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TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: EFFECTIVENESS IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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In recent decades, the focus of language instruction has increasingly shifted from traditional grammar-translation methods toward more communicative, learner-centered approaches. One such method, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), has gained significant traction among language educators for its emphasis on real-world language use and its potential to develop communicative competence, especially in speaking. Unlike form-focused instruction, TBLT places meaningful communication at the center of the learning process, encouraging students to engage in authentic, task-driven interaction.

In the context of higher education, where the development of advanced speaking skills is crucial for academic success and professional readiness, implementing TBLT can be particularly effective. University students often struggle with fluency, confidence, and spontaneous speech in English, which standard methods may fail to adequately address. TBLT offers a solution by promoting natural language production through contextualized tasks such as problem-solving, debates, interviews, and presentations.

This paper explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in enhancing speaking skills among university students. It examines theoretical foundations, practical implementations, and empirical results from classroom applications. The goal is to assess how task-based approaches can be optimized in university EFL classrooms to meet learners' communicative needs.

Task-Based Language Teaching draws from theories of second language acquisition, particularly those proposed by Ellis (2003), Nunan (2004), and Willis & Willis (2007). Central to TBLT is the belief that language is best learned when used as a tool for achieving communicative goals rather than as an object of study. A "task" is defined as any activity where the focus is on meaning rather than form, and where learners use the target language to achieve a real outcome[1][2].

TBLT is often structured in three phases: pre-task (preparation and introduction), during-task (task performance), and post-task (reflection and focus on language form). This framework allows for scaffolded learning, active student participation, and teacher facilitation rather than direct instruction [3].

Speaking is often considered the most challenging of the four language skills, requiring real-time processing, pronunciation, vocabulary recall, grammatical accuracy, and confidence. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) environments like those found in many university settings, students have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, making structured speaking tasks essential[4].

TBLT provides a valuable mechanism for improving speaking by creating authentic speaking opportunities. Tasks such as role plays, group problem-solving, storytelling, and project-based discussions simulate real-life situations where students must speak spontaneously and effectively.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of TBLT on students' speaking proficiency. For instance, a study conducted by Samuda & Bygate (2008) revealed that students who participated in task-based speaking activities showed marked improvement in fluency and complexity over a 10-week period. Another study by Ahangari & Abdi (2011) found that learners in TBLT classes exhibited greater self-confidence and communicative accuracy compared to those in traditional classrooms[5].

A practical example of TBLT implementation involves students participating in structured debates. In one university class, learners were tasked with preparing arguments on a controversial topic, presenting their points, and defending them in front of peers. The pre-task phase involved vocabulary and argumentation planning, the task phase involved live debate, and the post-task included peer feedback and teacher commentary. Measurable improvements in coherence, fluency, and vocabulary richness were recorded.

Despite its benefits, TBLT also presents several challenges. These include a lack of teacher training, limited classroom time, and difficulty in designing appropriate tasks. Additionally, assessment of speaking performance in a task-based framework can be complex and subjective.

To overcome these barriers, it is essential to provide ongoing professional development for teachers, integrate technology to support task design (e.g., virtual simulations), and develop clear rubrics for evaluating speaking outcomes. Furthermore, institutional support and curriculum alignment are necessary for successful implementation.

Task-Based Language Teaching represents a powerful pedagogical approach for developing speaking skills among university EFL learners. Its emphasis on meaningful communication, learner autonomy, and real-world application addresses the limitations of traditional language instruction and fosters a more dynamic classroom environment.

By engaging students in interactive, goal-oriented tasks, TBLT not only enhances their linguistic abilities but also builds their confidence and readiness for academic and professional communication. The empirical evidence strongly supports its efficacy, with significant gains observed in fluency, complexity, and confidence.

However, successful implementation requires institutional support, teacher training, appropriate task design, and effective assessment strategies. With these elements in place, TBLT can significantly enrich the language learning experience and prepare university students to communicate effectively in English.

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