



A REVIEW OF STUDIES ON TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: During the 1980s, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerged as an innovative instructional approach within Western education. This methodology focuses on the practical application of language through structured tasks, facilitating real-world communication skills. Due to its clear structure and ease of implementation, TBLT has gained widespread recognition in modern education. This review critically explores the definitions and classifications of tasks in TBLT, referencing multiple scholarly perspectives and past research. It also examines two models proposed by Willis and Ellis for implementing TBLT in the classroom. Additionally, this paper highlights studies from three leading researchers to demonstrate the effectiveness of TBLT in real-world English learning environments. The review further discusses the strengths and limitations of this approach and offers recommendations for educators on designing tasks to maximize efficiency while addressing potential challenges.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, Task, English Language Teaching



Introduction. English has become the dominant global language for success in various industries, recognized as the most widely studied and taught language worldwide. Its universal significance makes it a crucial skill across different regions. Due to its effectiveness and increasing demand, the number of English learners continues to rise, prompting ongoing advancements in teaching methodologies. In recent years, English language instruction has shifted from a teacher-centered model to a more student-focused approach, prioritizing learners' ability to use the language effectively in real-life contexts. One widely adopted pedagogical strategy is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which originated in the United States in the 1980s and is rooted in constructivist teaching theories. According to Prabhu, TBLT encourages students to concentrate on task completion rather than language structures, making the learning process more natural and accessible. By engaging in meaningful activities, students enhance their English proficiency in practical contexts, fostering authentic communication.

Brown highlights that tasks are essential components of the learning process, serving as more than just language exercises—they support broader curriculum goals. Grounded in second-language acquisition research, TBLT views tasks as central to learning, with task completion serving as both the process and the measure of success.

This paper explores TBLT through three key dimensions: defining tasks, classifying task types, and implementing task-based teaching strategies. It also examines research on the practical effectiveness of TBLT in English classrooms before analyzing its advantages and challenges.

Defining Tasks in TBLT

Nunan describes a communicative task as a classroom activity requiring students to use the target language with a primary focus on meaning rather than linguistic form. The goal is to facilitate meaningful interaction, ensuring that tasks feel complete and relevant to real-life communication. For example, role-playing scenarios where students negotiate



or engage in conversations serve as effective communicative tasks. Different scholars offer various interpretations of tasks. Skehan identifies five key features: emphasis on meaning, encouragement of communication over specific linguistic structures, connection to real-world activities, problem-solving elements, and a focus on task completion. Ellis similarly defines tasks as activities designed primarily for meaningful language use. Bygate and Swain emphasize that tasks should have a clear purpose, requiring students to use language to achieve a goal—whether solving a problem, completing an assignment, or making a decision.

Despite these differences in definition, scholars consistently stress that tasks should be rooted in real-life scenarios, enabling learners to actively engage, think critically, and collaborate. Through task completion, students apply their existing language knowledge, reinforcing the principle of learning by doing.

Classifying Tasks in TBLT

Nunan categorizes tasks into two broad types: real-life tasks and pedagogical tasks.

- Real-life tasks simulate authentic situations, requiring students to apply language skills in practical contexts. These may include asking for directions, expressing opinions, writing resumes, making phone calls, or filling out official forms. Such tasks aim to immerse students in realistic communication scenarios, improving their ability to use English in everyday situations.
- Pedagogical tasks, on the other hand, are designed for instructional purposes and may not directly correspond to real-world experiences. They serve as structured exercises that help students develop language proficiency by integrating linguistic knowledge with cognitive skills. Fu notes that while these tasks lack direct real-world application, they hold educational value and support meaningful language practice.



Pica further categorizes tasks based on communication characteristics, identifying five types: jigsaw tasks, information-gap tasks, problem-solving tasks, decision-making tasks, and opinion-exchange tasks. Each type serves a different communicative purpose, promoting interaction and engagement.

Implementing TBLT in the Classroom

Willis outlines a three-phase model for TBLT implementation:

1. Pre-task Phase – This stage introduces students to the task, activating prior knowledge and preparing them with relevant vocabulary and context. Teachers may provide models or background information to support comprehension.
2. Task Cycle Phase – During this phase, students work on the task through discussions, role-playing, or problem-solving activities, often in pairs or groups. The task cycle includes task execution, planning, and reporting.
3. Post-task Phase – Also known as the language focus stage, this phase shifts attention from meaning to form. Students analyze language structures and reflect on their learning, reinforcing key linguistic elements.

Ellis proposes a similar three-step process: pre-task, during-task, and post-task. In his framework, students engage in preliminary activities, complete the task within specific constraints, and then present their findings for review and reinforcement.

Advantages of TBLT

Compared to traditional language teaching methods, TBLT offers several benefits:

1. Encourages Student Engagement – By incorporating relatable scenarios, such as booking tickets or making inquiries, tasks capture students' interest and motivation.
2. Develops Communicative Competence – Through task completion, students integrate linguistic skills with problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking.



3. Promotes Active Learning – Unlike passive learning methods, TBLT places students at the center of the learning process, encouraging active participation. Group activities ensure that every learner has a role, fostering interaction.
4. Enhances Independent Thinking – Under teacher guidance, students engage in discussions and decision-making, refining their logical reasoning and critical thinking abilities.

Challenges of TBLT

Despite its advantages, TBLT presents certain difficulties:

- Time Constraints – Designing and integrating meaningful tasks into the curriculum can be time-consuming. Teachers may struggle to balance task-based activities with other instructional requirements.
- Assessment Challenges – Traditional exams often fail to measure communicative competence effectively. Task-based assessment methods are needed to evaluate students' practical language skills.
- Unpredictable Outcomes – Task execution may lead to unpredictable use of vocabulary and grammar, creating difficulties in structuring lessons.
- Large Class Sizes – Managing TBLT in overcrowded classrooms can be challenging, as individualized monitoring and feedback require additional time and resources.

Conclusion

No single teaching method is without limitations, and educators must select approaches based on specific teaching objectives and classroom contexts. Shifting from traditional teaching models to student-centered learning aligns with the fundamental principles of TBLT. To maximize its effectiveness, educators should carefully plan lessons, design appropriate tasks, and integrate objectives into the learning process. During task execution, teachers should provide guidance and facilitate student engagement.



Additionally, post-task reflection and feedback play a crucial role in reinforcing learning. By adapting and refining task-based strategies, educators can enhance English language instruction, fostering a more effective and dynamic learning experience.

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