

Preface

The present study examines whether English teachers at primary and middle school can understand and implement Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) better by framing language tasks, in addition to learning TBLT theory. Task-framing guidelines can include Multiple Intelligences (MI) for catering to individual differences and Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) to set a range of cognitive challenges for learners, from lower to higher-order thinking. MI-RBT-TBLT as the research intervention therefore, is expected to sustain teacher development inside the classroom, creating awareness of individual needs and thus, leading to learner autonomy and teacher empowerment. This ideal scenario, however, is far from the present reality in English classrooms.

Globalization of English Language Teaching (ELT) has led to universal recognition of the need to meet international standards. Communicative Language Teaching alone is not sufficient for this purpose, even in primary school. Language, as an interdisciplinary event, plays a mediating role between content and critical thinking skills in learners. English teacher education, therefore, also has to keep pace with global demands. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) has taken cognizance of this by emphasizing the development of teacher education as the basis of improved language learning outcomes. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), to which the largest number of Indian schools are affiliated, has introduced mandatory seven-day annual teacher-training programmes for ELT and other subjects. These workshops, however, lack continuity and do not show positive changes in the classroom. Most English teachers remain focussed on teaching textual content instead of language skills and force learners into rote-learning and grammar drills. Teacher-talk dominates lessons, leading to a skills imbalance in learning, with more writing and very little speaking. Passive learning, moreover, hinders the use of language for meaning-making or

higher-order thinking. Teacher-training workshops alone, therefore, cannot change how English is taught and learnt in the classroom.

Teachers can sustain new learning from workshops using their own classrooms as laboratories of action research. Then, they can experiment with language learning to help learners across a range of curricular and real life requirements. MI-RBT tasks framed by teachers can help in this by enabling focus on task structure, inputs and learning outcomes with reference to the individual needs of language learners beyond communicative requirements. Such tasks can integrate language skills in a balanced way while challenging learners to use language for information processing, meaning-making and problem-solving. MI-RBT tasks can include bilingual participation in the planning phase with peer-learning of metacognitive, cognitive, affective and social strategies.

Integration of MI and RBT also induces the inclusion of content in multiple formats and with varying textual complexity. Much of this content input can be borrowed from other subjects in the academic curriculum, thus, helping to develop subject-specific vocabulary and syntax. Language is therefore, acquired for linguistic functions at definite cognitive levels. Conventional texts are verbal-logical intensive in content, which can be demotivating for slow learners. MI inputs and digital technology can vary the nature of textual content with audio-visual, musical, kinesthetic and other inputs. MI can be integrated during three stages, of task input, planning and performance, thus engaging all learners in task-based learning.

Language acquisition for specific purposes motivates learners as they can directly use it in real life contexts. Inclusion of meaningful content from other subjects across the curriculum, with specific focus on the use of English in these subjects, would require collaboration between English and content subject teachers. Teacher collaboration can take

place during task-planning, team-teaching and feedback stages of the lesson. Class observation and peer-feedback from colleagues may lead to reflection on teaching processes, learning strategies and task-structure. Reflective teaching being the chief component of teacher growth, teacher collaboration can become an effective tool for self-empowerment.

Framing language tasks with content input from other subjects, in collaboration with colleagues from other departments, replicates one form of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL emerged from TBLT in bilingual countries where content and a foreign language were taught together, with the language as medium. The Indian context of teaching-learning is ready for CLIL as many trained English teachers at the primary level are also qualified to teach one other content subject, according to B.Ed requirements. Teachers, however, rarely enter into professional collaborations with colleagues teaching other subjects. English teachers teaching content subjects usually do not focus on language skills, although learner problems in the subject may be related to language structure and meaning-making.

It is possible through MI-RBT task-framing, to motivate teachers to focus on the micro-aspects of teaching like the use of strategies for differentiated teaching and reflection on learning outcomes. Teaching can become more learner-centric by changing its focus from written or oral examination products and grades to include learning processes. This will lead to more inclusive teaching, motivating even slow learners to engage in language learning and peer-collaboration. Cycles of task-planning, implementation and reflection can thus, help teachers in developing professional efficacy within the language classroom, and enable learner autonomy as well.

Since the introduction of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) in 2009 by the CBSE, many English teachers have focussed more on grading than on formative and

diagnostic assessment of learner needs. Testing has overshadowed teaching in the language classroom and NCERT Communicative English texts have been subverted due to this. Prescribed tasks with integrated skills are left undone while teachers set language items borrowed from previous test-papers or introduce grammar manuals and guidebooks for drill and rote-learning. Trained teachers being unable to use prescribed materials indicates a serious malfunction of teaching-learning due to negative washback from examinations. Teacher education in practical skills has therefore, become crucial in this context.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2009 discusses the importance of pedagogical skills to meet the needs of diverse learning situations, thereby critically influencing the quality of curriculum transaction in classrooms. The CBSE ELT curriculum, in particular, reiterates the need for process-oriented and learner-centric pedagogy. At the heart of all learning processes, however, lies teacher ability to assume the role of facilitator, a transformation that teachers may find difficult, even after training. Materials being always ready to hand and in everyday use, the present study focuses on teacher education through developing materials, thus appropriating the domain of expert teachers and researchers. Task-framing through trial-and-error along with reflection can enable teachers to focus on TBLT pedagogy in practice. This can be sustained in the classroom through teacher-collaboration, thus doing away with two shortcomings of workshops, namely, limited duration and lack of follow-up support.

Social Constructivist Theory led to discovery learning through collaborative discourse (Bruner, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978). It is possible to apply the same principles to teacher education by shifting focus from the *methods* of learning to *materials*. MI-RBT-TBLT is based on a multimodal approach that motivates independent thinking, amalgamates technology and valorizes learning over testing. MI-RBT tasks use thinking and meaning-

making as higher cognitive functioning of language in real life (Armstrong, 2003; Christison, 2005; Hall Hailey, 2007). Diversified instruction and feedback, development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and critical and creative thinking lead to whole brain, integrated learning of language skills as teachers and learners autonomously share responsibility and decision-making in the classroom. Developing their own teaching resources can make teachers critically aware of the implications of new methods and materials for learners, thus, enhancing their self-confidence and transforming them from passive recipients of curriculum and materials into policy-shapers at the grassroots.