

Examining the Role of Task-based Language Teaching in Fostering EFL Learners' Attitudes and Motivation

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Gönderilme Tarihi: 15 Kasım 2018 Kabul Tarihi: 24 Aralık 2018

Abstract

The present study aims to examine the role of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in promoting EFL learners' attitudes and motivation. It adopted the case study design of the qualitative research methods. The study group consist of 12 (M=8 F=4) high school students who were attending pre-intermediate language courses in a language school in Antalya. To account for homogeneity of the participants, Cambridge Interactive Placement Test was conducted and according to the results, students were placed into classes. Upon implementing 54-hour courses based on task-based teaching, the participants were asked to fill in an evaluation questionnaire about the course. The collected data were analysed through the content analysis technique. Four main themes (increase in learner motivation, demotivation towards learning English in the past, negative attitude towards course methods and techniques and positive attitude towards classroom activities) were identified. According to the results, it was found that the participants had a negative attitude towards English learning activities carried out before the task-based teaching, lost their desire and willingness to learn English, considered foreign language learning process as "tedious" and "tiring". When the participants' opinions after the implementation were examined, it was observed that the participants became remotivated, attended classroom activities more, started to love English again and their attitude towards English changed from negative to positive. The results of the study were discussed with the studies in the relevant literature and suggestions were put forth for practitioners and further research.

Keywords: Learner motivation, attitude, task-based language teaching, English language learning

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı Görev Temelli Dil Öğretiminin yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin hedef dile ait tutum ve motivasyonlarını arttırmadaki etkisini incelemektedir. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması deseniyle yürütülen bu çalışmaya Antalya ilindeki bir dil kursunda alt orta seviye düzeyinde İngilizce yabancı dil derslerine katılan 12 lise öğrencisi katılmıştır. Katılımcılar, Cambridge Etkileşimli Seviye Belirleme Sınavından elde ettikleri puanlara göre ilgili dil seviyesine ait sınıflara yerleştirilmiş, bu sayede grubun homojenliği sağlanmıştır. 54 saatlik Görev Temelli dil öğretim aktivitelerinin ardından katılımcılara yarı yapılandırılmış sorulardan oluşan ders değerlendirme formu verilmiştir. Toplanan veriler içerik analizi tekniği ile çözümlenmiştir. Yapılan içerik analizi sonucunda "öğrenci motivasyonunda artış", "geçmişte İngilizce öğrenmeye yönelik motivasyonsuzluk", "ders yöntem ve tekniklerine yönelik olumsuz tutum" ve "sınıf içi aktivitelere yönelik olumlu tutum" olmak üzere dört tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, katılımcıların görev temelli dil öğretim sürecinden önceki İngilizce öğrenme faaliyetlerine karşı olumsuz bir tutum içerisinde olduğu, İngilizce öğrenme istek ve arzularının azaldığı, yabancı dil öğrenme sürecini "sıkıcı" ve "yorucu"

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olarak tanımladığı görülmüştür. Uygulama sonrası görüşleri incelendiğinde ise, kaybettikleri motivasyonu geri kazandıkları, sınıf içi aktivitelere daha fazla katılım gösterdikleri, İngilizceyi yeniden sevmeye başladıkları, İngilizceye yönelik olumsuz tutumların yerinin olumlu tutumların aldığı görülmektedir. Araştırmada elde edilen sonuçlar, ilgili alan yazın ile tartışılarak uygulayıcılar ve ileriki araştırmalar için önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğrenci motivasyonu, tutum, görev temelli dil öğretimi, İngilizce öğrenme

INTRODUCTION

English as a lingua franca is widely considered as a common way of communication throughout the world. In the wake of increasing interest in learning English, new implementations and policies have been integrated into the countries' language policies. Especially with the effect of globalization and technological developments, the countries where English is spoken as a foreign language sought for the ways to enhance their citizens' foreign language skills. Learners as the main components in this process were the most affected ones from this change. In the Turkish context, students started learning English as of the 2nd grade and this process continued all through their compulsory educational life. Nevertheless, the results were lower than expected and the students' foreign language proficiency was not at the desired level (Habacı, Erdik, Adiguzelli & Sivri, 2011). Since the results were not satisfying, learners became concerned about this issue and the sense of fear and boredom on learning a foreign language appeared among them. The researchers conducted several studies to find out the potential problems and offer solutions for this situation. To change this paradigm, we have seen a growing interest in task-based language teaching (TBLT) in recent years. As an alternative method to traditional teaching practices where teachers were placed into the heart of teaching, task-based language teaching promoted communicative language skills in a way that learners cooperated and collaborated each other to complete the task given (Moore, 2018). In task-based language teaching, activities are carried out in a learner-centred atmosphere. Thus, the learner will become more motivated for the process by having the sense of controller of the process. While the learners are the active players of the process, the teachers play the role of facilitator, observer or counsellor. Considering the dimensions of task-based language teaching, several studies were conducted to observe its effect on language learning. Xiongyong and Samuel (2011) conducted a study with 132 secondary EFL teachers to find out their opinions and perceptions on task-based language teaching. They used a questionnaire consisting of five-point Likert type items and open-ended questions. The results showed that the participants had a positive attitude towards task-based language teaching. On the other hands, the results also revealed that they encountered some limitations in implementing task-based language teaching activities such as difficulty in adapting to the classroom with a large population, difficulty in assessing students' performance and students' unwillingness to join the tasks. Demir (2008) shed light on the literature with the study examining the role of task-based reading activities in the learners' attitude. The research was conducted with 50 pre-intermediate level students and the data proceeded in the study were collected through diaries, feedback forms, tasks and interviews. The results showed that task-based language teaching activities positively contributed to the willingness of the participants to attend the classroom activities. Tuna (2009) also examined the effect of this method in improving the reading skills of the students. She carried out her study with 59 upper-intermediate level students who were divided into two groups (experimental and control). The research results indicated that the task-based language learning activities did not meaningfully contribute to the improvement of reading skills for upper-intermediate level students.

Similar to Demir (2008) and Tuna (2009), Murad (2009) examined the effect of task-based language teaching in developing speaking skills of the secondary school students. The research was carried out with two groups (experimental and control group). While the experimental group were exposed to speaking activities prepared in accordance with task-based teaching, the control group followed their current activities. According to the results, it was found that speaking scores of the experimental group were higher than the control group. The researcher explained the reason behind this finding by stating that task-based language teaching activities give emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy. Therefore, while the experimental group was exposed to comprehensible inputs for developing their fluency in speaking, the control group maintained to focus on the form and accuracy. A similar research design was carried out by Soyaslan (2008) to compare the effectiveness of the traditional method and task-based language teaching in foreign language achievement of the students. The research was conducted with 32 6th grade students by forming two groups (experimental and control). The results of the study revealed that there was a significant difference between the scores of groups in favour of the experimental group. In other words, the task-based language teaching contributed to the students' success in the foreign language.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted the case study design of qualitative research methods. Yin (2009) defines the case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.”(p.14). As can be understood from this definition, this design enables to provide a detailed understanding of a phenomenon. With this motivation, this study aims to shed light on the role of task-based language teaching in fostering EFL learners' attitudes and motivation.

Participants

The study group consists of 12 (Male=8 Female=4) high school students who were attending pre-intermediate English courses in a language school, Antalya (mean age=15). They all had at least five years of experience in learning English as a foreign language. They volunteered to take part in the study and they were not given any specific instruction prior to or during the sessions so as not to affect their attitudes towards course instruction. Cambridge Interactive Placement Test was used to account for the homogeneity of the participants and they were placed into the classes according to their test results. Cambridge Face 2 Face pre-intermediate course book was used during the course. In accordance with the units in the course book, the researcher prepared task-based language teaching activities for the group. The courses lasted 54 hours (6 hours per week, 9 weeks in total).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data processed in this study were collected through an evaluation form consisting of semi-structured interview questions related to students' opinions on task-based instruction. They were computerized to simplify the coding process. The content analysis technique in which an inductive thematic analysis was used to code the common themes in the students' responds. Miles and Huberman Model was followed in the analysis process. This model encompasses four main phases [data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion (drawing/verifying)] (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In line with the model, the collected data were firstly examined in order to find out irrelevant expressions which do not serve for the

research purposes by two experts in the field. Later, the expressions in the statements were grouped and coded systematically. The findings were presented in tables by showing frequency and percentage values. In order to check internal consistency, Miles and Huberman's formula (reliability= consensus/consensus+ dissidence) was used and the reliability value was calculated as .83 which is higher than the cut-off point 80 % and considered as an indication of inter-coder reliability.

Role of Researcher

The researcher served as a teacher who prepared and led all the activities in the research. By asking the participants' previous teachers in the language school, he tried to depict the picture of the participants' profiles. He played an active role in the whole process. The written course evaluation form was developed by himself. However, he worked with an expert in the relevant field in order to provide reliable findings during the data analysis.

FINDINGS

Upon completing the 54-hour language teaching based on task-based language teaching, the participants were asked to make reflections on the course. 12 participants filled in the evaluation form and thematic data analysis was adopted. According to the findings, the following themes were unearthed;

An increase in learner motivation, Demotivation towards learning English in the past, Negative attitude towards course methods and techniques, Positive attitude toward classroom activities.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics according to Themes

PARTICIPANTS	Positive attitude towards classroom activities	Demotivation towards learning English in the past	An increase in learner motivation	Previous course methods and techniques
S1	√	√		
S2	√	√	√	√
S3	√	√		
S4	√	√		
S5		√	√	
S6			√	√
S7	√		√	
S8	√			
S9	√	√	√	√
S10	√	√	√	√
S11	√	√	√	
S12	√		√	
f	10	8	8	4
%	83.33	66.67	66.67	33.33

As seen in Table 1, four themes were developed from the statements the participants wrote in the course evaluation form. The theme called "*positive attitude towards classroom activities*" ranked number one with a ratio of 83.33 %. This theme sheds light on the students' opinions about the course and activities after implementing task-based language teaching. The statements of the participants on this theme are as follows:

Positive attitude toward classroom activities

“...The classes are wonderful....I never got bored in this course...” (S1)

“...I participate in the activities because they are funny...” (S2)

“...The lessons are funnier and cheerful...” (S3)

“...I started to have fun during the lesson...The lessons are interesting now...” (S4)

“... I started to learn English seriously because I have fun during the lessons...” (S7)

“...This method is more exciting...” (S8)

“...The lessons are funnier and more informative in this method...” (S9)

“...I didn't get bored in the classes...We learn by having fun...” (S10)

“...This method was enjoyable...The activities were slightly entertaining...” (S11)

“...The task-based instruction is more permanent, funnier and more entertaining...” (S12)

As can be seen in the statements, there is a consensus on the effectiveness of task-based instruction and activities to enhance their competence in English and foster their motivation. The findings show that teaching English through task-based instruction advanced students' beliefs on learning English and enabled them to acquire patterns in the target language comprehensively. This theme confirmed that the activities in TBLT encourage students to get pleasure from the course and spark their interest in English.

Demotivation towards learning English

The second theme obtained from the statements of the participants was “*demotivation towards learning English*”. Eight students expressed opinion on this theme which ranked number two with a ratio of 66.67 %. The emphasis of this theme was students' lack of motivation towards learning English. Since classroom activities and methods applied in the classroom are not appealing, the students lost their desire to learn English in the past. The scope of the present study was the high schools most of whom are encouraged by their parents to study English and improve their proficiency with the help of external courses. Therefore, most of the students were not at the desired level. They explained this situation and threw light on factors faced by themselves in the previous years.

The following statements were expressed by the students for this theme:

“... I got bored in my previous English courses...” (S1)

“...in the past, nobody spoke during the lesson....because the lessons were boring in the past, I didn't participate in the activities during the lesson...” (S2)

“...I didn't care about English in the past...” (S3)

“...the old methods are boring...” (S4)

“...in the past, we only wrote words on the notebooks or teachers taught a 5-minute grammar pattern...” (S5)

“...in the past, the classes were boring...” (S9)

“...I got extremely bored in the classes...” (S10)

“...I would think that English is boring and I didn't enjoy during the lesson...” (S11)

Increase in learner motivation

The third theme was “*increase in learner motivation*”. Eight students expressed opinions on this theme which had the same ratio with the previous theme “*demotivation towards learning English*”. The statements in this theme were mainly about change occurred with task-based language teaching. The students pointed out considerable changes and emphasized new learning experiences through the following statements:

“...I participated in the activities more...now everybody is talking about the lesson” (S2)

“...I am more motivated...Now, I am curious about what we will see next week” (S5)

“...We are more motivated to learn English” (S6)

“...I started to love English again....I started to learn English seriously.” (S7)

“...I am attending the classes with higher motivation.” (S9)

“... I started to love English. I didn't get bored in the classes.” (S10)

“...I slightly started to love English...My motivation level is naturally higher.” (S11)

“...My interest in learning English (even any foreign language) increased...Learning English seemed more entertaining.” (S12)

The statements given above points out the significant change in the students' motivation and attitude towards learning English. It can be inferred that the students considered learning English as a tedious activity and sat at the back of the classroom in the past. In addition, the statement of student 5 leads us to think that they lost their curiosity about English in the past. However, with task-based language teaching, their motivation and attitude changed from negative to positive and they became more interested in the activities and topics after the treatment of TBLT.

Previous course methods and techniques

The fourth theme was “*previous course methods and techniques*” which highlighted the reflections of the students about the previous courses. Four students expressed opinions on this theme which ranked number four with a ratio of 33.33%. The following statements were expressed by the students for this theme:

“...The lessons were based on the course books...” (S2)

“...The classes were based on theoretical learning...” (S6)

“The lessons were too strict and based on memorization in the past” (S9)

“...The lessons were taught through traditional methods...” (S10)

Based on the statements given above, it can be concluded that course books, theoretical learning, strict and memorization-based learning and traditional language teaching methods are the prominent factors in the past language experiences of the students. Those points show that the students were not satisfied with the extensive use of course book during the classes and criticized the use of theoretical learning activities rather than practical ones. They also showed a negative attitude towards strict and memorization-based language learning atmosphere. Learning new words by memorizing and tough classroom rules could have inhibited them to feel free and create a safe atmosphere.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The present study aimed at scrutinizing the role of task-based language teaching on improving EFL learners' attitudes and motivation. The results pointed out that there is a consistency between TBI and learner attitudes and motivation. Since the researcher implemented TBI into the courses, the learners' attitudes towards the course and motivation to learn English have increased periodically. The link between these two dimensions reveals that TBI can be considered as an effective method in language teaching. This finding of the study shows similarity with the findings of Pietri (2015) who found that task-based language teaching does not merely encourage students for the lessons but also enhances their creativity and language skills. The students of the study stated the significance of treatment of TBI in language courses. Besides, most of them specified that this method should also cover their other courses. The students' suggestions were found as acceptable by Xiongyong and Samul (2011) and Hu (2013) who revealed that the teachers had a positive attitude towards task-based teaching and pointed out that the teachers using this method show different instructional thinking procedures in terms of task selection and implementation. Despite their demotivation and boredom towards learning English, a considerable change occurred on the students in a short period of the course. Although the participants considered the English language learning process as a tedious activity, this attitude remarkably altered upon implementing task-based language teaching activities. The results also showed that there was an increase in the level of participation in classroom activities. However, as one of the students stated, they previously sat back and did not involve in the activities conducted by the classroom teachers in the past. One of the crucial results of the study was the changing attitude towards English learning. This change was particularly emphasized in the statements of the students. The students commonly used metaphors such as funny, enjoyable, informative, exciting, entertaining and wonderful to express their thoughts towards English after the task-based language teaching. When the statements for the previous learning activities were examined, it was found that the students mainly characterized language learning as “tedious”, in other words, “boring”. Even those expressions highlight the change in their attitude and motivation. However, the thesis study carried out by Tıkız (2008), in which a study with pre-test post-test design with the control group was conducted, indicated that task-based language teaching did not change the students' attitude towards learning English. This difference may result from several factors such as

students' backgrounds, quality of tasks implemented by the researcher, classroom population etc.

The present study also showed that students were not content with the use of traditional methods such as extensive use of course books, memorization and teacher-centred instruction. They all reflected that these components are the main reasons of demotivation, boredom and negative attitude towards learning English. In light of the results, this study recommends using task-based language teaching activities in the classrooms more. Considering the changes in the students' motivation and attitude, the educators can utilize from this method in order to remove handicaps related to those dimensions. Task-based teaching should also be encouraged by the course book writers and editors. By adding tasks which will lead teachers to use task-based language teaching activities, the course book writers can provide an incentive for the teachers.

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