

AAU FRESHMAN STUDENTS' VIEWS AND PREFERENCES
WITH RESPECT TO STRUCTURE-BASED VERSUS
TASK-BASED APPROACHES TO ELT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to find out the views of AAU freshman students regarding the task-based approach to ELT as compared to their previous English language learning experiences. The sample population of the study were 178 AAU freshman students on the Main and Arat Kilo campuses. These subjects had been exposed to the new Freshman English materials since their arrival at the university.

To obtain the necessary information, a questionnaire with nineteen items that aimed to assess views on 1) structure-based approach (2) task-based approach, and 3) classroom organizations ~~was~~ prepared and administered to the students. To consolidate the information obtained through the questionnaire, classroom observations were also carried out.

The students' views on the structure - and task-based approaches were compared. The study showed that there was a significant statistical difference between the students' views on the two approaches. The students' views on the task-based approach were more positive than their views on the structural approach.

An attempt was also made to assess the students' views on the classroom organizations pertinent to the task-based approach. The study showed that the respondents favoured the organizational techniques like pair and group work which suited the task-based language learning activities.

As a whole the study showed that the respondents were more favourably disposed towards the task-based approach in general, and about the new materials and the methodology used to implement the approach in particular.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Bender et al (1976:12) state that although "English has a negligible number of native speakers in Ethiopia, ... at the present time, it has a crucial position in education, commerce, government, and international communication, and from this point of view it can be regarded as a major Ethiopian language." And we know that English is the medium of instruction in this country from junior secondary schools through colleges. The degree of English language proficiency of our students, therefore, can have a great impact on their academic achievement. Poor performance in English can lead to poor performance in other subjects as students with poor English are more likely to underachieve in their studies than those with a good command of English.

Despite its importance, many educators and scholars believe that the English language proficiency of our students is very poor. According to the literature on the Addis Ababa University students, (Gebre Medhin, 1984; and Haile-Michael, 1984) many of them lack the necessary language skills which could help them cope with the demanding college studies. This is actually true for all learners who learn a second language under similar circumstances as Rutherford (1987: 18) confirms:

... the circumstances in which we learn a new language are often limited to the extent that,

contrary to the experience of acquiring our native language, we have access to considerably less than the necessary range of data for making appropriate generalization. This is especially true in situations where the classroom is the only resource for such data.

Educational authorities and teachers usually try to overcome the student language problems by issuing different methodologies and accompanied materials. But, on the other hand, there are others (Wajnryb, 1990: 14) who argue that whatever a sound methodology we implement, we cannot achieve the desired goal unless that methodology takes the interests of the learners into consideration. It is also the belief of many teachers that the views learners have regarding the target language and the process of teaching/learning that language will have an influence on the learners' language achievement.

Falling in line with this argument, and taking it as its premise, this paper attempts to find out the views and preferences of AAU freshman students regarding the task-based approach to ELT, with special reference to the methodology and the new Freshman English materials, as compared to their previous English language learning experiences.

1.2 Importance of the Study

The ultimate goal of any language teaching process is to enable learners to master a target language. To

attain that goal the road taken by those who are involved in the process is very important. It is believed that that road will be much easier if the methodology and materials language teachers use take into account the interests of the learners.

This study, therefore, could be of great help to syllabus designers, material writers and English teachers in Ethiopia for it attempts to find out the views of students regarding the long standing structure-based approach and the recently emerging task-based approach to ELT. The students' beliefs about these approaches can help teachers and others concerned to predict student expectations of, commitment to, success in and satisfaction with their language classes.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study is concerned with the investigation of the views and preferences of Freshman students at Addis Ababa University regarding the task-based approach to ELT on the one hand and their previous English language learning experiences on the other hand. These subjects have been exposed to the new English teaching materials prepared for 1994 to 1995 academic year according to the principles of task-based approach to ELT. Out of the nineteen sections chosen by the project committee from both the main campus and Arat Kilo, nine and ten sections, respectively, from each campus, this study is limited only to six sections due to

time and money constraints. These six sections represented about 33% of the group and involved 178 students.

1.4 Definition of Terms and Abbreviations

1.4.1 Definition of Terms

'Foreign' and 'second' language: A distinction is often made between the two. A 'second' language has social functions within the community where it is learnt, whereas a 'foreign' language is learnt primarily for contact outside one's own community. In this paper they were used without distinction.

1.4.2 Abbreviations

AAU:	Addis Ababa University
ELT:	English Language Teaching
ENE:	English for New Ethiopia (textbooks)
SLI:	Second Language Learning

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 The Structural Approach

For many years, it was believed that teaching a language meant making students understand the basic structures and vocabulary of that language. Consequently, teachers, material writers and course designers tried to realise this belief. It was also believed that once a learner mastered some basic structures and vocabulary of the target language, he could use them when the need arose.

The above views represent a structural approach to language teaching and, as Widdowson (1990: 160) states, it is based on "the belief that language learning comes about by teaching learners to know the forms of the language as medium and the meaning they incorporate; that they will learn how to do things with this knowledge on their own." Brumfit and Johnson (1979:1) also tell us that language teaching in the past few decades has shifted the emphasis away from 'mastery of language use to mastery of language structure."

Similarly, Collin Wring (1989: 18) characterizes the purposes and beliefs of language teaching in the past as follows:

Until very recently it was more or less universally assumed by language teachers that their first priority was to ensure that their

pupils should be able to produce and understand the main structures of the language and consensually agreed range of vocabulary... It was supposed that someone who possessed a thorough mastery of the structures of the language and a supply of relevant vocabulary would be able to use it for the purpose of communication, should the need arise.

The focus on the structure of the language has manifested itself in many ways, including evaluation of the learners. As a result success or failure in language learning was connected with the ability to manipulate the structure of the language.

This focus on the form of the language does not mean, as Brumfit and Johnson (1979:2) state, that language teaching in the structural approach "has taken place in a kind of vacuum in which structures are learned like mathematics formulae." Saying that would be an oversimplification because mastery of language use has not been completely neglected though it received less emphasis.

These days the emphasis seems to shift from structure to the use of language though many countries are still using the structural approach. GERAL Mosbach (1984: 178) states that "... many countries still find themselves working with a heavily structure-based course which they know is not satisfactory, but which they cannot, for economic and other reasons, quickly replace."

Many language professionals have pointed out that the disadvantage of the structural approach is that it does not allow the learners to use language in a natural way. The learners tend to focus on form for its own sake, internalize the language system as a separate body of knowledge and fail to learn for themselves how to use it. That was why Widdowson (1979: 117) states: "... students who have received several years of formal English teaching frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language, and to understand its use, in normal communication, whether in the spoken or written mode."

Similarly, O'Donnel (1969: 161) reveals the weakness of focusing on language form when teaching instead of its use as "... the failure is simply that human beings learn to use language by using it, not by talking about it." Widdowson (1978: 18-19) is also of the same opinion: "knowing a language is often taken to mean having a knowledge of correct usage but this knowledge is of little utility on its own: it has to be completed by a knowledge of appropriate use."

Another drawback of the structural approach is that it restricts the quantity and/or variety of language to which learners are exposed; it offers very few opportunities for real communication among students. A major part of the

total talking time is taken up by the teacher as a result of which learners become passive recipients for most part of the time allotted to language learning. This is obviously at the expense of the learners. As Stevick (1989:26) confirms, a learner must involve himself in learning so as to abstract the working language rules for himself. He says, "a learner will remember...that in which he/she has been involved actively through searching out and discovering as contrasted with rote repetition."

According to Robert Lado (1964: 50), one of the proponents of the structural approach, language learning is basically habit formation. Language habit is formed through mimicry, repetition and memorization. In the structural approach, mistakes are considered seriously so as not to be 'fossilized'. So the main tasks of the teachers under this approach is to give due attention to the mistakes learners make in their efforts to produce sentences. This way of teaching, according to Wilkins (1972:22), makes learners to focus on the form of the language, and leave aside the most important aspect of language learning: meaning. For Widdowson (1990:159) this [focusing on form] is simply 'inconsistent with the communicative ends of language learning.'

In general, the structural approach to language teaching emphasizes the structural aspect of language in the teaching and learning process with the belief that the

learners who have been taught the basic structures and relevant vocabulary of the target language can finally use them in real-life communication when the need arises. But in recent years, there has been a major shift of emphasis from presenting language as a set of forms which have to be learned and practised to presenting language as a functional system which is used to fulfil a range of communicative purposes. Below, this latter view will be discussed.

2.2 The Task-based Approach

We have seen above that the structural approach to language teaching emphasizes discrete items like grammar and vocabulary with the assumption that once these discrete items of the target language are mastered, the learners could use the language for various communicative purposes when the need arises. But with the development of linguistics and pedagogical science, the assumption that emphasizes the knowledge of the structures and vocabulary of the target language has declined. This has resulted in the emerging of new approaches to language and language learning. One of these is a task-based approach.

A 'task' has been defined in a variety of ways. These include non-technical and technical definitions. Nunan (1989:6), quoting different authors, presents two definitions which take a linguistic and pedagogical perspectives. The first definition is from a dictionary of

applied linguistics by Richards et al, and it reads as follows:

[A task] is an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e. as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of a variety of different kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make language teaching more communicative... since it provides a purpose for a classroom activity which goes beyond the practice of language for its own sake.

The second definition is from Breen and it also reads as:

... any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. 'Task' is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning - from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision making.

According to Nunan (1989: 10), these definitions share one thing in common: "They all imply that tasks involve communicative language use in which the user's attention is focused on meaning rather than linguistic structure." This actually agrees with the belief held by language experts like O'Donnell (1969: 161) that human beings learn language,

not by talking about it but by using it. It is with this view that the task-based approach to language teaching emphasizes the learners' use of the target language with any language repertoire they have at their disposal so as to convey the message triggered by the tasks they are doing.

Tarone and Yule (1989: 17) also tell us that in the task-based approach to language teaching the learners' main focus is not the language itself but the information obtained or conveyed using the language. Here the assumption is that learners pick up the target language accidentally or in a natural way while struggling to obtain the message. This kind of language learning is believed to be more memorable, and Rivers (1987:4) confirms its importance as follows:

Students achieve facility in using a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages (that is, messages that contain information of interest to speaker and listener in a situation of importance to both.

In the more interactive language learning, what is needed and most important is the communicative effectiveness of the learner. According to this approach, teachers know that focusing on the formal accuracy of the target language results in making the learners hesitant and inhibited. Classroom instructions which focus on the rules and correct forms of the language can interfere with the learners'

efforts in accomplishing a task which facilitates the learning of the target language.

Task-based activities are believed to be more advantageous than structural drills because the former involve the learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on the meaning rather than form. According to Tony Wright (1987: 77) tasks are different from structural drills because tasks involve the imagination, beliefs, attitudes and interests of the learners. They usually involve the participation of two or more learners in accomplishing them.

The critics of the more learner-centred approach to language teaching express their fear that this approach neglects the accuracy of language use by the learners. But Krashen and Terrell (1987: 50) argue that we do not necessarily sacrifice accuracy for fluency in the communicative language teaching. These two language experts and others who favour the communicative language teaching argue that the rationale behind the use of task-based activities in learning a second/foreign language is that they will help to develop both communicative and linguistic competence of the learners. That is, tasks-based activities are important for both fluency and accuracy. As River

(1983) and Prabhu (1987) state, tasks aid fluency by enabling learners to activate their linguistic knowledge for use in natural and spontaneous communication. One way of achieving fluency is developing strategic competence, where students use verbal or non-verbal means to compensate for breakdown in communication, to enhance the effectiveness of communication. Tasks also contribute to accuracy by enabling learners to discover new linguistic forms during the course of communicating, and also by increasing their control over already acquired forms.

To sum up, different second language acquisition researchers have suggested a number of ways in which communicating can lead to acquisition. Two of the hypotheses cited in this regard are the interaction hypothesis and the comprehensible output hypothesis. (Krashen & Terrell, 1987). According to the former, learners acquire new forms when input is made comprehensible through negotiating for meaning. That is if the learner does not understand what the speaker says, he asks for clarification which makes the speaker paraphrase his initial utterance. Such negotiation may help to make new forms and their meanings transparent in the input, with the result that they can be more easily acquired. According to the latter, acquisition takes place when learners are 'pushed' into producing output that is more grammatical. Here the listener

who cannot understand the speaker due to the ungrammatical sentence the speaker has produced, the listener asks for clarification which causes the learner to reformulate the utterance.

For an easy realization of the above hypotheses, the following criteria are set for the communicative tasks (Harmer, 1982: 167):

1. There must be a communicative purpose, not just a linguistic goal;
2. There must be a focus on message rather than on linguistic code;
3. There must be some kind of information or opinion gap between the speaker and the listener;
4. There must be opportunity for negotiation when performing the task; and
5. The participants must choose the resources - verbal and non-verbal - required for performing the task, that is, they are not supplied with the means for performing the task.

2.3 Views and Preferences

2.3.1 Learners' Views About SLL

The literature on the views of students regarding the teaching/learning of a second language shows that learners, particularly adult learners, have explicit beliefs about how

to learn the target language. These beliefs can influence their learning behaviours, i.e, what learners do to help themselves learn the target language. As Nunan (1989: 144) states, "... adults value their own experience as a resource for further learning, and that they learn best when they have a personal investment in the programme and when the content is personally relevant." Therefore, it is important to determine the views of the learners and their implications for language learning. This will help to facilitate learning the target language because it is the learner's personal preferences which determine the quantity and quality of what is to be learnt (Rivers, 1983: 133). It will also help us consider other alternatives if the present views and subsequent strategies students use do not fall in line with modern language learning pedagogies.

Learners' views about second language learning can be expressed in different ways. For instance, some learners want to learn language systematically. They believe that language should be learnt step by step and from easy items to difficult ones, starting with grammar and vocabulary. For these learners, learning a language is the same as learning about it - understanding how it works. Using the language to communicate is secondary. Of course, it does not mean that they discount the importance of practice, but their emphasis is on learning - practising will help them to remember the grammar and vocabulary they have learnt. They

also believe that language learning is a conscious process. "They emphasize the importance of being mentally active - manipulating or transforming in some way new words, sounds, structures in order to understand and remember them" (Wenden, 1986: 4).

On the other hand, there are others who want to learn English in a natural way, that is by talking about the meaning of a given topic but not by thinking about the target language. They believe that language is best learnt by using it to communicate in the social context in which they find themselves. In these situations, they do not usually think about language form or the purpose of learning. Their focus is on communication. Moreover, they feel that they should avail themselves to every opportunity to practise and not care about making mistakes. For these learners, language learning is an unconscious process.

Therefore, as the views and preferences of learners differ from learner to learner, we should not also be one-sided in our views about how learners should learn a second language. Bassano (1986: 13) warns us against a bias towards a single approach which takes into consideration the interests of some students at the expense of others' in the following words:

Although much of the new research suggests the value and efficacy of highly active, independent group work, self-investment, personal involvement and informality in the second - language classroom, students' needs,

preferences, learning styles, and educational backgrounds do differ widely, and some may have other perceptions of this new teaching/learning milieu, and may respond in unproductive ways.

Bassano's statement emphasizes the importance of eliciting the views and preferences of learners before trying to implement a new approach to language teaching. The implementation of the new approach, if it is to be successful, needs the conviction and acceptance of the learners. Therefore the new approach which needs the conviction and acceptance of the learners for its implementation must give opportunities to the learners to reflect upon their learning experiences so that they may become aware of their own beliefs and how these beliefs can influence what they do to learn the second language.

2.3.2 Implication for Language Learning

As mentioned earlier, it is believed that learners' views about language learning determine what they do to help themselves learn the target language. These beliefs are reflected in the learners' approach to language learning, that is, the kinds of strategies they use; what they attend to; the criteria they use to evaluate the effectiveness of learning activities and the social contexts which give them the opportunity to use/practise the language; and where they concentrate the use of their strategies (Wenden, 1986, 4). We have also observed that it is important that learners reflect upon their learning experience.

The value of activities in which learners are made to reflect upon their views about language learning lies in the fact that such activities can surface the expectations learners bring to their language learning classroom for examination, evaluation, and possible change or modification. In other words, these activities help us to find out the nature of beliefs which specific types of students hold, and how these beliefs affect language learning strategies (Wenden, 1986: 6)

According to Moskowitz (1981: 149), there are two equally important dimensions to the development of youth: intellectual and emotional. Despite this fact - many teachers and psychologists believe - for many years schools have tended to focus on the intellectual dimension of the students with little or no consideration for their emotional aspects. They feel that if schools have taken the emotions of the students into considerations, it can help them enhance the students' self-image, achieve their potential, develop healthy relationships, and become mature, adjusted human beings. It is believed that due to neglect of the learners' emotions, schools have become places where many students develop a low regard for themselves.

To alleviate this problem, Gertrude Moskowitz (1981: 149) believes, learning activities should be personal,

meaningful, and helpful to the learners in daily life. To meet that end, the learning activities should combine the subject matter to be learned with the feelings, interests, experiences, and values of learners to help them accept and understand themselves and one another. As students become aware of their strengths, learn about themselves, and share what is important to them, the positive reinforcement helps make the class personally rewarding and relevant.

This researcher does not deny the difficulties one encounters if the learners' preconceptions do not agree with the types of learning activities Moskowitz suggests. It has been found, for instance, that based on their previous learning experiences, some learners view the learning of a language as they would a content course, like biology, history, etc. They expect their language course to provide them with new information about the language. And when it fails to do so they may become impatient and bored. In other words, when a language class fails to meet their expectations, students can lose confidence in the instruction. This is usually what we encounter at the latest stage in language learning where knowing about the target language gives way to its meaningful practical use. In general such a reaction may have quite a negative effect on a student's ability to derive any benefit from the learning experience. It is, therefore, advisable to make

learners realize that learning a language means being able to use it as well as knowing about it, and that at a certain point it is no longer a matter of knowledge but of meaningful practice (Wenden, 1986:9)

To conclude, the point raised here is that learners, particularly adult learners, will come into the language classroom conditioned by their previous learning experiences, and that these experiences should be taken into account if one wishes the language learning and teaching to be a co-operative endeavour. Accordingly, this paper aims at sensitizing those who are concerned to the views of AAU freshman students regarding the task-based approach to ELT as compared to their previous English language learning experiences, and the possible consequences of these views for English language learning.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population

The target population of the study were freshman students on the main and Arat kilo campuses of the Addis Ababa University. These were students who had been exposed to the new Freshman English materials being prepared according to the principles of the task-based approach to ELT by a team of academic staff from the Foreign Languages and Literature Department. The students belonged to nineteen sections. Out of these nineteen sections, which had been selected for trialling and piloting the new Freshman English materials, the sample used for this study were six sections: three from each campus. The sections were selected by picking any third one from the list of sections for the two campuses. These sections are shown below.

Table I
Number of Students, with their Respective Campuses
and Sections, Used in the Study

Campus	Section	No. of Students
Main(Sidist Kilo)	11	31
	15	25
	1(Bus. Education)	16
Arat Kilo	5 and 6	39
	15 and 16	31
	33 and 34	36
	Total	178

3.2 Collection of Data

As stated in the introduction, the main aim of the study was to find out the views of the Addis Ababa University freshmen regarding the task-based approach to ELT which they had been exposed to since their arrival at the university as compared to their previous English learning experiences at high schools. The main focus of this study is both on the methodology and the teaching materials because as Nunan (1989: 13) states, unlike the traditional views, these two components were united indistinguishably in the task-based language learning activities.

To obtain the students' views on the two approaches, and the classroom organizations which are pertinent to the task-based approach, the main instrument chosen was a questionnaire, though classroom observations and group discussions were held to consolidate the data collected through the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of nineteen items intended to elicit information on the three variables mentioned: structure-based, task-based and the classroom organization. An attempt was made to make all questionnaire items positively-worded.

The technique used to measure the students' views was the Likert technique for all items except for items 16 and 17 which were presented with alternatives in a multiple choice type because this format seemed more appropriate for

the items than the Likert scale. The Likert technique is the most widely used technique these days because, as Robert Ebel (1979: 371) states, it is "easier to use in developing an attitude scale than other techniques, and gives almost equally good results."

In the Likert technique, the subjects respond to each item on a five-point scale of agreement.

	Numerical Scores	
	Positively-Worded	Negatively-Worded
Strongly agree	5	1
Agree	4	2
Uncertain	3	3
Disagree	2	4
Strongly disagree	1	5

Adapted from: Ebel (1979: 371)

Their score on the item depends, as indicated above, on the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Subjects

The sample includes a total of 178 respondents. These respondents represent AAU Freshman Students on whom piloting and trialling the new Freshman English materials was being carried out in the 1994/95 academic year on the main and Arat Kilo campuses. The following table shows the demographic characteristics of the subjects in terms of age, sex, mother-tongue and the location of high school last attended.

Table II
Demographic Characteristics of the Subjects

Age		Sex		Mother-tongue				High-school	
1	2	1	2	1	2	3	4	1	2
163	15	143	35	135	19	17	7	95	83

Key

Age: 1: -17-20
2: -21+

Mother-tongue: 1: - Amharic
2: - Oromigna
3: - Tigrigna

4: - Other Ethiopian Language

Sex: 1: - male
2: - female

High school: 1: - high schools in Addis Ababa
2: - high schools out of Addis Ababa

4.2 The Findings and their Tabulation

The nineteen questionnaire items assessed the students' views in three major areas: 1) views on the structure-based approach to ELT; 2) views on the task-based approach to ELT; and 3) views on classroom organization. The findings have been tabulated and discussed according to these three categories.

Seventeen items of the questionnaire were prepared in such a way that students would respond to them by ticking in the space given. The remaining two items were presented with alternatives in a multiple choice format because it seemed more appropriate to present them in this form than in the Likert scale.

The percentages of the students' responses to every questionnaire item were calculated as follows: for statement 1.1, for example, the respondents who strongly agreed, agreed, had no opinion, disagreed and strongly disagreed were 58, 95, 15, 6 and 4, respectively. Converted in percentages, these would mean 32.6%, 53.4%, 8.4%, 3.4% and 2.2%, respectively.

Table III

Frequencies and Percentages of the Responses

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	No opinion (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	
Frequency (FR)=	58	95	15	6	4	178
Percentage(%)	32.6	53.4	8.4	3.4	2.2	100

The same procedure was followed to compute the percentages for all items. For categories 1 and 2, which compare the students' views on the structure-and task-based approaches to ELT, the grand means have been computed to find out the relative inclination of the students' views. Finally, to determine whether or not the difference between the students' reactions to the two approaches was significant, the t-dependent formula $t =$

$$t = \frac{\sum di}{\sqrt{\frac{ndi^2 - (\sum d)^2}{n-1}}}$$

was used and the result was summarized as follows:

Table IV

Mean Difference of the Students' Scores on their Views Regarding the Structure-and Task-based Approaches

Approach				to	tc
Structure-based		Task-based			
X	SD	X	SD	1.78*	1.64
3.47	0.53	3.95	0.39		

* Significant at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 The Students' Views on the Structure-based Approach to ELT

The structure-based language teaching/learning is a long standing tradition in Ethiopia. Language teaching is taken as studying discrete items such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. of the target language (English) separately with the assumption that the sum total of these discrete items can be used in real life communication when the need arises.

So it is no wonder if freshman students at the Addis Ababa University, who are the products of the structure-based approach to ELT, show positive attitudes towards the structure-based language teaching and learning. It was the approach they were exposed to for about ten years, though they have had experiences in the task-based approach only since their arrival at the university. These positive attitudes towards the structure-based approach to ELT are what we observe from the students' responses as the following table shows.

Table V
Students' Views on the Structure-based Approach to ELT

Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		No Opinion		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total		X	
	5		4		3		2		1		Fr.	%		
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%				
2.1	30	16.9	50	28.1	15	8.4	56	31.5	27	15.2	178	100	534	3
2.2	54	30.3	68	38.2	15	8.4	20	11.2	21	11.8	178	100	648	3.6
2.3	90	50.6	72	40.4	5	2.8	6	3.4	5	2.8	178	100	770	4.3
2.4	110	61.8	48	27	6	3.4	8	4.5	6	3.4	178	100	782	4.4
2.5	28	15.7	37	20.8	15	8.4	53	29.8	45	25.3	178	100	484	2.7
2.6	25	14	56	31.5	12	6.7	47	26.4	38	21.3	178	100	517	2.9
4.1	48	27	59	33.1	10	5.6	34	19.1	27	15.1	178	100	601	3.4
6.1	67	37.6	67	37.6	14	7.9	20	11.2	10	5.6	178	100	695	3.9
7	43	24.1	37	20.8	16	9	48	27	34	19.1	178	100	541	3.1
9	50	28.1	64	36	13	7.3	32	18	19	10.8	178	100	628	3.5
13	49	27.5	99	55.6	13	7.3	11	6.2	6	3.4	178	100	708	3.9
18.1	36	20.2	49	27.5	18	10.1	48	27	27	15.1	178	100	553	3.1
19	48	27	53	29.8	13	7.3	38	21.3	26	14.6	178	100	393	3.3
Grand Mean													3.47	

The above table shows that in their responses to items 2.3 and 2.4, which attempted to elicit the views on vocabulary and grammar learning, respectively, a considerable number of the subjects thought that the vocabulary and grammar sections of their high school textbooks motivated them to learn English. In response to item 2.3, 91% of the subjects seemed to favour the explicit and step by step adding up of the knowledge of the vocabulary items of the type they were used to at their high schools. The same appeared to be true for the grammar sections as the responses to item 2.4 show. 88.8% of the students thought that the grammar sections of the ENE motivated them to learn English. It must be borne in mind that the ENE textbooks are heavily structure-oriented and they present both vocabulary and grammar discretely with the assumption that the appropriate use of the language can take care of itself when the need arises.

The structure-based language learning/teaching was perhaps the only method which these students were exposed to for many years so as to become their favourite way of learning English. The researcher confirmed this great interest subjects had in the explicit learning of grammar and vocabulary when he contacted the students again for classroom observation so as to cross-check the responses to the questionnaire and to obtain more information on the

subject. According to the views of some students, the mere teacher talk and the notes he gave them on word meanings and grammar rules during a lesson brought them a feeling of satisfaction that they had really learnt from that lesson.

These students wanted to 'feel' that they added some more new knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of English daily. That was perhaps why nearly 45% of the students responded in favour of item number 7: "English can be learnt more easily if structures and vocabulary are studied step by step as we used to do in our high schools." They seemed to regard language learning just like learning content subjects, like geography and history where new **bits** of knowledge are added daily. In their high school language learning experiences, they had learnt step by step and felt that they daily added some new structures and vocabulary explicitly, and this seemed to give them satisfaction.

It was this sort of language learning which they regarded as learning. As mentioned above, their experience of language learning in high school was the explicit, step by step adding of new linguistic items to what they had already had; they probably expect the same thing from the task-based language classroom as well.

It is important to notice that in response to the above statement, which stated that English language could be

learnt more easily by studying its structure and vocabulary, the students' views varied greatly. We can see that although 45% of the subjects responded in favour of the statement, about 46% opposed it. This latter result seemed to support the views held by the proponents of the communicative approach that the study of the structure and vocabulary of the target language alone does not necessarily lead to the use of that language in real life communication. It may also show a shift in the views of the students as the result of being exposed to the task-based language learning activities.

In their responses to the statement 'In the English textbooks I learnt at high school, the activities that motivated me to learn English were in the 2.1 listening sections; 2.5 speaking sections; and 2.6 writing sections, the majority of the subjects thought that these sections did not motivate them to learn English. There were students who even doubted the presence of these sections in the textbooks. There were of course some who reported that they had been exposed to additional materials other than those in the ENE textbooks. But, in general, speaking, listening and writing activities were the least learning experiences they all had had in their high schools.

It was perhaps due to the poor presentation of the activities which ^{could} develop these language skills in the ENE
↑

textbooks that the majority of the subjects favoured the new Freshman English materials as the responses to item 18.2 show. Only about 48% of the students thought that the high school textbooks could realize their language learning interests, whereas the percentage for those who favoured the new Freshman English materials was about 78%.

Their high school English learning experiences were also reflected in the views they had on the roles of teachers. In the structure-based language teaching, teachers are the controllers of the entire teaching and learning process. They also correct every mistake students make to ensure that those bits they have fed their students with have been understood, and to prevent bad habit formation. Regarding the role of the teacher, the responses students gave to item 9 were quite revealing where more than 64% of the respondents favoured the teacher who corrected every mistake students made. The responses to item 4.1 also showed that over 60% of the subjects favoured the instructor who explained the lesson thoroughly in the class, and finally gave them home-work instead of setting tasks to be done in groups in the classroom.

The subjects also seemed to favour taking notes on the rules of grammar before they started doing language activities. About 75% of the students responded in favour of the statement: " In grammar sections, I think, it is

better if the instructor gives us the rules before we do a task." This response reveals one of the main characteristics of the structure-based approach to language teaching where grammar rules are given explicitly instead of allowing learners to feel the rules of the target language for themselves from certain meaningful language data.

4.3.2 Students' Views on Task-based Approach to ELT

Almost all language professionals agree that the main and central goal of a second/foreign language teaching/learning is communication. This fact is not denied even by the structuralists like Robert Lado (1964) and Francis Mackey (1965). The difference between the structure-based and task-based approaches to language teaching lies in the ways they assume to bring about the ability for communication. The structural approach to language teaching depends on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary step by step with the belief that in the end the sum of these discrete items would help learners use the language in real communication.

According to the more interactive approaches to language teaching, however, the study of grammatical rules and rote learning of the vocabulary of the target language do not necessarily lead to the use of the language in real life communication. For the proponents of the communicative approach, language for use is acquired best by

communicating. Here producing sentences simply for the sake of showing one's knowledge for manipulating the structures of the target language is not valued. According to the principles of the interactive language learning, communication, either in spoken or written form, derives from interaction which in turn is triggered when people in the communicative process want to share some information with each other.

In short, the main issue of the more interactive approach is that second/foreign language is best learnt through interaction right from the beginning in the target language with the language repertoire the learner has at his disposal.

Falling in line with the above views, nine items (items 1,4,5 and 18 having their own sub-categories) were prepared to elicit the students' views on the task-based approach to ELT with special reference to the new Freshman English materials and the methodology used to realize this approach. Below, some of the outstanding findings are presented.

Table VI
Students' Views on the Task-based Approach to ELT

Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		No Opinion		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total		X	
	5		4		3		2		1		Fr.	%		
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%				
1.1	58	32.6	95	53.4	15	8.4	6	3.4	4	2.2	178	100	731	4.1
1.2	72	40.4	62	34.8	17	9.6	18	10.1	9	5.1	178	100	704	4
1.3	34	19.1	77	43.3	18	10.1	31	17.4	18	10.1	178	100	612	3.4
1.4	33	18.5	55	30.9	22	12.4	44	24.7	24	13.5	178	100	563	3.2
1.5	96	53.9	66	37.1	3	1.7	9	5.1	4	2.2	178	100	775	4.4
1.6	78	43.9	66	37.1	18	10.1	10	5.6	6	3.4	178	100	734	4.1
4.2	83	46.6	76	42.7	4	2.2	7	3.9	8	4.5	178	100	753	4.2
6.2	79	44.4	69	38.8	19	10.8	10	5.6	1	0.6	178	100	749	4.2
8	83	46.6	40	22.5	8	4.5	32	18	15	8.4	178	100	678	3.8
10	87	48.9	71	39.9	13	7.3	4	2.2	3	1.7	178	100	769	4.3
14	29	16.3	86	48.3	15	8.4	30	16.9	18	10.1	178	100	612	3.4
15	83	46.6	48	27	10	5.6	23	12.9	14	7.9	178	100	697	3.9
18.2	85	47.8	54	30.3	4	2.2	24	13.5	11	6.2	178	100	766	4.3
Grand Mean													3.95	

The six sub-divisions of item 1 (1.1 to 1.6) dealt with the views of the students on the sections found in the new Freshman English materials. They tried to find out the sections which the students thought motivated them to learn English. According to their responses, the most motivating activities were those found in the speaking sections, and this view was supported by 91% of the subjects, followed by listening sections (86%), writing sections (81%), and reading sections (64%). The least favoured sections as motivating factors for learning English were the grammar (49.4%) and the vocabulary (62.4%) sections.

Nunan (1989: 22) tells us that in real life communication different language skills are not used in isolation; they are found interwoven. In task-based approach to language learning - it is believed that this approach is closer to real life situation than the non-interactive approaches - the inter-woven nature of the different language skills are obvious. This researcher, for instance, observed a class where speaking and listening lessons were conducted at the same time. It was a lively interaction where the students took turn in arguing for and against family planning. They were completely immersed in the issue at hand and seemed to use every means and language repertoire, verbal and non-verbal, they had at their disposal to convey or receive messages. This actually falls in line with Rivers' (1987:4) statement that "students

achieve facility in using a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic message: messages that contain information of interest to speaker and listener in a situation of importance to both." In this respect, the students' high regard for the speaking and listening sections of the new Freshman English materials are reasonable and justifiable.

Regarding the problems one can face in developing writing skills, Nunan (1989: 34) states "... learning to write fluently and expressively is the most difficult of the macro-skills for all language users regardless of whether the language in question is first, second or foreign language." Despite Nunan's observation, the respondents found the writing sections to be one of the three most motivating sections in the new Freshman English materials. This is perhaps because the writing activities in these materials are the outcomes of the preceding sections - listening, reading and speaking. In the writing sections, students are asked to apply the information (knowledge) they have already obtained from other sections to a certain issue which is relevant to the topic developed by other sections.

The remaining three sections - the reading, vocabulary and grammar sections - seemed to be viewed as less motivating for them to learn English. This can invite different opinions, and this researcher presents his own as follows:

In the ENE textbooks, these three sections are common and exclusively dealt with. Therefore, these respondents had already had some sort of learning experiences in these sections before they were exposed to the task-based approach to ELT. As the new ways of learning these sections are different from their previous experience, it seems natural to expect some sort of resistance from the students.

In the ENE textbooks, for instance, the main focus of the reading sections is the end product where students would be able to answer some comprehension questions which had specific answers. But in the reading sections of the new Freshman English materials, priority is given to the process that leads to the final goal of language learning. The questions set from the reading passages are aimed to realize this purpose. Therefore, to students who are used to the product-oriented reading activities, doing activities in which they could not realize their understanding of the passage by giving 'exact' answers to questions is simply intolerable.

Similarly, the way they used to learn grammar and vocabulary at high schools, and the way they learn them now from the new Freshman English materials are different. This may conflict with the interests of the students who had taken the previous way of learning grammar and vocabulary for granted.

Another possible reason for the low regard subjects had to the grammar and vocabulary sections of the new English materials could be the shift in students' views about these sections. Focusing on the grammar and vocabulary sections may not help much in the fluency - oriented language learning, and this might have been understood by the students due to their exposure to the task-based approach during the first semester and now.

This shift in the views of students was also observed in their responses to items 4.2 and 6.2 which dealt with the roles of instructors. In item 4.2, 89.3% of the subjects responded in favour of the instructor who set tasks for them to be done in pairs or groups instead of lecturing to them. This actually agreed with the responses for item 10, where 88.8% of the respondents said they preferred interactive language learning, where students do tasks in groups, and this is important for developing proficiency in English. Similarly, in the responses to item 6.2, 83.2% of the subjects preferred the instructor who gave meaningful language data so that learners could work out the language rules for themselves.

As the responses for items 8, 14 and 15 showed, the students' views towards the new materials were favourable. About 69% of the subjects, for instance, said that the new

materials gave sufficient opportunities for the learners to use their English so that effective consolidation takes place. Consequently, about 73.6% of the students recommended these materials be used by all first year college students in the country.

4.3.3 Students' Views on Classroom Organization

This part of the paper tries to show the students' views regarding the classroom organization and other related factors like the use of the mother tongue in the target language classroom.

Nunan (1989: 12) observes that everything we do in the classroom is underpinned by beliefs about the nature of language and language learning. The classroom activities where language is seen simply as a system of rules, and those where language is seen as a dynamic resource for the creation of meaning are different. These different classroom activities will need the classroom organizations which suit them.

Accordingly, pair and group work are ways of organizing the language classrooms which are more suitable for interactive or task-based language learning activities than for the structure-based ones. These two ways of organizing classrooms are almost alien to the language teaching activities which underlie the structural approach. So, it

is natural to expect freshman students at Addis Ababa University, who are the products of the structure-oriented high school language teaching, to be strangers to the above two ways of classroom organization. It is very likely that most of them have encountered these ways of learning English for the first time here at the university.

The researcher's hypothesis was that as pair and group work were new to these students, they would not easily get used to them. So as one aspect of this paper - they are the main and central components of interactive language learning - the researcher has attempted to find out the students' views on the classroom organizations which are characteristic of the task-based approach to ELT. Below, some of the outstanding findings are presented.

Table VII
Students' Views on Classroom Organization

Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		No Opinion		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	5		4		3		2		1			
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%
3.1	40	22.5	108	60.7	19	10.8	6	3.4	5	2.8	178	100
3.2	96	53.9	65	36.5	7	3.9	6	3.4	4	2.2	178	100
3.3	28	15.7	58	32.6	20	11.2	48	27	24	13.5	178	100
3.4	48	27	66	37.1	14	7.9	25	14	25	14	178	100
5.1	20	11.2	53	29.8	16	9	58	32.6	31	17.4	178	100
5.2	58	32.6	68	38.2	13	7.3	26	14.6	13	7.3	178	100
5.3	45	25.3	67	37.6	22	12.4	30	16.9	14	7.9	178	100
11	19	10.8	31	17.4	14	7.9	71	39.9	43	24.2	178	100
12	26	14.6	22	12.4	11	6.2	81	45.5	38	21.3	178	100

The questionnaire items in this part attempted to elicit the views of students on the organizational techniques they preferred in learning English, the problems they thought they would encounter in group work, and whether or not they preferred lecture method to group work, and the like.

Accordingly, item number 3 dealt with the classroom organizational techniques that the students thought would help them most to learn English. These organizational techniques were pair work, group work, individual work, and whole-class work (teacher-fronted). The findings showed that group work, pair work, whole-class work and individual work were favoured by 90.4%, 83.2%, 64.1%, and 48.3% of the subjects, respectively. The majority seemed to be in favour of pair and group work. That was perhaps why, in item 11, the majority (64.1) of the respondents disagreed with the claim that group or pair work opened chance for only clever students to do a task.

Item 5 tried to deal with some possible problems, like lack of English proficiency, fear of making mistakes, etc., which students could encounter in pair and group work. The findings showed that 41% of the respondents indicated lack of English to convey or receive messages as a problem whereas 50% of them had no such problem. 9% of the respondents seemed unsure whether or not they lacked English for participating in pair or group work.

Their most common problem seemed to be the fear of making mistakes when speaking English in pair or group work. 70.8% of the respondents had this problem, whereas only 21.9% had no problem in this respect. 7.3% of the respondents seemed to be unaware whether or not fear of making mistakes when speaking English in group work was their problem.

Item 5.3 dealt with whether or not students were willing to discuss issues at hand freely. The students' responses showed that 62.9% of them said that students were not forthcoming in discussing issues at hand, whereas 31.8% said this was not their problem in group work. 12.4% of the subjects seemed not to know whether or not such problem existed. But despite the problems claimed by some respondents to exist as shown above, the responses to item 12 showed that 66.8% of the students did not like the lecture method. Pair and group work seemed to be their favourite styles to learn English in the classroom.

Item 17 attempted to elicit the students' views on whether or not they liked to choose partners on the spot, or sit where the instructor told them to sit, or have constant partners to do the task with in group work. Their responses showed that 39.9% of them liked to have constant partners whereas 30.9% liked to choose their partners on the spot. the remaining 29.2% liked to sit where their instructor told them to sit.

Finally, item 16 tried to find out the students' views on how often they thought one should use the mother tongue in the English classroom. Their responses are given below.

Table VIII

Students' Views on the Use of the Mother Tongue
in the English Classroom

Item	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total	
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%
16	66	37.1	52	29.2	55	30.9	5	2.9	0	0	178	100

The above table shows that 37.1% of the respondents did not completely like the use of the mother tongue when learning English, whereas 29.2% liked it if used rarely. It could be said that 66.3% of subjects did not favour the use of the mother tongue when doing tasks in pairs and groups. On the other hand 30.9% favoured if the mother tongue was used sometimes whereas only 2.9% liked if it was used usually. As a whole, it seemed that the students did not favour the excessive use of the mother tongue in the English classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

An attempt to mark a distinction between structure - and task-based approaches to language teaching/learning so as to prefer one to the other seems a paradox, particularly at first glance. A learner must use the structures and vocabulary of the target language, which are the focus of the structural approach, in order to communicate through that language. As Larsen Freeman (1986: 123) states, the adherents of the communicative language learning themselves:

acknowledge that structures and vocabulary are important. However, they feel that preparation for communication will be inadequate if only these are taught. Students may know the rules of language usage, but will be unable to use the language.

Similarly, as indicated in the review of literature of this paper, the proponents of the structural approach themselves do not deny the centrality of communication in language teaching and learning. They believe that the focus on the structures and vocabulary of the target language facilitates the way for the final goal of language learning: communication.

The high regard the students had, in the study, for the structural approach to ELT, particularly for the explicit learning/teaching of the grammar and vocabulary of English seemed to underpin the above view which sees the emphasis on

language structures and vocabulary in teaching as a facilitator for the final goal of language learning.

In recent years, the status of grammar in language teaching seemed rather uncertain. Linguists like Prabhu (1984), for instance, maintained that it was not necessary to teach grammar. For them the ability to use a second language would develop automatically if the learners were required to focus on meaning in the process of using the language to communicate.

But, according to Littlewood (1983), Rutherford (1987) and Nunan (1987), the view that requires the learners to focus only on meaning when learning a second language has come under serious challenge. They seem to accept that there is value in classroom tasks which require learners to focus on form. They also seem to accept that grammar is an essential resource in using language communicatively. In this light again the positive attitudes the respondents indicated for the learning of grammar were reasonable and justifiable.

This fact actually need not camouflage the centrality of communication in language learning and teaching. The main and central theme of the latest language teaching approaches is communication. In this regard the study showed that the students were generally optimistic about the advantages of the task-based approach to ELT. They viewed

this approach more positively even than the structural approach which they have been familiar with for many years. This was reflected in their views on the new English materials and the methodology used to implement the task-based approach to ELT. The study indicated that 69% of subjects thought that the new English materials for freshmen gave sufficient opportunities for the learners to use their English so that effective consolidation took place. It was perhaps as a result of this that 73.6% of the students recommended these materials be used by all first year college students in the country.

Similarly, the students' views regarding the classroom organizations, like pair and group work, were positive. The finding rejected the researcher's initial hypothesis that as pair and group work were new to the students, they would not get used to them easily. Contrary to the hypothesis, 90.4% and 83.2% favoured group and pair work, respectively in their language classes.

5.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

A) The New Freshman English Materials

Although the respondents had been exposed to the new English materials for freshmen only for about seven months when this study was carried out, their views about them as a whole were positive. The speaking, listening and writing

sections particularly seemed to be liked more by the students. They seemed to be reluctant in accepting the other sections particularly the grammar and vocabulary sections as motivating factors to learn English. The possible reasons might be the difference between the students' expectations how these sections should have been presented, and the way they appeared in the materials.

Therefore, though no literature presents the 'best' method to teach language, or any aspect of language for that matter, more recent approaches value the students' views and preferences most in selecting 'what' and the ways learners should learn. Thus, this researcher recommends that those who are concerned, particularly teachers and material writers take account of the views and preferences of the students so as to make them feel the sense of achievement more regarding the grammar and vocabulary sections in the new materials.

B) Methodology

The classroom organizations, the roles teachers and learners assume, etc., in the task-based approach to language learning are different from those which these students were used to. These strange learning environments and situations were feared to create psychological barriers which would hinder their language acquisition activities. But the students seemed to accept them enthusiastically particularly the group and pair work. As this researcher observed, this

sections particularly seemed to be liked more by the students. They seemed to be reluctant in accepting the other sections particularly the grammar and vocabulary sections as motivating factors to learn English. The possible reasons might be the difference between the students' expectations how these sections should have been presented, and the way they appeared in the materials.

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B) Methodology

The classroom organizations, the roles teachers and learners assume, etc., in the task-based approach to language learning are different from those which these students were used to. These strange learning environments and situations were feared to create psychological barriers which would hinder their language acquisition activities. But the students seemed to accept them enthusiastically particularly the group and pair work. As this researcher observed, this

could be due to the fear-free environment the instructors created for learning.

In general, the high regard the students had for organizational techniques and other methodological aspects pertinent to the task-based approach could have a positive impact on the learning outcomes and, therefore, should continue to be employed.

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APPENDIX A

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Aims and procedures: The main aim of the observations was to obtain information which could consolidate or refute the views students revealed through the questionnaire on the task-based approach they were exposed to since their arrival at the university. To avoid a possible embarrassment an observer could cause, the researcher tried to act as one member of the groups throughout the observations. The researcher attempted to observe and record in his own words the activities and the students' reactions to those activities.

Observation 1: Reading Comprehension

The students had already started organizing themselves into groups when the instructor arrived. (It seemed that group work was the routine they were accustomed to.) The instructor completed the half-organized groups.

After the groups had been formed, the instructor told the student that they were going to read the article entitled: Aging: An emerging Challenge. But before they read the passage he gave them pre-reading tasks whose aim was, he told the students, to train the mind to think quickly and thoroughly. The following were the pre-reading tasks:

- I. What does aging mean?
- II. Who should take care of the aged?
- III. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living until one is considered as 'aged'?

The students jotted down points on each question individually first, and then discussed in groups. The instructor also joined the groups in discussions.

The discussions were motivating. A point raised by a member of a group was either opposed or modified or agreed to by the other members. They seemed not to take what a member brought to the group without evaluation or comment. For instance, the question whether there were more aged people in the 'North' or 'South' triggered a hot debate among the group the researcher was in. Half of the group argued that as the population explosion was higher in the 'South', consequently, the number of aged people should be higher in the 'South'. The other group argued that due to every facility available for life in the 'North', people lived longer there than those in the 'South'. As a result we had more aged people in the 'North'.

Finally, a student produced population pyramids for the two hemispheres she had learnt in her geography class as evidence which made the group agree that the 'North' had more aged people. In the while-reading tasks the same procedure was followed and the participation of the students

was encouraging. The discussion was completely in English perhaps because there was a Nigerian girl in that particular group.

Observation 2: Speaking and Listening

The task for the period was a debate 'for' or 'against' family planning aimed to develop the speaking and listening abilities of the students. The organizational technique was group work. The students were required, in their respective groups, to prepare points for or against family planning. After they had prepared their points, they selected one member who represented the group and spoke on their behalf.

A chair-person was nominated to moderate the debate. She had her seat in front of the class with four students on either side of her. The ones on her right side were for family planning whereas those on her left were against family planning. The main points raised by both sides were the following.

Against Family Planning

- It is against the will of God.
- Population is an asset of the nation
- Children are the source of income.
- It is killing babies.

For Family Planning

- Helps to have a manageable population size.
- Mothers' and children's health care can be met easily.
- good supply of food and other basic needs can be met.

After all panelists presented their views for or against family planning, there were questions and comments from the floor either opposing or supporting the points raised by the panelists. In general, the debate was so successful that one could easily read the feeling of satisfaction both from the students and the instructor.

Observation 3: Vocabulary and Grammar

It seemed that the main focus in learning vocabulary and grammar was their importance to the whole meaning of the text, not the newness of the word or the strange structure of a sentence. As a result the words focused on were those which were very important to understanding parts of a text,

or the text as a whole. For instance, in the passage which dealt with the problems of refugees in the Far East, words 'land-mines' and 'infrastructures' were focused on not only because they were new but because they were very important to understanding the text. To understand the major problems refugees had, one had to know 'land-mines' and 'infrastructures' that appeared in the article. Therefore, the students needed to understand these words. As a result they attracted attention so as to be dealt with. No decontextualized list of words was given for definition purposes.

Similarly, in the grammar sections the main focus was the use of grammar in conveying meanings. For instance, in teaching what was traditionally called 'direct and 'indirect' quotations, the instructor's main focus was not their formal appearances as such but how the writer used them to convey his meanings the way he wanted in the article entitled Aging: An emerging challenge. The sentences were taken and discussed as they were used in the article. No arbitrary sentences were constructed to show the use of 'direct' or 'indirect' quotations.

Observation 4: Writing

The writing sections of the new English materials are usually directly based on other preceding sections - reading, speaking, listening, etc. By the time the students reach the writing sections, they are supposed to have enough

knowledge about what they are going to write and the language to write in. They do not suffer from lack of ideas. What they may encounter is organizing those ideas into easily readable paragraph(s).

The writing task the researcher observed was the 'Aging' problems in Ethiopia. The students had already had enough information on the world-wide socio-economic problems 'aging' could cause from the discussions they had had on the article entitled 'Aging: An emerging challenge'. They had to apply that knowledge to the Ethiopian context. The task was done individually. The major problem was organizing the information they had in good language. The researcher hoped that the ability to organize would come with time. A mere producing a page or so of their own on a topic was believed to give them a sense of achievement which could act as a motivating factor to learn English.

Finally, the classroom observations were concluded with group discussions held with two groups, five student in each group, in section 19. The purpose was the same as that of the classroom observations.

The points of discussions were those found in the questionnaire. The views the students revealed during the discussions were basically the same as the ones already obtained through the questionnaire. They varied on different issues in the questionnaire. For instance,

concerning the status of grammar in English learning, there were students who argued that grammar was everywhere, i.e., in speaking, listening, reading and writing sections. According to these students, there was no need to study grammar separately and explicitly as they used to do in their high schools. Others opposed this view on the ground that without sufficient knowledge of grammar, they could not deal with the sections cited above. In the same way, they attempted to support their views on different points in the questionnaire. This served the researcher as a resource to reflect on the reasons behind particular views students held about the teaching and learning processes under discussion.

APPENDIX B

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAMM

To the students: This is a questionnaire intended to find out your views on the task-based approach to ELT and the new Freshman English materials you have been exposed to as compared to your high school English learning experiences. The researcher requests you to give your genuine opinions by responding to the statements.

Direction I:

A) Please fill in the following blanks with genuine information about yourself.

1. Sex _____
2. Age _____
3. Nationality _____
4. Mother tongue _____
5. High school last attended _____
6. Administrative region _____

Direction II: Mark with a tick (✓) in ONLY one of the five spaces what your opinion is with respect to each statement: Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. If you are not certain about any statement, please ask the researcher.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	In the new Freshman English materials, the activities that motivate me to learn English are in the:					
	1.1 listening sections					
	1.2 reading sections					
	1.3 vocabulary sections					
	1.4 grammar sections					
	1.5 speaking sections					
	1.6 writing sections					
2.	In the English text books I learnt at high school, the activities that motivated me to learn English were in the:					

	2.1	listening sections				
	2.2	reading sections				
	2.3	vocabulary sections				
	2.4	grammar sections				
	2.5	speaking sections				
	2.6	writing sections				
3.	The organizational techniques that, I think, help me most to learn English are:					
	3.1	pair work				
	3.2	group work				
	3.3	individual work				
	3.4	whole-class work (teacher-fronted)				

4.	The instructor I like most is the one who:					
4.1	explains the lessons thoroughly, and finally gives us home-work to be done at home.					
4.2	sets a task to be done in pairs or groups in the class					
5.	My main problem in pair or group work is:					
5.1	lack of English to convey or receive messages.					
5.2	fear of making mistakes when speaking English					
5.3	that students are unwilling to discuss issues at hand freely					
6.	In grammar sections, I think it is better if the instructor:					

6.1	gives us the rules before we do a task					
6.2	gives us meaningful language items from which we can derive the rules for ourselves					
7.	English can be learnt more easily if structures and vocabulary are studied step by step as we used to do in our high schools.					
8.	The new freshman English materials, I believe, give sufficient opportunities for the learners to use their English so that effective consolidation takes place					
9.	The teacher who corrects every English mistake his students make really knows how to do his job well.					

10.	Interactive language learning, where students do tasks in groups, is very important for developing proficiency in English					
11.	Group or pair work opens a chance only for clever students to do the task.					
12.	students are inhibited and shy to talk in groups, so the lecture method is more preferable					
13.	English grammar and vocabulary are presented more sufficiently in the high school textbooks than in the new freshman English materials.					
14.	Now being exposed to the new freshman English materials for about six months, I feel that they can help me achieve my goals for learning the language.					

15.	I can recommend the new Freshman English materials to be used by all first year college students in Ethiopia.					
18.	The teaching materials that I think realize the learning interests of the students are:					
	18.1 the high school English textbooks.					
	18.2 the new freshman English materials.					
19.	The high school textbooks are preferable to learn English grammar and vocabulary from.					

Direction III: For items 16 and 17 choose the alternative that suits your interest best.

16. How often do you say one should use his mother tongue in group or pair work when learning English?

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Usually
- e) Always

17. In group or pair work, it is better to:

- a) Choose one's partner(s)
- b) Sit where the instructor tells one to sit
- c) Have constant partners to do the tasks with.

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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