

An Investigation of Planning Time and Proficiency Level to Improve Writing Skills of Rural School Students- A Case Study

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Abstract

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is becoming very popular now-a-days. The main purpose of this case study is to investigate the effect of Planning Time and Proficiency Level on the improvement of writing skills of rural students in a rural school. Forty two students, twenty one (21) students from grade IX A and twenty one (21) from grade IX B were selected randomly as sample from Swarnandhra International School, Chinnamamidipalli, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh. The objective of the study was to investigate if the effect of Planning Time is more than the Proficiency Level of the students. To carry out the intended study, a writing task was selected and the topic for the writing task was “ My Childhood Days”. Two different groups were treated differently. Grade IX A students with low proficiency level were given 10 minutes time for planning whereas grade IX B were asked to start writing immediately after the topic was announced. After the students had written, the scripts were collected to evaluate and obtain the data. Simple statistics were adopted to find out the mean values for the results. The findings show that the effect of the Proficiency Level of the students is more than Planning Time.

KEYWORDS: Task, writing task, Planning Time and Proficiency Level.

Introduction

Communicative approach demands high levels of language proficiency in order to implement TBLT and carry out the tasks competently (Li, 1998). Students with high language proficiency will be capable enough to take up any task of wider range and complete it more quickly and thereby involve in additional tasks. Such students facilitate their teachers with higher range of tasks whereas students with low language proficiency will harm the efficiency of the teachers in implementing Task-based Approach in his/her classroom (Karavas-Doukas,1995).

On the other hand Planning is one of the significant factors and a key element in the studies of TBLT. Review of previous research has made it clear that planning influences students’ language performance. According to Clark and Clark (1977), there are three different levels for Planning in TBLT methodology such as linguistic elements plan (e.g. selection of words or phrases), sentences plan, and structure plan. But Ellis (2005) states that Planning in TBLT can happen at two different stages such as pre-task planning and within-task planning. Pre-task planning has positive influence on students’ language performances.

Review of the Related Literature

Gillian Wigglesworth (1997) conducted a study on the topic “An Investigation of Planning Time and Proficiency Level on Oral Test Discourse” to investigate the influence of planning on students’ language performance of tasks in tests. The study of Wigglesworth included 107 adult ESL learners who were given five tasks to perform in the Australian Assessment of Communicative Skills test in two conditions, planned and unplanned. Twenty eight high-proficiency learners were picked up for a task with a high cognitive load. The study was to analyze their performances against

the measures of accuracy, fluency and complexity under two conditions, planned and unplanned.

The findings showed significant differences between planned learners and unplanned learners in their performances. Wigglesworth's research also showed that the influence of 'planning time' on the performance of the candidates particularly in the setting of language testing is high. One-minute pre-task planning showed much improvement in the performance of the candidate but the same results might not be obtained and it might differ if the tasks are of wider range and if the candidate's level of proficiency is low.

David R. Carless (2001) carried out a qualitative case study titled "Factors in the Implementation of Task-based Teaching in Primary Schools" to explore the implementation of task-based teaching in three primary classrooms in Hong Kong. He had reviewed altogether six issues namely, teacher's understanding of tasks, their attitudes, their classroom time available for task-based teaching, their preparation of resources, the influence of textbook and topics, and the language proficiency of pupils. In his study three female English teachers – Priscilla, Susan and Gloria – were the participants and they implemented Task-based Approach over a seven month period in their own primary classrooms with pupils of 1&2 primary classes under the age group 6-7.

The findings indicate that pressure of time is a barrier to the implementation of task-based teaching in Hong Kong primary schools. The more positive the teacher attitude towards task-based teaching, the more likely he/she is to take time to prepare supplementary task-based materials or to create classroom time for carrying out activities. It was also found out that preparation of resources was time consuming endeavor but the time needed for preparation of task-based materials did not seem to be a major impediment to the implementation of task-based teaching. The topics covered in the textbook had an impact on the extent of task-based teaching. The findings also show that the language proficiency of their students was a barrier to the implementation of tasks. The higher the language proficiency of their students, the greater the implementation of tasks and the lower the language proficiency of their students, the lesser the implementation of tasks.

Methodology

To carry out this case study and to fulfil the objective, the following methodology was adopted.

Sample : The sample for the present study, forty two (42) students from grade IX, twenty one (21) from section A and twenty one (21) from section B from Swarnandhra International School, located at Chinnamamidipalli, a very small village in West Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh were selected. A and B batches had been formed basing upon their academic performance and language proficiency level in grade VIII. Grade IX A students were low in language proficiency and grade IX B were high.

Objective of the study: The objective of this case study was to investigate if the higher language proficiency of the students has its greater effect on the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching methodology or the time given for planning has its greater effect on the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching methodology?

The Research Question: Is the higher language proficiency of the students having its greater effect on the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching methodology or the time given for planning is having its greater effect on the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching methodology?.

Instruments: To carry out the intended study, a topic “My Childhood Days” was selected for the writing skills test.

Design of the Program

Step 1: At the outset the learners were told that the task was on the writing skills and the topic for the writing skills was “My Childhood Days”.

Step 2: At the second step the students of grade IX B were asked to start writing immediately on the given topic.

Step 3: At the third step, the students of grade IX A were given 10 minutes time for planning.

Step 4: At the fourth step, after the students of grade IX B had finished their writing, they were asked to submit their papers for evaluation. After 10 minutes, papers from A section also were collected.

Step 5: Scoring Criteria: According to Krishnaswami (2005:286) simple marking grids can be used for marking.

The following grid is suggested

- (i) Spelling and punctuation – 5 marks
- (ii) Vocabulary – 5 mark
- (iii) Sentence construction – 5 marks
- (iv) Cohesion and style – 5 marks
- (v) Clarity and accuracy – 5 marks

Step 6: After the corrections, the mean values were calculated to find out the results. Simple statistics was adopted to find out the mean values. The answer scripts of two students, one from section A and one from section B are enclosed as Annexure – 1.

Data Analysis

The objective of this case study was to investigate if the higher language proficiency of the students has its greater effect on the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching methodology or the time given for planning has its greater effect on the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching methodology?

To fulfil the objective, a test in writing task to the students of grade IX, Section A and Section

was administered. The students were introduced the topic, “My Childhood Days”. Section A students were given planning time 10 minutes but Section B were asked to write no sooner than the topic was introduced. After they finished writing the test, the scripts were collected

and evaluated. To find out the mean percentage, simple statistic was adopted. The marks

obtained by the students of Section A with the given 10 minutes planning time and section B

without planning are shown in the following table 1 and table 2 respectively.

Table- 1
Scores of 21 students of grade IX A (with planning time)

Sl.no.	Name	Spelling & Punctuation	Vocabulary	Sentence construction	Cohesion & Style	Clarity & Accuracy	Total-25 marks
1	Sajeeva Rao	1	1	1	1	1	05
2	Vinay Kumar Jakkam	1	1	1	1	1	05

3	K. Rushi Charan	1	1	1	1	1	05
4	Sowmya Chavakala	1	1	1	1	1	05
5	Karthikaya Chavakala	3	3	3	3	3	15
6	Sona Deepthi Meka	1	1	1	1	1	05
7	Jahanavi Kadali	1	1	1	1	1	05
8	Nehanjali Alluri	1.5	1.5	2	2	2	09
9	Manichandra Bolichetti	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	08
10	K. Nitin Sai Laxman	2	2	2	2	2	10
11	Akhil Varma	1	1	1	1	1	05
12	Surya Teja Varma	1	1	1	1	1	05
13	Soma Sekhar Natina	1	1	1	1	1	05
14	Siva Mani P	1	1	1	1	1	05
15	Sai Pechetti	1	1	1	1	1	05
16	Vijay Raghava	1	1	1	1	1	05
17	Prasanna P	2	2	2	2	2	10
18	Manish Digamarthi	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	7.5
19	Sindhil Raj	1	1	1	1	1	05
20	Sumanth Kumar	2	1	1	2	1	07
21	Mohan Teja	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1	07
	Total	28	27	27.5	28.5	27.5	138.5
	Mean Percentage	26.67%	26.19%	26.19%	27.14 %	26.19%	26.38%

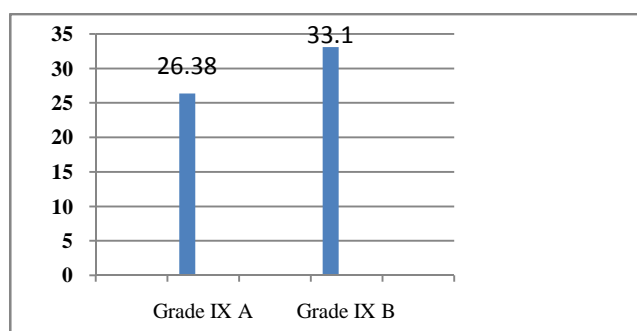
Table- 2
Scores of 21 students of grade IX B (without planning time)

Sl.no.	Name	Spelling & Punctuation	Vocabulary	Sentence construction	Cohesion & Style	Clarity & Accuracy	Total-25 marks
1	Lakshmi Varshita	3	3	2	2	2	12
2	Divya Sri Naga Supraja	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	8
3	Manvitha Lakshmi	1.5	2.5	1.5	2.5	2	10
4	Yesaswini Ratna N.A.	2	2	2	1	1	08
5	Jishnu Vardhan	1.5	1.5	1	1	1	06
6	Sumantha N	3	3	3	2	2	13
7	Charishma K.	2	2	2	1	1	08
8	Sudarshan Reddi	2	2	3	1	1	09
9	Vaishnavi Inti	3	3	3	2	2	13

10	Jagan Pavan Kumar	2	2	1	1	1	07
11	Sri V. Leela Venkata Laxmi	1	1	1	1	1	05
11	Devika Rani B	2	2	2	2	2	10
13	Venkata Akshay	2	2	2	2	2	10
14	Jeswa Nagasurya Kotti	3	3	2	2	2	12
15	Dwarka Priya	1	.5	.5	.5	.5	03
16	Pranav Mahindra Reddi	2	1.5	1.5	1	1	07
17	Prudhavi Sai Ravi Varma	2	2	1	1	1	07
18	Sai Vinay	1.5	1.5	1.5	1	1	6.5
19	V.K. Varun Rayudu	1.5	1.5	1	1	1	06
20	Yeshwanth Kumar	2.5	2.5	1	1	1	08
21	Deepthika Pachigolla	1	1	1	1	1	05
	Total	41	41	34.5	28.5	28.5	173.5
	Mean Percentage	39.04%	39.04%	32.85%	27.14%	27.14%	33.1%

The following Figure shows a comparison between the scores of the students obtained by the students of section A (with 10 minutes planning time) and section B (without planning time).

Fig. 1
Graphical presentation of the results



Data Interpretation and the results: The mean percentage of the scores obtained by Section A students is shown in the table 1 is 26.38 and the mean percentage of the scores obtained by Section B students is shown in the table 2 is 33.1. The same is presented in a relevant figure above. The mean value of the scores obtained by the students of section B is greater than that of the students of section A, $33.1 > 26.38$. The results show that the B section students who were not given planning time and whose proficiency level on the basis of which their batch was formed scored higher than the A section students.

Findings of the study

The findings indicate that in improving the writing skills of the students studying in Swarnandhra International School, the higher language proficiency of the students of Section B has its greater effect on the implementation of Task-based Language Teaching methodology than the time given for planning to the students of Section A.

The students of grade IX B with higher proficiency level brings better results than the students of grade IX A who were given 10 minutes of planning time.

The findings of the present study are on par with the findings of the study conducted by Wigglesworth (1997) whose findings concluded that much improvement in the performance of the candidate might not be obtained if the tasks are of wider range and if the candidate's level of proficiency is low. The findings of the present study are also on par with the findings of the study conducted by David R. Carless (2001) whose findings show that the higher the language proficiency of the students, the greater the implementation of tasks and the lower the language proficiency of the students, the lesser the implementation of tasks. The findings of this case study show that as the proficiency level of the students of grade IX A is low, their performance in writing skills is poor and they scored less than the students of grade IX B. 26.38<33.1

Conclusion

It is concluded that if the students' proficiency level is low, it hinders their performance and as a result their improvement is marred. On the other hand if their proficiency level is high, their involvement would be more and there would be steady growth in their language acquisition.

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