

Effect of Task-Based Learning in Reading Comprehension of EFL Student

ผลของการจัดการเรียนรู้แบบมุ่งปฏิบัติงานด้านความเข้าใจในการอ่าน ของผู้ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

Kamonchanok Deecharoen

กมลชนก ดีเจริญ

School of Liberal Arts, Eastern Asia University

คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยอีสเทิร์นเอเซีย

Received: March 7, 2022

Revised: April 25, 2022

Accepted: April 25, 2022

Abstract

In task-based learning, the emphasis is on meaning and the learners are required to use the language for learning. Teaching English through tasks has been considered useful to employ in the language classroom because students are believed to learn the target language better when tasks are used as vehicles in language teaching. Developing reading comprehension ability is an important aspect in acquisition of a language. In addition, increasing learners' motivation and performance has always been the primary concern of language teachers. Therefore, a new approach, TBL, is additionally applied to a traditional classroom situation with the aim of finding solutions to certain problems such as poor learner motivation.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning, Reading Comprehension, EFL (English as Foreign Language), Teaching English, Language teachers

บทคัดย่อ

ในการจัดการเรียนรู้แบบมุ่งปฏิบัติงาน สิ่งสำคัญคือการมุ่งเน้นการปฏิบัติและผู้เรียนจำเป็นต้องใช้ภาษาในการเรียนรู้ การสอนภาษาอังกฤษผ่านการปฏิบัติงานมีประโยชน์อย่างมากในห้องเรียน เนื่องจากผู้เรียนจะได้เรียนรู้มากขึ้นโดยมีงานที่ได้รับมอบหมายเป็นสื่อกลาง ในการเรียนการสอนภาษาและการพัฒนาทักษะทางด้านความเข้าใจในการอ่านก็เป็นสิ่งสำคัญในการรับภาษาใหม่ นอกจากนี้การเพิ่มแรงจูงใจในการเรียน และการปฏิบัติในห้องเรียนก็เป็นผู้สอนจะต้องให้ความสำคัญเป็นอันดับแรก รูปแบบการเรียนการสอนแบบใหม่ ดังเช่นการจัดการเรียนรู้แบบมุ่งปฏิบัติงาน จึงได้ถูกนำมาประยุกต์ใช้ในห้องเรียนสอนภาษาแบบดั้งเดิมเพื่อเป็นการแก้ปัญหาลดแรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษา

คำสำคัญ: การจัดการเรียนรู้แบบมุ่งปฏิบัติงาน, ความเข้าใจในการอ่าน, การเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ, การสอนภาษาอังกฤษ, ผู้สอนภาษา



Introduction

One of the receptive skills in learning English language, which should be focused on, is the reading comprehension since reading plays an important role in language learning and acquisition. Reading comprehension is also considered as the real core for reading process. It assumes that comprehension is the peak of the reading skills and the bases for all reading processes. Therefore, teaching students to read with a good comprehension must be teachers' highest priority. Furthermore, the main aim of teaching reading in junior high schools is to enable students to comprehend various reading texts. Realizing the high importance of reading comprehension ability, it is very important to find and use appropriate instructional methods, materials, activities, media, and other requirements that will help the learners improve their reading comprehension ability (Astuti, Priyana., 2020)

Task-based Learning (TBL) seems to match the appropriate method to be used. TBL is one of the teaching learning methods that its focus is put on the learners. Through TBL, learners have the opportunity to work more autonomously and build their vocabulary and grammar. TBL provides learners the opportunity in depth investigations of worthy knowledge.

What is Learning?

Learning is the process of acquiring new understanding, knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, attitudes, and preferences. [1] The ability to learn is possessed by humans, animals, and some machines; there is also evidence for some kind of learning in certain plants. [2] Some learning is immediate, induced by a single event (e.g., being burned by a hot stove), but much skill and knowledge accumulate from repeated

experiences. [3] The changes induced by learning often last a lifetime, and it is hard to distinguish learned material that seems to be "lost" from that which cannot be retrieved. The acquisitions of knowledge or skills are obtained through experience, study, or by being taught.

The word learning is used routinely in discussions about teaching in higher education, so it's important to clarify what we are referring to when we talk about learning. Educational researchers agree that learning is much deeper than memorization and information recall. Deep and long-lasting learning involves understanding, relating ideas and making connections between prior and new knowledge, independent and critical thinking and ability to transfer knowledge to new and different contexts. Learning is "a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning" (Ambrose et al, 2010, p.3). The change in the learner may happen at the level of knowledge, attitude or behavior. As a result of learning, learners come to see concepts, ideas, and/or the world differently. Learning is not something done to students, but rather something students themselves do. It is the direct result of how students interpret and respond to their experiences.

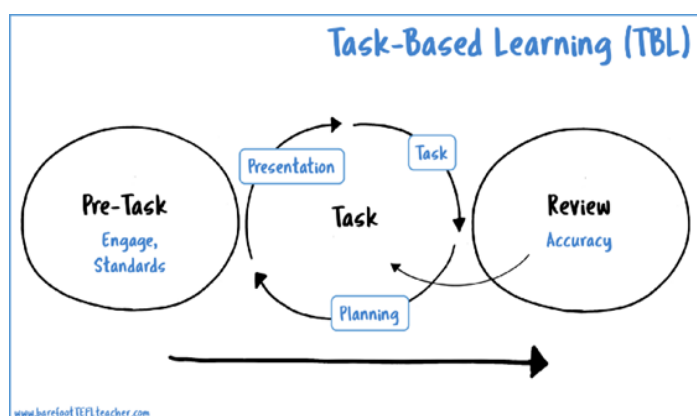
While there are disciplinary differences in what students learn, it is important to keep in mind that learning content or information constitutes only one part of learning in university courses. Regardless of the field of study, students need to have significant opportunities to develop and practice intellectual skills/thinking processes (e.g., problem-solving, scientific inquiry), motor skills and attitudes/values that are important to their fields of study. In addition, students need opportunities to develop interpersonal and social skills (often

referred to as soft skills) that are important for professional and personal success. Examples of these skills include teamwork, effective communication, conflict resolution and creative thinking.

Task-Based Learning

Task based learning is a different way to teach languages. It can help the student by placing his/her in a situation like in the real world.

A situation where oral communication is essential for doing a specific task, task-based learning has the advantage of getting the student to use her skills at her current level. To help develop language through its use, it has the advantage of getting the focus of the student toward achieving a goal where language becomes a tool, making the use of language a necessity.



According to Weller (2019), Task-Based Learning (TBL) is a lesson structure, a method of sequencing activities in your lessons. Sometimes called ‘Task-Based Language Teaching’, TBL lessons students solve a task that involves an authentic use of language, rather than completing simple language questions about grammar or vocabulary. Task-Based Learning is a good way to get students engaged and using English. That, together with the collaborative element, builds confidence with language and social situations. It’s also been shown to be more aligned with how we actually learn a language.

What is Task?

Willis (1996) defined the TASKS as activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. This means a task can be anything from doing a puzzle to making

an airline reservation.

A Task-Based approach to Language has two-fold benefits; first, allows for a needs analysis to be matched to identified student needs and supported by research findings of classroom-centered language learning. Second, allows evaluation to be based on testing referring to task-based criterion and allows for form-focused instruction. So, we should select topics that will motivate learners, engage their attention and promote their language development as efficiently as possible. It involves meaningful communication. A ‘gap’ between what the students know to prompt communication (e.g., they have different information, or a difference of opinion). Students can choose how to complete it, and which language they use to do so. There’s a clear goal, so students know when it’s completed. A task could be to create a presentation, some kind of media, a piece of text, or a recorded dialogue. It could be trying

to work out the solution to a practical problem, like planning a complex journey, or deducing missing information, like working out who started a rumour at school. It could even be justifying and supporting an opinion, like arguing for your preference in an election or favourite competitor in a TV show. Whichever task you choose, like ‘Present, Practice, Production’ (PPP), Task-Based Learning is a structure with three stages:

Advantages for Task-Based Learning

Task based learning is useful for moving the focus of the learning process from the teacher to the student. It gives the student a different way of understanding language as a tool instead of as a specific goal. It can bring teaching from abstract knowledge to real world application. A Task is helpful in meeting the immediate needs of the learners and provides a framework for creating classes, interesting and able to address to the students’ needs.

Disadvantages for Task-Based Learning

Tasks have to be carefully planned to meet the correct criteria. It can take longer to plan. It’s also time-consuming adapting PPP-style coursebook lessons. Too much scaffolding in the early stages can turn a TBL class into a PPP class. The students can avoid using the target language to complete the task if: Tasks aren’t well-designed, students aren’t motivated, students are too excited and students are feeling lazy

The Pre-Task

This is where you introduce the task to the students, and get them excited for the task. Once they’re engaged, then you should set your expectations for the task. Do this so the ‘less motivated’ students don’t do the bare minimum.

To do this, you could show the students an example of the completed task, or model it. If you want to differentiate your students, then now is a good time to hand out support materials, or scaffold the task appropriately. Group them and give instructions. In summary; the focus of the stage is to engage the learners, set expectations and give instructions.

The Task

To begin the task, small groups or pairs are good, rather than a bigger group where shyer students can ‘hide’. Ideally you won’t join in the task, but you’ll be monitoring, and only giving hints if students get really stuck. A note here on task design — there are several ways to go about designing a task, but usually (as mentioned above) it should involve a ‘gap’ of some sort. Read this article for ideas on how to do this. In summary; the focus of this stage is fluency — using the language to communicate without falling into L1 unless really needed.

A Review

Once the learners have completed the task and have something to show, then it’s time for a review. Peer reviews are preferable, or if during your monitoring you see an error common to many, a teacher-led delayed correction is also very useful. For weaker groups, peer correction can be made more effective by giving the students support on how to give feedback — perhaps via a checklist, or a ‘Things to Look For’ list. In summary; the aim for this stage is accuracy — reflecting on completed work and analyzing it.

Three Reasons TBL Classes Go Badly

a. 1. If Tasks Aren’t Well Designed

What happens: Students might get into

the task, but if it's designed around communication, then there's no need to talk, and students can just complete the task by themselves which inevitably happens.

Why it happens: there's no gap in the task

Solution: design your task with one of the communicative gaps. Here's a useful podcast where I discuss task design.

b. If Students are 'Lazy' or Bored

What happens: Students will do the bare minimum to complete the task. They'll avoid the target language and use the simplest language they know, even single word utterances, to get by.

Why it happens: the topic isn't interesting, hasn't been presented clearly, they don't understand, or there's no rapport with the teacher.

Solution: choose an interesting topic/context/material for learners, grade your language appropriately, check your instructions, and work on rapport building.

c. If Students are too Excited

What happens: students are so excited to complete a task that they revert to a mixture of crazy interlanguage, body language and shouting ("That... Here! No, wrong, it, it — [speaks own language] — ta-da! Teacher, teacher, done!")

Why it happens: well, they're over-excited and just want to complete the task as soon as possible. The good news is that you chose a topic, context and materials that really connected with them — congratulations! Bad news is, it got in the way of the task...

Solution: If you expect that your task will make the students a little excited, make sure that you set the standards very clearly. Definitely show a model of some kind, and be clear about the minimum standard. If appropriate, quantify it;

"you have to record at least 20 lines of speech, everyone must speak at least three times..." and so on.

Task-Based Learning Framework

The TBL framework consists of three main phrases, provides 3 basic conditions for language learning. These are pre-task, task-cycle and language focus.

1. Pre-task: introduces the class to the topic and the task activating topic-related words and phrases.

2. Task Cycle: offers learners the chance to use whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task and then to improve their language under the teacher's guidance while planning their reports on the task. Task Cycle offers learners a holistic experience of language in use. There are three components of a task cycle:

a. Task: Learners use whatever language they can master, working simultaneously, in pairs or small groups to achieve goals of the task.

b. Planning: Comes after the task and before the report, forming the central part of the cycle. The teacher's role here is that of a language adviser. Learners plan their reports effectively and maximize their learning opportunities.

c. Report: is the natural condition of the task cycle. In this stage learners tell the class about their findings. So, the report stage gives students a natural stimulus to upgrade and improve their language. It presents a very real linguistic challenge to communicate clearly and accurately in language appropriate to the circumstances.

3. Language Focus: allows a closer study of some of the specific features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle. Learners examine the language forms in the text and look in detail at the use and the meaning of

lexical items they have noticed (Willis, 1986, p.75). Language focus has two components:

a) Analysis: Analysis activities draw attention to the surface forms, realizing the meanings learners have already become familiar with during the task cycle and so help them to systematize their knowledge and broaden their understanding. Instead of the teacher presenting language to learners as new analysis activities, learners reflect on the language already experienced.

b) Practice: Practice activities are based on features of language that have already occurred in previous texts and transcripts or in features that have just been studied in analysis activities.

On looking back at these definitions, I can say that using tasks in teaching is a popular method and the implications of using these tasks in a classroom context is observable after conducting research. Many people have studied the implementation of TBL and tasks within their classrooms and have advised using tasks in language classrooms suggesting that the motivation of students' rises through assigned tasks. On looking at the positive results that the use of tasks may bring about in the EFL students, it can be said that using a variety of tasks in class gives positive results.

Further Observations on Task-Based Learning

With advanced learners that are enthusiastic, a model isn't as important, and might even be a bad idea. Giving a model can steer your students in a particular direction, as they think that's what you want, and try to please you. Not giving a model lets them really use their imagination and creativity. Conversely, for younger or weaker learners, a model is really necessary or there's a danger of ending up with low quality work. Task-Based Learning seems to be changing its name

slowly, as more people are calling it 'Task-Based Language Teaching'. You might have heard of 'Project-Based Learning' (PBL) — the only real difference between that and Task-Based Learning is that PBL is usually run over periods longer than just one lesson, and with more review stages.

Reading

Reading is a dialogue between the reader and the writer and comprehension is a procedure through which a reader builds meaning from the text using his/her knowledge, experience, and the information from the text. Reading is not an easy skill to master. It is a complex process that requires specialized skill of the reader (Dechant, 1977; 21). It is also comprehension process. According to Nunan (1998; 33), reading needs identification and also interpretation processes which require the reader's knowledge about the language structure used in the text and his knowledge about a given topic. It is the complexity that makes students less interested in this kind of activity. They find it difficult to understand what is on the reading passage since they do not know the technique which can help them to read more effectively and efficiently. This phenomenon happens in almost every language class.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to read and process a text and understand its meaning. It is the process of constructing meaning from a written or printed text. Reading cannot be separated from comprehension. That is why there are a lot of problems dealing with reading comprehension. Many English learners find it difficult to understand the English text. They often get stuck because of some problems, such as an unfamiliar word, their inability in understanding

the context, being reluctant, and so forth. Many other researchers have studied the integration or implementation of TBL in teaching English, ESP, EAP, or reading comprehension (Chodkiewicz, 2001; Ellis, 2000; Skehan, 1998; Wallace, 2001; Willis, 1996). Some of them have shown interest in using authentic materials to improve reading comprehension ability of the EFL learners.

Reading comprehension skills separate the “passive” unskilled readers from the “active” skilled readers. Skilled readers do not just read, they interact with the text. Skilled readers, for instance, predict what will happen next in a story using clues presented in text, create questions about the main idea, message, or plot of the text, and monitor understanding of the sequence, context, or characters (Sanders, 2001:26).

To be able to achieve the purpose of reading comprehension, one should have some basic reading skills as follows; (1) literal skills (recalling and recognizing facts and information, finding answer to specific questions); (2) interpretive skills (getting the central thought and main idea, drawing conclusions, generalizing, deriving meaning from context); and (3) creative skills (applying information into daily life).

Effect of TBL in Reading Comprehension

The effect of TBL on reading comprehension ability of EFL students, the data are analyzed through statistical procedures. The results showed that the role of task was an attention injector for EFL students. They became involved in the class works by sharing answers, trying to participate, paying attention, giving answers, encouraging others to participate in the activities and tasks, participating as volunteers, working on the exercises, drawing, etc. In the language focus phase, it is recommended to provide the

students with an overall description about the text by asking them to discuss the grammatical problems involved in the text and the teacher can assess the students’ comprehension of the text by giving them the comprehension questions.

In general, due to the fact that using the task-based learning can improve the students’ reading comprehension; it is suggested to the English teachers especially whose students have the same characteristics and in similar situation to apply the technique as one of the alternatives that can be used in the teaching of reading comprehension.

Definition of EFL

EFL is regarded as English as a Foreign Language, and ESL is called English as a Second Language. Before distinguishing EFL from ESL, it is important that there are differences between “foreign language” and “second language”. Yuko Iwai (2011) defined that EFL refers to those who learn English in non-English speaking countries. (E.g., Japanese people who learn English in their country are EFL learners). Moreover, ESL refers to those who learn English in countries where English is used as a tool for communication and is formally spoken. From the above, EFL is mainly used by non-native English learners, such as Chinese learners of English in China.

Conclusion

Therefore, when we choose TBL, there should be a clear and defined purpose of that choice. Having chosen TBL as language teaching method, the teacher thereby recognizes that “teaching does not and cannot determine the way the learner’s language will develop” and that “teachers and learners cannot simply choose what is to be learned”. “The elements

of the target language do not simply slot into place in a predictable” Skehan, P. (1998). This means that we, as teachers, have to let go of the control of the learning process order, as if there ever was one! We must accept that we cannot control what each individual learner has learnt after for example two language lessons and as Skehan, P. (1998) says “instruction has no effect on language learning”. In TBL the learner should be exposed to as much of the foreign language as possible in order to merely observe the foreign language, then hypothesize over it, and that is individually, and finally experiment with it. One clear purpose of choosing TBL is to increase learner activity; TBL is concerned with learner and not teacher activity and it lies on the teacher

to produce and supply different tasks which will give the learner the opportunity to experiment spontaneously, individually and originally with the foreign language. Each task will provide the learner with new personal experience with the foreign language and at this point the teacher has a very important part to play. He or she must take the responsibility of the consciousness raising process, which must follow the experimenting task activities. The consciousness raising part of the TBL method is a crucial for the success of TBL, it is here that the teacher must help learners to recognize differences and similarities, help them to “correct, clarify and deepen” their perceptions of the foreign language. (Lewis, M.). All in all, TBL is language learning by doing.



References

- Allwright, D., & Bailey, K. B. (1991). *Focus on the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barefoot. (n.d.) *TEFL Teacher*. Retrieved from <https://davidrweiler.medium.com/what-is-task-based-learning-c3f42bbf51fc>
- Carroll, M. (1994). Journal writing as a learning and research tool in the adult classroom. *TESOL journal*, 4(1), 19-22
- Chodkiewicz, H. (2001). The acquisition of word meaning while reading in English as a foreign language. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 1, 29-49.
- Cohen, I., & Manion, L. (1980). *Research methods in education*. New York: Routledge.
- Cook, V. (1996). *Second language learning and teaching*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Davies, R. (1993). *Chronicles: Doing action research: The stories of three teachers. reconstructing teacher education*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Dechant, E. (1977). *Psychology in teaching reading*. New York: Macmillan.
- Education & Culture DG, Lifelong Learning Programme, funded by European Commission. (n.d.) *Task-based learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.languages.dk/archive/pools-m/manuals/final/taskuk.pdf>, accessed on October 25, 2014).
- Ellis, R. (2018). *Reflections on task-based language teaching*. Bristol: Blue
- Ellis, R. (2000). *Task-based language learning & teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Gibbs, G. (1995). *The society for research into higher education and Open University Press*. Celtic Court: Buckingham.
- Leedy, P. D. (1997). *Practical research: Planning and design*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *The lexical approach*. Hove: LTP.
- Lewis, M. (2000). *Teaching collocation*. Hove: LTP.
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (1993). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDonough, J. (1994). A teacher looks at teacher's diaries. *ELT journal*, 42(1), 14-20.
- Munn, P., & Drever, E. (1990). *Using questionnaires in small-scale research*. Edinburgh: The scottish council for research in education.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Understanding language classrooms*. London: Prentice-Hall International.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1998). *Designing task for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge language teaching library).
- Podcast. (n.d.). *Principles for designing better tasks (with Dave Weller)*. A discussion between myself and the lovely folks at the TEFL Training Institute.
- Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second language pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sanders, M. (2001). *Understanding dyslexia and the reading process: A guide for educators and parents*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wallace, J. M. (1991). *Training language teachers*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Wallace, C. (2001). *Reading*. In R. Carter, & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511667206.004
- Waters, A. (1988). Teacher-training course design: A case study. *ELT journal*, 42(1), 14-20.
- Weller, D. (2019). *What is task-based learning*. *Barefoot TEFL Teacher*. Retrieved from <https://davidrweller.medium.com/what-is-task-based-learning-c3f42bbf51fc>
- Willis, J. (1981). *Teaching English through English*. London: Longman.
- Willis, J. (1986). *Teaching English through English*. Hong Kong: Longman.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Harlow: Longman.
- Willis, D., & Willis, J. R. (2011). *Doing task-based teaching*. 5. print. Oxford: Oxford University. Press (Oxford handbooks for language teachers).
- Yuko Iwai. (n.d.) The effects of metacognitive reading strategies: Pedagogical implications for EFL/ESL Teachers [J]. *The reading matrix*, 2011, 150-159.

