The Effect Of Task Based Learning On The Teaching Of Writing Skills Of Esl Learners

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ABSTRACT

Language is a means of imparting thoughts and ideas. The majority of the communicative activities befall either in the written or spoken form. However, the competence to communicate in written way is a noteworthy objective of ESL learners in the target language. Writing ability is the most credible method of communication through which thoughts and ideas are conveyed beyond time and space. Good composition expertise is rudimentary for academic achievement and it is obligatory for execution in different occupations. Learning to write in second language is supposed to be the most challenging and hard process. So developing ability to write is inevitable for ESL learners. The purpose of the study is to reconnoiter the "effectiveness of task-based learning (TBL) on the teaching of writing skills". To attain the goal and explore the research questions, survey method was adopted under descriptive research. The research was qualitative in nature. In data collection, a five Likert scale questionnaire was used in order to get the opinion of selected sample regarding the effect of task-based learning on the teaching of writing skills. It was found that students felt comfortable in task-based learning regarding their writing skills.

Keywords: Task Based Learning (TBL); Writing Skills; English Language; Teaching Methods; Descriptive Research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is putting speech in the form of letters. It is also collection and organization of ideas and experiences. To write fluently is regarded as one of the most difficult skills for all language users (Nunan, 1989, p. 37). As stated in Nunan (1989), "writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously" (as cited in Bell & Burnaby, 1984). Nunan (1989) adds that this involves control of the sentence content, structure, format, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation, whereas the writer must be able to organize information into cohesive and coherent text (as cited in Bell & Burnaby, 1984). The role of the teacher in developing

learner's writing skills is to design and interpret appropriate tasks, encourage learners to be innovative in writing, give them enough time and motivate them to better results. Furthermore, teachers should be flexible and sensitive, create comfortable atmosphere and take into consideration different levels and needs of their learners. Moreover students need to comprehend that whatever they are writing down on the paper can be erased, included, rebuilt, and reorganized and so on. Learners may likewise retort adversely to rework on a similar material. Educators can help them compose tasks more efficiently by motivating them to look at their own specific inventive procedures. It indicates that students experience practice stage, where they need to revise target tasks through several exercises. Task-based learning offers the divergent option to the educator in the task based lesson. The study is designed to analyses, to what extent task based learning is helpful in learning all aspects of writing, on the part of students and the impact of this strategy on the teaching of writing skills. The objectives of the study are: to explore the effectiveness of the task-based teaching to develop writing skills; to explore that the proficiency in writing skills can be developed by giving opportunities to students, of meaningful self-expression; to explore that transactional writing skills can be learnt through task-based learning; to check reliability of the task based method to teach writing skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Task-based learning method was basically proposed by N Prabhu (1987) in Banglore, southern India. The basic concept behind this belief was that understudies learning can be improved more proficiently when they have engaged in task-based learning. In this method, student minds are involved in the tasks rather than in the language they are using (N. Prabhu, 1987). Notion behind its association is the lack of practice in the target language and different restrictions of the traditional teaching techniques in light of structural approach taking after PPP (presentation, practice, production) model. The PPP approach depends on behaviourist school of learning where pupils are given chunks of language concentrating on the conceptual linguistic principals and repetition of the target language structures (Ellis, 2003; Long & Crookes, 1993). In task-based learning the learners begin with the assignment, subsequent to finishing the assignment the instructor focuses the student's attention towards the usage of language, making amendments and corrections to the learner's performance. According to Jane Willis (1996) "tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome". Task-based learning is being used consciously or unconsciously in teaching system by many teachers but it is astonishing to know that they are unacquainted with the fact that they are using a task-based approach in many aspects of their teaching. The underlying principle of task-based learning is to do a task. Some experts adopt task-based instructions by keeping in view a meaning-focused approach that will reflect daily life usage of language. The target language should be transferable to daily life activities and can be done by undertaking some of these activities inside the classroom (Brown et al. 1989). Other practitioners like Prabhu (1987), adopted tasks as teaching technique since they consider the notion that task-based interaction motivates natural acquisition practices and are less concerned with everyday life situations. Most experts would agree that task based guideline lies with respect to three essential premises, despite the fact that not all specialists give approach significance to each of the three premises.

Those premises are:

(1) Language learning cannot continue in traditional manner but rather is a mindboggling natural process (Krashen, 1985). In other words, instructing a foreign language does not prompt to the quick authority of that language.

(2) "Language form is best learned when the learners' attention is on meaning" (Prabhu 1982). If the students focus on form while learning a language then they would automatically learn form by their subconscious. This implies learners require a lot of conceivable information, i.e. acquaintance with a foreign language being applied in a variety of contexts, both spoken and composed.

(3) Learners require opportunities to utilize the objective language for a real purpose in order to learn it by keeping in mind the end goal. This is occasionally stated as "Output Hypothesis". Output here is correlated in the perspective of communication, many researchers considered it essential for acquisition as it offers chances for both negotiation and meaning (Krashen, 1985).

2.1. Definition of Task-Based Learning:

Many definitions are specified by the advocates of task-based learning. Some of them are given below. According to Krashen (1985), "A task is a piece of work which people do for themselves or for some other person". Whereas Prabhu (1987) describes task-based learning as, "A task is an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process"

2.2. A Framework for Task-Based Learning:

Slattery & Willis (2001) have specified a three step procedure:

- Pre-task – an overview to the task and topic.

- Task cycle - Task preparation and report

- Language focus - Investigation and exercise.

According to Ellis (2003) the Pre-task phase is designed to "prepare students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition" (p. 244). He proposes to provide learners with its structure, requirements and possible outcomes so that they are able to see its "purpose and utility" (p.244). Moreover, he offers four ways of going through the Pre-task phase: "Performing a similar task; providing a model; Non-task preparation activities; Strategic planning"(p. 245- 248)

   After defining the topic first, J. Willis (1996) proposes "to help the students recall and activate [useful] words and phrases" (p.42) and to introduce some key expressions that will perhaps be unknown to students. For this purpose, she recommends to select such activities that "involve all learners, give them relevant exposure and, above all, create an interest in doing a task on this topic" (p.43). She offers several examples:
- Classifying words and phrases
- Odd one out
- Matching words to pictures
- Memory challenge
- Brainstorming and mind maps
- Thinking of questions to ask

- Teacher recounting a similar experience (pp. 43-44)

Furthermore, J. Willis (1996) suggests adding the lesson with a recording of fluent target language speakers completing the task. Not only will that provide learners with more valuable input as such, but also as D. Willis (2007) specifies "In listening they [learners] may "mine" the recordings for appropriate language forms" (p. 4). In some cases, it can be placed within the priming phase. However, when performing closed types of activities, such recording needs to be played only after the task has been completed by learners themselves.

Before students may advance to commencing the task itself, they need to obtain clear instructions and to know what is expected from them. Many teachers will agree with J. Willis (1996) that it is often problematic to make students talk. The author recommends that "the more specific the goal, and hence the instructions, the more likely students are to feel secure about doing the task" (p.45).

3.3.2 Task Cycle: Stage 1 - Task

The task cycle consists of three parts .In the first part (task), students perform the particular task, usually in groups or pairs. J. Willis (1996) points out that this stage provides students with a unique opportunity to use all the language they have acquired so far.

As D. Willis (2007) explains, the students are "too preoccupied with the discussion to worry too much about how to express their ideas" (p. 3) when completing the task. The learners are focused on meaning rather than form and use the target language to informally exchange information. Therefore, the language is used to meet its real purpose – communication. Moreover, the arrangement of small groups provides safe environment. J. Willis (1996) believes that these are ideal conditions for students to develop both fluency in speaking and valuable communicative strategies.

2.2.1. The Pre-task Phase:

In this phase, the teacher prepares the students to do a task. First of all the teacher try to make the students acquainted with the topic. The teacher may provide correlated lexical items. The supplementary input might be delivered to the students in the form of authentic text or recording of someone similar to the task.

2.2.2. The Task Cycle:

The task cycle can be separated into three phases.

- Task- in this phase the students are assigned a task.

- Planning- in this phase the pupils try to prepare a report of what they have done in the task.

- Report- at report stage, the reports of what the understudies did in the assignments are displayed in the class and results looked at.

Teacher's role is to monitor and encourage all efforts of students during the task by communication without correcting them.

2.2.3. Language Focus:

In this stage, the language is focused on analysis and practice. While analyzing students scrutinize the recording or content for new lexical things or structures they need to accomplish a task.

2.3. Components of a Task:

Tasks have certain kind of input. It can be verbal or nonverbal shadowed by an activity which is resulting in the input. Tasks also have goals and roles for both instructors and students. Nunan (1989) has noted some components of the task. (Refer Fig. 1) A task may be noticed as a part of meaning focused work, involves the student in comprehension, production and interaction in the target language. Prior designing a task, teachers must keep in view these points.

• The target of the task needs to be specified obviously.

• The task should be according to student's level.

• The task need to set up the learners with the capability to apply classroom learning in innovative conditions.

• Tasks should be stimulating and appealing for pupils.

• The instructors and students roles should be stated plainly. • Through the task, students should be stimulated to convey the sense.

• There should be diversity and flexibility in the tasks.(Nunan, 1989)

2.4. Theoretical Background on Task-Based Writing:

Task-based writing is closely linked to a constructivist view of language that learning requires the learners to figure an individual understanding of exercise by choosing and converting material by which they may build hypotheses and make conclusions (Wang, 2011). The constructivists mainly focus on the role of student's enthusiasm, intellectual abilities and self-sufficiency, which are major assumptions in task-based language teaching (Robinson, 2011; Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2009; Bygate et al., 2001). Learning is an active forming method involving diverse levels of an acquaintance at the same time. Each person has his/her own unique style of judging qualities and imperfections of language (Dornyei, 2005). In addition, language learning is not a confined action; rather it is as a social movement, a nonstop generative process connected in the social-verbal contact of a user. Words accomplish a high social polish and radiance by the result of responses and reactions with respect to a social audience (Warschauer, 1996).

2.5. Goals for the Advanced Writing Course:

To develop a writing course to advance students writing skills such goals must be settled that fulfil students writing needs.

• Students must give the chance to choose the topic of their own choice so that they can do their work with interest and passion.

• The educator must urge understudies to compose for a more extensive group of audience

• Learners must be encouraged to share their writing with their fellows.

2.6. The role of the Teacher instructional Materials

In the task based learning teacher has a very important responsibility (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The teacher must choose and edit tasks prudently in order to achieve task objectives (Willis, 1996). 2.8. The

role of the Learner: In task-based learning classroom learners role is dominant and active. It can be specified as: Group Member; Observer; Risk-taker; Moderniser (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Instructional resources perform a vigorous role in task-based learning. Teachers must select materials carefully according to their mental abilities and language needs. It leads toward effective learning. So it must not be unnoticed.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in order to find out whether task-based learning plays an important role in the enhancement and judgment of the students writing skills. It also analyses the advantages and disadvantages of task-based method. To answer the research objectives, the researcher has selected 50 respondents from 5 departments of a college, through random sampling under descriptive research method. The survey questionnaire is used as the data collecting tool for this research work. It includes statements that categories advantages, disadvantages, importance, and effectiveness of using the task based method in the teaching of writing skills. The Likert format is used in the questions. The choices stand for the extent of agreement of every respondent. Creswell (1994) specified that the descriptive method of research is to collect evidence related to the current situation.

The study describes the advantages and disadvantages of task-based learning by knowing the attitude of respondents towards task-based learning. The researcher has provided the guidance to the respondents while filling questionnaires. The questionnaires were filled with the total willingness and permission of the respondents. The scale beneath is used to understand the total responses of all the respondents for each survey question. The data collected through questionnaire was figured for the attainment of the percentage of answers.

4. DATA ANALYSIS The results and interpretation of the statements are given as following:

Task-based learning motivate learner's involvement in learning writing process. (Refer Table 4.1 and Graph 4.1)

TABLE 4.1	
Rating scale	**percentage**
Strongly agree	24%
Agree	46%
Neutral	16%
Strongly disagree	4%
Disagree	10%
	100%
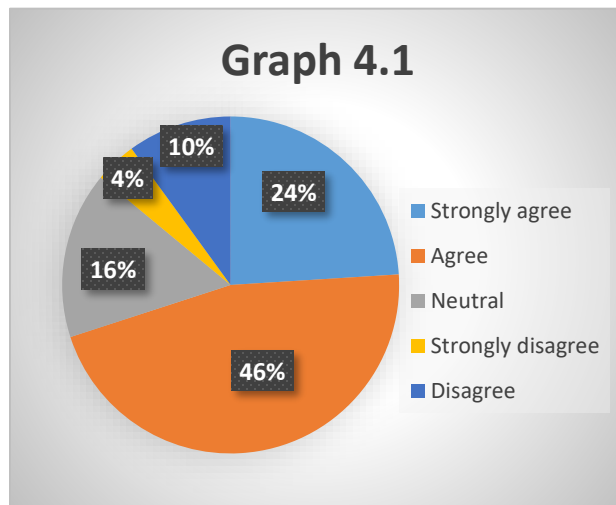
In the first statement, 70% students approved that task-based learning motivates learner's involvement in the learning process and 14% disapproved the statement and 16 remained neutral. **Task-based learning provides the chance to the learners to share their experiences while writing. (Refer Table 4.2 and Graph 4.2)**

TABLE 4.2	
Rating scale	**percentage**
Strongly agree	22%
Agree	44%
Neutral	20%
Strongly disagree	6%
Disagree	8%
	100%

Graph 4.2
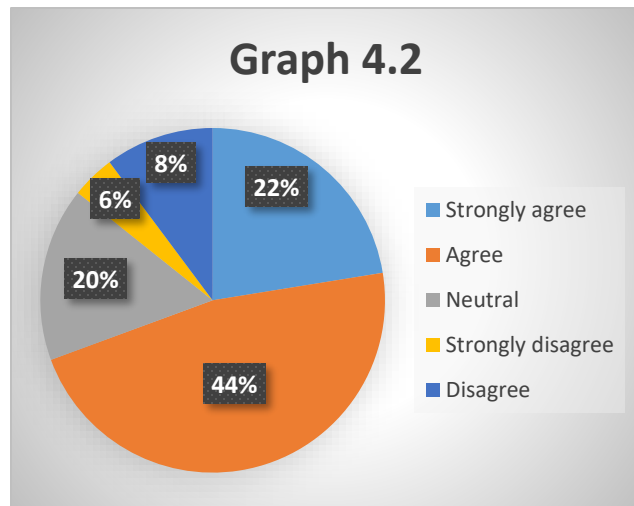
The above table shows that 22% responded strongly agrees and 44% agree that students can share their experiences while writing task based learning and 4% responded negatively.

**Tasks are helpful in improving students existing knowledge while writing. (Refer Table 4.3 and Graph 4.3)**

TABLE 4.3	
Rating scale	**percentage**
Strongly agree	14%
Agree	38%
Neutral	32%
Strongly disagree	6%
Disagree	10%
	100%

Graph 4.3
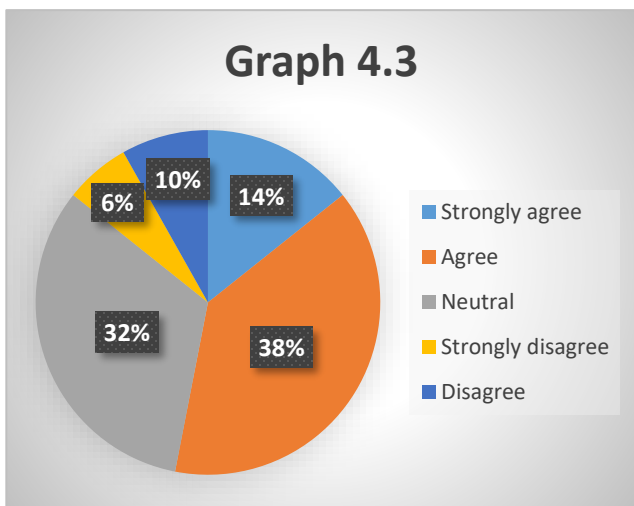
In the third statement, 38% students agreed and 14% students strongly agree that task based learning enhances the existing knowledge of students and 32% remained neutral.

**Task-based learning helps the students to review their performance. (Refer Table 4.4 and Graph 4.4)**

TABLE 4.4	
Rating scale	**percentage**
Strongly agree	16%
Agree	38%
Neutral	36%
Strongly disagree	4%
Disagree	6%
	100%

Graph 4.4
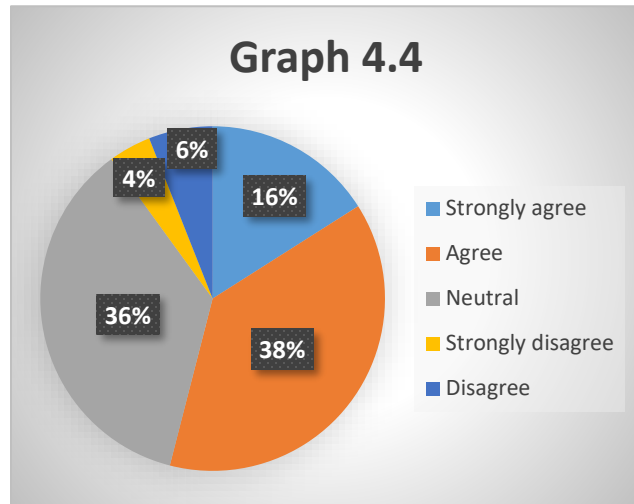
In fourth statement, 54% students were satisfied that task-based learning helps the students to review their performance and 10% were not satisfied.

The total percentage was 100% Task-based learning make the student to correct their mistakes whenever they want. (Refer Table 4.5 and Graph 4.5)
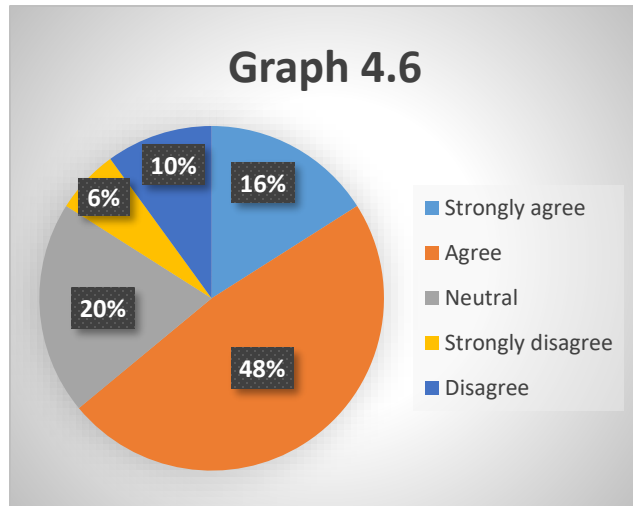
TABLE 4.5	
Rating scale	**percentage**
Strongly agree	40%
Agree	32%
Neutral	12%
Strongly disagree	6%
Disagree	10%
	100%

Graph 4.5
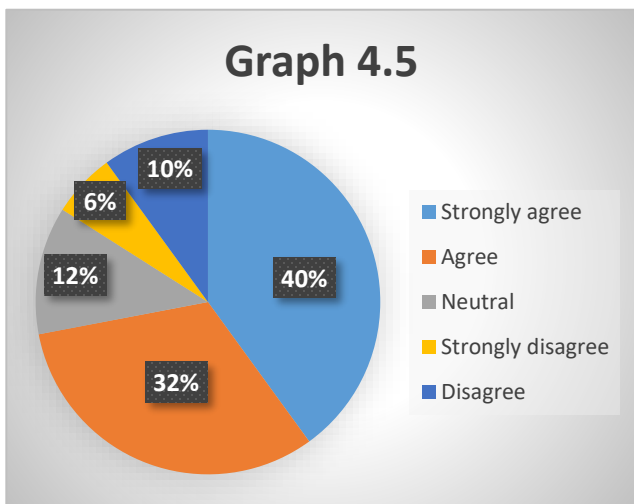
The above shows that 10% students disagree, 6% strongly disagree that task-based learning provides the collaborative learning environment to correct their mistakes while 72% agreed.

**Table 4.6: Task-based learning improves the vocabulary of the students. (Refer Table 4.6 and Graph 4.6)**

TABLE 4.6	
Rat ing scale	percentage
Strongly agree	16%
Agree	48%
Neutral	20%
Strongly disagree	6%
Disagree	10%
	100%

Graph 4.6

 Above table and graph shows that 64% respondents agreed and 16% disagreed that task-based learning helps to improve the vocabulary of the students.

The focus of task-based learning is mostly on grammatical aspects. (Refer Table 4.7 and Graph 4.7)

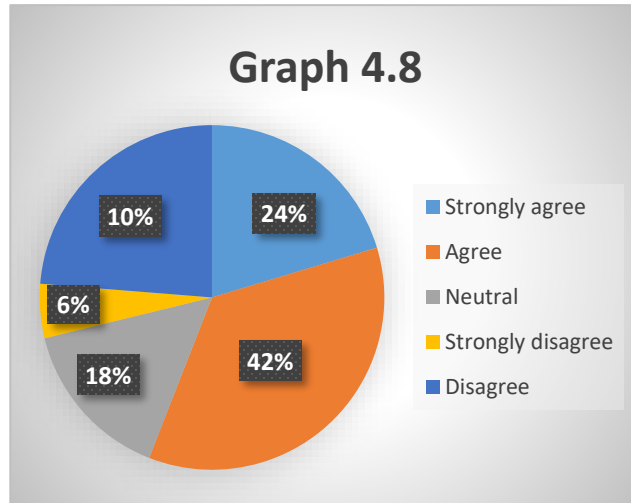| TABLE 4.7	
Rating scale	percentage
Strongly agree	8%
Agree	40%
Neutral	26%
Strongly disagree	8%
Disagree	18%
	100%

Graph 4.7
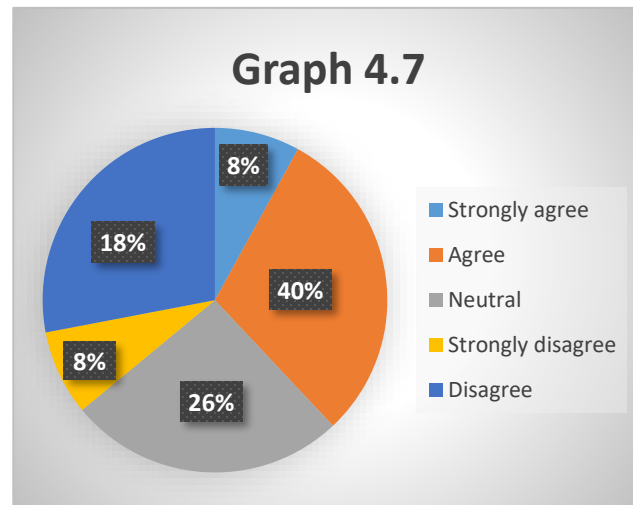
In seventh statement 48% students responded yes that task-based learning helps to improve their syntactic knowledge while 26% students responded no to the statement.

Task-based learning increases students' interest in writing skills. (Refer Table 4.8 and Graph 4.8)

TABLE 4.8	
Rating scale	percentage

|	
Strongly agree	24%
Agree	42%
Neutral	18%
Strongly disagree	6%
Disagree	10%
	100%

Graph 4.8

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree

In the eighth statement, 66% students have agreed that task-based learning increases student's interest in writing while 16% disagreed.

Task-based learning makes the writing skills more efficient. (Refer Table 4.9 and Graph 4.9)

TABLE 4.9	
Rating scale	**percentage**
Strongly agree	24%
Agree	40%
Neutral	20%
Strongly disagree	6%
Disagree	10%
	100%

Graph 4.9

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
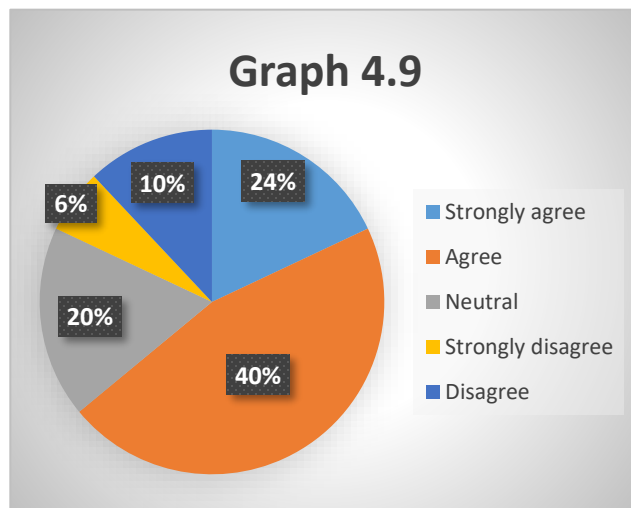
In this statement, 64% of students were agreed that task-based learning makes writing skills more efficient while 16% disagreed

In task-based learning writing is given more importance. (Refer Table 4.10 and Graph 4.10)

TABLE 4.10	
Rating scale	**percentage**
Strongly agree	20%
Agree	46%
Neutral	22%
Strongly disagree	4%
Disagree	8%
	100%
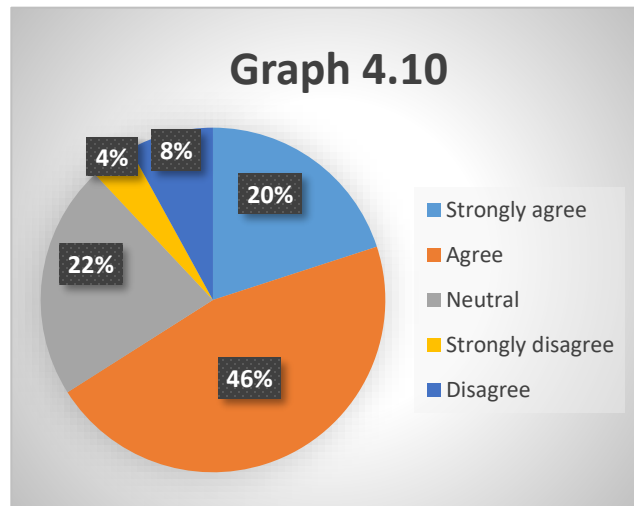
Graph 4.10

In tenth statement, 66% of students approved that in task-based learning writing is given more importance while 12% disapproved the statement.

In the tenth statement, 66% students have agreed that task-based learning increases student's interest in writing while 16% disagreed. Task-based learning makes the writing skills more efficient. (Refer Table 4.9 and Graph 4.9) In twelfth statement, 64% of students were agreed that task-based learning makes writing skills more efficient while 18% disagreed. In task-based learning writing is given more importance. (Refer Table 4.10 and Graph 4.10) In tenth statement, 66% of students approved that in task-based learning writing is given more importance while 12% disapproved the statement.

5. FINDINGS

The main findings may be summarized as under:

• 76% agreed that task-based learning improves confidence in writing, 65% said that writing tasks lead towards accuracy, enhances self-learning, maintains learner's interest in writing.

• 70% of the respondents agreed that task based learning improves learner's involvement, sharing their experiences and existing knowledge, and their syntactic knowledge.

• 66% showed their agreement that task based method helps in collaborative learning, making corrections, and develops thinking process.

• 65% respondents agreed that task-based learning maintains interest in writing, leads towards accuracy and enhances self-learning.

• 63% of the respondents agreed that tasks put attention toward writing.

• 59% showed agreement that task-based learning exposes new language to the students, they can check spelling, use accurate syntax, enhances motivation level and students produces the correct text, use extracurricular text and relevant vocabulary.

• 54% of respondents responded yes task based learning provides the formal context of language. • 53% responded yes that task-based learning provides relax environment.

• 50% responded positively that written tasks help to use correct punctuation.

• 43% showed their agreement that tasks focus on grammatical accuracy.

6. CONCLUSION

Considering the information based on the analysis done through the questionnaire some factors which have currently been pointed out by the students regarding the impact of task- based learning on the teaching of writing skills are as follows.

• From the data analysis, it is revealed that students feel comfortable therefore learn better in task-based learning classroom for their writing skills.

• Teachers focus mainly on the result rather than cultivating productive skills in students.

• Students feel that writing skills can be learnt and polished through task-based learning.

• While engaging in task-based learning students feel that they can learn all aspects of writing at the advanced level.

• The rules or vocabulary learnt through task-based learning is well applicable in real life situations.

• Task-based learning involves every individual in writing tasks so it helps to build up confidence in students.

• Writing tasks demands accuracy so leads towards learning writing at the advanced level.

7. DISCUSSION

As it was found that 65% agreed that writing tasks leads towards accuracy, enhances self-learning, maintains interest in writing. According to Prabhu (1987), students learning may improve more effectively when they have engaged in the task based method. Most of the students think task based learning is helpful in learning all aspects of writing skills because by completing the tasks they can analyses their writing skills but rest of them think it is just wastage of time. The respondents agreed that task-based learning improves learners involvement sharing their experiences and existing knowledge and their syntactic knowledge. The impact of this strategy on the teaching of writing skills is very positive. Written expressions in the target language are learnt more effectively. Some students also get confused while sharing their expressions in target language because of weak grammar. In my findings, respondents agreed that task based learning maintains interest in writing, leads towards accuracy and enhances self-learning. Krashen (1985) concluded that students want opportunities in order to use the target language in everyday life. It is necessary for acquisition because it offers prospects for comprehension of meaning. While engaging in task-based learning students feel that they can learn all aspects of writing. It's a good chance to make use of target language for negotiation purpose but some respondents do not agree. They

think in writing tasks mostly student only utilize the knowledge they already have. It does not bring something extra to their existing knowledge.

As tasks focus on grammatical accuracy, Jane Willis (1996) also discussed that after completing the task the teacher focuses the student's attention to the language used, making corrections and adjustments to the student's performance. And task-based learning provides a formal context of language. Most of the students think that teachers assets learners to write more successfully by providing them feedback in order to inspect their inventive processes. Some student's views are different. They think teachers focus mainly on the result rather than cultivating productive skills in students.

From the data analysis and various research papers, it is revealed that students feel comfortable therefore learn better in task based learning classroom for their writing skills. Task-based learning involves every individual in writing tasks so it helps to build up confidence in students. Writing tasks demands accuracy so leads towards learning writing at the advanced level.

However, the results in the current study may not be sufficient to provide in-depth insights into student's involvement in task-based learning. The researchers have shown study on only developing writing skills through Task based Learning at only one public sector university of Pakistan. To this end, further research in both quantitate and qualitative can be conducted on effectiveness of task-based learning by keeping in view four communicative skills i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills at secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary levels in Pakistan with large sample of participants.

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