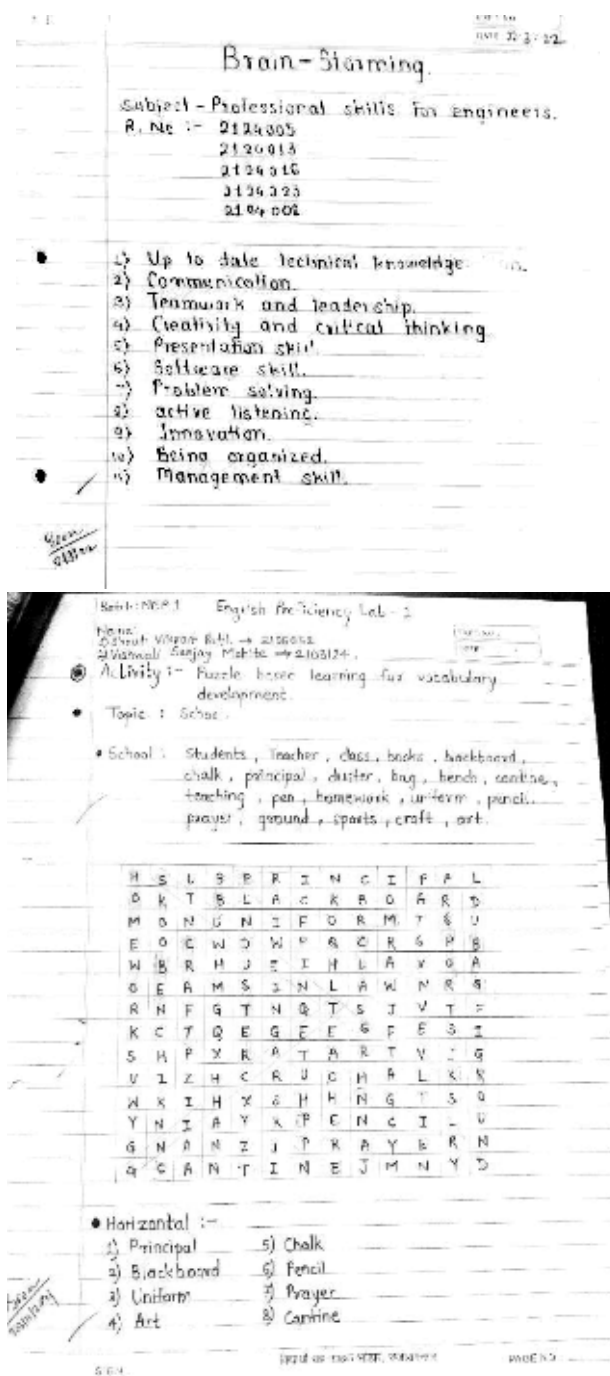


Fig.2 : Sample write ups of students

For quantitative assessment rating method was used. The questionnaire was provided to students through google form and collective feedback received from students as a response was analyzed. The questionnaire comprises 5 questions for each task having a five-point Likert scale in which 1 indicates strongly disagree to 5 indicating strongly agree. Table I gives the rating method. Even oral feedback from random students at the end of each task is also collected for record purpose.

Some sample write ups of the students during activity are shown in Fig. 2.

V. Results And Discussion

The assessment reflects the outcome of tasks and major outcome of TBLT is to use the language in daily situations (Motlagh, Jafari, & Yazdani, 2014)) which is reflected in assessment for communicative competency through four basic language skills. The effective implementation was analyzed through Course outcomes (CO) attainment. The course has four COs. The researcher compared CO attainment of both controlled and experimental group as shown in Table I. The weightage given for in semester evaluation is 60 marks out of which 40 marks evaluation was based on activities conducted during TBLT. The communicative competency through LSRW was assessed by using rubrics.

Table 1 : Comparative Analysis of Course Outcomes Attainment

Course Outcomes	CO attainment of controlled group in % by using Traditional mode of delivery	CO attainment of experimental group in % by implementing Task based approach
Demonstrate verbal and non-verbal communication skills through presentations, speeches, group discussion, role plays.	55.20	68.05
Organize content for written messages in specific forms	62.00	72.5
To prepare and communicate desired message through letters and reports in appropriate formats	61.78	71.35
Apply techniques of online communication to communicate effectively in its various forms like e-mail writing, conferencing, and social media.	59.00	70.45

The bar graph as per Fig. 3 shows the comparison of CO attainment of controlled group and experimental group. The graph shows that there is difference in CO attainment and it is increased due to task-based language teaching, a student-centric approach. Average CO attainment of experimental group was 70.58% whereas for control group it was 59.49% and it shows that there is an increase in CO attainment of English Proficiency course because of effective implementation and execution of Task based approach as compared to controlled group where researcher taught the course by using traditional mode of language teaching.

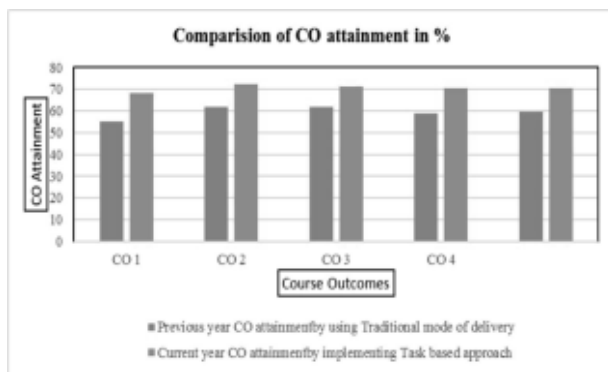


Fig. 3 : CO attainment comparison

For quantitative assessment rating method was applied to analyze the effectiveness of task based approach to experimental group as compared to control group. The questionnaire was sent to students as per Table II and the collected responses were analyzed.

Table 2 : Questionnaire

Statements
The teacher announced every task prior and guided for each task.
The teacher and students both were enthusiastic during tasks.
I learnt new things to improve my communication in English language.
I enjoyed every task.
I enhanced my vocabulary with the help of vocabulary building and creative writing task.
All students became cooperative and interactive during sessions.
Learning was more enjoyable as compared to regular class.
I improved my writing skills with my peers in brainstorming and paragraph writing activity.
I worked on listening, speaking, reading and writing skill in every task.
I worked on listening, speaking, reading and writing skill in every task.
I enjoyed peer assessment which leads to observation and better learning.
It is just time pass without learning.
After every task teacher gave the feedback.
It needs proper planning and execution.
Overall impression of TBLT is good as it resulted in confidence building and team work.

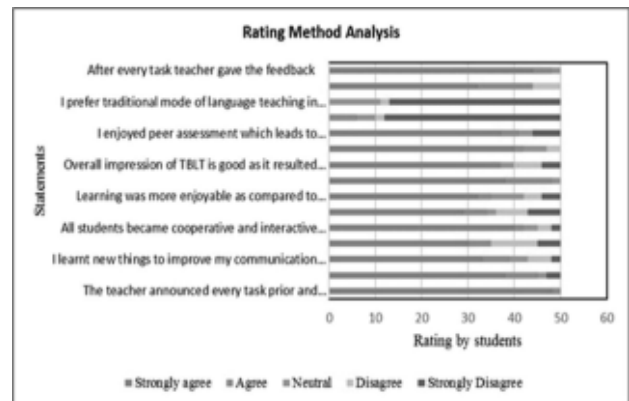


Fig. 4 : Rating Method Analysis

As per the data received through questionnaire it is observed that implementation of this approach in English Proficiency course reflected in better learning through situations or tasks as compared to traditional mode of teaching.

Approximately 75% students gave positive response in quantitative assessment. The graph in Fig. 4 showcased the analysis of each question asked in questionnaire. As per the graph we can predict that task based approach enhanced student's motivation towards communication in English language through LSRW skills. The specific activities addressed particular skills and it is observed that confidence level with communicative competency and other soft skills such as team work, planning, time management, confidence, observation skills, and critical and creative thinking etc. are also enhanced Even the researchers asked oral feedback after every task and students' collective responses are as follows:

1. We enjoyed activity because of increased confidence level due to interactive atmosphere in classroom.
2. I learnt language skills through tasks as they are student oriented.
3. The teacher provided us guidance so that without fear or burden I participated in activity.
4. Peer assessment is one of the task I enjoyed as it enhanced my critical thinking and by assessing my friends I got my lacunas while performing during particular task.

The researchers observed the learners' performance in each activity. It was found that most of

the learners had a positive attitude towards effective communication in English language.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of current study was to identify the effectiveness of Task based approach in enhancement of communication in English language. Mainly the research was focused on writing skills of F. Y. B. Tech students but as four language skills are interrelated with each other so the outcome of these implemented tasks is also in the form of better learning of four basic skills i.e. LSRW. The activities conducted were student-centered activities and the observations of this action research are in the form of confidence building, developing creative and critical thinking, improvement in speaking skills, active listening, and reading of resources for writing skills. We have faced some challenges such as time management during tasks, involvement of shy students, and fair peer assessment by students. Irrespective of these challenges every task was concluded through writing skills which resulted in improvement of language learning with vocabulary building, grammatical accuracy, and style of writing. Both qualitative and quantitative assessment proved that Task based approach in English language classroom is one of the best approaches in the form of active learning techniques as compared to traditional mode of language teaching to enhance communicative competency of students.

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