The Effectiveness of Task-Based Activities in Enhancing the Speaking Skill of English as a Second Language Learners

By

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Thesis submitted to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura for the award of the Master of Philosophy

Declaration by the candidate

The work described in this thesis was carried out by me under the supervision of Dr Lalith Ananda and a report on this has not been submitted in whole or in part to any university or any other institution for another Degree/Diploma.

…….. ……..

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Certification by the supervisor

I certify that the above statement made by the candidate is true and that this thesis is suitable for submission to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura for the purpose of evaluation.

…….. ……

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Dedication

To my loving parents…

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List of abbreviations

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CG	Control Group
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELTU	English Language Teaching Unit
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
EG	Experimental Group
HETC	Higher Education for the Twenty First Century
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IRQUE	Improving Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education
IT	Information Technology
PPP	Presentation, Practice, Production
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TBI	Task-Based Instruction
TBL	Task-Based Learning
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TENOR	Teaching English for No Obvious Reason
TL	Target Language
UGC	University Grants Commission

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to find out the effectiveness of TBLT to see whether this particular approach could bring about productive results in relation to the Science students of the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. When a graduate passes out from a university in Sri Lanka, he or she has learned English as a second language in both the school system and the university system for more than one and a half decades. Nevertheless, a general complaint often made regarding these graduates is their poor language competence, notably, oral communication skills. The causes of this problem are attributed to many issues and it has even resulted in graduates' unemployment.

The researcher being a university teacher of English noticed that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is very popular in various contexts of the world and it has now become theoretically well-established. To this end, the researcher carried out an empirical investigation at the Faculty of Science of the University of Ruhuna, taking 60 first year undergraduates as the sample. To homogenize the participants' level in terms of their knowledge of English, the students who scored average marks (45-55 marks) for the placement test of the Intensive course in English were considered for the study. Then, the students were randomly divided into two groups namely the Experimental Group that received instruction in TBLT approach and the Control Group that received instruction in Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) approach. Each group was exposed to 30 hours of instruction and the study was carried out over a period of 15

weeks. The research instruments in this study included a pretest, a posttest, questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation.

The pretest and the posttest were conducted to analyze the students' speaking skill and they were given marks on the IELTS band descriptors. The data obtained from the tests and the questionnaires were statistically analyzed. The data from the interviews and classroom observations were qualitatively analyzed. The findings from the posttest showed a statistically significant difference in the mean scores, with the Experimental Group showing much better progress compared to the Control group in terms of enhancing the speaking skill. In addition, the qualitative results indicated that the teachers and students had a greater preference to TBLT and that it can immensely help the students improve their speaking skill.

Keywords: effectiveness, tasks, English, L2, university.