Exploring the Effectiveness of Task Based Language Teaching in the Improvement of Master Level Students' Narrative Writing Skill

Muhammad Rashid   Lecturer in English Khawja Fareed Govt Post graduate college Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan

Abstract: This paper explores the effectiveness of task based language teaching (TBLT) in improving master level students' narrative writing skill as well as students' perception of task based language teaching. The sample has been taken in two stages. In the first stage two classrooms of MA English part 1(morning and evening) comprising 122 students have been selected by non-probability sampling technique. In the second stage, 60 students were selected and divided into two groups randomly after they were passed through a structure test adopted from old papers of English of grade 12. The treatment class has been taught for 20 days through task based language teaching. Experimental and control class data were collected through written tests and questionnaires. Written pre and post tests were administered to both classes comprising 60 students. Questionnaires were given to the students in experimental group after each of 12 treatment tasks. Data from written pre and post-test and questionnaires were analysed quantitatively. T-test was run to analyse improvement between the groups. Test results revealed highly significant difference between two groups. The study also demonstrated treatment groups' general perception of task based language teaching positively. Findings of this study may inspire the teachers to adopt task based language teaching to improve students' narrative writing as well as other skills.

Keywords: Task; Task-based language teaching; Role of teacher & learner; Narrative writing.

1. Introduction

Interest in task based language teaching (TBLT) and learning has grown enormously in the present era (Ellis, 2000). It has evoked interest among the teachers, scholars, researchers as well as learners. The reason is "task' is taken as a construct of equal significance to second language acquisition researchers and to language teachers as well.

Task based language teaching is a new methodology of teaching language. It is in contrast to the traditional methods of teaching foreign language. The aim of the method is the improvement of functional use of communication language. This method provides a free environment to the learner. He learns language without any external pressure as in the traditional methods of teaching language, the teacher controls the whole environment but this approach is learner centred. He chooses the forms of target language which help him to accomplish the communicative goal (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996).

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is born out of Bangalore Project" that started in 1979 and ended in 1984.The project was started by Prabhu in India. Prabhu lays emphasis on competence and communication. By competence, he means 'grammatical competence' while communication refers to 'conveying meaning' (Sanches, 2004).

Although it was a short term project, it gave insight to language scholars and debates and enlarged its scope. At the present age, there are various versions of TBLT. But the term task is the key concept in all the various versions of TBLT. The term task has been defined differently by different scholars and researches. In the second language learning, a task is considered an activity that is undertaken by the learners to accomplish some specific goal (Bygate *et al.*, 2001; Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 1998).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Learners in public sector colleges in Pakistan especially in Punjab have fewer opportunities to practice English language outside the classroom because of the traditional pedagogic approach. The need of the time is to rethink about the teaching methodology so that we could compete the modern world. The most modern methodology to teach language is task based language teaching (TBLT). Task based language teaching uses tasks, pedagogic as well as the real world tasks to teach any skill of English language. Task based language teaching is viewed differently in different contexts. Although a lot of work has been done on TBLT so far as the improvement of speaking skill is

concerned, a little research has been conducted on TBLT in terms of improving writing skill especially the narrative one. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of task-based language teaching to improve the learners' narrative writing skill in literature class at a public sector post graduate college in the district Rahim Yar Khan of Punjab. After completing 14 years education and studying English language as a compulsory subject in 14 grades, many of the learners complain about their lack of communicative as well as writing competencies. This may be the result of poor teaching methodology along with other factors responsible for this plight. So, task based language teaching intends to improve the situation so that the learners may become successful professionals and may perform well wherever writing performance is required.

1.2. Research Questions
1. How effective is the use of task based teaching in improving students' narrative writing skill?
2. What is the perception of students at master level about task based language teaching?
3. To explore which tasks were liked most by the students?

2. Literature Review
The study covers prior study on narrative writing, task and its types, features of task, task based language teaching and role of teacher and learner.

2.1. What is task?
The word task is from Old North French 'tasque'. It means duty, tax or piece of work imposed as duty.

Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995) cited by Littlewood (2004) in article defines task thus: a task is a piece of work to be done especially one done regularly, unwillingly or with difficulty.

2.2. Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)
Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) was born out of "Bangalore Project" that started in 1979 and ended in 1984. The project was started by Prabhu in India. The word "Task" in TBLT refers to particular activities done in classroom. During these activities, the focus remains on meaning which ends with emphasis on form. This method developed from "a strongly felt pedagogic intuition, arising from experience generally but made concrete in the course of professional debate in India. This was that the development of competence in second language required no systematisation of language inputs or maximization of planned practice, but rather in creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication" (Prabhu, 1987).

Robinson (2011) in his fresh study points out rationales behind TBLT namely Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis, Swan's output hypothesis and Long's interaction hypothesis. Moreover he describes some recent proposals that stimulate acquisition process. He also mentions the effects of task designs on three aspects of language accuracy, complexity, fluency.

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is defined as an approach of language teaching and learning in which tasks are the central points. The difference between TBLT and traditional approaches is that in the former approach students are treated as language users' (Ellis, 2003) while the latter treats them as language learners. In fact TBLT is more natural methodology than the traditional ones which follow 3p's. According to Ellis (2009) 'There is no single way of doing TBLT'.

But mainly, there are two notions of TBLT, as is put by Naguyen (2014). The first notion is meaning focused expounded by (Ellis, 2003;2009; Prabhu, 1987; Willis, 1996; Willis and Willis, 2007). The second notion is form focused preached by Nunan (1989) and Long (1997). The most important aspect of TBLT is that it is a flexible approach to language teaching. It can be adapted to the needs and circumstances of any country or clime. For example, use of L1 is usually thought adverse in language classroom. L1 is considered to be a great setback in the learning or teaching of language. But TBLT allows the use of L1 at priming stage if this use helps in learning language. Anyhow, presentation in all cases must be in the target language.

(Breen, 1987) says that TBLT is the product of
- New views on language.
- New views on methods of teaching.
- New views on the learners' contribution to learning process.
- New views on planning learning and teaching.

Carless (2007) in his study about the suitability of task based language teaching in Hong Kong secondary schools reports that he chose 21 teachers from different schools and conducted an interview. The findings of his study show that task based language teaching can be implemented in countries having traditional system of teaching but with a little adaptation and flexibility. Nahavandi and Mukandan (2013) state that TBLT is useful for all the four skills of language. They conducted a study on 84 students of elementary learning in an Iranian university. The population was divided into control group and experimental one. Experimental group was taught reading comprehension through TBLT. The results were in favour of treatment group. So the general understanding of TBLT has been punctured because generally TBLT is taken to be suitable for teaching speaking. Murat and Sibel (2011) have found that TBLT is based on constructive learning theory and communicative methodology that emerged against traditional methodologies centred on three components (presentation, performance, practice). TBLT takes

language learning as developmental process. Recently, TBLT has been viewed from variety of angles like spoken performance, written performance etc. It provides opportunity to learner to learn both speaking and writing with the help of task. Colin (2012) conducted a study to see the effectiveness of TBLT to improve grammar usage in Japan. 36 students were selected for the study. They were taught through Willis framework of TBLT based on various task activities. Ordering and sequencing of pictures was the main task to teach language and grammar to students. The focus on from was emphasized in the during task phase. The results were tremendous in case of grammar improvement. The study shows TBLT can be adapted to teach form and language.

(Ahmadniay (2014)) reports that task based language teaching is born out of communicative language teaching. It is a learner centred approach. It is about learning language rather than teaching it. Tasks are of fundamental importance. Task engages learners in interaction which facilitates language learning. It also provides learners with an opportunity to "negotiate meaning". It facilitates the learning of all the four skill. The researchers report the development and growth of task based language teaching. TBLT is the product of last 20 years' research in the field of second language acquisition. No one knew about tasks before Prabhu (1987) work.

2.3. Narrative Writing

Narrative is a 'sophisticated' word linked with 'literary fiction and oral tradition'. Narratives play dominant role in people's life. People narrate their daily happenings, routine experiences in the form of anecdotes and stories. These narratives serve a cementing role among people. The ability to tell stories oral or written help establish and maintain human relations. So the learners of foreign language may take help form these narratives to improve their conversational or writing skills. So one way to prepare students for conversation or writing outside the class room, is to create narrative tasks which have been used by teachers and teacher researchers to 'elicit learners' output in second language acquisition study.

Narrative tasks provide learners opportunities to undergo mental or cognitive demands of real time organization. In task based framework, storytelling can be 'manipulated' by the task designer or teacher' in order to help and challenge the learners. So we have to look for possible ways of 'grading' narrative tasks.

Repetitions of a short story on the basis of known text is suitable for low learners but telling a 'personal anecdote' to a group of people would be apt to more advanced one when we move from one dimension to other. There may be some overlapping. Robinson (2011) proposed that these dimension would include:-

Azizzadeh and Dobakhti (2014) report their study about the effectiveness of TBLT on learner's narrative written performance. They chose 40 students for the study, applied post and pre- test. They divided their subjects into experimental and control group. The control group was engaged in repetitive tasks. After three weeks post -test was applied. The learners showed significant improvement in case of complexity but a little advancement in case of accuracy.

David *et al.* (2013) report their study about enhancing the narrative writing skill of the undergraduate students who are not proficient in writing. They selected 40 students as their subject. Pre and post- test were applied to bring homogeneity. The students were instructed through task based story telling. After the completion of treatment, post test was administered to students. The results were analysed by observing grammatical errors committed by learners in pre- test and post -test. The results of the post -test were marvellous regarding improvement of learner's narrative writing skill.

3. Methodology

The present study investigates the effectiveness of task based language teaching (TBLT) to improve master level students' narrative writing skill. In this study the answers of the following questions are explored and reported.

- How much effective is TBLT in improving narrative writing skill of students of MA English P1 at Khwaja Fared Govt. Post Graduate College, Rahim Yar Khan?
- What are learners' perceptions of task based language teaching in literature class at Khwaja Farid Govt. College?
- To explore which tasks were liked most by the students?

3.1. Research Population

Total Population taken in this study for research is 578 in seven different Govt and private Institutes in tehsil Rahim Yar khan- Khawja fareed Govt post graduate college, Govt post Graduate college for women, Islamia University Rahim Yar khan campus, Nicaas College, Nice college, MTB college and Superior college.

3.2. Research Sampling

The accessible population in this study is MA English part 1 class including students of morning and evening class. This sample is studying English literature in a government college. The total number of the accessible population is 122. These students have been passed through a structure test to bring homogeneity.

3.3. Sample Size

The participants in this experimental study are 60 male and female students enrolled in MA English Part-I at a well- known public sector male college in southern Punjab. The sample size of the study population is 10%. The sample population has been taken from Khawja Fareed Govt post graduate college.

3.4. Sample Technique

The sample has been taken in two stages. In the first stage two classrooms of MA English part 1(morning and evening) comprising 122 students have been selected by non-probability sampling technique. In the second stage, 60 students were selected and divided into two groups randomly after they were passed through a structure test adopted from old papers of English of grade 12.The student participants have been equally divided into two groups. Each group has equal number of students.

3.5. Participants in the Study

Table-1. Participants in the Study

Participants	Number
Teacher	1
Ratter	1
Students in the treatment group	30
Students in the control group	30

4. Data Collection Tools

4.1. Test

The data has been collected by using two tools, the first tool has been pre-test and post-test which were administered to both groups treatment as well as control. To bring homogeneity among the population a general structure test was administered. Pre-test was administered to both groups before the start of treatment. After teaching the experimental group through TBLT and control group through traditional methodology, post test was administered to both groups. The question papers were prepared by the researcher himself. However, the nature of question was similar. To maintain similarity between pre- test and post test questions, split half method was used. The scripts of pre-test and post-test were marked by the researcher himself and one other ratter. The test consisted of narrating any topic carrying 20 marks. The ratters rated scripts in the light of writing rubrics.

4.2. Questionnaire

The second instrument used for data collection was perception questionnaire. This perception questionnaire was given to students of experimental group after each task was completed by them. The questionnaire comprised 20 statement items. The items were designed on four point Likert scale.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

For the analysis of data collected through pre and post treatment written tests of two groups, a paired sample t-test was applied to investigate the effects of TBLT and traditional pedagogy on the experimental and control group respectively.

In order to analyse data collected through 12 perception questionnaire, mean values were applied as calculating techniques. The purpose of this analysis was to answer research questions by comparing their Mean values. The data collected through pre- test and post and perception questionnaire was statistically analysed by using statistical packages for social sciences, 20.0 (SPSS). To answer these purposes mean value has been deduced on the bases of minimum agree and disagree answers. The data collected through pre and post treatment test was also analysed by using statistical package for social sciences, 20.0 (SPSS). Means and standard deviations of pre and post treatment written tests in both the experimental and control groups were compared by using t- tests. The purpose of this analysis was to find the answer for the first research question namely how effective is the use of task based language teaching in improving the narrative writing skill of the students

6. The Results of pre and post Treatment Written Test

The data collected through pre and post treatment test was analysed by using sample t-test by using statistical package for social sciences 20. (SPSS). The purpose of this analysis was to find the answer for the first research question namely how effective is the use of task based language teaching in improving the narrative writing skill of the students. So the results of both pre and post tests have been compared within the groups.

Table-2. Within group results

Characteristics	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation(S.D)	T-Test
Pre-Experimental	30	4.2	2.61	40.098***
Post-Experimental	30	10.4	2.92	
Pre-Control	30	3.63	2.60	6.77***
Post-Control	30	4.8	2.91	

Note: *** p<.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Table 2 shows that pre experimental group averaged 4.2 on the pre-test and 10.4 on the post test. The t-test results show that experimental group's improvement was highly significant.

Table 2 also shows the pre- test and post test results of control group. Pre control group averaged 3.63 whereas post control group averaged 4.8.The t-test results show that control groups' improvement was statistically significant.

But on the whole the post results of both control and treatment show a large difference. Though the students improved in control group, their development is less than that of experimental group. The t-test results show a great difference. The results strengthen the first research question that is task based language teaching is extremely effective in improving student's narrative writing kill. The students improved through traditional method noticeably but treatment group showed remarkable improvement in narrative writing. All the results were deduced on the bases of initial and final variation of pre- test and post test scores between control group and experimental group. The overall comparison between control group and experimental group is different at highly significant level.

The second instrument used to collect data has been perception questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire has been to determine the answer of the next research questions. The perception questionnaire has been given to the students of experimental group at the end of every task .According to students' effective response in the questionnaire, a rank order of tasks has been developed in terms of their mean values. Table 3 shows the rank order of tasks in the study. It answers the third associative research question namely to explore which tasks were liked most by students?

Table-3. The Rank orders of tasks in the treatment group in terms of their mean values on the bases of agree and strongly agree answers.

Rank	Task No	M
1	3	12.70
2	2	12.65
3	1	12.5
4	4	12.30
5	11	12.25
6	9	12.20
7	7	11.90
8	12	11.78
9	6	11.75
10	10	11.73
11	8	11.70
12	5	11.30

The scoring for the positive statements was as follows:
Strongly agree = 4   Agree = 3   Disagree=2   strongly Disagree=1

Table 3 shows that task No. 3 has the highest order in ranking. The ranking has been produced on the basis of positive responses by the students of treatment group. Task 3 has been taken by students as the most interesting and appealing.

The Table shows that perception questionnaire fulfils one of the twofold purposes namely what tasks were most liked by the student to the least liked, on the bases of mean values of tasks. Task No. 3 shows the top mean value ei. 12.70 and task No. 5 shows the least mean value ei, 11.30. The reason is the task No. 3 was first based on the introduction of the story in the form of material. Story telling mode was well liked by the students. They felt relaxed and enjoyed such a narrative task. Some of the positive items in all 12 tasks received positive response in terms of mean values. Whereas some negatively stated items received significant mean values.

The fourth statement (the task was enjoyable) in the perception questionnaire received positive responses in all 12 tasks.

Table-4. The task was enjoyable

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	0.5000
Disagree	12	1.1667
Agree	12	8.5000
Strongly agree	12	19.8333

Item No. 6(this task helped me in learning) also received positive responses in terms of mean values.

Table-5. This task helped me in learning.

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	1.0
Disagree	12	1.75
Agree	12	9.33
Strongly agree	12	18

Item No. 8This task improved my knowledge of English

Table-6. This task helped me in learning

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	0.2500
Disagree	12	2.2500
Strongly agree	12	8.4167
Agree	12	19.0833

Item No. 20 TBLT brings positive changes among learners.

Table-7. This task helped me in learning

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	1.9167
Disagree	12	2.0000
Strongly agree	12	6.6667
Agree	12	18.5833

Item No. 18 TBLT improves writing skill.

Table-8. This task helped me in learning

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	0.0000
Disagree	12	1.6667
Agree	12	14.5833
Strongly agree	12	13.7500

Item No. 15 TBLT is student centred instructional approach.

Table-9. This task helped me in learning

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	0.4167
Disagree	12	1.0833
Strongly agree	12	15.1667
Agree	12	13.3333

All the tables show positive responses of students in terms of mean values. The reason is all the tasks have been arranged in accordance with the objectives of teaching narrative writing. Moreover all the students in the treatment group were mature enough to perceive and understand the tasks. All the participants were graduates and students of MA English Part one. They enjoyed all tasks because they were based on narration. In fact, all the tasks were students centred because the teacher played a role of guide and monitor.

The tasks in fact, improved student's knowledge of English and brought positive changes. They improved students' narrative writing skill.

The tasks were enjoyable because the tasks provided students with knowledge in interesting and fun like activities. Perhaps they had not experienced such an atmosphere in their early learning. The tasks provided pair work activities.

Item No. 9 The task was boring for me.

Table-10. This task helped me in learning

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	12.2500
Disagree	12	15.7500
Strongly agree	12	2.3333
Agree	12	0.3333

There were some negatively stated items as well in the questionnaire. They were responded positively by the students as mean values put in table 15 show. The students disagreed to the statement 'the task was boring for me'. The number of students who agreed to the above stated statement was less than those who disagreed.
Item No. 10 This task was very long.

Table-11. This task helped me in learning

Characteristics	Number	Mean
Strongly disagree	12	5.8333
Disagree	12	16.2500
Strongly agree	12	3.000
Agree	12	4.9167

Item No. 10 is another negatively stated item in the perception questionnaire. All the tasks in the study were managed within time prescribed for each task. The students did not find the tasks long because they all were mature and had literary background which prepared them to do all the tasks potentially. Moreover, maximum tasks were based on story telling that was interesting for the students. Finally, all the rest items in the perception questionnaire were responded positively.

7. Findings and Discussions

The findings of T-test analysis for pre and post test results manifested that improvement in experimental group's writing skill was highly significant.

Although both control and experimental groups were formed from intact class and had approximately equal performance in the pre-test, the treatment group improved at highly significant level. This significant improvement is the result of teaching methodology, task based language teaching. The teaching methodology was the most important factor to improve the participants' narrative writing skill. The participants had never experienced such a relaxed and interesting teaching environment in which students were free to discuss and exchange ideas. They found the teacher as monitor, guide and facilitator and not an authority who always controls the classroom environment. The participants were all in all free from any pressure, anxiety or psycho or socio factors that hamper in free learning. Another reason of highly significant improvement could be the higher level of students. All the participants in treatment as well as in control group were the students of master level—MA English Part-I. They already had developed a literary background. They already had been studying novel, drama, poetry and short stories. Still another reason of students' highly significant improvement could be the easiest mode of writing, narrative writing. The study answers all the research questions stated in the objectives.

The results of the second tool, perception questionnaire, have also been encouraging. Maximum students responded positively to positively stated items and some students answered negatively to some discrete items in the questionnaire. The mean values of answers to some discrete items in the questionnaire have been calculated. Some negatively stated items were responded by students in negation. For example the item No. 10 'The task was very long' was responded negatively by maximum participants. However, some students agreed to the statement. The possible factor behind this affirmation may be the burden of other lectures as all the participants were regular students of MA English Part-I.

Another discrete item of the perception questionnaire is item No. 9 'The task was boring for me'. Only a few students agreed to the above stated item. The reason may be same of the tasks that were not interesting for the participants. However, maximum students responded negatively to the item No. 9, because all the tasks were very interesting based on some story or the real world situation. Item No. 15 is positively stated in the perception questionnaire. 'TBLT is based on student centred instructional approach'. Almost all the participants agreed to this statement because participants experienced for the first time Task based language teaching which provided opportunity to students to participate in the learning process. Possibly maximum students have learnt English language through grammar translation method which is teacher centred approach.

Almost all the participants responded positively to this statement. In fact, it was first time that the students got such a treatment which improved their narrative writing skill. The methodology adopted was the dominant factor that brought revolutionary improvement among the students. However, narrative writing itself is an easy mode of writing that is why the treatment group improved in highly significant terms.

'The task was enjoyable'. Almost all the participants strongly agreed to the above sated item. All the tasks were made enjoyable for the students with untiring effort. The tasks were enjoyable and they were fun activities because such an experience which provided the students was really something new. All the participants worked in groups. The group activity provided them opportunity to discuss with one another. They got help from the teacher as well. The students were encouraged to write in their own language without caring of spelling, punctuation, tense or grammar. They exchanged their drafts among themselves and finally got help from the teacher. The most important feature of the tasks was the students were not under any pressure. The teacher for them was a guide, a counsellor and monitor. He provided them maximum guidance. Only in such an atmosphere students were able to improve their knowledge of English. Maximum students responded to both items, positively. They strongly agreed to the items. The study also proved the third research question namely which tasks were liked most by the students. The Mean

values in table 3 show that task no 3 has been liked most by the learners. The reason is this task was based on story which has always been interesting mode of teaching.

The notable aspect of pre and post test results is the highly significant improvement in the participants' narrative writing. Whether this improvement was the result of interaction among students over the course of time or effect of pair and group work or teaching methodology, it is not difficult to determine. In fact, the teaching methodology is the major factor to bring such a significant improvement in the students' narrative writing skill.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of task based language teaching to develop narrative writing skill of students. In this study quantitative data were collected and analysed. It was an experimental study conducted with two groups of MA English Part-I students at Khwaja Fareed Govt. Post Graduate College. One was treatment group whereas another was control group. The treatment group was taught through task based language teaching. Pre and post tests were administrated to both control and experimental group. The results were in favour of the treatment group. The learners in experimental group improved their narrative writing skill at highly significant level. The perception questionnaire results were also in favour of TBLT.

Statistical values give direction that experimental group improved significantly as compared to control group. The treatment helped the learners to improve narrative writing skill in terms of accuracy. The results show that task based language teaching can be taken as an alternative teaching methodology. It can be used extensively with those students who respond to TBLT positively. Almost all tasks were liked by the learners but task no 3 was highly liked by the students.

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