

## **THE CHALLENGES FACED BY INSTRUCTORS AND LEARNERS WHILE ADOPTING TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION IN THE LEARNING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper explores the existing challenges that hamper instructors' and learners' efforts while adopting task-based instruction in their contexts of learning the English language. Teaching and learning English as a second language continues to draw attention regarding the appropriate approach that instructors should adopt particularly in the case of Sudan where Arabic is the first language. A mixed method was embraced to answer research objectives of this study. In the study, questionnaires and interviews were administered to the research subjects who were recruited from the University of Khartoum using convenience sampling technique. Data from the study was analyzed using the SPSS software where descriptive and inferential statistics to test research objectives of the study. Results of the study indicated a correlation between the need to adopt the task-based instruction with 18% of the students interviewed attributing that task-based instruction approach failed to foster students' speaking skills.*

**KEYWORDS:** Task-Based Instruction Approach, Second Language Acquisition, Language Fluency, English Language.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Research studies have intensified the debate on the appropriate instruction associated with effective teaching and learning technique of English as a second language. Scholars have undertaken to benchmark studies to identify approaches that could be adopted by institutions where English is taken as a Second Language and used a medium of instruction. Task-based language instruction is attributed as an effective approach for enhancing learning ability through respective tasks that are tailored to promote speaking ability amongst learners (Samuda and Bygate, 2008). Despite the advantages and positive outcomes hinged on this approach, most instructors and learners are finding it difficult to relate speaking ability and learning improvement amongst the latter. According to Khan (2011), the dominance of the first language contributes hugely to the failure of students reaching their highest levels of free and effective communication in English.

The context of this study indicates a case scenario where the Arabic language is utilized in most disciplines when compared to the English language. The trend and domination of First Language tend to hinder the task-based instruction approach as most students have a high likelihood of preferring First Language over the Second Language as a medium of instruction. The primary objective of this study aimed at exploring challenges that hinder the limitation caused by a task-based method in affecting students' speaking ability using the English language. Moreover, the following are research questions that this study will answer;

1. Does the task-based method reduce and eliminate challenges faced by learners in their use of the English language?

2. What are the responses from instructors and students regarding the embrace of the task-based instruction in learning and enhancing language fluency?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Most institutions worldwide continue to grapple with the uncertainties posed by approaches embraced by instructors as a medium of instruction. The task-based approach has been recognized by different scholars in enhancing learning language proficiency especially for the case of English as a second language. Robinson (2011) defines the task as the activities that aid learners in language learning. Prabhu (1987) echoes similar ideas by elucidating that task is an activity that entails processes that provide learners with an opportunity central to language acquisition and ability to speak fluently. The task-based approach is associated with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) that is tied to the competence of students and their ability to develop language fluency. Brown (2001) discusses the theory of TBLT that cites the learning process of a language with a set of communicative tasks that are interlinked with the requisites of curricular goals.

Accordingly, Richards and Rodgers (2001), and Long and Crookes (1991) emphasize that the role of such tasks have been attributed by scholars as they play a crucial role in the acquisition of a second language. As such, the authors embed their ideas based on the principles and application of the theory of second language acquisition. Despite the positive outcomes identified with the tasks helping build the speaking skills and language proficiency of students both inside and outside the classroom, there are many issues and challenges that instructors and learners encounter in the process of adopting the task-based instruction approach for the second language learning purposes. The dilemma manifested in this context elicits questions regarding other issues that remain unaddressed from students embracing and using English as a second language in their classroom and interaction activities.

The loopholes and concerns surrounding the impact of the task-based approach prompts a study that pursues to explore challenges faced by instructors and learners with the latter's striving to learn to speak English. The purpose of this study, therefore, seeks to understand these challenges and concerns that limits learning amongst the students, and subsequent recommendations for enhancing the learning processes. The failure of exposure comprehensively to the second language could also undermine the efforts fostered by the instructors and the learners' ability to speak English competently (Hedge, 2000). Moreover, Thomas and Reinders (2010) expound that lack of confidence amongst the learners can also be recognized as an underlying factor restricting the success of the task-based instructions in facilitating learning and using the English language effectively amongst learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The research subjects of this study consisting of instructors and students were selected from the University of Khartoum using convenient sampling. The study adhered to ethical principles as an initial email was sent to the respondents highlighting the research objectives of the study. The respondents were also reminded of their rights, and the informed consent was built upon

the confidentiality and anonymity of their information and names respectively. The sample size of the study was 100 with the sample meeting the criteria of years of experience, speaking Arabic as the first language and the age bracket of 20 and 50 years. The procedure helped reduce cases of bias during the sampling process given the sample size was drawn from the large population.

### Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through a detailed survey and interviews. The questionnaires and interviews were administered to the research subjects at their time of their convenience. The study employed the use of semi-structured questions and closed-ended questions. The semi-structured questions were expected to stimulate students and instructors to expound on their thoughts and reasons given to their respective answers regarding the challenges they face in the course learning the English language.

### Data Analysis

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

### Results and Findings

The purpose of this research was aimed at exploring challenges that limit teachers and students from using the English language effectively. Data collected from the study conducted amongst the sample selected from the Faculty of Education, University of Khartoum was analyzed using SPSS and subsequently qualified with information drawn from the qualitative analysis. The descriptive research questions employed in the study revolved around challenges instructors and learners faced in their contexts in enhancing their speaking ability and language proficiency with the task-based instruction at the center of the learning process.

The respondents were asked a question that whether the task-based approach helped improve and foster the development of the University Students speaking skills. The results in the table below illustrate their responses.

#### **Do the task-based learning method currently employed by the University foster the development of University Students speaking skills?**

<b>Do the task-based learning method currently employed by the University foster the development of University Students speaking skills?</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
	Strongly disagree	18	18.0	18.0	18.0
	Disagree	28	28.0	28.0	46.0
	Somewhat disagree	11	11.0	11.0	57.0

Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	6	6.0	6.0	63.0
	Somewhat agree	9	9.0	9.0	72.0
	Agree	16	16.0	16.0	88.0
	Strongly agree	12	12.0	12.0	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

From the table above, we can note that 18% of the respondents strongly disagreed, while 28% of the respondents also disagreed with the statement that task-based method currently employed by the university fostered the development of the University Students speaking skills. Moreover, 12% of the respondents strongly agreed with 16% agreeing with the statement that task-based method currently employed by the university fostered the development of the University Students speaking skills. The differences between the responses can attribute to the underlying factors that prevent students from interactively attributing the embrace and use of the English language.

Regarding the question on the utilization of the task-based approach, the responses from the study were analyzed and presented in the table below.

### Result of descriptive test for Utilization of the Task-Based Method

Descriptive Statistics		
The university implements the utilization of the Task-Based Method to enhance University Students' Speaking Ability in the English Language		
N	Valid	100
	Missing	0
Mean		2.96
Std. Deviation		1.312

The mean value from the analysis indicated that the statement that the university implements the utilization of the Task-Based approach to enhance University students' speaking ability in the English language reported a parameter of 2.96. This result indicates that on the average, most of the respondents from the study agreed that the University had fostered any efforts in the implementation towards the effective utilization of the Task-Based approach that would otherwise enhance the University students' speaking ability in the English language.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results and findings of the study, it is imperative to ascertain that the learning environment in Sudan entails the use of the Arabic language for most courses, thereby, restricting the English language to the likes of the Arts and English faculties. The challenge experienced with the current curriculum is the assumption that students are not proficient enough with the English language through writing and speaking. These results and findings can be confirmed by Baker and Westrup (2003) who stipulate that the lack of a favorable environment for utilizing the first language is a challenge for students learning to enhance the proficiency of their acquired second language.

From the qualitative analysis, instructors responded that they conformed to the curriculum which advocates for some disciplines to be taught using the Arabic language. Similarly, students interviewed conveyed their thoughts indicating that they felt comfortable taking instructions, getting an explanation, interacting with their instructors and fellow teachers through the Arabic language. This is evidenced by Swain (1985) and Taylor (2011) who point out that, the learning environment is critical to learners comprehending and enhancing their competency in the second language acquisition. Nevertheless, the respondents responded that the task-based activities could be enhanced to address challenges limiting the students' proficiency in the English language.

Additional information from the qualitative analysis reported that the respondents agreed in unison that the learning environment could play a critical role in fostering the proficiency of the English language. Moreover, from the interviews carried out amongst the respondents, numerous thematic areas rose, such as; the extensive use of the Arabic language, lack of confidence, and the ease of the First Language. Accordingly, the respondents pointed out that there was a need for strategies to be embraced in order to utilize the task-approach for the benefit of enhancing students' speaking ability.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

The main aim of this study was to provide an understanding of the existing challenges faced by instructors and learners in the course of adopting the Task-Based instruction approach in their learning context. The data from this study is a huge contribution to institutions who would wish to understand these challenges and formulate recommendations to support the approach in fostering proficiency amongst learners' who take English as a second language. The empirical data from this study also provide requisite information and models needed to improve how to utilize the principles of the Task-Based approach in encouraging students to enhance their proficiency and speaking ability of the English language.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the findings from this study indicate that whereas the Task-Based approach is effective in developing the University students' speaking ability, there is a need for the adoption of strategies that would help eliminate challenges that restricted its effort and objective. It is imperative to note that the application and structure of the Task-Based method allow University students to express themselves freely, hence, a provision of a favorable environment where they are able to practice speaking English more than any classroom setting. The findings from this study coupled with ideas from studies conducted report that challenges and hindrances can be eliminated once the processes of the Task-Based approach are undertaken appropriately.

### **Future Research**

The nature of this study opens up numerous opportunities for future research regarding the medium of instruction approaches, theories, and framework based on the results drawn from the analysis. As such, findings from this study will help future research to look more into the tasks and activities to be adopted amongst students using the target language.

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