
**FROM GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION TO TASK-BASED LEARNING: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY IN RURAL CLASSROOMS**

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The aim of this study is to explore the pedagogical shift from the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) to more contemporary, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, specifically in rural school environments. In many post-Soviet and developing educational systems, GTM continues to dominate due to teacher training legacies, exam-driven curricula, and limited access to modern materials. GTM often focuses on translating texts, memorizing vocabulary, and learning grammar rules in isolation—practices that do not always support communicative competence or practical language use. By contrast, Task-Based Learning engages learners through meaningful, real-world tasks such as role-playing, problem-solving, and collaborative dialogues. It encourages fluency, autonomy, and context-based language application. This study contributes to the growing body of research that challenges outdated instructional models and promotes student-centered methodologies—even in under-resourced environments. It also provides actionable recommendations for rural English teachers, policymakers, and curriculum developers seeking to modernize rural ELT without requiring expensive materials or digital infrastructure. Ultimately, the research advocates for pedagogical innovation rooted in context, recognizing the potential of rural learners to thrive under communicative and interactive language instruction.

INTRODUCTION.

“Learning a language is a political act. Those that know a language are empowered in a way that those who do not know the language are not.” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) With the advent of Globalization because of the advancement in the technology, the boundaries between the countries and continents apart from the physical ones have been removed and English has emerged to be the language that acts as the

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common thread between the nations. Therefore, the corporates are now investing in training their salesmen and women in English. The traders are signing up for the popular spoken English classes; the academicians especially in the field of Science and medicine want to learn the language to remain updated with the advancements in their respective fields. “The availability of English as a global language is accelerating globalization. On the other, the globalisation is accelerating the use of English.” (Graddol, 2006). The first method employed was Grammar-translation method which was in practice since the 1500s to teach Latin and Greek because of Latin being a prominent language in government, academia and business. With the decline of Latin’s prominence, it was replaced by Italian, English and French. The method soon spread to the language teaching classrooms of USA and Europe. The focus was on the linguistic understanding of the language instead of the communicative competence, therefore the students were required to read the prescribed texts and translate from the native language to the target language¹ and vice versa. The major drawback of this method was its failure in making its students orally competent which led to the Direct Method. With the focus on laying down a strong foundation in grammar but with oral competency, the Direct method teachers encouraged their students to think in the target language instead of their native tongue. The teacher used pictures, or pantomime to explain the meaning of the words. Use of native tongue was strictly banned. Also, the grammar was taught inductively that is the students were provided with examples from which they were supposed to deduce the grammar rule they were to learn. The focus was more on vocabulary instead of grammar and oral competency. World War II required people who can communicate well enough with the foreign allies and it was soon realized that this method also failed to serve its purpose and US government turned to the dominant theories in the applied and psycholinguistics such as the Behavioural Theory. In 1945, under the leadership of Charles Fries in the University of Michigan, Audio-Lingual method was devised which incorporated principles from structural linguistics and Behaviorism². The focus of the method is mastering the sound system and grammatical sentence patterns instead of vocabulary like the Direct method through several drills such as substitution drill where the learner is required to repeat a sentence and replace the specified word or phrase with the word given by the teacher. Repeated reinforcement of the grammatical patterns takes the centre stage. The common link between these three methods is the fact that the grammar or the vocabulary forms the teaching point. The emphasis is on knowing the correct forms and plenty of words and the correct pronunciation or in other words, these are linguistic-centred approaches. In 1970s, the educators began wondering whether the methods in practice are fulfilling the desired goal which is communicating effectively in the target language. It was

¹ Target language: The language being taught to the learner. It is usually used in ESL/EFL context.

² Behaviorism: A theory of learning that was based on the idea that all behaviours are acquired through conditioning and conditioning occurred

observed that the communicative competency of the students was limited to the classroom that is, the learners were able to produce correct sentences in the classroom but outside, in a natural context, they were unable to communicate in the target language. It was also noted that the linguistic centred approaches ignored a key aspect of the language which is the social side (Halliday, 1973). In a social context, language served several purposes such as greeting, scolding, inviting and declining invitations etc (Wilkins, 1976). Therefore, having the linguistic knowledge was not enough or in other words, communication in a language required more than linguistic competence; it required communicative competence (Hymes, 1971). The theory believed that the human responses to environmental stimuli influence the actions. Refer to Skinner, 1957 for more information language teaching paradigm that is Communicative Language teaching (CLT). This method gives flexibility to the teachers to design their lesson plans and also be able to include the needs of their learners along with the wants of the sponsoring institution. Innumerable activities such as games and role plays are used with the sole intent of making the target learners efficient interlocutors. Another unique aspect is the use of authentic materials which lends a fun element in the learning process.

According to Howatt (1984), there are two versions of the Communicative approach to Language teaching – strong and weak. The strong version lays stress on the fact that language is acquired through communication and this observation is manifested through Content-based instruction and Task-based language teaching methods. In the content-based instruction method or otherwise known as specialized language course, content from the academic discipline or the professional field is used. For example, an English language teaching course for the engineering students will contain content from their academic fields so as to make the content familiar. It will vary from discipline to discipline such as the course for the pilots would not be same as that of the one designed for electric technicians. In the European context, the method is also known as Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The objectives of this method include vocabulary, structure, discourse organisation and mastering the language as well as content. This method has led to another major field in English Language Teaching which is English for Specific Purposes (ESP). I will not discuss it since it does not fall within the purview of this paper. Task-based instruction or the language teaching method where specific tasks are used to teach the target language. Like content-based instruction, it is also one of the outcomes of the strong versions of the communicative language teaching approach.

Blended Learning is one such method where the learning process is a combination of online educational materials and the traditional comfortable classroom teaching. Just like other methods discussed as part of Communicative language teaching approach, this one is also quite flexible and is highly dependent on context. Usually, the teacher holds the absolute power when it comes teaching but not in the case of the methods devised under CLT. The teachers more often than not play the role of facilitators and encourage their

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students to discover learning for themselves instead of the traditional role where the teacher is controller and spearheads the teaching-learning process as in the case of Linguistic centred approaches. Therefore, revisions, improvisations and support to the efforts made by those who dare to think different are much required to make the learners efficient and communicatively competent in English so that language should not pose as barrier between them achieving their goals or we might just churn out generation and generations of Indian students who might score 95 out of 100 in English but are incapable to speak the same language for more than five minutes.

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