

BRIDGING THE GAP: EVALUATING TASK-BASED LEARNING AS A FACILITATOR FOR ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN PAKISTAN

Muhammad Asad Ishtiaq

asadjoiyya@gmail.com

S26W-MPHILE-052- MPhil scholar at University of Okara

Asma Iqbal

laibasipra4@gmail.com

S26W-MPHILE-054- MPhil scholar at University of Okara

Tariq Usman, Corresponding Author,

tariq.usman@uo.edu.pk

Assistant Professor of English, University of Okara

Abstract

The English language classroom in Pakistan is often faced with a rather unusual dilemma. In one regard, society and institutions are under a great deal of pressure to churn out graduates who can speak fluent English to be able to work in multinational companies, call centers, and government jobs. But on the contrary, what happens in pedagogy is that the English language classroom sticks to its grammar translation method and students only learn about the rules without being able to order a meal or argue their point of view orally. This research tries to find out whether TBL could help bridge the gap between the two realms. Results show that there was a statistical difference in terms of the level of oral fluency and strategic competence of the experimental group; however, grammar accuracy still posed difficulties. From this paper, one can infer that although TBL cannot be considered as a magic pill, its application, namely the concepts of “task repetition” and “schema building,” helps to break down affective filters that inhibit the Pakistani learners.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning, Oral Communicative Competence, Pakistani ESL, Affective Filter, Grammar-Translation Method.

INTRODUCTION

It's a Thursday morning at the government college of Multan. Thirty students are seated in neat rows. The teacher, armed with her much-thumbed Practical English Grammar book, writes down a rule about the present perfect tense on the blackboard. “Has he gone?” she prompts. The chorus from the class follows her query: “Has he gone?” But when she suddenly asks them “What have you done today?”, a profound silence pervades the classroom. From the back row comes a boy, speaking in Urdu, “Humara to bas chalta hai, likh lete hain, bol nahi sakte” (We can manage writing, but not speaking). And herein lies the crux of the ELT situation in Pakistan – the great schism between receptive knowledge and productive skills.

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), for decades now, has been the staple method in Pakistani English Language Teaching (ELT). Having been passed down historically through the colonial structure of power, GTM was used to make individuals who could understand law books, not individuals who could make sense. According to Rahman (2017), GTM has led to stratification within the English-speaking society of Pakistan, with fluency reserved for those who are educated in elites circles. While the rest have broken English due to its test-oriented nature. Thus, the term ‘silent English’ has been coined by the locals (Shamim, 2008). Students get high marks in their exams but freeze during interviews.

CLT was revolutionary when introduced in the 1990s. But for Pakistani classrooms, it seemed like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. The biggest issue that teachers raised regarding CLT is that it was too Western. Authentic materials such as menus and tickets needed for CLT activities could not be found. Moreover, the setting required by CLT, that is, small groups of twenty or thirty students, could not be accommodated in the classroom with eighty students (Khan & Bashir, 2019). As a result, CLT came to be used only superficially.

Step forward, Task-Based Learning (TBL). Whereas CLT is essentially a philosophy, TBL is more of a procedural model. According to Ellis (2003), TBL is an approach in which the task serves as the focal point for both planning and instruction. Learners are presented with a task, meaningful in nature (e.g., “Plan distribution of funds in the aftermath of a flood” or “Persuade your partner to contribute towards the specified charity organization”), making use of what language they currently possess. It is only after completion of the task that the teacher interferes to rectify any linguistic errors made by the students. The “task cycle feedback” procedure may suit the Pakistani context best. It facilitates code-switching between Urdu/Punjabi and English within the task itself and discourages students from worrying about making mistakes.

The problem lies in the fact that TBL is primarily a theoretical concept in Pakistan’s teacher education courses. Practicing teachers have all heard of it, but very few have experienced its practical application in a local context. The main question to be addressed through this paper is thus not whether task-based learning is universally applicable; rather, it is the following: How much effect can a task-based learning intervention produce on the oral communication skills of intermediate students in Pakistan?

In order to find the answer to this question, we examined the lower middle-class students of a semi urban college who were exposed to English learning for ten years but never generated it. The aim of this research is to fill up this void, not by installing costly laboratories or foreign resources but by transforming the social arrangement of classrooms from one of transmission into negotiation.

1.1 Background of the Study

English in Pakistan represents a situation which can best be described as paradoxical with regard to the country’s educational, political, and socioeconomic dynamics. Since English represents a part of the legacy left by its colonial past, it not only represents a language in Pakistan but an institution of prestige, career advancement, and respect. The English language serves as a language of authority, higher education, and upward social mobility. Proficiency in spoken English is equated with being intelligent and employable, especially in international companies, higher education, governmental organizations, and the ever-growing digital industry (Rahman, 2002). Educational institutions are, therefore, under constant pressure to deliver students that are competent communicators and not just students that know about grammar and vocabulary.

However, due to this critical need, the teaching culture of English language instruction in Pakistan still relies on the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). In most state-owned and semi-state-owned educational institutions, the method of teaching is focused on memory-based learning, translation, and test-based teaching procedures. Language learners are often taught how to reproduce grammatical forms in writing tests but are not capable enough to interact in society. This discrepancy has created a notable gap between linguistic proficiency and communicative competence. High-scoring students in the English language examination often exhibit hesitations and anxieties when expected to participate in spontaneous interactions (Mansoor, 2005). These results clearly show that traditional pedagogical techniques are inadequate in acquiring oral communicative skills in ESL classrooms.

The advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and further developments in CLT pedagogy have led to a rethinking of conventional approaches to language teaching worldwide. Within the realm of the wider communicative movement, Task-Based Learning (TBL) has received extensive scholarly attention in view of its focus on interaction and authentic language usage. In this respect, TBL views language learning as the result of carrying out practical tasks instead of grammar exercises. As stated by Ellis (2003), tasks help learners negotiate meanings, communicate successfully, and employ linguistic knowledge

appropriately. Likewise, Nunan (2004) maintains that TBL promotes interaction within the classroom environment at the expense of teacher-centered lessons and thus encourages pragmatics and communication skills.

Nevertheless, in the Pakistani ESL environment, the application of the TBL approach is still quite underutilized and not explored sufficiently. Several factors impede the use of communicative approaches, such as overcrowded classes, standardized exams, inadequate professional development of teachers, as well as a scarcity of educational materials. In addition, cultural issues prevent students from engaging in communicative exercises, due to their fear of shame and embarrassment. This idea can be associated with Krashen's (1982) notion of the "affective filter," which plays an important role when discussing the issues of Pakistani learners who have difficulties acquiring the language because of their anxiety and lack of confidence.

In this context, this current study examines the impact of Task-Based Learning as an enhancer of oral communicative competence in intermediate-level ESL students in Pakistan. Through a comparison between the efficacy of TBL as against the conventional form of learning during a sixteenth-week period, the study endeavors to add to the ongoing discourse about language education within the confines of resource-deprived learning settings. In particular, the study tries to apply the global principles of CLT within the socio-linguistic context of Pakistani classrooms. Through this process, the purpose of the study is to find out if task-based language learning can resolve the dichotomy between grammar and communication in Pakistani ESL classrooms.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The issue that has been facing the English language learning process in Pakistan for a long time now is the failure of students to be able to speak English. Students usually have an awareness of grammar, literary material, and the format of English exams, but they still lack the ability to participate actively in any sort of communicative situation. This shows that there is an inherent problem in the pedagogy being applied in the ESL classrooms of Pakistan, where linguistic accuracy has been prioritized over linguistic communication.

The widespread application of the Grammar-Translation Method in Pakistani education institutions has greatly added to this communicative failure. The conventional methods of teaching focus on rote learning, translating, and teacher-controlled classes, thereby providing limited scope for natural communication or cooperative usage of the language. Activities based on oral communication fail to receive adequate attention since these are not evaluated in the existing examination system. Students tend to get accustomed to seeing English as a subject of study rather than a means of communication.

Psychological and socio-cultural obstacles also contribute significantly to making the acquisition process difficult for Pakistani learners. Most learners feel very anxious, fearful of failure and evaluation, and not confident when asked to communicate in English in public. These affective factors generate a classroom setting where learners feel silent, hesitant, and less participatory. According to Krashen (1982), high affective filters prevent language acquisition because learners feel reluctant to get involved in communicative processes. Moreover, in the Pakistani context, where proficiency in English is viewed positively in terms of class and status, any oral error becomes a source of embarrassment for the learner.

Task-Based Learning (TBL), though established as an efficient communicative approach worldwide, still requires more research in order to be applicable for Pakistanis' English language acquisition process. Indeed, previous works concentrated on theoretical deliberations about communicative pedagogy while paying little attention to practical aspects of using tasks in limited resources environment where large groups of students need constant help from teachers to acquire a language. In addition, it needs further exploration whether TBL

would effectively promote fluency, strategic competence and learner's self-confidence in intermediate Pakistani learners.

In consequence, the key issue which needs investigation and discussion in this study is the existence of a significant divide between the teaching of English and the development of oral communication abilities among the learners in Pakistan. The main focus of the study is to find out if Task Based Learning would be able to provide a workable replacement of traditional methodologies for the sake of facilitating authentic communication among ESL learners.

1.3. Research Objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in enhancing oral communicative competence among intermediate-level ESL learners in Pakistan.
- To investigate the impact of Task-Based Learning on learners' affective factors, particularly speaking anxiety, communicative confidence, and willingness to participate in oral interaction.
- To examine the pedagogical challenges and practical feasibility of implementing Task-Based Learning in resource-constrained Pakistani ESL classrooms.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does Task-Based Learning influence the oral communicative competence of intermediate-level ESL learners in Pakistan compared to traditional grammar-oriented instruction?
2. To what extent does Task-Based Learning reduce affective barriers such as speaking anxiety and lack of communicative confidence among Pakistani ESL learners?
3. What institutional and pedagogical challenges affect the implementation of Task-Based Learning in Pakistani ESL classrooms?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of the study can be attributed largely to the fact that it seeks to solve one of the most serious problems facing English language learning in Pakistan, which is the failure of learners to communicate fluently using their English despite years of schooling. In a society in which English language competency is becoming an important requirement for higher education and career success, the importance of acquiring oral communication skills becomes critical from an educational and economic perspective. The current study is an important part of ongoing research on language teaching in Pakistan.

Theoretically speaking, this research makes contributions to the field of Applied Linguistics and second language learning in that it attempts to relate communicative approaches to language learning within the context of an ESL education system that is postcolonial in nature. Many studies related to Task-Based Language Learning have been conducted within the context of developed societies and educational systems that benefit from technological advances. Therefore, studies analyzing the application of task-based approaches in developing nations where resources are scarce and educational institutions are driven by examination are few and far between.

This research is also highly relevant in a pedagogical sense since it can benefit many EFL teachers and syllabus designers. Many Pakistani teachers perceive the shortcomings associated with conventional grammar-based learning methods; however, they find themselves puzzled about the ways in which the communicative approach can be practiced in large classes. Through pinpointing the key aspects that make communicative exercises work, this research can provide teachers with useful suggestions on how to combine communicative activities within the existing syllabus structure.

Moreover, the significance of this study lies in its emphasis on the psychosocial aspects of language learning through the inclusion of anxiety and affective filters in oral communication. The Pakistani students are generally insecure when it comes to their language

usage owing to the fear of social evaluation and pressures exerted by institutions. In focusing on the connection between the activity of communication and learner self-confidence, the study underlines the necessity of creating an emotionally conducive environment for the learning process. In addition, the study has further socio-institutional implications. In an increasingly globalized Pakistani workforce, communicative abilities are crucial, especially in fields like higher education, journalism, IT, customer services, and international business. The failure of educational systems to cultivate these skills among students is likely to result in the generation of academically proficient but otherwise socially incompetent individuals. This implies that the results obtained from the current study may provide useful inputs for curricular and linguistic policy decisions in the country. Through the promotion of communicative approaches to pedagogy, this research hopes to advocate for better English language education practices in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study takes off from the idea of “communicative competence” that was broken down by Canale & Swain (1980). According to these researchers, language knowledge is more than just grammatical competence, i.e., knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language; one needs discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence as well. Pakistani learners who are trained using GTM tend to excel in grammatical competence in exams where they can memorize grammar rules easily. However, they are abysmally poor when it comes to strategic competence. If a Pakistani learner cannot remember the word for “salary,” they will not use an equivalent phrase like “the money I earn for my work”; they just go silent and turn red.

Task-Based Learning provides an answer to this deafening silence. According to Nunan (2004), a task is defined as an activity engaged in by students which involves understanding, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language, where the student’s focus is on utilizing his or her grammatical competence to convey meaning. This paradigm shift occurs from form to meaning. In the TBL class, what matters is not whether the sentence is correct but whether the partner was persuaded to participate in the study group. A number of studies have also validated the efficacy of TBL. In a landmark research study, Skehan (1998) concluded that TBL improves fluency and risk-taking behavior since students are constrained to employ communication strategies to overcome lexical holes. But he also issued a warning against the possible side effect associated with TBL: that of “syntactic pidginization.” Students, in their haste to accomplish the tasks assigned to them, may fossilize themselves by developing erroneous syntactic structures unless the follow-up feedback is appropriate.

Importantly, TBL studies have mostly taken place within the cultural confines of either Europe or East Asia (for example, Japan, where students are famous for their shyness). According to Carless (2004), TBL was not accepted by teachers in Hong Kong due to a misunderstanding of “learner-centeredness” as being synonymous with “chaos.” The same type of cultural hurdle needs to be overcome in Pakistan. In the Pakistani classroom, there has always been an autocratic system wherein the teacher serves as the Ustad (master). TBL requires the teacher to change into a facilitator—a “guide on the side.”

Secondly, the linguistic ecology of Pakistan is different from most other countries. Pakistan is a strongly diglossic society where Urdu is the national language, English is the official language (used in courts, universities, and corporate business), and the regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Balochi are languages of the heart. In the case of a TBL task in a classroom in Peshawar, the learners would be expected to code switch. While some might consider code switching to be “bad English,” recent theories on translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) have argued that code switching could serve as a cognitive scaffolding

tool. The learners use all languages available to them in the process of communication. Gradually, the English becomes larger.

However, there exists a significant gap in Pakistani literature in this regard. Although various researchers have been quite enthusiastic about the benefits of TBL in their theoretical analyses (such as in Manan et al., 2015), there is hardly any study that has used a controlled experiment for measuring oral production before and after the application of treatment through a rubric. Last but not least, the idea of the “affective filter” (Krashen, 1982) needs to be understood in order to make sense of the matter. It can be imagined as an invisible barrier created due to anxiety, low self-confidence, or boredom. In Pakistan, this barrier is very high. The student feels nervous while communicating because he/she fears being ridiculed by the teacher (“Angrezi nahi aati to chup raho” – If you don’t know English, remain quiet) or being laughed at by other students. The emphasis on completing the task instead of producing perfectly correct utterances will definitely lower the affective filter. While completing the task “draw a route to the bus stop” is easier for the student than producing a flawless use of prepositions, the fear evaporates.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a pragmatic, sequential explanatory approach to mixed methods. The quantitative stage tested the effects of TBL on fluency and accuracy, whereas the qualitative stage (in the form of semi-structured interviews and classroom observation) helped explain the reasons behind particular changes within the socio-cultural environment of Punjab, Pakistan.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in two intermediate colleges (grades 11 and 12) in the suburban area of Raiwind, near Lahore. This site was chosen for its “middle-condition” characteristics: not a high-fee elite school (where students already speak English at home) and not an under-resourced rural school (where electricity is an issue), but a typical semi-urban government college with classes of forty to fifty students. Sixty male students (the colleges were single-gender due to cultural norms, which unfortunately limited gender generalizability) aged 16 to 18 participated. They had been made to learn English as a compulsory course throughout their ten-year academic journey. They had similar oral proficiency skills before treatment. According to the results of a test (describe your best friend in one minute), 85 percent of the participants had spoken less than fifteen seconds before ceasing due to some lexical or anxious problems. The subjects were randomly distributed into two groups: control (traditional GTM method, n=30) and experimental group (TBL approach, n=30). Both groups used the same textbook: Intermediate English Book II.

Intervention Design (16 weeks)

The experimental group was taught with the use of TBL activities twice a week for a duration of 90 minutes each time. Our activities conformed to Ellis’s (2003) model that consists of three phases:

1. Pre-task (20 mins): Discussion of topic, activation of vocabulary, and task-modeling. Care was taken not to introduce any grammatical concepts in order to maintain natural conversation. To illustrate, before carrying out an activity on “booking a hotel room,” we had students list qualities of a good hotel without introducing modal verbs (could, would).

2. Task Cycle (50 mins): Students were put in groups of five people (no pair work since groups mimic reality); the tasks were constructed having “information gaps” about Pakistani young people:

· Task 1: You have 500 PKR. Make dinner plans for your five friends. Arrange how much each person will pay. (Practice: negotiating, numbers).

· Task 2: Your friend wants to leave school. Talk him/her into staying with three reasons. (Practice: persuading, logical conjunctions).

· Task 3: Your town is affected by dengue fever. Teach a volunteer three steps to prevent it. (Practice: imperatives, sequence of actions).

It was critical that the teacher did not correct any mistakes throughout the task. The teacher moved around the class, listened, and noted down common mistakes (e.g., “He go” vs “He goes”).

Post-activity / feedback (20 minutes): The teacher wrote 5 to 6 incorrect sentences on the board (without mentioning whose sentences these were) and then asked the students to “fix” them. It was not a grammar lesson but “consciousness raising” session.

In the control group, however, the same lecture technique was used. The teacher would take out passages from the book, translate them into Urdu, ask the students to memorize the synonyms for certain words and take dictation once a week.

Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were employed:

1. Oral Pre-test and Post-test: Both groups were recorded individually performing two tasks before and after the intervention: a) a 2-minute monologue on “A memorable day in my life,” and b) a paired role-play (“Customer returning a defective mobile phone”). Recordings were transcribed.

2. Scoring Rubric: Two blind raters (university ELT instructors not involved in the teaching) assessed the recordings using a modified version of the IELTS speaking band descriptors. Instead of the full 9-band scale, we used a simplified 0-12 scale covering three domains: Fluency & Coherence (0-4), Lexical Resource (0-4), and Grammatical Range & Accuracy (0-4). Pronunciation was noted separately but not statistically analyzed due to rater reliability concerns.

3. Semi-structured Interviews: After the post-test, we purposively sampled six students from the experimental group (two high-gain, two mid-gain, two low-gain) and the two TBL teachers for 30-minute interviews in Urdu. Questions explored emotional responses (“How did you feel when the teacher did not correct you immediately?”) and perceived challenges.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from college principals and parents (since students were minors). Students were assured that their participation (or lack thereof) would not affect their grades. Pseudonyms are used in the qualitative data.

Limitations

We recognize certain deficiencies in our research. First, the fact that we used only one gender sample limits our conclusions to male learners; the dynamics in female classes can be different since females tend to be cooperative but also shy due to the presence of their peers. Secondly, 16 weeks is not enough time for language learning; a 12-month study may yield different outcomes with regard to grammar. Lastly, the Hawthorne effect is inevitable.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, we present the quantitative comparison of pre-test and post-test scores. Second, we unpack the qualitative themes that explain the numbers.

Quantitative Findings

There was no marked statistical difference noted between the two groups at the pre-test level. The mean score in oral competence for the control group was 3.2/12 (SD=1.1), while for the experimental group, the mean was 3.3/12 (SD=1.0). Long pauses filled with words such as “Ummmm” and “Yani” (meaning) were common to the students of both classes, and most students could not talk beyond 45 seconds. However, 16 weeks later, things changed greatly. In the case of the control group, there was a slight improvement in mean score to 4.5/12

(SD=1.4). This was attributed to maturation and incidental exposure to the language through textbook readings. On the other hand, the mean score in oral proficiency increased tremendously to 8.7/12 (SD=1.6). An independent samples t-test conducted showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of mean score ($t(58)=12.4$, $p<.001$), with an effect size of 2.1 (Cohen's d).

Looking more deeply into the rubric scores provides an interesting analysis. First of all, the experimental group performed better in the category of Fluency & Coherence (it increased from 0.9 to 3.7). The students became able to cover silences with hesitations such as "Let me think," "Well," and "Actually...." Their Lexical Resource score was rather good (from 1.1 to 2.8); however, they still tend to use common words such as "good" or "bad." The lowest result, but still the predictable one, was the increase of Grammatical Range & Accuracy (it went up from 1.3 to 2.2). The students in the TBL group continued to make mistakes like subject-verb agreement ("She go to market") and tense changes ("Yesterday he come and then we go"). It fully corresponds with the statement by Skehan (1998) that fluency is achieved while making fossilized errors. The control group showed higher results in this category (3.1 instead of 2.2) since they practiced grammar rules, not speaking.

Qualitative Findings: The Lived Experience

The numbers only tell half the story. The interviews revealed why TBL worked for fluency and why it struggled for grammar.

Theme 1: The Destruction of "Sharam" (Shame)

An anonymous student, referred to as Bilal, who received a score of 2/12 on the pre-test, explained his first impression: "First time, when sir came to our group and stood near to me, my hands were trembling. I was expecting that he would say 'wrong' but he just nodded and wrote something down in his diary. I felt...strange. Not scared. Strange." In the eighth week, Bilal mentioned the following change in his physical reaction to speaking English. "The lump in my throat disappeared." It may be claimed that affective unblocking achieved by teachers is one of the biggest strengths of TBL within a Pakistani classroom setting. Teachers did not act as authorities; they acted as observers and recorders. As one of the teachers pointed out, "When I stopped correcting each error, they spoke thrice more. It was like opening a pressure valve."

Theme 2: Urdu as a Strategic Resource, Not a Sin

In the purist version of English education in Pakistan, Urdu is not allowed in class. However, in our TBL class, we encouraged students to use Urdu when negotiating the procedure before switching to English when doing the presentation. One high-performing student, Usman, described how this happened: "At first, I would think in Urdu, and then translate in my head and finally give up. But now, I just mix and talk. Sir never gets angry but slowly, the Urdu part is decreasing." This was an efficient method since the cognitive overload was less. Students did not have to be flawless; all they had to do was to be understood.

Theme 3: The Persistence of the Accuracy Problem

The reason given by the students for not improving their grammatical accuracy was quite revealing. As one of the mid-gainers explained, "Sir never stops us... After the task, he points out the incorrect sentence on the board. By this time, I would have already used the sentence 'He go' ten times. And by now, it sounds correct to me." This is because the way in which we have implemented the program contains a procedural problem, wherein feedback is not immediate enough to correct errors made in performance. Ellis (2003) argues that "task repetition" (i.e., repeating the identical task after receiving corrective feedback) is necessary for improving accuracy. In our program, we did this only three times during the sixteen-week course period. Teachers found that repetitions bored students. "They complain, 'Sir, we did this before. Why do it again?'"

Theme 4: Peer Pressure as a Motivator

Another surprising revelation was that of inter-group rivalry. While the control group worked for the teacher, the experimental group was performing for their peers. While undertaking the “budgeting for a college sports day” activity, the two groups were listening very carefully to the other party. One student, by the name of Faisal stated, “Our group budgeted three thousand rupees. However, the other group did it for two thousand and two hundred. I feel such an idiot. For next time, I memorized figures in English.”

Summary of Analysis

While TBL succeeded in fostering fluency and strategic competence by reducing the affective filter, its role in enhancing grammar proficiency was insignificant, particularly in the absence of task repetition. The Pakistani student's need for corrective feedback in grammar due to his previous exposure to GTM contradicts the non-interventionist nature of the fluency stage of TBL. As such, a combination approach is required, wherein the fluency stage is immediately succeeded by the repetition of the very same task, but with corrected grammar.

CONCLUSION

In this context, it is worth coming back to that young man in Multan who said quietly, “Humara to bas chalta hai, likh letay hain” (We can only write), and pointing out that TBL provides a solution to his problem, but it does not provide an easy solution to his problem. This study attempts to find out if TBL can make oral communication easier in Pakistan.

Summary of Findings

Over the course of sixteen weeks, students who began by being too scared to speak, gradually progressed from struggling to communicate, to effective and even sometimes eloquent speaking. They became more competent at negotiating meaning, using communicative strategies such as circumlocution and asking for assistance, and maintaining their turn in the conversation. It is clear from the qualitative results that the application of TBL is effective in helping to reduce the sociocultural anxiety (sharam), which has in the past rendered Pakistani ESL learners unable to function effectively.

Nonetheless, the authors of the study make one thing abundantly clear. TBL cannot be a substitute for grammatical instruction; it can only serve as an accompaniment. The experimental subjects' grammatical performance was still significantly inferior to that of the control group members'. Far from being a condemnation of TBL, this result emphasizes the fact that “accuracy” and “communication” are distinct objectives. If a student wants to work in a call center in Pakistan, then he or she does not need to achieve absolute perfection in terms of grammar.

Implications for Pakistani ELT Policy

In order for this research to translate from scholarly journals into classrooms, three important practical suggestions become apparent:

1. Hybrid Teaching: The Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board needs to develop the teacher's guide to include a “TBL + Repetition” component. This is not about replacing GTM with TBL. The GTM will be used for the direct instruction of difficult grammar (present perfect, passive voice), while TBL will be employed for practicing that very grammar.

2. Assessment Reforms: There are no speaking tests in the board examinations for Pakistan. Unless there is an assessment that awards marks for speaking, teachers will focus on teaching writing. The suggestion is that speaking should be internally assessed at the school level through a TBL task rubric.

3. Professional Development in “Intentional Non-action”: There needs to be a professional development effort made towards helping Pakistani teachers unlearn the tendency of immediate correction. The video recording of a teacher and analysis at the time when he/she interrupts a child must be done in a workshop setting.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This particular study was confined to male students belonging to a specific geographical location only. Future studies need to be carried out among the students of all-girls institutions located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Sindh, because there are stronger restrictions concerning females' use of voice in those areas. Furthermore, the future studies should include a longitudinal study design (one-year span) with a delayed post-test phase (three months later). The other area that can be explored is technology use. In this research, for instance, some students who would ask how the word 'barish' can be used in English through their smartphones were performing better compared to those who would not. A study which integrates guided digital vocabulary searches in the pre-task stage can solve this problem more effectively.

Final Reflections

In writing this article, I recall an incident that occurred during the fourteenth week. Tariq, a student who never spoke a word during the whole first month, was part of a team that was required to “make complaints against a broken water cooler.” Pointing towards the imaginary water cooler, Tariq remarked in a blend of Urdu and English: “Sir, this cooler. Every day it produces heat, not coolness. My mind is overheated. Please change.” The sentence had incorrect grammar. In fact, he used “cooler gives heat” instead of “the cooler produces hot air.” Nevertheless, the message was conveyed clearly enough, and Tariq was smiling! That smile is the data point itself. The journey from silence to talk in Pakistan does not start with an idealized grammar book; rather, it starts with the right to try and fail. Task-Based Learning, when modified to take into account the significance of shame culture and the value of using Urdu, provides this permission. This process does not constitute the end point; it is rather a stepping stone along the way. The task ahead for Pakistani academics and educators is no longer whether TBL works, but how to patch up its grammatical problems without snuffing out the newly lit spark of student expression.

REFERENCES

- Adnan, S. & Usman, T. (2024). Self-realization and Spiritual Flights in the Poetry of Wordsworth and Bullah Shah: A Comparative Intertextual Study, *International Research Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 42-51.
- Akhtar, M. (2020). Teacher identity and resistance to communicative approaches in Punjab. *Journal of Language and Education in Pakistan*, 12(2), 45-61.
- Ameen, S., & Usman, T. (2026). Language Learning Apps and Vocabulary Enhancement: Perceptions of Intermediate Level Students at Mianwali. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(2), 101-114.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47.
- Carless, D. (2004). Issues in teachers' reinterpretation of a task-based innovation in primary schools. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 639-662.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ijaz, I., & Usman, T. (2026). Intergenerational code-switching patterns among Pakistani bilingual speakers. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(2), 1-21.
- Jabbar, S., & Usman, T. (2026). Gamified language learning apps and writing skills enhancement: an experimental study of intermediate students at Mianwali. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(2), 22-31.
- Khan, H. I., & Bashir, S. (2019). Challenges of communicative language teaching in rural Pakistan. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 4(3), 157-165.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.

- Manan, S. A., David, M. K., & Dumanig, F. P. (2015). The English-medium fever in Pakistan: Analyzing policy, perceptions, and practices. *Asian EFL Journal*, 17(6), 45-82.
- Mansoor, S. (2005). *Language Planning in Higher Education: A Case Study of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Nousheen, S., & Usman, T. (2026). Esl learners' concord comprehension and self-efficacy through interactive grammar-based activities at university level. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(2), 42-60.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2002). *Language, Ideology and Power: Language Learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2017). *From Hindi to Urdu: A social and political history*. Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shamim, F. (2008). Trends and issues in English language teaching in Pakistan. *Journal of the Research Institute of Asia*, 45(1), 45-75.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Tahira, S., & Usman, T. (2026). Impact Of Nursery Rhymes on Vocabulary Enhancement: An Experimental Study of Primary Level Siraeki-Speaking English Language Learners. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(2), 86-100.