

IMPLEMENTING TASK-BASED LEARNING IN PRIMARY LEVEL HINDI TEACHING IN MAURITIUS

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Abstract

Mauritius has an extraordinarily rich history reflecting its growth, from its discovery to its social, cultural and economic development. The island witnessed different periods of colonization; each colonization leaving a unique socio-economic and cultural tag. As a matter of fact, Mauritius grew into a flourishing, democratic and globally recognized Republic. The Education System of Mauritius deepened with the French and British Colonization, both leaving a lifelong impact on the linguistic, administrative and pedagogical approaches established. Alongside Mathematics, English, French, History and Geography, and Science, Asian Language Teaching (Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Marathi, Telugu, Modern Chinese, Arabic) plays a vital role in the Education System of the Island. This research paper shall, therefore, focus on the Teaching and Learning of Hindi in Government Primary Schools with emphasis on implementing Task-Based Learning.

Key words

Education System of Mauritius, Primary Level Education, Hindi Language Teaching, Task-Based Learning

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Introduction:

The Education System of Mauritius has been a core factor pre-independence and expanded even more post-independence. It is underlined that pre-independence Mauritius (during the British Colony) has faced numerous campaigns and movements in order to promote the Teaching of Hindi and other Asian Languages. With the establishment of Arya Sabha Mauritius and Hindi Pracharini Sabha, and the sacrifices and struggles of eminent personalities, such as Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, Bicondylar Brothers, Somduth Bhuckory, Dr. Bhardwaj and his wife, and many more, Hindi has been able to touch heights in such an Education System which focuses intensely on academic subjects. As of now (year 2025), Asian Languages are taught as a 'Matière Core Optionelle' in the Mauritian Education System and are also assessed for Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) Examinations structured by the Mauritius Education Syndicate.

Education in Mauritius

Education in Mauritius has acted as a key role in shaping the island's path to independence. The country's educational journey all started from Missionary Schools to Government Schools reflecting a wider socio-political wave that demarcated the Mauritian society. It is believed that Education in Mauritius was laid by Christian Missionaries in the early nineteenth. After the abolition of slavery in the year 1835, Education was seen as a means to civilize and educate the population. While being segregated to certain races, these institutions promoted basic literacy, religious teachings and moral values.

Later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Colonial Government realized the need for and importance of a more structured education system in the Island which marked the transition from Missionary to Public Schools. It was crucial to educate the population for economic growth. As a result, Government Schools started to function with a more inclusive approach which provided Secular Education to a broader range around the Island. The Mauritian Education system proved itself with the 1944 Education Ordinance which aimed to provide free Education to all the children.

Education in Mauritius became more accessible and less restrictive to religious communities by the mid-twentieth century. By the 1950s and 1960s, Education became one of the critical elements in the economic and socio-cultural struggle of the Island. Post-independence (after March 1968), Education remained a keystone of national development. To increase literacy, free education was then provided at the primary and Secondary Level, and more access was given to Tertiary Education.

Needless to say, over the years, and post Covid-19, the Education System of Mauritius has adapted to numerous modern changes; Information Technology, Artificial Intelligence, etc. Additionally, Mauritius being a ‘polyglot island’ has always promoted multilingualism in classrooms alongside cultural awareness.

Primary Education in Mauritius

Maturana and Davila (2006: 32) defined education as an artificial way of accomplishing something that ought to happen naturally within families and societies. Primary Education in Mauritius officially begins at the age of six and caters to learners till the age of eleven. It is to be noted that before entering the Primary Education, learners aged three to four years complete a two-year foundation at the Pre-Primary Level, private or public depending on the choice of the Parents. As per the Constitution, Primary Education in Mauritius is compulsory. This includes six continuous years of acquiring knowledge in different subjects – Mathematics; English; French; Social, Scientific, and Environmental Education; History and Geography; Science; Asian Language; ICT, Visual Arts, Music, Physical Education, and developing skills and moral values. At the end of the sixth year, learners sit for the Primary School Achievement Certificate which then demarcates them and allocates them to different Secondary Schools (according to their performance and region).

Among the subjects taught at the Primary Level, Hindi falls under the subjects named as ‘Matière Core Optionelle’ – A subject which forms part of the Core ones but is still optional for the Parents and Learners to choose. As per facts and circumstances, the Hindi Language has been through a lot of struggles to reach its heights in the Education System of Mauritius. Hindi and other Asian Languages have been propagated by Mahatma Gandhi and Manilal Doctor after their visit to the island in 1901 and 1907 respectively. Mahatma Gandhi had then realized that it is this language that can save many (Indian Labourers) from poverty. He had then requested Manilal Doctor, a barrister by profession, to reach the Island and start educating the population.

However, it should not be forgotten that much before their arrival, the Arya Sabha and the Hindi Pracharini Sabha had already started the propagation of Hindi Language and Indian Culture through social gatherings and weekly ‘baithkas’. ‘Baithkas’ were opened to one and all. After the arrival of Manilal Doctor, Dr. Bhardwaj and his wife, and many others, Hindi started flourishing, and people started showing interest in learning the Language. This later increased literacy across the Island. As at now (by 2025), Hindi has become one of the Asian Languages most-understood over the island after our mother-tongue Mauritian-Creole, English and French.

Unfortunately, Hindi is losing its value in the Mauritian society with time and ‘modernization’. Despite the effort of the Government and Associations like the Hindi Speaking Union, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Hindi Pracharini Sabha, and World Hindi Secretariat, it has been noticed that learners at Primary Level are gradually decreasing. Reasons when asked; too difficult, have to focus on academic subjects, there is no one to help at home etc.

Task-Based Learning in Primary Level Hindi Language Teaching in Mauritius

Previously, Traditional Methods were adopted in Primary School Classrooms to teach various subjects including Hindi. Traditional Teaching Methods were then termed as Teacher-Centered Method of teaching – teaching was more based on direct instructions by the Teacher, the latter being the main source of Information to Learners. (Tularam & Machisella, 2018) Traditional Teaching Methods also involved rote-learning as a way for Learners to remember lessons.

In contrast, Task-Based Learning (TBL) is a Learner-Centered Method of Teaching. TBL focuses more on learners’ creativity, productivity and ability to do any activity on their own. TBL also refers to the 21st Century Skills – the 4Cs (Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and Critical Thinking), and also a short interactive project that results to a finished product. Long (1985) defined TBL as things we do in our daily life; Willis (1996) said that Task-Based Learning is a goal-oriented activity that leads to a result; Ellis (2003) defined TBL as a completed work plan that is ready to be assessed. (Corwin, 2022)

Corwin (2022) emphasizes that Task-Based Learning is an approach to teaching that was previously used by second and foreign-language educators; originating from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) – a language teacher methodology developed in the 1970s. As a matter of fact, it can be deduced that TBL is not a new approach and it was originally adopted by Language Teachers to make their classrooms much more Student-Centered and communicative long ago. In the realm of Education, Task-Based Learning is also referred to as Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI).

TBL incorporates the following stages: Pre-Task, Task, Plan, Report/Present and Feedback. ‘Pre-Task’ refers to the teacher introducing a topic and giving learners clear instructions on what they will be doing – providing them a clear understanding of what is being expected at the end. ‘Pre-Task’ therefore includes brainstorming and questioning. ‘Task’ refers to the learners being ready to carry out the activity. During this process, learners are provided with materials and are assigned to groups. The teacher acts as a facilitator by monitoring learners as and when required. ‘Plan’ – learners start working to present their product. As the product is ready the learners

present their findings to the class. This is referred to as ‘Report/Present’. In this process, learners are also questioned by their classmates and teachers. At the end, learners are given constructive ‘Feedback’. (Corwin, 2022)

Teaching Language, especially a second or foreign language, in a multilingual country is not merely about the teaching process. It is most importantly about helping learners to develop themselves as individuals who can express themselves in another language apart from their mother tongue. As a matter of fact, TBLT is defined as the complete use of tasks while conducting language classes. According to research conducted by Dorathy and Mahalakshmi (2016: 1822), TBLT was first introduced by Prabhu (1987) in his Bangalore Project in which he had focused mainly on communication through tasks rather than explicit grammar teaching.

It is to be stated that Hindi is now not only the ‘Rajbhasha’ of Bharat but as per Ethnologue (2025), Hindi Language has reached the third place in the world with about 609.5 million speakers. (Galan 2025)

Hindi which was once considered as a language that would bring all Indians together is also now considered as a vital language in communication and in the world of Trade. Thus, using TBLT rather than Traditional Teaching Methods as a means to teach Hindi at the primary level in a country like Mauritius proves to be significant.

Since Hindi has become one of the most spoken languages of the world, it has become important to focus on the different ways of teaching the language, especially at the basic level, i.e. Primary School. TBLT eventually brings out diverse cognitive undertakings that learners need to perform to function practically. As mentioned above, when learners are given a specific task related to language to conduct in class or at home, certain goals are set to be met. For instance, one of the goals can be proper sentence construction in Hindi or the use of correct vocabulary according to situations. Notably, Task-Based Language Learning can be directly connected to Vygotsky’s constructivist approach – Learning and cognitive development happen through interactions and cultural tools. It can also be added that it is through TBLT or exposure to meaningful situations that learners can acquire proper foreign language.

Below are few characteristics of TBLT as per the constructivist approach (SZABÓ & CSÉPES, 2022: 407) :

1. Task-Based Language Teaching allows students to ask questions and discuss their problems in class, both with their teacher and peer group.
2. Secondly, the use of materials, creativity and activity-based resources would encourage learners to develop individual thinking skills; thus, improving their creativity and critical thinking skills.

3. The teacher acts as a mediator between the learner and the syllabus, thus interacting positively with both sides.
4. Activity-based classes allow the use of different and alternative assessments in classrooms – student-self assessment, peer assessment, etc.
5. Task-Based Language Teaching promotes both individual and teamwork.

Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching does not only refer to speaking tasks. Listening to some kind of information, and deriving a conclusion, for example, can also form part of TBLT. Additionally, reading aloud something and understanding what is being read is also a Task in a language classroom. Teachers should definitely not think that giving a Learner a ‘fill in the blank’ exercise is a task in a language classroom. That is actually a form-focused exercise rather than a task. On the contrary, a Task is about understanding and producing full-fledged results of what has been instructed or taught in the class.

Moreover, Teachers should not think that Learners can be given tasks to attempt only after having gained basic knowledge of a specific Language. TBLT is such an approach that should be implemented on the very first day of the lesson. As this generation of Mauritians is not fully exposed to Hindi due to some above-mentioned reasons, Learners should be given numerous listening and reading tasks from Grade one to be able to gain proficiency in Hindi. Thus, Learners would develop their grammar and vocabulary more as they have already built in an implicit language base since the very first class. In a Mauritian context, Hindi can be taught through TBLT by allowing Learners to craft something based on simple and clear instructions by the Teacher; by learning a new sport even in a language classroom, etc.

According to the Hindi syllabus of the Mauritian Education System, and the books prepared by language experts of the Country, Learners are given a text which they listen to and read and afterwards answer questions regarding it. However, in TBLT, questions are provided before the reading process. Thus, learners listen and read the text purposely to attempt the questions given. In this phase, learners are more excited to read or listen to a particular text or topic based on their prior knowledge gained through the questions given beforehand. Students are then given time to answer the questions which are later discussed in the class. In such cases, Teachers can challenge the Learners for in-depth interactions and arguments regarding a particular topic. This would definitely develop the interest of the Learner as the Teacher will get the opportunity to bring different engaging topics into the classroom.

As a result, TBLT would build real communicative competence in Learners rather than rote knowledge. Meaningful tasks will allow Learners to use Hindi to

achieve real goals rather than only memorizing and sitting for examinations. This would beyond doubt develop fluency and confidence in Learners.

Additionally, as we live on a multi-cultural island, tasks can be designed based on the different cultures and festivals celebrated throughout the year. This would allow Learners to delve into several cultures and festivals apart from the ones they celebrate at home. It is to be noted that the existing Primary School Hindi Syllabus gives space for such culturally rooted activities.

Practical Recommendations

1. Upgrade and Align Hindi Syllabus and Objectives

The Hindi books designed for Grades one to Grade six can be adapted with different tasks based on the different topics.

2. Teacher Training

Teachers can be trained in task-designing, scaffolding and formative assessment. Microteaching and peer-observation would allow teachers to develop different task-based exercises to make their classes more interactive and interesting for Learners.

3. Teaching Aids and Materials

Teaching is successful when teachers have the appropriate teaching aids and materials in the class. As a matter of fact, teachers are often required to prepare teaching materials based on the lessons being taught in class. It is also important for the Ministry of Education and the school concerned to provide materials according to the age and capabilities of their learners.

4. Use of Mother Tongue

It is noteworthy that UNESCO strongly advocates the use of the mother tongue in primary education. (UNESCO, 2022) As mentioned above, Mauritius is a multilingual island with Mauritian Creole as the mother language, English as the official language, French as the second most spoken language and many vernacular languages spoken and understood around the island. Thus, the use of mother tongue as a means of translation or 'known to unknown' allows learners to carry out tasks straightforwardly.

5. Society/Community and Cultural incorporation

Many institutions are already working for the propagation of Hindi in Mauritius. It is therefore time to integrate parents along with socio-cultural and educational institutions to reinforce the use, and teaching and learning of the Hindi language. Parents should be encouraged to bring their children to educational and cultural gatherings and also participate with their children in different language and culture-related tasks.

Conclusion

Being a multicultural and multilingual Island, it can be reasoned that the implementation of TBLT in the Primary Education System of Mauritius proves not only to be a pedagogical need but also a necessity to propagate Hindi and other Asian Languages all over the Island. While many teachers still opt for teacher-centered methods, it can be seen that traditional methods quite often fail to extend communicative proficiency, creativity and critical thinking in learners. TBLT therefore, would allow learners to grasp Hindi through meaningful tasks and activities related to their known life experiences.

As most Mauritians speak several languages simultaneously, Task-Based Learning then allows contextualized scaffolding and encourages interaction among peer learners. As the learners develop their critical thinking and speaking skills at the same time, they would therefore be motivated to speak and use Hindi in their daily routine and communication. Allowing them to communicate in Hindi would thus connect them to their elders, the society, and their festivals and cultural beliefs, strengthening emotional attachment to their ancestral languages.

As we have seen several benefits of TBLT above, it can definitely be said that TBLT allows cognitive, social, and emotional development, but at the same time fosters for life skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, etc. In a nutshell, implementing Task-Based Learning in the Primary Education of Mauritius would definitely improve the language outcomes in the near future; allowing learners to interact, and promote Hindi from generation to generation.

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