

DOES TASK-BASED LEARNING PRODUCE MORE EFFECTIVE SPEAKING ACTIVITIES DURING CLASS TIME?

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Introduction. The problem is that students do not answer general questions to the class and silence infallibly follows and it is not clear why this happens and what can be done to have students speak.

It has been hypothesized that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) could help solve this problem and the motivational one, since it "focuses on the use of authentic language to complete meaningful tasks in the target language. Such tasks can include visiting a doctor, conducting an interview, or calling customer service for help"[1]. This approach should allow to give students real life tasks that they need to perform using the language as a medium rather than as a final objective, and thus making lessons more interactive. Interactivity should lead to more speaking and motivation to answer general class discussion questions. Jon Larsson says: "...one of the main virtues of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is that it displays a significant advantage over traditional methods in how the communicative skills of the students are improved" [2].

The author continues by saying that an entire course built around such a method allows to reproduce what happens when students are in the country where the language is spoken by natives, the which has proven to be a somehow more effective way to learn than the classroom environment and the classical language teaching lesson.

Larsson also pinpoints: "Another large advantage of PBL is that it encourages students to gain a deeper sense of understanding" [2].

By saying so he means that PBL helps make students learn the vocabulary and insert it in their permanent memory thanks to the real-world tasks they perform, instead of learning words from a list by heart, and this makes them an active part in the learning process, because without their participation neither the activity goal nor the acquisition of new words are achieved.

This is exactly what the Action Research Project is about. Paired with the Flipped Classroom Approach and interviews, surveys and reflective writings, to verify what motivates students to speak more, it is the focus of the 2020 Action Research Project for Masters students.

Main Body. To reach the research goals and verify the effectiveness of TBLT in a Technical Russian University in achieving more speaking and motivation in the students, the following methods have been chosen:

1. Questionnaire with open and yes/no questions for Qualitative and Quantitative data;
2. Group Interviews about the same points using open questions and recording the conversation to keep record of students' comments;
3. Reflective writing answering the question "What do you think of the speaking activities in class?" to let students assess TBLT classes freely and anonymously. These have brought the following main results.

Results for Questionnaires: students are happy with TBLT, they feel they speak more and are learning new vocabulary and using it in TBLT Tasks. They also state that they are given topics to their liking, Results for Group Interviews: students are happy they can share their opinion and do something relevant for themselves during class activities. Results for reflective writing: after fully analysing data, it emerges that TBLT is really effective in improving students' speaking.

The current research contributes to the field in that there is little research about teaching English with TBLT in Russian universities, where the method is still considered an innovative one, as stated in the article by Larisa M. Spynu [3]. Why are the results for the applied methods significant in the field? They show that TBLT can be successfully used to teach English in Russian Universities

too and increase students' speaking time as well as it happens in other countries where extensive research has proven its effectiveness, The importance of using Reflective Writing relies in the fact that the information comes first hand from students themselves and it seems to confirm the positive impact of TBLT on language learning and students' motivation.

Conclusions. In conclusion, this Action Research has proven the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning and Teaching in the Russian Technical University ITMO in Saint Petersburg and the repeatability of a success story, since positive results have been achieved in both classes which have been taught this way. The only drawback is that the Masters' class was formed by only one student and their level was not really the same as that as the Bachelor class students, even if formally the two classes were a C2 CEFR one.

For this reason, future research could be conducted at ITMO in the Foreign Language Training Centre with classes held by different teachers having a more homogeneous number of students to see if TBLT is confirmed as being more effective than the Presentation, Production and Practice teaching method (PPP) method. From there an interuniversity project comparing classes from different institutes using TBLT could be implemented to verify if it still stands as a more effective method to spur motivation and speaking.

References:

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