EXPLORING THE UTILIZATION OF THE TASK-BASED APPROACH ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SPEAKING ABILITY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper examines the implications of the application of Task-Based Method amongst university students' English language proficiency. The current learning environment is impacted with teaching and exposing students to the second language given its prevailing benefits. Nevertheless, the problem of the appropriate approach that teachers and students should to foster effective teaching and learning respectively. This study employed a mixed method approach with both quantitative and qualitative analysis utilized to answer the formulated research objectives. 100 research subjects were recruited from the University of Khartoum through convenient sampling. Data collected from the study was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively through the SPSS 21.0 and thematic analysis respectively. Results from the t-test and Spearman's correlation indicated the existing relationship between utilization of Task-Based Method and the university students' English speaking ability.

Keywords: *Task-based method, speaking ability, language fluency, first language, second language, English Language.*

Introduction

The English language faces problems as a medium of instruction in countries where it is regarded as the second language. The preference given to the first language even in the case where the English language is involved in teaching and learning is usually hinged upon various aspects that natives tend to attribute with the mother tongue language in the learning process. Nevertheless, studies conducted have indicated there exist various ways of language and knowledge acquisition amongst human beings. According to studies conducted, learning styles constitute a range of contested and competing for theories that seek to account for differences in knowledge acquisition among individuals. Santos (2011) attributes Fleming's Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic (VAK) model that exposes learners to three modalities of learning. Accordingly, the model indicates how different learners respond differently to learning and processing information. In the recent years, the task-based approach has received tributes through the delivery of learning platforms where learners learn different languages through tasks and activities.

In this context, students' from the University of Khartoum receive their instruction through the Arabic and English languages. Despite their efforts of learning English as the second language and utilizing it in their studies, there exist underlying concerns of the mastery of the language, speaking abilities and failure to proficiently use English in their learning contexts. The primary objective of this study, therefore, aims to explore the task-based instruction approach and the subsequent concerns involved in English language acquisition and resulting skills manifested amongst the University students. The study will also focus on proving answers to the following research questions;

1. How is the process of task-based-based approach perceived amongst the University students?

2.   Does the task-based method enhance students speaking ability?

Literature Review

The use of the English language as a second language continues to face fierce competition from the first language in most institutions in the world where it is not natively spoken. Regardless, of these uncertainties, many institutions continue to adopt strategies and learning styles to enhance learning and use of English language despite dominance from the first language in those respective countries. Amongst the numerous learning styles, Task-Based is recognized for its influence where learners are able to grasp and enhance their proficiency of the learned second language. According to Robinson (2011), the task-based approach is characterized with activities and tasks that provide with the ease of learning the second language. Moreover, Nunan (2004) defines task into ways: first, tasks are related to the real world and are referred as target task which is often employed for learners or authentic users outside the classroom, and the second definition is that task is pedagogical which are fulfilled within a classroom.

Learning theories regarding second language acquisition have also been utilized in most studies and their applicability particularly amongst where English is perceived as a foreign language. Bühler, Goodwin, and Eschbach, (2011) attribute that, according to theory of learning, task-based methods provide both the input and output processing for language such as English language acquisition. Task achievement and activities can also be motivational to the students as they improve their speaking ability. Furthermore, the authors suggest that that speaking or any language difficulty, for example, learning can be negotiated and fine-tuned for specific pedagogical purpose such as speaking.

Graham- Marr (2004) elucidates numerous reasons for focusing on speaking and listening when teaching English as a second or foreign language, which is a similar approach as the ancient

approach in the fact that human beings have been learning languages. Even though speaking skills is not a set curriculum in many schools, especially those speaking English as their second language, speaking skills have been found to be an important skill required for a child's success in life (Pawlak, and Waniek-Klimczak, 2015). It is vital to note that these authors provide a line of thought indicating the need for skills for individuals pursuing and enhancing the proficiency of the learned second language. Brown and Yule (1987) shares same ideas from their research findings and discussion where they observed that the nature of spoken language by distinguishing between spoken and written language. Also, they clearly pointed out that in the history of language, the teaching of language has been more concerned with the written language teaching.

Methodology

Participants

The research subjects of this study consisting of instructors and students were selected from the University of Khartoum using convenient sampling. The study adhered to ethical principles as an initial email was sent to the respondents highlighting the research objectives of the study. The respondents were also reminded of their rights, and the informed consent was built upon the confidentiality and anonymity of their information and names respectively. The sample size of the study was 100 with the sample meeting the criteria of years of experience, speaking Arabic as the first language and the age bracket of 20 and 50 years. The procedure helped reduce cases of bias during the sampling process given the sample size was drawn from the large population.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through a detailed survey and interviews. The questionnaires and interviews were administered to the research subjects at their time of their convenience. The study employed the use of semi-structured questions and closed-ended questions. The semi-

structured questions were expected to stimulate students and instructors to expound on their thoughts and reasons given to their respective answers regarding the challenges they face in the course learning the English language.

Data Analysis

Data from the study was cleaned, categorized and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The data was categorized into homogenous groups to for ease of drawing out relationships. Based on the qualitative analysis, the data was organized systematically from the questionnaires and interviews to facilitate the analysis used to qualify the numbers the quantitative numbers reported in the study. The study also had the primary data collected exported to the SPSS 21.0 software where it was cleaned and analyzed. The research questions drawn from the study objectives were tested using the T-test analysis and also subjected to the Correlation Coefficient Analysis. Nevertheless, comparative analysis and statistical analysis approaches were adopted for further analysis.

Results and Findings

The purpose of this research was aimed at exploring the Task-Based instruction approach and questionnaires and interviews administered to the research subjects to understand their thoughts, perception, and experiences involved in the English language acquisition.

The respondents were asked to point out benefits that Task-Based method has University Students speaking ability in the English Language. Their results are captured in the table below:

Result of frequency analysis of the potential benefits or impacts of Task-Based Method on University Students' Speaking ability in the English Language

What are the benefits or impacts of the Task-Based Method on University Students' Speaking ability in the English Language?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Task-Based Method improves or enhances University Students' Speaking ability in the English Language	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Integrated understanding of English Language learning tasks i.e. speaking tasks	34	34.0	34.0	84.0
	Use of Task-based Approach to improve the students' speaking skill	10	10.0	10.0	94.0
	Task-based learning is effective in developing listening and speaking abilities of the learners of English.	6	6.0	6.0	100.0
	TOTAL	**100**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Results in the table above indicate that 50% of the respondents stated that Task-Based Method improves or enhances University Students' Speaking ability in the English Language while 6% of the respondents agree that Task-based learning is effective in developing listening and speaking abilities of the learners of English. Thus, these study findings can be validated or supported by the theory of learning which states that Task-Based Method provides both the input and output processing for a language such as English language acquisition (Bühler, Goodwin and Eschbach, 2011).

On the question of utilizing a Task-Based method and if this could improve university students' speaking accuracy, responses captured and analyzed are reflected in the table below;

Do you agree that utilizing a Task-Based Method can improve university Students' speaking accuracy in the English Language?

Do you agree that utilizing a Task-Based Method can improve university Students' speaking accuracy in the English Language?		Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	10	10	10.0	10.0
	Disagree	8	8	8.0	18.0
	Somewhat disagree	4	4	4.0	22.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	2	2	2.0	24.0
	Somewhat agree	16	16	16.0	40.0
	Agree	21	21	21.0	61.0
	Strongly agree	39	39	39.0	
	TOTAL	**100**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Results in the table indicate that 10% of the 100 respondents strongly disagree that utilizing a Task-Based Method can improve the students' speaking accuracy in the English Language while 8% of the 100 respondents disagree that the utilizing a Task-Based Method can improve the students' speaking accuracy in the English Language. On the contrary, 39% of the 100 respondents strongly agree that utilizing a Task-Based Method can improve the students' speaking accuracy in the English Language.

Regarding the question whether Task-Based Method improved the students speaking fluency in the English language, the respondents' answers were analyzed and presented in the table below:

Do you agree that utilizing a Task-Based Method improves the students' speaking fluency in the English Language?

Do you agree that utilizing a Task-Based Method improves the students' speaking fluency in the English Language?		Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	9	9	9.0	9.0
	Disagree	7	7	7.0	16.0
	Somewhat disagree	3	3	3.0	19.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	1	1	1.0	20.0
	Somewhat agree	17	17	17.0	37.0
	Agree	23	23	23.0	60.0
	Strongly agree	40	40	40.0	
	TOTAL	**100**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

From the table above, it is observed that only 9% of the respondents strongly disagree that utilizing a Task-Based Method improves the students' speaking fluency in the English Language while 40% of the respondents strongly agree that utilizing a Task-Based Method improves the students' speaking fluency in the English Language.

Discussion

Based on the study findings, Task-Based instruction approach is a learning method that is effective in developing listening and speaking abilities of the learners of English or the University Students.

For this reason, the use of Task-Based Method should be utilized as an alternative way of teaching English in the sense that it assists the University students to communicate through interaction in the English language. This is almost similar to Robinson (2011) findings which found that Task-Based Method on speaking ability in the English language is considered an effective approach because it enables the university lecturers, teachers or tutors, to see if the students are developing the ability to use English to communicate effectively and speak fluently. Therefore, in the later stages, students will be able to relate their in-classroom learning experiences with the use of English Language inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, the results from the quantitative analysis correlated with the findings deduced from the qualitative analysis have instructors and learners attribute existing evidence of Task-Based activities that enhance the speaking accuracy of the latter both inside and outside their classrooms.

Implications for Research and Practice

The empirical findings presented in this study provides an immense contribution to the understanding of the implications of embracing English as a second language coupled with the aspect of utilizing the Task-Based approach in most institutions. Based on the concept model, methodology, and findings from this study provoke insights aimed at strengthening the quest for enhancing speaking abilities amongst students. In this regard, the study contributes to the practical validation of the Task-Based approach in teaching and learning of English as a second language.

Conclusion

The study results indicate that the Task-Based Method can be utilized in increasing the University students' speaking accuracy and fluency. Therefore, it can be concluded that implementation of the Task-Based Method is much needed in the English language learning and teaching, particularly in improving University student's English language fluency and proficiency.

Future Research

Whereas this study has provided important leads and contributions to the field of research, there are numerous areas that remain ripe for future research undertakings. The first area involves the need to adopt appropriate approaches needed to foster learning and development amongst learners with both first and second languages present. The second area is pegged on the need for further research on complex and underpinning challenges that restrict the smooth embrace of the English language amongst institutions where it is regarded as a second language.

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