

Task-Based Instruction for Academic vs. Conversational Language Skills

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Abstract. *Task-Based Instruction (TBI) is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks to promote language learning. This study explores the effectiveness of TBI in developing both academic and conversational language skills. Utilizing a mixed-methods design, the research compares the impact of TBI on learners' proficiency in academic and conversational contexts. Quantitative data were collected through proficiency tests and error analysis, while qualitative data were gathered from learner feedback and classroom observations. Results reveal that TBI significantly improves both academic and conversational skills, though its impact varies between these contexts. The findings suggest that while TBI can enhance language proficiency across contexts, tailored task design is necessary to address the distinct demands of academic and conversational language use.*

Keywords: *Task-Based Instruction, academic language skills, conversational language skills, second language acquisition, language proficiency, instructional design.*

Introduction

Task-Based Instruction (TBI) has gained prominence as an effective approach to language teaching, focusing on the use of authentic tasks to promote meaningful communication and learning. TBI is grounded in the belief that language learning is most effective when learners engage in tasks that mirror real-world language use. However, there is ongoing debate about the effectiveness of TBI for different types of language skills, particularly academic versus conversational language.

Academic language skills involve formal language used in academic settings, such as writing research papers, giving presentations, and participating in scholarly discussions. Conversational language skills, on the other hand, involve informal communication used in everyday interactions, such as casual conversations, social exchanges, and informal debates. These two types of language skills require different sets of competencies and may benefit from distinct instructional strategies.

This study investigates how TBI affects the development of academic and conversational language skills. Specifically, it examines whether TBI can effectively enhance proficiency in both contexts and identifies the factors that contribute to its effectiveness. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- How does TBI impact the development of academic language skills?
- How does TBI impact the development of conversational language skills?
- Are there differences in the effectiveness of TBI for academic versus conversational language skills?

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of TBI's impact on academic and conversational language skills. The research was conducted over a 12-week period with intermediate-level EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners.

Participants

The study involved 120 intermediate-level EFL students from two language institutes. Participants were randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group that received TBI and a control group that followed a traditional language instruction approach.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data:

Proficiency Tests: Pre- and post-tests were administered to measure learners' proficiency in academic and conversational language skills. Tests included tasks

such as academic writing assignments, oral presentations, and conversational role-plays.

Error Analysis: Written and spoken outputs were analyzed for common errors related to academic and conversational language use. This included assessing grammar, vocabulary, and discourse features specific to each context.

Qualitative Data:

Learner Feedback: Surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather learners' perceptions of how TBI influenced their academic and conversational language skills. Questions addressed learners' experiences with TBI tasks and their perceived improvements in language use.

Classroom Observations: Observations were conducted to examine how TBI tasks were implemented and how learners engaged with these tasks. Notes were taken on task effectiveness, learner interactions, and context-specific language use.

Procedure

TBI Implementation: The experimental group engaged in TBI tasks designed to develop both academic and conversational language skills. Tasks included research projects, academic presentations, conversational simulations, and discussion activities.

Traditional Instruction: The control group received traditional language instruction focused on grammar, vocabulary, and isolated practice for academic and conversational contexts.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods to compare pre- and post-test results between the experimental and control groups. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and insights from learner feedback and observations.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Academic Language Skills:

Experimental Group: The experimental group showed a significant improvement in academic language proficiency, with an average increase of 30% in

writing accuracy and 25% in presentation skills. Error analysis revealed a reduction in common academic language errors, such as incorrect use of academic vocabulary and inappropriate discourse markers.

Control Group: The control group demonstrated a smaller improvement in academic language skills, with an average increase of 12% in writing accuracy and 10% in presentation skills. Error analysis indicated persistent issues with academic language features.

Conversational Language Skills:

Experimental Group: The experimental group also exhibited substantial gains in conversational language proficiency, with an average improvement of 28% in fluency and 22% in conversational accuracy. Analysis of conversational errors showed a reduction in issues related to informal language use and conversational strategies.

Control Group: The control group showed more modest improvements in conversational language skills, with an average increase of 14% in fluency and 12% in conversational accuracy. Errors related to conversational language remained more prevalent.

Qualitative Findings

Learner Feedback:

Academic Skills: Learners in the experimental group reported that TBI tasks helped them better understand academic language requirements and apply academic conventions effectively. They valued the practical nature of the tasks and felt more confident in academic settings.

Conversational Skills: Learners appreciated the interactive nature of TBI tasks for developing conversational skills. They noted that tasks provided useful practice in informal communication and enhanced their ability to engage in everyday conversations.

Classroom Observations:

Task Effectiveness: Observations indicated that TBI tasks were effective in promoting both academic and conversational language use. Learners demonstrated

improved application of academic language in presentations and writing, as well as enhanced conversational skills during role-plays and discussions.

Learner Engagement: The interactive and contextualized nature of TBI tasks led to increased learner engagement and participation. Learners actively engaged in tasks and showed greater enthusiasm for practicing both academic and conversational language skills.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the effectiveness of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in enhancing both academic and conversational language skills. TBI's focus on meaningful, context-rich tasks provides learners with practical opportunities to develop language proficiency in diverse contexts.

Impact on Academic Language Skills: TBI was found to be highly effective in improving academic language skills.

The significant gains in writing accuracy and presentation skills, along with the reduction in common academic language errors, highlight the benefits of using authentic tasks to address the demands of academic communication.

Tasks that simulate academic tasks, such as research projects and presentations, enable learners to practice and refine their academic language use in realistic scenarios.

Impact on Conversational Language Skills: TBI also proved effective in enhancing conversational language skills. The improvements in fluency and conversational accuracy, coupled with the reduction in errors related to informal language use, suggest that TBI tasks provide valuable practice in everyday communication. Interactive tasks, such as role-plays and discussions, help learners develop practical conversational skills and strategies.

Differences in Effectiveness: While TBI was effective in both contexts, the impact varied between academic and conversational skills. The study suggests that task design should be tailored to the specific requirements of each context. Academic tasks should focus on formal language use and conventions, while conversational tasks should emphasize informal communication and interaction

strategies.

Pedagogical Implications: The study supports the integration of TBI into language teaching practices to address both academic and conversational language needs. Educators should design tasks that reflect the specific demands of academic and conversational contexts, providing learners with targeted practice in each area. This approach ensures that learners develop well-rounded language proficiency and are better prepared for diverse communication scenarios.

Limitations: The study's limitations include its focus on intermediate-level learners and a relatively short duration of 12 weeks.

Future research could explore the long-term effects of TBI on academic and conversational language skills and examine its impact on learners at different proficiency levels. Additionally, studies could investigate the effectiveness of TBI in various language learning contexts and for different language pairs.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Task-Based Instruction (TBI) is an effective approach for developing both academic and conversational language skills.

The significant improvements observed in both contexts highlight the value of using authentic, context-rich tasks to enhance language proficiency. While TBI benefits learners in academic and conversational settings, task design must be tailored to address the distinct requirements of each context.

Recommendations: Language educators should incorporate TBI into their teaching practices to address the diverse needs of learners.

Designing and implementing tasks that reflect the specific demands of academic and conversational language use can enhance learners' overall proficiency and engagement.

Future research should continue to explore the effectiveness of TBI across different contexts and learner populations to further understand its impact on language acquisition.

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