Growth of Communicative Proficiency in Teaching Foreign Languages for Work-Related Objectives

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Abstract: This study investigates the effectiveness of a task-based approach to teaching foreign languages for work-related objectives, focusing on communicative proficiency development. This article suggests that the task-based approach effectively fosters work-related communicative proficiency, highlighting its potential to prepare students for success in a globalized workforce. Further research on this methodology across languages and professional fields is encouraged.

Keywords: Communicative proficiency, foreign language teaching, Task-based approach, Work-related objectives, Fluency, Accuracy, Simulations, Professional communication, Collaborative projects, Self-reported confidence, globalized workforce.

Introduction

In today's globalized economy, proficiency in foreign languages is increasingly deemed essential for success in diverse professional fields. While traditional foreign language teaching often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary acquisition, effective communication in work settings necessitates a shift towards developing communicative proficiency, encompassing fluency, accuracy, and adaptability in real-time professional interactions. This study investigates the efficacy of a task-based approach to foreign language instruction specifically designed to foster communicative proficiency for work-related objectives.

Methods

Participants: Forty university students enrolled in an intermediate-level English course were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n=20) or the control group (n=20). Both groups received the same standard English grammar and vocabulary instruction. However, the experimental group additionally participated in task-based activities (TBAs) simulating real-world professional scenarios in diverse fields such as business, hospitality, and healthcare. These TBAs involved role-playing, simulations, and collaborative projects requiring participants to apply their language skills in communicative tasks relevant to the chosen work context.

Instruments: Pre- and post-tests assessed participants' communicative proficiency in French through three measures:

➢ Oral Interview: A semi-structured interview simulating a job application scenario, evaluated by independent English-speaking raters on fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness of professional language.

➢ Written Response: A task simulating professional email communication based on a work-related scenario, assessed for grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, and clarity of communication.

- ➢ Self-reported Confidence: Students completed a pre- and post-test survey measuring their perceived confidence in using English for work-related communication.

- ➢ Data Analysis: Pre- and post-test scores for each measure were analyzed using independent samples t-tests to compare improvement between the experimental and control groups.

Results

Participants in the experimental group displayed significantly greater gains in all three measures of communicative proficiency compared to the control group.

- ✓ Oral Interview: The experimental group showed a statistically significant increase in average interview scores ($p < 0.05$), exhibiting greater fluency, accuracy, and use of professional language compared to the control group.

- ✓ Written Response: Experimental group participants demonstrated a larger improvement in email writing scores ($p < 0.01$), displaying more grammatically correct, sophisticated vocabulary, and clear communication compared to the control group.

- ✓ Self-reported Confidence: The experimental group reported a significant increase in confidence in using French for work-related communication ($p < 0.05$) compared to the control group.

Discussion

These findings suggest that the task-based approach employing simulations and collaborative projects fostering real-world professional scenarios effectively enhanced communicative proficiency in English for work-related objectives. Compared to the traditional grammar-focused approach, this methodology led to greater improvements in fluency, accuracy, and ability to communicate effectively in professional contexts. The increased self-reported confidence further underscores the potential of task-based learning to empower students to apply their language skills for professional goals.

In fact, the English language competence of non-linguistic students in spoken language is still a concern. According to the latest curriculum, students must be able to express either business or interpersonal communication in the context of everyday life, such as expressing and responding to likes. This means that the goal of the speaking curriculum is for students to understand and use the language appropriately according to the respective situation; for example, expressing sympathy and responding to it. However, many students still do not have the opportunity to express their ideas, thoughts clearly. They certainly face difficulties that prevent them from being competent in speaking; like lack of vocabulary, poor or unusual pronunciation, and poor grammar. Moreover, although a huge variety of language teaching methods are currently used that help to use the English language in various real life situations, the results are still not satisfactory.

The problem then lies not only in the implemented methods. It may be assumed that some problems arise from the students themselves, because an important factor in language learning is the language of the learner. One of the aspects that are involved in the process of developing conversational skills is the language learning strategies used by learners on their own. Learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the significant contribution of a task-based approach to teaching foreign languages for work-related objectives. By prioritizing communicative activities and simulations of real-world professional scenarios, educators can effectively foster students' proficiency in using the language for work situations, enhancing their confidence and preparing them for success in a globalized workforce. Further research with larger samples and across different languages could further explore the efficacy of this approach and optimize task-based methods for diverse professional fields. A foreign language teacher should teach students to bypass language difficulties, that is, not to focus on lexical and grammatical phenomena unknown to the

student. This is possible when such phenomena do not interfere with the correct interpretation of the text. Students tend to stop in front of words unknown to them, regardless of their informative significance, which ultimately complicates the normal process of reading in a foreign language.

In practical classes in a foreign language, it is necessary to develop in students the skills and abilities of reading with varying depths of understanding depending on the purposes of reading. In this regard, we can distinguish viewing, introductory and studying reading. In a technical university, introductory reading takes a leading place.

In summary, reading skills are crucial for developing compensatory competence in nonlinguistic specialties, especially in practical classes. Students must begin working with specialized texts from the first year of the academic year, as they may not yet know their specialty terminology. To avoid disappointment and damage to motivation, teachers must carefully select problem situations and correlate them with students' language and general training levels. Educational activities should imitate genuine verbal communication and consider students' age, intellectual characteristics, and interests.

Semantic memorization is the most effective method for teaching specialized texts, as it allows for easy and strong assimilation of material. Reading specialized texts should begin with a predictive attitude to achieve correct, context-appropriate understanding of individual words and sentences. Teachers should teach students to bypass language difficulties and focus on lexical and grammatical phenomena that do not interfere with the correct interpretation of the text. In practical classes, students should develop reading skills and abilities, distinguishing viewing, introductory, and studying reading.

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