Teaching Vocabulary And Grammar Through Task Based Learning Activities

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Abstract:*Grammar and vocabulary are two vital components that exist in English language. A good command on both of these would relatively make the use of the language better and attractive on the part of the listeners. But today students find it quite challenging to have an excellent hold or command in these areas of grammar and vocabulary and students often end up on a poor scoring scale either in the English subject or in competitive exams or in their professional careers. In order to have an experience and learn the problems faced by students on these two challenging areas an experimental study was conducted among degree students among a semi- urban college and after analysing the results,task-based learning activities were implemented for learning. The outcome and analysis from the teaching learning experience makes the source of this paper. The rapid development and progress among the students become the result of innovative teaching practices over traditional teaching and it shows the essentiality for implementing innovative teaching practices among language teachers. The outcome of the study showed a significant improvement in the performance of the students and also their receptiveness to activity-based learning method over the traditional method that was highly admired. The outcome of the TBL method can be seen through the post test scoring that has relatively improved the overall performance of the learners.*
Keywords: innovative, language, learning, students, teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of CLT in teaching learning exhibited a rush in the whole process of language learning. The application of activities in language learning evolved interest and better result among the students. It improved the mood and participation among students through an improved performance and soon many other methods found its emergence and existence in teaching learning process. TBL was one among those outcomes of such innovative teaching learning method popularly referred as TBLT and this could be confidently used to teach tough concepts. TBLT can be best defined in the words of Richards & Rodgers as:"task-based language teaching refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.223) Some common concerns that affect student performance are poor language skills of LSRW, weak grammar and vocabulary, influence of mother tongue and other economic concerns, medium of instruction in the past like schooling experience etc. these are some major concerns that can be mentioned. Relatively, students find the English language easy but applying the rules and presenting ideas professionally turns to be a challenging task. Hence, in this crucial situation the weak learners become the targets and the whole learning process ends up as a disaster to them, because they feel no importance is being given to them in a classroom and one bad experience can turn language learning into a nightmare. To

address this problem of the weak learners and to assure a better learning experience the task-based learning approach was initiated to the students and at the end they welcomed the new teaching method that restored confidence and improved performance among them. Application of TBL is more to do with activities, where it can be a student centric learning experience and the teacher just becomes the teaching instructor. Richards, Platt and Weber define the activity or action of the learning process as:"An activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command may be referred to as tasks. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. 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 kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make language teaching more communicative … since it provides a purpose for a classroom activity which goes beyond the practice of language for its own sake". (Richards, Platt & Web, 1986, p.289)

In the words of Ellis, task means,"A 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". (Ellis, 2003, p.16).

Background

Learning a language means a process of encountering varied number of challenges, the role of the English language attributes itself to number of minute details that have to be taken up as a challenge of learning, because English is an International language and it is highly reputed globally. Some of the challenging situations come in mastery of pronunciation and articulation of words, sentence structuring, error free writing, adapting to a classic form of writing and yet another very important aspect would be grammar and vocabulary learning. Grammar and vocabulary at present has not remained enclosed in the textual learning as such but it has conquered the competitive and professional market in the form of exams like CAT, MAT, GMAT, IELTS, TOEFL and many more. Poor language skill among the weak learners especially in grammar and vocabulary will make things more challenging and stressful hence developing confidence among the second language learners needs to be the ultimate aim and objective of the language classroom.

Importance of grammar and vocabulary in academics:

Grammar delivers efficiency, competency and structure to a language as in the words of Harmer "Grammar is an important component in learning English in order to gain competency in using English"(Harmer, 2001, p.12). Grammar and vocabulary are nothing but soul of a communication process, ideas that are to be conveyed are effectively put forth through appropriate use of communication. Among the four language skills most appropriate use of grammar and vocabulary comes in writing and speaking where an effective and organised transfer of ideas would favour communication without any hassles. The prominence of Language has been featured by Ramelan as "Language is an arbitrary of speech sounds or sequence of speech sounds which is used in interpersonal communication by an aggregation of human beings and which rather exhaustively cataloguethings and events in the human environments" (Ramelan, 1992, p.10). The idea of grammar is generally structured on the concept of syntax and morphology along with phonology and semantics, the major items that penetrate English grammar can be termed as accurate placing of word order, Punctuation, Knowledge of Tenses, Use of Determinants and Utilising Connectors. On the

other hand, Vocabulary deals with word order used in a particular group or field with a specific purpose. In the words of Donald and Kneale "Grammar is the science which formulates rules to describe the working of a language"(Kneale, 2001, p. 78-79).

The difficulties in learning Grammar from the view point of foreign or second language learners is more complex because of the lack in knowledge of using appropriate tense forms, The numerous ways in which tenses are divided makes the task more laborious and challenging as the basics are not taught or sometimes not understood by the second language learners. Vocabulary learning undergoes a challenge generally because simple and primary words are frequently substituted in classroom contexts in order to make things look very easy, hence this trend continues as the learners academically progress higher but remain intact and adamant to take the stress of learning apt and specific linguistic terms and words. In the words of Penny Ur we can summarise this idea as "There is no doubt that knowledge-implicit or explicit of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of a language; you cannot use words unless you know how they should be put together" (Penny Ur,2006, p.4).

Grammar and Vocabulary enhances the four skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Learning Grammar and Vocabulary doesn't only mean learning set of rules but it enables and improves language communication, however language learning and teaching are both quite challenging, Widdowson opinions that,"grammar is not a constraining imposition but a liberating force : it frees us from a dependency on context and a purely lexical categorization of reality" (Widdowson, 1990, p.86). The craft of teaching grammar and vocabulary also stresses the tutor because language classrooms have a lot of unforeseen challenges like- Background of students who are a mix of regional medium and English medium, Clash between one or more languages spoken at home or in a region, poor schooling or learning at primary or intermediate level, Lack of language skills including poor reading and writing. The following can be termed as some exceptions for a good learning atmosphere.

Introducing TBL:

Task based learning has a deep and in-depth application for learning in a classroom atmosphere. Classroom is a place for exercising and installing new ideas with a goal to teach and refine knowledge by providing a platform of opportunities to the learners. Task can range from simple to complex or even comprehensive work designs that favour the learners to develop skills in communication. Prabhu describes task-based learning as, "A task is an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process"(Prabhu, 1987, p.24).Through this we can conclude that learners can be made to work on themselves through tasks and aim to develop all the basic skills of a language.

The context of a classroom has a natural and specific target that can be used for the benefit of the learners as in the words of Willis "the aim of tasks is to create a real purpose for language use and to provide a natural context for language study" (Wilis, 1996, p.1). TBL can be effectively used in order to reach this outcome by exclusively stressing on the learners potential and applying it to the existing text as well, when the learners are given learning through tasks over the traditional methods, then there is a tendency that all the learners get a chance to exhibit the skill, group wise or individual division offers a chance for the learners to determine their potential, also the weak learners are benefitted through this method as they are forced to complete the task. Learning always happens in a challenging atmosphere. Initially there is a tendency for the slow learners to be defiant and escape the process but the instructor can be a guide to establish the connectivity and potentially pump the required confidence. At the initial process mistakes are common, it is not an exhibition of perfection but it is a step forward for the growth of the slow learners.

A much better definition on TBL is provide by Nuan as following "a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than manipulating form." (Nuan, 2011, p.4). Finally to conclude, grammar and vocabulary both serve as major and core components of a language and hence we can take the following insight by Richards and Renandya comprehending that "vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write" (Richards &Renandya, 2002, p.255). The implementation process of TBL has a number of steps and these steps are in the forms of process as in the words of Brown (2000) that states the role of implementing TBL in the language classroom, as a step to attain success through implementation of task learning as it provides results through a feature of innovation, motivation, challenge, appeal and meaningfulness as compared to many other methods. The issue of language competence often has a byword on the materials chosen or on the learners motivation but there can be issues wider and broader than what are generally represented and discussed as in the words of Tollefson : ... inadequate language competence is not due to poor texts and materials, learners' low motivation, inadequate learning theories and teaching methodologies ... instead, language competence remains a barrier to employment, education and economic wellbeing due to political forces of our own making, For while modem social and economic systems require certain kinds of language competence, they simultaneously create conditions which ensure that vast numbers of people will be unable to acquire that competence ... " (Tollefson, 1990)

The words of Nuan (2004) show the emergence and aim in adapting to tasks in language teaching and learning that provide benefits in improving linguistic competency as: The task based approach aims at providing opportunities for learners to experiment with and explore both spoken and written language through learning activities that are designed to engage learners in the authentic, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Learners are encouraged to activate and use whatever language they already have in the process of completing a task. The use of tasks will also give a clear and purposeful context for the teaching and learning of grammar and other language features as well as skills.... All in all the role of task- based learning is to stimulate a natural desire in learners to improve their language competence by challenging them to complete meaningful tasks" (Nunan, 2004: 13, 14).

Stages of TBL:

The whole process of TBL execution is based on a three step process which needs attention and that has to be monitored by the learners as well as the instructors. In some cases the organisation and implementation may be fairly new especially when it is a rural crowd of learners or if they possess the dominance of second language or in some cases there may be more number of weak learners. However, in any circumstances the role of the instructor needs to be of utmost prominence. The three stages can be broadly classified as:

Pre- task: During this phase the learners are briefed on the topic and a collective framework is presented to them.

Task Cycle: This is the next step after introducing and selecting the text, this will enable and facilitate the phase of reporting and planning.

Post Cycle: This is the last step in the process, where the learners present and are analysed through the attained results.

2. METHOD

Student Participants:
The following is an experimental study of implementing the procedure of TBL study to improve the Grammatical and Vocabulary related competency among a selected group of students in a selected degree college in Mangaluru, Karnataka, India. The implementation of TBL in a classroom context is presented through the following sample teaching method, after selecting a group of students who were pursuing their bachelors degree in a particular stream, from a semi rural college, the group was divided into 44 male participants and 31female participants. They were from a mixed group of urban and rural background having different mother tongue and regional influence. However all of them were pursuing their degree studies in a particular stream.

This following table-1 provides a detailed report on the number of participants and the division, there is also extended information regarding the distribution of the native language among the participants. Generally in the area around Mangaluru, the mother tongue influence is relatively high because various languages are used and spoken for different purpose, Kannada is the State language of Karnataka and generally it is also used as a language of conversation for trade and commerce purpose. Konkani is a regional language most popular among the Roman Catholics. Tulu is a popular language spoken generally among the Hindus, but it is a common language of conversation among the public. Byari language is spoken by the Muslims. Hence through the following representation of language division, one can find that the linguistic diversity is unique among all the people in Mangaluru, Karnataka. And the influence of mother tongue is also deeply rooted among the respondents.

The division of the participants were on the following criteria, out of 44 male students who participated in the study, 26 were from the urban area and the other 18 were from the rural area making a total of 44 students. Similarly the female students were divided as 19 who were from the urban background and other 12 who were from the rural, with a total number of 31. Hence from the table we can say that 75 students in total participated in the study. It can be noted that the number of students are relatively higher in both male and female groups who are from urban area, and the number of male students is more as compared to the female students. Here is the tabular representation of the data.

Table 1: Profile of the participants

Gender	Area		
	Urban	**Rural**	**Total**
Male	26 (34.7)	18 (24)	44 (58.7)
Female	19 (25.3)	12 (16)	31(41.3)
Total	45 (60)	30 (40)	75 (100)
Native Language			
Tulu	18 (24)	12 (16)	30 (30)
Byari	10 (13.3)	06 (8)	16 (21.3)
Konkani	14 (18.7)	12 (16)	26 (34.7)
Kannada	03 (4)	-	03 (4)
Total	45 (60)	30 (40)	75 (100)

Source: primary Data

Note: The values in the bracket represent the percentage.

Method and Criteria for study:
After selecting the students and providing the basic information of the study area, permission was taken from the management and also confidentiality of the participants was assured. The

main intention was to make students aware about the knowledge they possessed on the concept of grammar and vocabulary and also about how they managed to learn these challenging concepts. The selection was done through a Pre-test that included common forms of tenses, articles, prepositions, linkers, reading comprehension and completing a story outline. The test was conducted to get a fair idea about the performance of each student. After tabulating the result the learners were made aware of their performance and were also insisted to follow a particular teaching learning method of TBL where it would make the learning process more relaxed and easy, at the same time the students were also asked to make a note of their performance and also compare it at the end of the innovative learning process.

Content selection and teaching approach through TBL

In order to implement the TBL approach and make the students aware and make them develop confidence they were initially divided into groups. The group was a mixture of regional learners as well as those who had studied in English medium and had a good command over the language. The initial task was to develop confidence among the learners to make them partake in the learning process and hence a prose was selected from their own syllabus and TBL activity based learning was advocated to specifically aim in developing the Grammar and Vocabulary skills. Here is a glimpse of the activities that were initiated to develop the language skills in the learners and develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The text that was selected was *Good Manners* by J.C Hill.

Task -1: Learning Vocabulary.

Pre task: All the students were asked to bring a copy of the text, and just read through the whole text, without any burden of knowing or understanding any part of the text. They were asked to complete reading of the text and were asked to mark the tough words according to them.

Task cycle: Once the words were selected the students had to pass the selected words into their group and make a collection of words which were similarly selected as tough by others in the group and other words were kept aside.

Post task: Once the word list was prepared, a discussion was made within the group on the possible meaning that the learners could relate and the meaning was jotted down, once the whole exercise was over with a help of a dictionary, the meaning was identified and also other related meanings in the form of synonyms were also taken down for further study and reference by the members of the group.

Task outcome: At the end of this exercise we were able to compile a glossary of words, other than those discussed at the end of the text and also a collection of synonyms and antonyms were ready within a short interval. Many learners were able to learn many more words than those given in the glossary.

Task-2: Learning Tenses.

Pre Task: All the students within their group were asked to select an example sentence for each tense form; this was done after teaching them the tense forms through a chart.

Task Cycle: Each of the learners would collect one or two sentences for each of the tense forms and mark them under the specific tense. Hence each learner would be able to collect twelve to fifteen sentences.

Post task: Once the list of sentences were ready with each learner they were asked to move into their groups and start verifying within the group on the appropriate sentence chosen along with the tense, each right sentence is ticked and wrong identification is discussed.

Task outcome: At the end of the activity, alongside the teaching process the students get a practical knowledge and working exercise on applying the already taught concept of tenses to the text, ultimately they became aware of the application of tenses in a practical manner with the context of the leaning text itself.

Task 3: Identifying Prepositions and linkers

Pre task: The learners are asked to prepare a chart of words that are prepositions and linkers from the text. About five to ten words are selected individually in the whole process.

Task Cycle: Within the group the learners will discuss the difference whether the selected word is a linker or a preposition, they can take help from any source to get rid of the doubt, and even the tutor helps in the process.

Post task: Once selected with the list the students are given a sentence or a phrase from the lesson as e.g.: *bad mannered people*, In a similar way 15 phrases or sentences are selected and they are asked to write a small write up in their own words in about five to seven sentences with the help of prepositions and linkers, In this exercise they have to make use of the already learnt vocabulary and tenses.

Task outcome: In this activity the learners develop the skill of writing and also work on utilizing the already learnt ideas in a better way with confidence. On one hand they keep learning novel ideas and on the other they develop the art of applying the already learnt concepts.

Task 4: Develop writing and speaking skill:

Pre task: This activity aimed at a comprehensive development of speaking and writing skill. These two are relatively difficult concepts but are most useful in a communication process. In order to develop these skills, an activity was conducted for the students, they had to make a story on any phrase or word and make it as a title of the whole story which they had to present in about 150 -200 word length. The written story had to be presented before the class in order to develop the confidence and also to check the progress attained by the learners individually.

Task Cycle: The learners individually sit down after reading the text; selecting a word or phrase of their choice they complete a story, the process involves a careful and effective use of grammar and vocabulary forms that are already learnt.

Post task: This is a phase of presentation that the learners undertake after completing the story of their choice word. It's not a test of perfection but it's a phase of development associated with confidence. The learners are given the required assistance to complete the assignment. Other students note the various errors and areas of improvement are suggested to them.

Task outcome: After briefing the participants on the importance of Vocabulary and Grammar it was noted that the development and application of this skill is needed with utmost perfection in writing and speaking, because a good command of vocabulary and grammar is extremely necessary as graduates, aspiring their future in various multinational companies and other spaces of professional importance.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-test:

In order to get a comprehensive overview on the grammatical ability and the standard of vocabulary, a small test was conducted for the students taking some simple grammar and vocabulary section. The total marks allotted for the test was 50 as each question carried about one mark each. The section that was tested was based on tenses, prepositions, linkers, articles and vocabulary through Reading Comprehension. This was a random test conducted under the supervision of the researcher and the students were made aware on the requirement and outcome of the study. Confidentiality of the whole process was ascertained to the participants, the result of the performance has been tabulated and analysed through the following table-2

Table 2:Marks scored by respondents in the pre test

Marks	Male	Female	Total
0-10	02	01	03
10-20	16	10	26
20-30	18	17	35
30-40	08	03	11
40-50	-	-	-
Total	44	31	75

Source: Primary Data

The total number of participants who participated in the research study was 44 male and 31 female students making it a total of 75 participants. The scoring of these has been tabulated using the percentage method. The number of students who scored in the range of 1-10 was 03 in total of which 02 were male and 01 was a female student. These students were unable to get even the basic marks to pass in the exam. A scoring of 10-20 marks was by 26 students in this 16 were male students and 10 were female. These were fairly on the border of passing the test. A scoring of 20-30 marks was by 35 students in this 18 were male students and 17 were female students. This range of scoring was fairly in between the average and good performance and we can see substantially a large group of students had scored in this range. A better teaching learning method was probably needed to the following set of students to improve their performance and hence TBL was the focus method for the following group of students. In the range of 30-40 was marks scored by a total of 11 students out of which 08 were male and 03 were female students, these students had convincingly a better performance but their capacity was not restricted to this level, a better teaching and learning method was useful to make them attain a better performance. And no student scored in the range of 40-50 as they were unable to qualify to this range. This was more a concern because in a mixed group of English medium students it was an uneasy experience of not getting anyone occupying this range.

Intervention Programme:
In order to analyse the difficulties that hamper the performance of the students and to get an assurance of better performance in the post test an intervention programme of 08 hours was planned for the students. The aim of the intervention programme was not to display a drastic change in performance in a short time but it aimed at achieving progress among the weak learners by developing their confidence and building their performance in a progressive manner. The aim of the teaching and learning outcome was not to change the scoring into a rank performance but to improve step by step. Hence by knowing the need of the learners and understanding their performance the TBL learning method was employed to the classroom teaching exercise. The mode and the method employed for learning has already been discussed and this was how the TBL intervention programme helped the learners to equip with a better performance and improve their scores.

Post-Test:
The post test was conducted after the intervention programme. The format of the post test was as similar to the pre test. The students were guided through the task based learning to cope up the aspects of grammar and vocabulary. The questions were based on the subject area itself so that it would help them learn and understand the use of TBL activities. There was an improvement seen in the performance of the students as compared to the pre test performance, the result of the post test performance is discussed below from Tabel-3.

Table 3: Marks scored by respondents in the Post test

Marks	Male	Female	Total
0-10	-	-	-
10-20	04	01	05
20-30	12	07	19
30-40	22	19	41
40-50	06	04	10
Total	44	31	75

Source: Primary Data

The scoring of the students was in the following manner. There were no students who scored between 0-10 marks, and this was an improvement as compared to the pre-test as 03 students in the pre- test had scored in this range. The scoring in the range of 10-20 was by 05 students in this were 04 male students and 01 female student they were from a weak language background and needed more support to improve on their performance. In the range of 20-30 there were 19 students of which 12 were male and 07 female; this range witnessed a surge as compared with the pre test. A scoring in the range of 30-40 was by 41 students out of which 22 were male and 19 were female students. Finally in the range of 40-50 were 10 students of which 06 were male and 04 were female. Through this comparison we can arrive at a conclusion that, if the students are monitored and teaching of the language is done by innovative activities then we can expect a better scoring and performance by the students and even the weak learners could be governed in a pleasing performance.
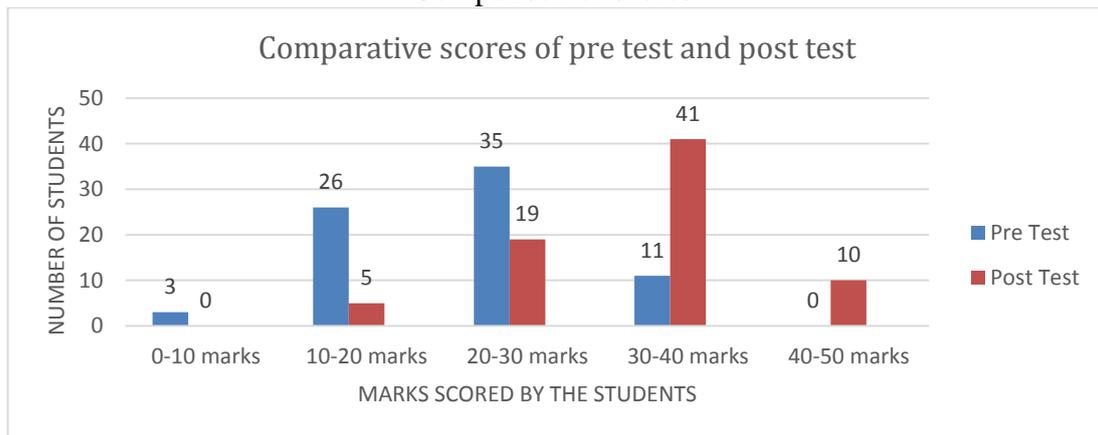
Comparison of scores:

Figure 1: Comparison of pre-test and post-test

In the figure 1 we can get a comprehensive difference of marks and the scoring improvement in the pre test and post test. The chart shows, in the range of 0-10 marks in the pre test 03 students had scored but there were none in this range in post test. In the range of 10-20 marks there were 26 students in the pre test but in the post test it had reduced to 05. In the range of 20-30 marks in the pre test there were 35 and in the post test it reduced to 19. Marks in the range of 30 -40 were scored by 11 students in pre test but in the post test the number of students reached to 41 this is a substantial improvement. Finally 10 students had been in the range of 40-50 in post test but there were none who scored in this range during the pre test. Through this one gets a clear idea on the benefits of TBL learning method and its outcome.

Challenges for implementing TBL method:

TBL is one among many other teaching learning methods that gained prominence in recent times. Though the learning outcome can be easily generated and results achieved there are some challenges that have to be encountered. The major challenge would be to divide the weak learners and make them accept that fact. Generally students would not be receptive on this division. Number of learners in a class is a challenge, as in the case of the place of study, Mangaluru in Karnataka is located in a small town, the colleges are crowded with students

and sometimes there are combination and batches of students that are mixed together, larger the crowd the infrastructure also needs to be developed. Planning of activities is another challenge, as every teaching method needs different activities and they have to be systematically planned otherwise the whole method will not serve the purpose effectively. Willingness and approach of the students matter a lot as generally the weak learners always take the support from the friends and often show others work as their own or even copy, at the same time they may not show willingness to complete the task assigned to them, there is a need to make them gain confidence and insist to be bold in making presentation.

4. CONCLUSION

The intention behind the following study was to improve the grammar and vocabulary skills among the learners and also to identify the weak learners and assure them of a better performance. The study found that students lack the mastery and proficiency of the English language and this in turn hampers their progress and language proficiency. The study found that the performance of the students was relatively poor in grammar and vocabulary and an improvement was expected on their part and hence the researcher advocated the TBL method of learning as a premier method to develop the competency of grammar and vocabulary among the learners. Most of the learners who are weak in language skills and have regional influence or strong mother tongue influence suffer from poor language skills that hamper their learning process and especially prohibit the skill acquisition process of LSRW skills. Poor grammar and vocabulary skills pose a serious threat for learning especially in competitive exams like CAT, MAT, GMAT, IELTS, TOEFL, IBPS and other exams where a lot of questions appear from grammar and vocabulary section.

An informal interview post exam and intervention programme showed a rising concern among the learners that they were unable to acquire the language skills and didn't succeed to put a satisfying performance as the language they used to converse or write showed common errors of inappropriate use of words, common spelling errors, repetition of words or ideas, wrong use of tenses, redundant errors and many more. Dealing with these language problems is the need of the hour. The major problem about language classroom is on the less emphasis that is given to learning vocabulary and grammar; this in turn results in students acquiring low language skills as they remain dormant in their learning approach and at the same time most of them find it extremely difficult to get professionally acquainted with good job in the future.

The reception from the student's side for the TBL programme was overwhelming as it included activities and task as part of the teaching learning process to learn their syllabus. The students liked the idea of teaching vocabulary and grammar because that was an area that is generally not emphasised in language classroom. Students were also satisfied because the students were made aware of learning grammar and vocabulary from the perspective of competitive exams. The students were highly delighted because they were shown the prominence of adapting the LSRW skills and implementing it for the benefit of their future prospects. Teaching must be an innovative practice in today's challenging situation and a teacher should always be ready to engage innovative teaching learning in a classroom context.

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