

Teaching of Tenses to Tamil learners through Task Based Approach

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Abstract

The present study aims to develop the proficiency in grammar skills on specific areas such as verb forms and tenses through various activities called Task Based Approach. This research attempts to analyse the activity of students and notion behind teaching grammar. It also discusses the issues which affect students' life when they go for higher education. An empirical study was conducted among school students from standard 6th to 8th in S.P.V. Matric Higher Secondary School. It establishes that Task Based approach enhances grammar skills.

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Introduction

This study aims to develop the proficiency in grammar in specific areas such as Tenses through various activities called Task Based Approach. Moreover the development of knowledge in tenses helps further to improve their writing and speaking skills in second language in the tender age. The learners' capability in learning the second language lies on their comprehension level and their grasping. Their interest level also helps them to learn and understand the grammar when it is done through interesting activities. Therefore, the researcher attempts to conduct an empirical study on school students and it also identifies the factors which causes hesitation towards learning grammar.

Background of the study

In this modern era, English is considered to be the measure of intelligence. Everyone wants to speak in English inspite of learning the language in proper way. However, they have learnt English from their tender age in schools but it is not useful to them when they attend interviews after their graduation. So, they go for Spoken English classes to learn better English. These classes again fail to teach them speaking in English. This is because, a foreign

language cannot be learnt by attending classes for three months or a year. Their drawback is that they have memorised and reproduced the foreign language rather than understanding and learning it.

Teaching grammar is one of the difficult task in language teaching. Using correct verb forms and tenses in writing and speaking reveals one's proficiency in a specific language. If it is learnt in the tender age, one can easily grasp the underlying rules of grammar of a foreign language.

Research Questions

1. What is the place of tenses in grammar teaching in Indian schools?
2. How effectively the tasks helps the learners to enable their skills in tenses?
3. What grammar do they need to know to accomplish the task?
4. Is it tenses to learn tenses of English?

Research Hypothesis

In the present study, the first priority is given to the language task and not the theories of grammar. The tasks will ultimately enable the students to use tenses in the classroom atmosphere with their peer group.

Research Tool

The researcher has used Task Based Approach to teach Tenses and Verb forms to the school students. By presenting various tasks, the students slowly start using the correct forms of verbs and use appropriate tenses while speaking and writing.

Place of English in the schools

English was not only a compulsory subject of study but also the medium of instruction in the secondary schools; the languages to be studied by the pupil were two, English and mother tongue or regional language or a classical language. English is however, a compulsory subject of study at the Secondary stage in practically all the States. In this connection it may be pointed out that the students acquire the second language which is considered to be the measure of intelligence in their tender age and in view of the difficulties experienced by a certain number of pupils who had to migrate from one part of the country to the other and who could not easily take to a new regional language, English was allowed to be continued in some schools as the medium of instruction and as a language of study.

A great deal of controversy also exists in the place of English in the scheme of studies. As a result of historical causes, English has come to be the one language that is widely known among the educated classes of the country. In India, the national unity in political and other spheres of activity are brought about through the study of English language and literature. The present position of India in the international sphere is partly due to the command that educated Indians have acquired over English.

English in the schools of Tamilnadu

In Tamilnadu, the textbooks for the students from the 1st standard to 12th standard are published under free textbook program of Government of Tamilnadu has two medium of instructions: Tamil and English. Most of the English medium and matriculation schools make use of the books instructed in English. But still some of the government schools denied to use books instructed in English. However the syllabus and chapters remain the same in all the

books, students from government schools lack English knowledge. This is because the regional language, Tamil is imposed on them. Basically students from rural areas, backward class and those who are in poverty are forced to learn all their subjects in Tamil. Though these students are good at all subjects and score good marks, they have difficulty in conversing in English. When they go for higher education in universities or colleges, they face many hardships to comprehend the messages that were instructed in English. This is a prevalent issue of college students who are from Tamil medium background in the present scenario. Under present conditions, it is necessary that a sound knowledge of English should be considered a pre-requisite to studies at the higher levels of learning whether in the university or in other institutions. For this reason, it is stated that English should be a compulsory subject of study in the Secondary school beginning from the Middle school stage.

Memorisation of Grammar rules

Indian English teachers have marginalised English on par with other utility-based subjects such as mathematics and science. They allocate very less hours for English classes. This makes the students lose their interest in language classes. English teachers handle English like a puppet and brings all the rules under their control. They modify, alter and tabulate the rules of grammar like mathematic formulae to suit their circumstances.

In many schools, teachers do not have enough time to explain the concepts and meanings to the students instead; they cover the syllabus as soon as possible and make the students to learn. While studying, some of the students who have the ability to understand the subject, read and understand without memorising the text. The students who are under the pressure of the parents and teachers tend to memorise whatever they learn without

understanding the essence of certain sentences. It is a kind of escapism. To escape from the pressure, the students memorise hastily. The students who have good memorising power get good cut-offs and join professional courses like Engineering, Law and Medicine, etc.,

Task Based Approach: an Overview

There was a time during 1970s when language researchers felt that focus on grammatical forms alone was not enough for overall development of language. Learners were also in need of development of second language to convey their views and meanings in order to express them. In a state of dissatisfaction within the traditional methods, which is teacher centred and grammar focused in Second Language Teaching, the concept of Task Based Approach was developed by English Language Teaching (ELT) scholars and researchers (**Branden 2008**). According to **N.S. Prabhu (1987)**, the traditional courses led to unsatisfactory results in real life, because learners were unable to survive their actual situations using English even though they are able to produce grammatically perfect sentences in classrooms.

According to **David Carless (289, ELT J-2002)**, Task Based Learning is a contemporary and also a non-conventional orthodox approach in teaching a second/foreign language that seeks to engage learners in interactional authentic language use by having them perform a series of tasks. It helps the learners to develop their existing skills and to acquire new linguistic knowledge. It places the students in a situation like the real world. Task Based Approach has the advantage of getting the focus of the students towards achieving a goal where language becomes a tool and making the use of target language becomes the necessity.

What is a Task?

David Nunan (1987) defines tasks as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on the meaning rather than form. **Carroll (1993)** defines tasks as “Any activity in which a person engages, given an appropriate setting, in order to achieve a specific class of objective”.

These definitions claim that the learners of second language should be given sufficient time to interact in the classroom and the tasks given should be closely related to the real life situations. From the context of task as a language learning activity, an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought and which allowed teachers to control and regulate the process was regarded as task.

Presentation and Interpretation of Tasks

The researcher has divided the tasks on the basis of think, speak and write. In the first stage, pictorial representation of action words such as run, eat, sleep and write are given to the students and make them to think. This will enable them to think further action words in English. Slowly they put the words into sentences when they start writing. In the second stage, the students are asked to fill the gaps between the given sentences with the help of pictures. They start comprehending and responding to the pictures by their own through these activities. Meanwhile the facilitator teaches the basics of the usage of tenses in brief and practice them with further activities. In the third stage, the students are asked to write five sentences in Simple present/Simple past/Simple future in a given situation such as daily activities, past experiences or future planning. For example, dressing up to the school, getting ready for a tour, childhood days, etc.

Some of the second language learners feel that acquiring English is a merely impossible mission. There is a strong hesitation towards learning English, since the students accuse the compulsion of learning grammatical rules in English classes. This is because English teachers handle English like puppet and bringing all the rules under their control. They modify, alter and tabulate the rules of grammar like mathematics formulae to suit their circumstances. Students' interest is preferably less in English classes while comparing it with other classes. This is because the teachers allocate very less hours for English classes and they have marginalised English on par with other utility-based subjects such as mathematics and science. This makes the students lose their interest in language classes.

Summation

The fear of students in learning second language reminds of **Stephen Krashen** who strongly claims that language can be acquired only in less anxiety situations. It is clear that the current generation of students needs facilitators and not teachers anymore in the language classrooms. When group tasks are given to the students they feel when fun with their pairs or group members as their focus will be on completing the task. Task Based Approach tries to model out a motivational, funning classrooms which helps students in better acquisition of second language. The motivation that they need from the language teachers who are in terms of task based learning called as facilitators was the first possibility which could bring a confidence inside learners in mastering language. Therefore, the students' centred ambience in classrooms is possible through Task Based Approach.

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