

Implementing task-based teacher training: Narratives from language classrooms

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Abstract

This paper aims to document the impact of task-based teacher training on the classroom teaching of two native-speaker English Teaching Assistants (ETAs). The data are drawn from a 30-hour teacher training course offered to the ETAs who taught in two different government schools in Hyderabad, India, as part of the United States India Education Foundation's Fulbright Fellowship Programme. The training offered to the ETAs consisted of eight modules: teaching vocabulary and grammar, developing listening, speaking, reading and writing and classroom management and lesson planning. Training was offered through tasks, responses to prompts, and case studies. It also included analysis of critical moments that emerged from the everyday teaching of the ETAs. Constructs such as teacher decision-making (Borg, 2006), critical reflection (East, 2014) and pre-service teacher mentoring (Gardiner 2017) have been used to build the theoretical support for the study. A Challenge-Input-Implementation (CII) model is developed to interpret and analyze the data. The data are gathered from three tools: a) reflective journals of ETAs which recorded pertinent issues that emerged from their everyday teaching and possible solutions to these; b) trainer's field notes that identified critical areas from lesson observation and post-observation conferences; and c) cognitive information sheet which documents ETAs perceptions of how their learning from the training impacted their teaching and what they would like to explore further in their future teaching careers. Findings revealed areas where trainees needed more support (e.g., class control), as well as the strengths that they have developed in instruction delivery (e.g., the ability to make the class interactive).

Keywords: pre-service teachers, task-based teacher education, language classrooms

1. Introduction

Teacher education programs impact and mould pre-service teachers' pedagogical preconceptions. The goal is to prepare pre-service teachers to not just survive but flourish in their prospective classroom teaching. Therefore, the training offered should be hands-on, experiential, and task-based (Van den Branden 2006; Brandl 2008). Scaffolding the trainees in developing tasks and lesson plans also is a part of the training. During the training programmes the pre-service teachers traverse a path of transition from learner to teacher. Embedded within a safe and secure environment that promotes experimentation with novel approaches, they can reflect upon pedagogy and develop professional skills 'without the constraints of immediate performance' (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). The present study documents the professional learning that is accrued to two pre-service teachers through a four-month long training programme.

2. Review of Literature

Research in pre-service teacher education has focused on a plethora of themes such as teacher agency, mentoring, implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and emerging teacher identity. Xu and Fan (2021) investigated how two Chinese EFL teachers (one experienced and one novice) enacted their agency in implementing TBLT and the factors that mediated the implementation. The teachers demonstrated agency through teaching as adaptation and teaching as learning to overcome the contradictions in the instructional activity system. O'Dowd et al. (2020) examined the role of two types of pedagogical mentoring employed in a virtual exchange project among three classes of initial English teacher education in Israel, Spain, and Sweden. Findings revealed that pedagogical mentoring that integrated students' own online interactions into class work was more effective than pedagogical mentoring that presented and modeled online interaction strategies before the virtual exchange. Locating a study in two Midwestern public schools in the USA, Gardiner (2017) examined the practices two induction mentors employed with six new teachers, the new teachers' perceptions of the practices, and if the practices contributed to new teachers' professional learning. Results indicate that "inside" and "outside" mentoring practices are complementary and should be conceived as assisted performance and judiciously selected to promote productive changes in new teachers' practice. East (2019) explored how seven teachers, three years after they had been trained with a focus on TBLT, incorporated task-based principles in their classrooms, together their perceptions of the barriers to successful

implementation, and their responses to perceived barriers. It was found that TBLT principles can be successfully enacted by teachers who are open to the innovation, but that theoretical, practical and contextual constraints limit that enactment. Nguyen (2012) investigated how professional identity of four beginning English teachers teaching at the tertiary level developed as a result of working with a peer mentor in a Vietnamese context. Findings demonstrate that the participants were able to create a new learning community of practice in which all of the teachers became more reflective and collaborative. The current study carries this research forward with a focus on training pre-service teachers through a task-based teacher education model labeled the Challenge-Input-Implementation (CII) model. The CII model and the theoretical principles that guided this model are explained below.

3. Theoretical Framework

A Challenge-Input-Implementation (CII) model is adopted to explore the impact of the task-based training offered to the English Teaching Assistants (ETAs). The CII model is explained as follows. The challenges that ETAs faced in their classroom teaching vis-à-vis the eight modules – vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing, lesson planning, and classroom management – are presented by the ETAs in the training sessions (the challenge, ‘C’ in the model). Through tasks and discussions and other curricular inputs, several options were arrived at to address these challenges (the input ‘I’ in the model). The ETAs selected what they considered most appropriate among these and implemented them in their real time classroom teaching and reported back to the trainer whether and how they worked (the implementation, ‘I’ in the model). The ETAs were thus offered ‘practice-oriented training’ Van den Brenden (2006) that focused on what they can do in their classrooms. They were initiated into the multifarious, unrehearsed reality of the classroom wherein they attempted to play the role of ‘active, thinking decision makers’ shaping classroom events (Borg, 2006). Further, the trainees had ample opportunities throughout the training to reflect upon their classroom experience with the trainer. Such ‘critical reflection’ (East, 2014) aided the ETAs to critique their classroom decisions and actions ‘with a view to improving their teaching’ (Williams & Grudnoff, 2011). They also supported each other through peer mentoring in ‘an open, non-threatening and non-evaluative’ environment (Nguyen, 2016) by exchanging notes on their best (and worst) practices.

While discussing teacher training vis-à-vis the implementation task-based language teaching, Brandl (2017) underlines the need for trainees to be involved in the development of the task materials. A framework that begins with task analysis and progresses to modifying existing traditional materials and ultimately to designing tasks from scratch is suggested for novice teachers in training. The CII model is aligned with these propositions. Further, the model is designed to promote teacher agency which entails intentional actions and choices in order to make a meaningful difference (Toom et al., 2015) in the learning experiences of the students. The ETAs were encouraged to exercise agency through their efforts to make choices in relation to student learning, teaching innovation, professional development and collaborative teacher learning (White, 2018). The current study embraced an integrated mentoring approach which conceives mentoring as a diagnostic, deliberative, and practice-oriented process (Orland-Barack & Wang, 2021). Mentoring that was site-based and predicated on a collaborative, inquiry-based model aimed towards instructional improvement (Gardiner, 2017) was offered to the ETAs.

4. Aim of the Study

The study aims to investigate the impact of the task-based teacher education on the classroom teaching of the English Teaching Assistants. The impact is assessed vis-à-vis the eight modules that were included in the training: vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing, lesson planning and classroom management.

5. Research Questions

The following questions are addressed in the study:

- a) What challenges did the ETAs face in their everyday teaching?
- b) What inputs (scaffolding) are offered to resolve the challenges?
- c) How did the inputs (scaffolding) help resolve the challenges?

6. Methodology

Two native-speaker English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) were offered a 30-hour teacher training course. The ETAs were recipients of the Fulbright-Nehru English Teaching Assistantship (FNETA) of the United States India Education Foundation's (USIEF). As part of the FNETA

Programme they taught in two government schools in Hyderabad, India. The ETAs were young females of 25-30 years of age with no or very limited teaching experience prior to their FNETAP. They had started teaching two months before the training began. The course inputs consisted of eight modules: developing language skills (LSRW- 16 hours), teaching vocabulary and grammar (8 hours) and lesson planning and classroom management (6 hours). A task-based, problem-solving approach is employed to offer the training that spread across four months. The ETAs worked through tasks and activities based on the prompts provided which ensured a deep and meaningful engagement with the theoretical concepts and principles. The tasks are derived and sometimes adapted from Scrivener (2005) and Watkins (2007). The ETAs were eager to learn and displayed a high level of motivation throughout the duration of the training. Since there were only two of them, it was possible to personalize the training to address the specific and individual challenges faced by them. Mention must be made of the fact that the ETAs shared a certain level of psychological comfort and ease with the trainer which contributed to their unguarded narrations of the classroom teaching experiences. These positive affective factors enhanced the value of shared experiences for the trainees as well as the trainer.

6.1 Data collection

Data were collected through three tools:

1) Reflective journals: the ETAs maintained reflective journals which recorded pertinent issues that emerged from task completion during the training sessions. No particular template was provided for the journals. The ETAs were free to write about their queries, confusions and apprehensions about classroom teaching of LSRW grammar and vocabulary. They also described how these challenges were addressed through the inputs offered as part of the training. Characterized by flexibility in structure and multiplicity in themes, these narratives were crucial in measuring the depth and breadth of the trainees' understanding of the concepts and their attempt to assimilate and apply such understanding to their real time teaching.

2) Field notes: the trainer made extensive notes related to the training inputs offered to the ETAs. These offered different lenses to view the vignettes described in the teacher narratives above. Further, field notes gathered from lesson observation and post-observation conferences helped identify critical areas that needed immediate attention and appropriate intervention. Thus the trainer is able to gauge the strengths and weaknesses in the lesson execution of the ETAs.

3) Cognitive information sheet (CIS): this tool documented the ETAs perceptions of how their learning from the training impacted their teaching and what they would like to explore further in their future teaching careers. The CIS consisted of two parts: Part 1 elicited information on the challenges the ETAs faced in specific areas of classroom teaching (e.g. teaching reading) before training is offered. Part 2 sought details about how the training helped to resolve the challenges described in Part 1. It also urged the ETAs to mention pedagogic areas that they would like to strengthen in the future. This helped probed into ETAs own perceptions of their strengths as well as weak points.

6.2 Data presentation and interpretation

The data collected for the study are presented and analyzed in the following sections. A detailed discussion of the impact of the training with respect to the eight modules – lesson planning, classroom management, vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing – is undertaken in terms of three aspects: a) the specific challenges faced by the ETAs in their classroom teaching b) the inputs (scaffolding) offered to help resolve the issues identified and c) the efficacy of the teaching solutions offered in addressing the issues. This tripartite approach coupled with the triangulation of the tools as presented earlier helped garner rich data thereby addressing the research questions in an in-depth manner.

6.3 Module-Wise Discussion

As stated above the following sections will discuss the impact of the task-based training programme vis-à-vis the eight modules. Throughout the training period, the ETAs brought to the discussion forum several challenges they faced. Each section will present one or two instances of the challenges, the inputs (solutions) offered and the implementation of the solutions.

Module 1: Teaching vocabulary

Instance 1

Challenge: How to present new words to the students?

Input: The ETAs are given the following task to find the solution to the issue.

Task:

Look at the list of words. Choose the best way to convey their meaning. Why it is the best way?

Words: disgusting, café, swimming, often, chase, frightened, crossroads, window sill, exploitation, stapler

Ways to convey meaning: explain the meaning (with examples); read out the dictionary definition; translate; draw a quick sketch on the board or show a flashcard or picture in a book; point to the object; tell a personal anecdote; get students to act it out; mime; bring the object to class to show; act out a short conversation.

Implementation: The ETAs experimented with ideas to convey word meanings to their students. They made flash cards for easily ‘showable’ words such as crossroads; used realia for words such as stapler, made board drawings with stick figures for words like swimming etc.

Discussion: The task above exposed the ETAs to a variety of ways to present new vocabulary in class. They understood that a given word can be presented in different ways and that a given way can be used to present different words. For instance, ETA 1 thought that the best way to present the word ‘window sill’ is to show a flashcard while ETA 2 felt that it can be presented most effectively pointing to the object i.e. to simply show the window sill in the classroom. They have also discussed the rationale behind their choices of words and the ways to present these. This exercise thus has widened their cognitive structures enabling them to make informed decisions. It is worth mentioning here that the trainer consciously chose not to suggest best solutions to the challenges faced by the ETAs simply because no such solutions exist. There is no one-size-fits- all for any critical moment in class. The purpose is not to offer readymade, instant solutions but to expose the ETAs to the various options available and provide them with sound theoretical principles that will enable them to choose the best way within their particular contexts.

Instance 2

Challenge: How to make sure that the students are actually learning new vocabulary and not just writing down the meanings?

Input: The ETAs are to given the following task to explore vocabulary learning

Task:

When the teacher teaches new words, she writes them on slips of paper and puts them in a bag in the classroom. When she has a few minutes at the end of the lesson, she goes to the bag and re-elicits some of the words from the learners. Sometimes she divides the class into groups and gives each group several words from the bag and gives the groups time to make up a story incorporating the given words. After hearing the stories, there is feedback and correction.

Questions:

- a) Convert this into a procedure for classroom activity. Tip: Use imperative sentences.
- (b) What are some of the advantages of this technique?

Implementation: The ETAs implemented the idea of the ‘word bag’. They devised tasks that made their learners practice the new words in engaging ways.

Discussion: The ETAs understood that children need to practice using the new words they have been taught several times before the words are internalized. The first question of the task helped them realize the importance of task procedure. They are able to visualize how this task can be conducted in class and this helped them in implementing it. The second question made them understand several aspects: the importance of contextualized vocabulary learning, need for designing engaging activities and role of teacher feedback and correction. ETAs have reported the success of the new tasks they designed, for example, how learners enjoyed using the words from the bag to talk about topics that interest them such as friendship, food, festivals and so on. The ETAs thus pushed their learners to explore vocabulary beyond the coursebook lessons. These tasks also offered practice for developing oral fluency.

Module 2: Teaching grammar

Instance 1

Challenge: How to teach grammar in a systematic way?

Input: The following task is used to demonstrate aspects of grammar teaching

Task:

Teacher prepares some sentences using the first conditional for warnings (e.g. If you touch the dog, it'll bite you!). She cuts each sentence in half and hands out these pieces to the students. Students have to read out their half and find the matching half amongst the other students. Note: this is a whole class activity where students are searching for their partner with the suitable sentence part.

*If you eat that, you'll be sick.
If you go out now, you'll get soaked.
If you steal my boyfriend, I'll never speak to you again.
If you don't leave, I'll call the police.
If you book a ticket now, you'll be lucky to get a seat.*

Questions

1. Is it a presentation/ practice/ production activity? Why?
2. Is the focus on form/ meaning/ use? Why?
3. What is the level of the learners? Why do you think so?
4. Is it a potentially 'good' or 'bad' activity? Why?
5. Think of one other language item that can be taught in this way.

Implementation: The knowledge gained about grammar teaching has helped the ETAs to focus on form, meaning and use of a given grammatical item. They designed activities that help children notice the form, understand the meaning and provide opportunities for using the grammar item in questions.

Discussion: This task is aimed at helping ETAs plan their grammar teaching in a systematic manner. It triggered meaningful discussion about the differences between presentation, practice and production activities. It demonstrated how practice activities can be designed blending form and meaning. ETAs debated the factors that make an activity potentially good or bad and provide a justification for their stand. The last question made them explored ways to adapt the task to teach other grammar items, for instance conjunctions (e.g. I was absent for school because I had fever. They were tired so they went to bed).

Instance 2

Challenge: How to make grammar learning fun?

Input: The task aims to show that grammar learning can be fun and implicit

Task:

The teacher gives each student a piece of paper with ten instructions. They all start with ‘Find someone who...’ and are followed by such things as: can swim, can speak three or more languages, can play a musical instrument. The learners move around the room asking each other questions, such as ‘Can you swim?’ If the answer is ‘Yes’ they write the name of the person on the piece of paper next to the appropriate prompt. They must try to collect as many different names as possible. After they have finished the teacher conducts feedback on what they found out and also draws attention to any mistakes she heard.

1 What language item does this example practice?

2 What other pieces of language can be practiced using the same activity with different prompts?

Implementation: The ETAs designed very interesting tasks to teach grammar with peer and trainer support. For instance, they asked their students to interview their peers to find out their favourite food and write its recipe using imperative sentences.

Discussion: The ETAs shared that they found grammar teaching extremely challenging and admitted that their own concepts were wobbly. Through activities such as the above the ETAs are helped with conceptual clarity about grammatical items. They also perceive the value of teaching grammar communicatively where knowledge of language is put to serve functional purposes. They have also noticed how grammar activities can be made game-like and can include the fun element, too. They learnt to adapt and supplement the grammar activities in the textbook. Thus, they invested time and efforts in making grammar accessible to the children.

Module 3: Developing listening

Instance 1

Challenge: How does one ‘teach’ listening?

Input: The task presents a classroom vignette of a listening lesson

Task:

Laura: I told the students they would hear the tape twice, but they found it quite difficult and hadn't really understood, so I ended up playing it three times.

Questions

Was Laura right to tell her students how many times they were going to listen?

Was she right to change her plan?

Implementation: The ETAs followed the strategies for and models of teaching listening discussed in the training sessions. They experienced a sense of satisfaction and achievement while designing lessons that worked for their students.

Discussion: The primary issue with developing listening skills was that the ETAs had no idea as to how to go about it. They thought that listening happens naturally and that it was not necessary to 'teach' it. But through discussions and readings, they realized the importance of teaching listening as a skill, especially, second language listening. The first question of the task emphasized the importance of preventing the anxiety that learners experience in a listening lesson caused by the lack of opportunity to go back to the text as many times as possible like in the case of reading. The second question underlines the idea that the teacher should be ready to modify her lesson plan depending on learner needs.

Instance 2

Challenge: Why do my students find listening lessons difficult?

Input: The task below is used to help the ETAs understand what makes listening difficult for students.

Task:

Here are some comments made by learners of English on why they find listening difficult. In each case try to think of a way the teacher could help the situation.

- 1 I worry more about listening than reading because you can't go back to check. Cinzia, Italy.
- 2 English people speak too fast and sometimes the words sound different from the way I learned them. Alejandra, Chile (studying in the UK).
- 3 My school is near the airport. Sometimes the noise of the planes stops me understanding. Nena, Athens.
- 4 I can understand my teacher but other people with different accents are really hard for me to understand. Li Na, China.
- 5 English people 'eat their words'. Maria, Madrid.

Implementation: Having become aware of the difficulties students face in listening, the ETAs devised ways to help their students cope with these problems. They reported back success stories where their students ‘cooperated’ with them but acknowledged that it was quite a challenge to ensure that the class stayed focused.

Discussion: This task was really helpful in bringing to the fore the difficulties that listening lessons cause to the students. The discussions were geared to identifying the problems and what teachers could do to help children in each case. One of the reasons why the ETAs found it rather hard to gauge the challenges that listening could throw for their learners may be that they were native speakers of English. For instance, it took them sometime to understand the statement English people ‘eat their words’. However, once they were convinced that listening needs to be taught as a skill and that it could be quite a hard skill for their learners to develop, they were more sympathetic in their attitude and more oriented towards designing listening lessons that worked for their students.

Module 4: Developing speaking

Instance 1

The challenge: is it okay to correct learner mistakes while they are speaking?

The input: this task aims to help ETAs understand how to design and organize fluency development activities.

Task:

The teacher sets up the following role play. There is a proposal to build a new chemical factory in a town. Some residents think this is good idea because there is currently high unemployment. Some residents think this is a bad idea because they are concerned about the risks of pollution. Each student is given a card with their role described. For example, there are two representatives from the company, concerned parents, a doctor, unemployed workers and so on. The students are given time to prepare what they want to say and then they perform the role play. The teacher listens and only becomes involved if communication breaks down. She later corrects.

Questions

1. What is the purpose of this activity?
2. What kind of support is provided to the students?
3. When and how much does the teacher correct?

Implementation: The ETAs devised tasks opinion gap activities and information gap activities to develop oral fluency. They refrained from correcting the errors while the learners were speaking but worked on these at a later point through accuracy-based activities.

Discussion: The ETAs noted the importance of pair and group work activities is in developing speaking skills. In a role play, the teacher should assign roles and spell out the responsibilities of the roles clearly. This would ensure successful task completion. Once the task is set up and is underway with the learners deeply involved in it, the teacher can remain in the periphery, observing and monitoring unobtrusively. A democratic classroom atmosphere where all learners are provided equal opportunity to participate in the learning activities is needed. In addition to the much needed and ever expected teacher correction, learners should be trained to accept peer and self correction.

Instance 2

The challenge: how to instill confidence in the student?

The input: discussion around what causes hesitation and apprehension in learners and how to help them overcome these

Task:

Read the fears of the learners and think of ways to alleviate these

- I do not know many words related to this topic.
- I do not have enough grammar to make correct sentences.
- My friends will laugh at me when I make mistakes
- My teacher will think that I am stupid if speak wrongly.
- I want to speak but fear overtakes me.

Implementation: The ETAs are able to understand why their students lack confidence. They impressed upon their learners that it is okay to make mistakes.

Discussion: The ETAs realized that in additions to limited language proficiency, fear of making mistakes and the subsequent anxiety about ridicule from peers were the major contributors to the lack of confidence of their learners. Therefore, they worked towards creating a positive classroom environment where learners are made to feel safe and are willing to take risks. The teacher needs to win the trust of her learners and create a bond among all the learners in class so that the affective

filter stays low and learners are able to participate and interact. If they know that the teacher will offer them help when necessary and that their friends will not make fun of them if they make mistakes, they will be willing to take risks and use the language they have available with them to participate in the speaking tasks.

Module 5: Developing reading

The challenge: How to adapt/use authentic materials?

The input: This task offers training in the use of authentic materials

Task:

Steven decides to use his classified advertisements in a lesson. He gives the learners a list of people who all want to buy specified things. The students must try to find what they need in the classified ads Steven has provided.

Later Alice, Steven's friend, borrows the ads for her lesson. However, before giving out the ads she asks students to think of the kind of things that may be advertised, e.g. electronic gadgets or household appliances. She then asks them if they have ever bought or sold anything in this way. She allows students to chat about this for a few minutes before completing the same task as Steven used.

Whose lesson is likely to be better and why?

Implementation: One of the ideas that enticed the ETAs from the training was the use of authentic materials. They used an interesting array of materials in class. However, they were not always successful since some materials did not appeal to the learners or were a little complex in terms of content as well as language.

Discussion: The task above provided a framework to the ETAs regarding maximizing the potential of the authentic materials for meaningful language learning. While Steven's lesson showed them how to engage learners through activities that are close to real life experiences, Alice's lesson demonstrated how learner interaction and hence language use can be enhanced. The ETAs noticed that personalizing learning the way Alice has done not only guarantees greater learner involvement with the tasks but also ensures meaningful learning. However, it must be mentioned that the ETAs needed more training in the selection and adaptation of the authentic materials which is understandable since they were truly novice teachers.

Module 6: Developing writing

The challenge: How to teach students to think critically when writing?

The input: this task aims to provide ideas regarding enhancing critical thinking skill of students

Task:

The learners work in groups of 3 to write an essay about censorship. They write on large pieces of paper, which are later displayed around the room. The learners then circulate, reading each other's work, and are invited to write comments on the essays – noting the bits they agree or disagree with. They can also highlight any bits of language that they think may be wrong (grammar mistakes, spellings problems and so on).

Implementation: The ETAs designed several tasks that enhanced the critical thinking skills of their students

Discussion: The ETAs considered writing as the most complex and difficult skill to acquire for their students. They also found it rather difficult to teach writing maybe because it demands cognitive and linguistic skills. The task above demonstrated to the ETAs how they can help learners support each other both with ideas as well as language. They will also understand that an issue can be viewed from multiple angles and that people perceive things differently. This helps develop critical thinking skills and expands the schema of the learners. The idea of peer editing is beneficial in the sense that it gives learners an opportunity to examine other students' work. It could make them more confidence about their own writing. The ETAs managed to design more tasks geared to the development of critical thinking skills.

Module 7: Lesson planning

Challenge: How to create a thorough lesson?

Input: This task is geared to helping the ETAs

Task:

Look at the different aspects of lesson planning presented in the table below. What questions will you ask yourself under each column?

Goals	Materials	Tasks	Student activity	Teacher activity	Interaction pattern	Anticipated problems	Possible solutions

Implementation: The ETAs are able to design lesson plans with specific learning goals but they need to hone their planning skills further

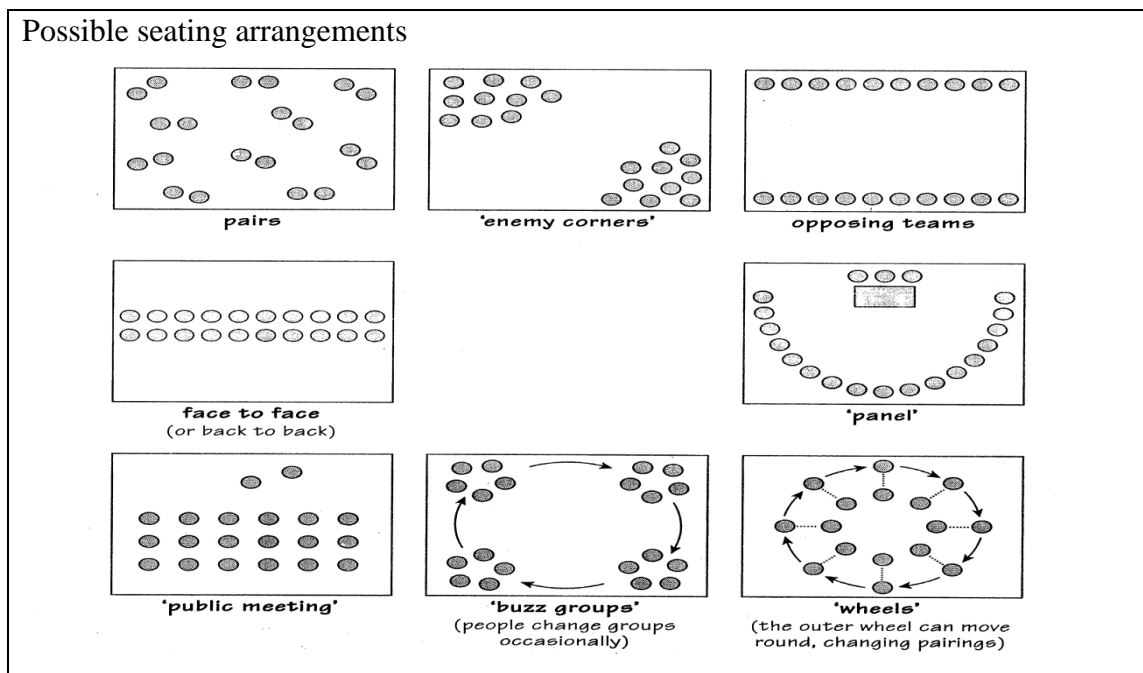
Discussion: An area that the ETAs needed most help with was creating wholesome lesson plans that are focused on achieving learning outcomes. The task above helped the ETAs understand the essential components of a lesson from multiple aspects such as learner needs, individual differences, suitability of materials, variety in task types, learner roles, teacher roles, problems that might disrupt the lesson and the possible solutions thereof. A variety of lesson planning ideas with different templates are discussed. Two important aspects of lesson planning attracted attention – lesson transitions and consolidation of learning. It must be mentioned here that the ETAs shared their disappointment when their lessons did not go as planned. They were comforted that this is the hallmark of classroom teaching and teachers are well within their right to modify/ deviate or digress from their plans as long as they have a rationale for altering their predetermined plan.

Module 8: Classroom management

Challenge: How to group students for a variety of tasks and activities?

Input: This task aims to familiarize the learners with different choices with regard to seating arrangement

Task:



Implementation: The ETAs experimented with many ideas regarding grouping the students. They realized that the grouping and related seating arrangements are determined by the nature of the task and the specific task goals.

Discussion: A suitable interaction pattern – individual, pair and group work, can enhance the rate of task success. The seating arrangement also makes a difference to the quality and quantity of interaction that is possible in a language classroom. The ETAs were very enthusiastic to experiment with seating arrangement options but they were constrained by the class size as well as their own apprehensions of losing class control. They also wanted to learn strategies to stabilize a class after a noisy activity and to tame mischievous students. Maintaining discipline, spreading attention evenly, using the resources profitably are some other classroom management issues that merited discussion in the training session.

7. Findings and Implications

The findings of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions addressed:

What challenges did the ETAs face in their everyday teaching?

As the data presented and interpreted above demonstrate, the challenges that the ETAs faced span a range of issues related to teaching vocabulary, grammar, developing LSRW and lesson planning and classroom management – all pertinent issues that form the core of classroom experience. The ETAs wanted to learn how to present new words and ensure that their learners actually learn the words taught. They needed inputs on teaching grammar in a systematic manner while also ensuring that grammar learning is fun for their students. Teaching listening through the ETAs off balance because they thought that listening occurs naturally. They were clueless about how to ‘teach’ listening and wanted to know that factors that make listening tough for their learners. The ETAs were unsure whether language errors could be corrected while learners were speaking. They were also keen on exploring strategies to enhance confidence of their learners. The use of authentic materials for developing reading, techniques for enhancing critical thinking in writing, putting together a reasonably workable lesson plan and ideas for suitable interaction patterns and seating arrangement to maximize task potential are other areas where the ETAs needed support.

What inputs (scaffolding) are offered to resolve the challenges?

As presented in the data interpretation section, inputs are offered through tasks and activities related to the issues identified in the first research question. The inputs were focused on providing subject matter knowledge (the ‘what’ i.e. the content) and developing pedagogic content knowledge (the ‘how’ i.e. delivery of the content). The tasks were selected and designed in such a way that they trigger deep engagement with the challenges the ETAs faced in their teaching with respect to vocabulary, grammar, LSRW and lesson planning and classroom management. The tasks promoted divergent thinking and generated rich discussions. Various options were considered for any given scenario throwing light on the tacit and complex process of teacher decision-making.

How did the inputs (scaffolding) help resolve the challenges?

Through the tasks and activities, the ETAs were pushed to understand the challenges from multiple perspectives. No ready-made solutions were provided to the ETAs rather, they were forced to find suitable solutions on their own and apply these to their specific classroom contexts. Often, perceived problems are different from real challenges; the trainer is able to help the trainees to tell them apart. This proved beneficial since the ETAs discovered the possible strengths and lacunae in the strategies they employed to resolve the challenges.

8. Limitations

- The training was limited to 30 hours since the ETAs were teaching full-time in the schools during the period of training. Therefore, it could focus on only eight pertinent issues related to classroom teaching – LSRW, grammar, vocabulary, and lesson planning and classroom management. Given a more elaborate training programme, the study could have included many more equally pertinent issues such as maximizing coursebooks, catering for individual learner differences and classroom-based evaluation to name a few.
- The study documents the teaching experiences of ETAs who taught in government schools in an urban setting. If they had taught in private schools or in a rural context, they may have brought in a different set of issues to the training programme which will then have yielded different results.
- The ETAs of the current study demonstrated a deep engagement with the inputs offered as part of the training. They were very eager to learn and consistently brought challenges that

emerged from their classroom teaching for discussion in the training sessions. If carried with a different set of trainees, the study may not reveal findings of this breadth and depth.

9. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the professional learning of two ETAs based on a task-based teacher training programme. The challenges they faced, the complex process of teacher decision-making, and the strategies they used to address challenges have been considered. It is suggested that task-based teacher education can trigger critical thinking among pre-service teachers. Spontaneous and unpremeditated decision-making is part of the fluid, dynamic reality of the language classroom. Through task-based teacher education, the decision-making capability of the trainee teachers can be developed, which helps them face the challenges that await them in their everyday classroom teaching.

Future research might consider the following: First, the construct of teacher cognition is an area that has merited research interest for a long time now, but given its importance, more studies can be expected to be undertaken to explore the role of teacher training on the formation of beliefs of pre-service teachers. Next, teacher development has an impact on student learning. It is possible to explore the impact of various strategies that the ETAs adopted in their teaching in relation to successful achievement of task outcomes. In addition, challenges faced by pre-service teachers teaching in rural settings and underprivileged contexts can be explored.

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