

Outcomes of the implementation of a task based approach in the EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classroom

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The task based approach has gained recognition as an important element in the language classroom as a method to move learners from reproductive language use to creative language use, resulting in maximum engagement in language acquisition through requiring them to draw upon their emerging language skills and resources in an integrated manner (Nunan, 2004).

The objective of this study was to explore the effects of tasks in pedagogy in the English as a second language classroom for undergraduates. This was achieved through investigating dialogic exchanges, involving noticing, formulation and hypothesis testing, produced as a result of stimulus from a pedagogical task.

A task was designed for second year undergraduates at the Faculty of Science, who are learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) following the English for Academic Purposes course. The task which was designed to reinforce structural and grammatical skills while focusing on the meaning conveyed and involved learners using and manipulating previously taught forms to fulfill the functions of the task. The task was structured to engender discussion and foster peer learning.

Learners were provided with incomplete information in the form of three short excerpts from a newspaper article. Working in groups the learners had to decide on the storyline of the article guided by the given excerpts. As the final outcome, each group had to write an article for a newspaper about the incident incorporating the given data and adding further details. The structures targeted in this task included the past tense, reported speech, lexical items and sequence markers, all of which the students had encountered in previous lessons.

The learning outcome was measured through Language Related Episodes (LRE) that occurred in the process of carrying out the task. Success in the task was measured in terms of accuracy of linguistic use and the achievement of the task.

Investigation of the LREs produced during the task showed that this task resulted in peer learning and achieved the aim of pushing learners to think about, manipulate and practice the target language features. Thus, in conclusion, well planned tasks can engender language learning in a second language context by pushing learners to notice, interact and formulate language, focusing on both form and meaning.