Exploring Learners' Engagement in Learning Process towards Effective Language Teaching

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Abstract: Learners' engagement in learning process is essential in EFL classrooms because it is one of the keys to be effective in language teaching.. The main purpose of this paper is to improve communicative competence of the learners and their motivation by encouraging them to involve in EFL classrooms more than before which can lead the effectiveness of language teaching. It was conducted with Task-Based Approach in Language Teaching by Nunan,.D(2004). It took two months. In this research, 28 Fourth Year Non-English Specialization students at different ages and different sexes from Yangon University of Education were selected randomly as the sample. Eight integrated tasks based on Straightforward Level 4A (B2+) and questionnaire based on Task-Based Approach in Language Teaching by Nunan,.D (2011) were used as research tools. Data were collected and analyzed with quantitative research method. Due to the findings from the research, 70% of the students became developed in communicative competence and motivation in their language learning because students' involvement in learning process was more than before, but, 30% had still no awareness in learning engagement. In brief, this research will be supportive for further research related to students' involvement.in language teaching.

Index Terms - **cooperative learning, integrated tasks, learners' engagement, task-based approach**

I. INTRODUCTION

Learners' engagement in learning process is essential in EFL classrooms because it is one of the keys to be effective in language teaching. Besides, learners' involvement or learners' engagement can support cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is essential to succeed not only in language learning but also in language teaching because it can encourage the great interest and motivation of the students in EFL classrooms. In the same way, students can have the more chances in EFL classrooms to learn the new lessons by cooperating one another, sharing their own ideas and engaging themselves with or without assistance or guidance of the teachers. In the previous studies, the two scholars named Danyan Huang from International College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China and Sayed Mahdi Rozati, from Amin Higher Education Institution, Fouladshahr, Iran did the researches respectively concerning task-based approach in language teaching. One scholar focused on task-based approach to improve language competence of the students and the another one introduced and discussed some major principles of task-based language teaching and indicated how teachers can apply them in their curriculum. By adapting the previous studies, in this paper, the researcher has the desire to seek for the involvement of the students in learning process in EFL classrooms which can lead to effective language teaching in EFL classrooms.

The main purpose of this paper is to improve communicative competence of the learners and their motivation by encouraging them to involve more in EFL classrooms than before which can focus on the effectiveness of language teaching. to encourage the students in engaging learning process. The objectives of doing this research are to improve communicative competence of the students to persuade the motivation of the students more in learning processIt was conducted with Task-Based Approach which emphasized in improving language teaching and language learning by Nunan.D. 28 Fourth Year Non-English Specialization students at different ages and different sexes from Yangon University of Education were selected randomly as the sample or participants. In this research, eight integrated tasks based on Straightforward Level 4A (B2+) and questionnaire based on Task-Based Approach designed by Nunan.D were used as research tools.As the outcomes of the research, after doing this, (70%) three –third of the total participants became developed in communicative competence and motivation in their language learning. This is because engagement of the students in learning process became more than before. However, only one- third of those participants had still no awareness in learning engagement. The process that the researcher did in this research can be studied in next sections.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on seeking learners' engaging in learning process to be effective teaching in EFL classrooms towards improvement of their language competence and motivation. In this research, as the sample, 28 Fourth Year Non-English Specialization students were selected randomly. They were at different ages and different sexes from Yangon University of Education. The participants joined my research in their great interest and enthusiasm. This research took two months.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In doing this research, the researcher found some limitations, especially in time consuming, language intervention and other unexpected difficulties with participants. Sometimes they had the struggles in participating for my research when they had other school activities, for instance they had the exposure with tutorials or presentations for other subjects. It was difficult to do assessment on individual improvement in learning process because this research emphasized on task-based group work activities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, there are four parts which can be related to literature review of this research. They are as follow:
Definition of "Task"

According Long (1985), a task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence and so on. According to Richards, Platt & Weber (1986), a task is an activity or action

which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding the language, for example, drawing a map while listening to a tape and so. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of a variety of different tasks in language teaching is more communicative since it provides a purpose for a classroom activity which goes.

Peter Skehan (1998), in his book "A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning" lays a solid foundation for defining a task from a pedagogical perspective by reflecting a broad consensus among researchers and educators. He suggests five defining criteria: A task is an activity in which a) meaning is primary b) there is some communication problem to solve c) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities d) task completion has some priority e) the assessment of the task is in terms of outcomes.

According to Ellis (2003: 16), a pedagogical task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes.

Task Components

According to Nunan (1989), the definition of a language-learning task requires specification of six components: goals, input, activities, teacher role, learner role and settings. Of all six components, three components are mentioned as follow:

1. Goals

Goals are the vague general intentions behind any given learning task. Goals provide a point of contact between the task and the broader curriculum. Goals may relate to a range of general outcomes (communicative, affective or cognitive) or may directly describe teacher or learner behavior. In the teaching of reading, goals may be to get the learners to learn the topic, or find the detailed information or get the main idea of the reading material, etc.

2. Input

Input refers to the data that form the point of departure for the task. In fact, input for communicative tasks can be derived from a wide range of sources. Hover (1986) suggests a list of sources, to name just a few, letters, newspaper extracts, memo note, shopping lists, recipe, weather forecast, etc. Hover's list of sources of input is quite authentic. The aim to learn a language is to use it in the real world, so using authentic materials in the reading task is quite necessary.

3. Activities

Activities specify what learners will actually do with the input which forms the point of departure for the learning. Nunan (1989) proposes three general ways of characterizing activities: rehearsal for the real world, skills use, and fluency/accuracy. The activities focus the learner on how writers convey their aim through the function and organization of the text. Learners are taught to identify the function of the text by utilizing linguistic and non-linguistic clues. They are also taught to identify the essential organization of the text. Finally, learners are sensitized to the mechanics of schematization. They are shown how altering the order of elements in a sentence can alter the meaning. The activities have two different aims:1). To make students active in the reading process by presenting them with decision-making activities (e.g. drawing a diagram with the information given in the text, solving the problem, completing a table which reorganizes the information).2). To devise activities which are as natural as possible, i.e. as close as possible to what one would naturally do with the text (e.g. answering a letter using the information given in that letter, completing a document, comparing several texts, etc.)Activities focusing on assessing the text are designed to get readers to go beneath the surface of the text, as it were, in order to judge it and evaluate it. Here readers are required to differentiate fact from opinion and to identify the writers' attitudes, intentions and biases.

Task-based features

Major characteristics of task based approach are that Task as a reflection of real world activity, as the syllabus unit,as a learner -centred base ,as an ideal for second language acquisition condition and as an instrument to specify the parts to be concentrated in the next activities.

According to Breen (1987) tasks are defined as social and problem solving interaction. The second feature, Task as the syllabus unit, is more difficult than the first one, since new syllabuses do not involve a single method to identify the subject of any course but usually include several ways to deal with different features of the course. The third feature, Task as a learner -centered base, is regarded as a general characteristic for this approach by Breen and Nunan. Nunan supported increased learner-centred base. His views were relevant to task based approach. The fourth point, Task as an ideal for second language acquisition condition, was the base of Long and Crookes' model to task based approach. They claimed that this model is based on a second language acquisition project, on a classroom-oriented research, and on the bases of syllabus and course design. The last feature, Task as an instrument to specify the parts to be concentrated in the next activities, directly indicates the role for tasks in a cycle. However, different ways to select the type of tasks have been offered. Long outlined four steps for developing a task: to set a need analysis program to get target tasks. to sort out the target tasks into separate and to base on the tsk type and to set pedagogical tasks as well as to choose pedagogical tasks and put them in order to form a task syllabus.

Cooperative learning

According to Wikipedia, cooperative learning is an educational approach which aims to organize classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences. Students must work in groups to complete tasks collectively toward academic goals. Unlike individual learning, which can be competitive in nature, students learning cooperatively can capitalize on one another's resources and skills (asking one another for information, evaluating one another's ideas, monitoring one another's work, etc.). Ross and Smyth (1995) describe successful cooperative learning tasks as intellectually demanding, creative, open-ended, and involve higher order thinking tasks According to Brown & Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) and Siltala (2010), there are 5 basic and essential elements to cooperative learning. They are as follow:

Positive interdependence
 Students must fully participate and put forth effort within their group. Each group member has a task/role/responsibility therefore must believe that they are responsible for their learning and that of their group
  Face-to-face promoted interaction
  Members promote each other's success. Students explain to one another what they have or are learning and assist one another with understanding and completion of assignments
  Individual and group accountability
  Each student must demonstrate mastery of the content being studied. Each student is   accountable for their learning and work, therefore eliminating "social loafing"
Social skills
Social skills that must be taught in order for successful cooperative learning to occur. Skills include effective communication, interpersonal and group skills: leadership, decision-making, trust-building friendship- development, communication and conflict-management skills.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES
In this section, there are two scholars who have made the research related to task-based approach in language teaching. They are the Chinese scholar named Danyan Huang from International College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China and the second one is is the scholar from Iran named Sayed Mahdi Rozati, Amin Higher Education Institution, Fouladshahr. To start with, the Chinese scholar named Danyan Huang did the research "A Study on the Application of Task-based Language Teaching Method in a Comprehensive English Class in China", he studied to investigate whether the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in a comprehensive English class would have a positive effect on students' study motivation and language proficiency. A two-phase eight-cycle action research project was conducted in one of the author's classes. Questionnaires, interviews, classroom observation and a teaching journal were employed as data collection instruments. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data revealed that the majority of students showed positive perceptions towards the use of TBLT in their English learning class and acknowledged a growth in their study motivation, indicated by increased interest, enjoyment and study autonomy, and their language skills, especially speaking and writing as well as some other related skills like information retrieving.

However, problems arose in the process, showing that more literature reading and further research are needed by the author for better implementation of this language teaching approach in English learning classes in the future. The second scholar named Sayed Mahdi Rozati, Amin Higher Education Institution, Fouladshahr, Iran studied in his research" Language Teaching and Task Based Approach, "he used as some special activities that are carried out in the classroom. These activities were performed by putting an emphasis on meaning. In this approach Grammatical Competence and communicative competence were extremely emphasized, that was being able to adjust with grammatical norms and being able to convey ideas. Consequently, grammatical competence in this approach is made by 'internal self-regulating processes' and it helped to convey the meaning in 'appropriate conditions'. The main goal of this article was to introduce and discuss some major principles of task-based language teaching and indicates how teachers can apply them in their curriculum.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
In this section, there are there are five parts and they are in the parts of research design. . They are as follows:
Participants
To conduct this research, twenty –eight students were chosen randomly as participants depending on their own interest and enthusiasm. They were attending the Fourth Year (COE) class from Yangon University of Education. These participants were different sexes, males and females. They were at the ages between 15 and 20 having different language background knowledge.
Research Period
This research took two months having eight periods or eight days. One month had four periods. One day took thirty minutes and there were 120 learning minutes in two months.
Research method
To do this research, the quantitative research method was used. The data were collected based on scores from eight integrated tasks which were assigned to the students within the limited period and answers of questionnaire which were given to the students at the end of learning period.
Research tools
.In this research, eight integrated tasks based on Straightforward Level 4A (B2+) and questionnaire based on Task-Based Approach in Language Teaching by Nunan,.D (2011) were used as research tools.
Research procedure
To do this research, the researcher used task-based approach designed by David Nunan, the famous scholar. This research took eight periods within two months. During these periods, the researcher used eight integrated tasks extracted from on Straightforward Level 4A (B2+) according to the relevant lesson plan. To start with, the participants were asked to make in groups and seven students were involved in each group.

LESSON PLAN
Class Size   - Medium
Participants   - Fourth Year Non-English Specialization Students from YUoE
Number   - 28
Level   - Intermediate Level
Duration   - 8 days in two months
Teaching hours   - 30 minutes per week, 120 minutes in eight weeks (two months)
Materials   -   integrated tasks based on Straightforward Level 4A (B2+)
Objectives   -   to improve communicative competence and motivation of the students

Table.1   Lesson Plan

Days/ Periods	Duration	Specific Skill by TBL	Titles	Performance	Remark (given marks
Day1	30 minutes	Reading		Tr- Ss (Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction)(Group work	15 marks
M	30 minutes	Speaking	Cold Comfort	Tr- Ss (Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction)(Group work)	10 marks
Day3	30 minutes	Reading		Tr- Ss (Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction)(Group work)	15 marks
Day4	30 minutes	Writing	Celebrity Heroes	Tr- Ss (Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction) (Group work)	15 marks
Day5	30 minutes	Reading		Tr- Ss (Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction) (Group work)	15 marks
Day6	30 minutes	Speaking	Good Deeds	Tr- Ss (Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction)(Group Work)	10 marks
Day7	30 minutes	Reading		Tr- Ss(Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction)(Group Work)	15 marks
Day8	30 minutes	Writing	A Good Job	Tr- Ss (Instruction) Ss-Ss(Interaction)(Group Work)	10 maeks

Table.2   Teaching Materials

Days/ Periods	Duration	Specific Skill by TBL	Title	items	Materials based on exercises from Straightforward Level A
Day1	30 minutes	Reading	Cold Comfort	15	Read the article and (a) Fill the blanks with suitable headlines.(a-f) (b)Match the highlighted words or expressions in article to definitions (1-10)
Day2	30 minutes	Speaking		5	Discuss the following questions in group. Which of the ten symptoms mentioned in the article would you go to the doctor? What would you do or take to treat other symptoms? What are the possible causes of the symptoms given in the article? What are the common diseases occur in your country? Have you experienced with visiting the hospital? Why or Why not?
Day3	30 minutes	Reading	Celebrity Heroes	15	Read the article and put the paragraphs in the correct order (1-5). Answer all questions with relevant information. (6-13)
Day4	30 minutes	Writing		1	Write your favourite celebrity in your country. Who is your favourite celebrity
Day5	30 minutes	Reading	Good Deeds	15	Read the article and put the sentences 1-7 into the gaps. Answer all questions with suitable information.(8-15)
Day6	30minutes	Speaking			Discuss the following questions in group. What is the altruistic thing that a person can do? Have you ever made a sacrifice for another person? If so, what happened? Would you ever make a sacrifice for someone you did not know? If so, in what circumstances? How many different examples of altruistic behavior can you think of? Do you know the famous organization who usually

					does altruistic things? How does it do these?
Day7	30minutes	Reading	A good Job	15	Read the article and put the sentences (1-7) into the gaps and find the words similar to the words given in the article. (8-15)

5.DATA COLLECTION

In this section, there are two main parts. They are data collection based on language competency of the students and the another

Table.3 Language Competency of the students obtained from Eight Integrated Tasks data collection based on the questionnaire given to the students.

Participants	Day1 (Read)	Day2 (Speak)	Day3 (Read)	Day4 (Write)	Day5 (Read)	Day6 (Speak)	Day7 (Read)	Day 8 (Write)	Total (marks)
Group1	10	6	8	6	10	7	8	8	64
Group II	8	8	10	8	10	8	10	8	70
Group III	8	6	8	6	10	8	10	8	64
Group IV	8	7	10	6	10	7	10	8	76
Total(marks)	34	27	36	26	40	30	38	32	

Table .4 Level of motivation of the students on task-based activities based on questionnaire

No	Categories for questionnaire	True	False	None
1	I think speaking with groups is better than individually.	*		
2	Cooperative learning can make me more confident.	*		
3	Task-based activities are very effective in learning English	*		
4	My English can be better and improved by doing task-based activities		*	
5	I have more confidence in doing writing have more confidence in doing writing tasks with my friends.			*
6	Working in group makes me more knowledgeable in learning English	*		
7	Group work activities are very effective in learning process.	*		
8	Learners' engagement is beneficial in learning process.	*		
9	I dare to speak and write English in group work activities more than individually.		*	
10	I prefer learning in group than in pairs or in isolated ways.			*
11	I like learning with my friends in the classroom, especially in English class.	*		
12	I don't think group learning is effective in learning process.			*
13	Because of group work activities, I can have more confidence in writing.	*		
14	I think group work activities can make progress my language ability.	*		
15	I believe doing task-based activities can help me to improve my general knowledge.	*		
16	I think doing task-based activities make me friendlier with my classmates.	*		
17	I think group work activities can reduce my stress and weakness in English.		*	
18	I don't think group learning is effective in learning English for me.			*
19	I think group learning leads to cooperation than competition.		*	
20	I think students should do group work activities in EFL classrooms to improve their language.		*	

6.DATA ANALYSIS

By studying data from table.3 Language Competency of the students obtained from Eight Integrated Tasks, it can be seen clearly that the language competency of the students became more developed than before. Within two months of learning process, students became more confident in speaking, reading and writing. During the limited period, all participants, otherwise, 28 selected students were asked to make four groups and they were assigned to do task-based activities in integrated ways for eight days.

Their scores obtained by four groups from these task-based activities came into different levels day by day in limited period. Due to the scores and answers obtained from eight integrated tasks and questionnaire, among four groups, the scores of Group II and Group IV became almost 80% and those Group I and Group III became 70%. The scores of four groups became70% in average. Furthermore, according to table .4 Level of motivation of the students on task-based activities based on questionnaire, the motivation of the students among four groups became more increased upto 70%, In brief, during the eight-day lesson,

communicative competence of the students and the motivation of the students became developed more than before through learners' engaging in learning process.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Concerning this section, due to the data from eight integrated tasks and questionnaire , most of the participants, in particular, 70% of the selected students became more active and more enthusiastic in learning process during and after doing this research by training them with task-based activities in EFL classrooms. They were very reluctant in working or learning together with their classmates before training with these activities in group. Furthermore, the level of the students' communicative competence became higher and learning process became more powerful and effective by engaging in group. But, 30 % of the students were not interested in participating in group work activities and they wanted to learn in their own. According to the data from this research, it can be said that learners' engagement in the learning process was upto 70%.

 Hence, group work activities are useful in learning process because they can make the students more energetic in their learning. Furthermore, they can assist the students to do peer learning and peer checking among them in EFL classrooms. Learning English is just the foreign language and by letting them do frequent group activities in learning process under the guidance of the teachers, students can build up the self-confidence more and they can reduce stress and other language barriers in EFL classrooms. Furthermore, task-based activities are very effective in language teaching and learning so that students can share their background knowledge with one another more and they can improve their communicative competence and motivation in learning process of EFL classrooms by the students' engagement.

8. CONCLUSION

Task-based activities are useful for learning process in EFL classrooms. They can create the chances for students to learn and share their general knowledge related to language learning. In this research, 28 Fourth Year Non-English Specialization students participated as the sample. They had the different knowledge and different language knowledge. They were not the same ages and sexes. They were not selected in special ways and they joined the researcher in their own interest. This research took two months. It was conducted with the task-based approach in language learning designed by Nunan,D(2004).

 Within eight-day lesson of task-based activities, the communicative competence and motivation of the students became more developed and the learners' engagement became more it could lead effective teaching in learning process of EFL classrooms according to the outcomes of this research. Though there were still a few students had the lack of interest in engagement in learning process, this research will be supportive in further research relating to learners' engaging in learning process.

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