RESEARCH ARTICLE

DESIGNING TASKS FOR TEACHING REPORT WRITING

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ABSTRACT

In the present time, students are writing extensively but not intensively. They are busy writing on social media, it can be Facebook, Whatsapp or Twitter. However, the writing skills used for such communication is not what employers are looking for, especially from engineering students. When these students are employed, they are expected to write memos, letters and emails, technical and formal reports like laboratory report, design report, progress report, theses, executive summaries, problem analyses and proposals. Writing is not the concern but it is writing effectively. Though students study the English language as a subject for almost 10 – 15 years, the employers are not satisfied with their writing skills. (Riemer, 2007). Hence, there is a need to change the teaching methodology. They need to be taught where they can easily relate the learning with their job place scenario. It should not be theory based teaching and product based approach but it should be task based where they perform and learn the components of Writing Skills and the process of writing to make them self-reliant in future. Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), unlike traditional approach gives freedom to the learners to learn at their own pace without making learning tedious, boring, and out of context. (Ellis, 2014). It focuses on the generation of meaning and as by-products form and language. This paper discusses how TBLT can be used for enhancing report writing skills of engineering students, what is the role of a teacher, and how a teacher can use 'tasks' for teaching report writing to engineering students.

Keywords: TBLT, engineering students, task, report writing, by-product

INTRODUCTION

When engineering students get into a job, they are expected to write memos, letters and emails, technical and formal reports like laboratory report, design report, progress report, theses, executive summaries, problem analyses, and proposals. According to, Forbes (Adams, 2014), a survey carried out by The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the 'Ability to create and/or edit written reports' is

considered as one of the top ten skills that employers are seeking. The article emphasizes that creating a report is more important than 'Ability to sell and influence others'.

Students study English as a subject for almost 10 – 15 years but employers are not satisfied with their writing skills. (Riemer, 2007). There might be a problem with the methodology adopted for teaching that speaks the lack in improving language proficiency of students in English. Hence, there is a need to change the teaching method.

They need to be taught in the classroom what they can easily relate to with their job place scenario. It should not be theory based teaching and product based approach, but it should be task based where they perform and learn the components of Writing Skills and the process of writing to make them self-reliant in future. According to Ellis (2004) Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), unlike traditional approaches gives freedom to the learners to learn at their own pace without making learning tedious, boring, and out of context. Language is a tool for communication and communication takes place in the real world. In traditional approaches, language learning is carried out in isolation, but in TBLT learners communicate the way they are supposed to in the real world.

ROLE OF TEACHER IN TBLT

In traditional form-focused pedagogy, teacher controls the development of topic whereas in TBLT teacher allows students to control the development of the topic. If in case traditional class is interactive teacher regulates the conversation by dictating turn-taking whereas in TBLT class there is no regulation on turn-taking, communication takes place just like any normal situation. Traditional teacher (TT) ask questions and students reply only if the raised hand is chosen by the teacher, whereas in TBLT teacher allow students to initiate and respond as well as agree and disagree, ask and give information. They get opportunities for negotiating meaning when communication problem/s arise/s. TT support students for producing correct sentences but TBLT teacher gives freedom of whatever they want to say. TT gives form-focused feedback that is correctness on the while TBLT teacher gives Content-focused feedback concentrating on message content given by the students. It seems to be an easy task for the observers but the teacher takes the pain of designing tasks. Because it is a learner-centric approach, at times teacher will need to modify the task on the spot while the task is being executed. The teacher has to be very active and alert; the impromptu situation may arise.

The apprehension is not for what is occurring in the traditional classroom, where for an hour it is only the teacher who speaks and writes on the board. The on-looker may find that in task based language teaching 99% of the time in the classroom students are busy executing the task and teacher is idle, but it is not so. In TBLT teacher play many roles like leader and organizer of discussion, manager of group/pair work, facilitator, motivator, language 'knower' and adviser, language teacher, selector, and sequencing of tasks, preparing learners for tasks, consciousness-raising

The job of the teacher starts with gauging the need and level of the students, deciding the goal/objective of the task, executing the objective by designing task keeping in mind pre-task activities, task activity/task cycle (task →planning →report), post-task activities and the language focus (analysis and practice).

REPORT WRITING

The first step towards the job of engineering students is when they proceed for internship or project in their final semester. During this phase, they need to submit 'Progress Report' to their external guide (in the institution where they are working) and to their internal guide (at the department). In this report, the summary of how the assigned job was executed in the stipulated time limit and the end result with evidential proofs is submitted. At the end of the internship, they submit 'Project Report Theses' where "project report shall be presented in a number of chapters, starting with Introduction and ending with Summary and Conclusions. Each of the other chapters incorporates a precise title reflecting the contents of the chapter. A chapter can be subdivided into sections, subsections, and sub-subsection so as to present the content discretely and with due emphasis…" (IIT Guwahati). Once they are in the job on an average they write 62% formal reports and 59% technical reports like laboratory report, design report, progress report, and theses.

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(National-Commission, 2004). The format of these reports may vary according to the need of an institution, but generally it remains the same: (1) Title page, (2) Acknowledgements, (3) Contents page, (4) Terms of reference, (5) Procedure, (6) Material and Methods, (7) Summary, (8) Introduction, (9) Main Body/Sections, (10) Results, (11) Conclusion, (12) Recommendations, (13) Appendices, (14) References, (15) Bibliography, and (16) Glossary.

The components of a report are technically placed, for example, appendices should be at the end not in the beginning and introduction at the beginning, which students are supposed to follow throughout their career. Thus, a teacher can start teaching Report Writing with the 'Sequencing of the Report'.

TASK

Anything that we do can be called an 'activity' like planting the sapling, cooking food, or students copying from the blackboard. However, 'Task' refers to a range of work-plan which has the overall purpose of facilitating language learning - from the brief and simple exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making. As Willis (2015) quotes Skehan (1996, 2001) "classroom task should relate in some way to an activity in the real world".

For Willis, Task is an activity which "Engages learners' interest, …the primary focus is on meaning, there is an outcome, success is judged in terms of outcome, completion is a priority, and it relates to real world activities" (Willis & Willis, 2015).

It is possible that not all the tasks will give the complete real-world experience, but they will get exposed to the real life socializing and dealing with others which are the part of professional life.

Here are the examples of the tasks designed for Report Writing:

Task: Help Your Friend… (Sequencing Report)

Sequencing Report: Task Description

	Design feature	Description
1.	Goal	To understand the components of the technical report and their sequencing.
2.	Input	Randomly arranged pages of a report with a detailed table of content. i. Report without subheadings.
3.	Conditions	(i) Split (ii) shared information and (iii) converging
4.	Procedures	The methodological procedures to be followed in performing the task: pair work and planning time
5.	Predicted outcomes:	
	Product	Students will be able to write the components of the Report and their sequence.
	Process	Through these task students will be mentally prepared to write a report. This task can work as a base for the next task on Report Writing.

Sequencing Report: Task Framework

Phase	Steps
Pre-task	Step 1: Instruction by teacher: Your friend is in mess. The pages of his report are all mixed and above all, he had forgotten to insert page numbers. In 20 minutes he has to submit this report to his boss. Help him by arranging the pages in 5 minutes. • among the pages is a Table of Contents
During task	
Task Performance	Step 2: Instruction by teacher: You had taken out the printout of your rough report but all the pages have got mixed up. Unfortunately, your laptop's battery is completely down and hence you have no other option but to arrange them without any support. Oops, you have forgotten to insert not only page numbers but subheadings too. In one hour you need to take a printout of the final copy. So finish up in 30 minutes.

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	Hence, arrange the pages. Read the content and accordingly give the subheadings Note: Here they are not provided the Table of Content. They must use the knowledge acquired from the previous phase. The teacher should manage the length of the report depending on the time allotted for the session.
Process Options	Step 3: Once they have finished ask them to cross check each other's 'page sequencing' and discuss whether the subheadings are appropriate or not.
Post-task	Step 4: Discuss with class:
	(i) Sequence of the report
	(ii) Subheadings
	(iii) The language used in the report
	(iv) Their experience throughout the task
	Step 5: Explain them the various types of Report.

In executing the task there is and there should always be flexibility depending on the Learners and the time on hand. In this task, pre-task can also be used as the main task. When it is used as a Main task for the pre-task activities like brainstorming can be carried out: Give them the situation "You came to knew about the unfair means used during the exam and you want to share with somebody. Suppose if you are sharing with your parent/s how will say, and if you are sharing with your HOD how you will say? This exercise will mould their subconscious mind to understand that language used in the social setup is dissimilar from the professional setup. The language used in Report writing is formal.

Summary is also a very important part of a Report. Students are taught précis writing in the school but the majority of them find it difficult; they just copy directly from the passages. Summary in a report is called Executive Summary or Abstract or Synopsis. It has to be very concise and includes aims and objectives, methods or procedure, key findings, main conclusions and recommendations.

To teach summary writing teacher can start with a basic task where students understand the concept of summarizing which is not just deleting lines of a given passage and rewriting what remains.

Task: Filmy Bug (Summary Writing)

Summary Writing: Task Description

	Design feature	Description
1.	Goal	To develops the skill of summarizing.
2.	Input	Short film and written text
3.	Conditions	Whole class will be given the same input.
4.	Procedures	Students would be writing in a stipulated time and will share their write up with the class or in their small group.
5.	Predicted outcomes:	
	Product	Summary of a visual mode as well as of written text
	Process	The linguistic and cognitive processes the task is hypothesized to generate.

Summary Writing: Task Framework

Phase	Steps
Pre-task	Step 1: Ask any three students to tell the story of their favorite film.
	Or Ask three students to narrate story of the same film
During task:	
Task Performance options	Step 2: Show them a short film.
	Step 3: Ask them to write the story
	Step 4: Instruction by teacher: Share the write-up with your friend/one sitting next to you.

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Process Options	Step 5: Instruction by teacher: If your friend has written personal views/comments, strikethrough them. Do not erase or hide. Write your comments or suggestions at the end.
Post-task	Step 6: Ask few students to narrate a story of the movie. Instruct them not to write personal comments or views the only story should be narrated.
	Step 7: Ask students regarding their write-up and their views on the comments or suggestions shared by their friend.
	Step 8: Explain them the importance of summary writing and how it is to be written in technical documents.

CONCLUSION

By designing various tasks, learning technical writing can be made easier and lifelong habit for the students. In TBLT approach teacher has to be very alert in the class and very imaginative and creative while designing the task. While designing the task teacher should always keep in mind the needs of employers and learners, the level of the learners and time allotted by the institution.

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