

The Impact of Task-Based Approach on EFL learner's Performance

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which task-based instruction affecting EFL learners' performance. This paper covers the impact of task approach on EFL learners' performance. It shades light on the relevant literature reviewed and studies on TBLT. At the same time, the speaking skill and speaking sub-skills are introduced as a base for teaching and developing speaking activities. On the other hand, the paper reflects on implementing task-based instruction and the principles for implementation by drawing a framework for implementation, and factors affecting implementation of TBI. On the above findings, the researcher recommends that teaching instruction should be given more attention in EFL classes in the light of using task-based approach. Also the researcher suggests that further research is needed to explore more in the effectiveness of task-based programs on EFL learner's performance as well as its fluency.

Keywords

task-based instruction, EFL learners' performance, speaking skills

1. Introduction

As a common fact, task-based language learning has its origins in communicative language teaching, and is a subcategory of it. Educators adopted task-based language learning for a variety of reasons. Some moved to task-based syllabi in an attempt to make language in the classroom truly communicative, rather than the untrue-communication that results from classroom activities with no direct connection to real-life situations.

The use of tasks in language pedagogy has a long tradition, particularly in the "communicative approach" to language teaching. In fact, in the late 1970s and 1980s, these tasks were often called "communicative activities" (Crookes, 1986). The term "communicative activities" has been gradually replaced by "tasks" (Bygate et al., 2001). The interest in tasks comes from the belief that they are "a significant site for learning and teaching" (Bygate, 2000, p. 186).

The early research efforts focused on investigating the potential of the task as a unit of organisation in syllabus design or language instruction (e.g., Harper, 1986; Candlin & Murphy, 1987; Prabhu, 1987;

Breen, 1987, 1989; Long & Crookes, 1993; Willis, 1996, among others). This interest in tasks then shifted to concentrate on the cognitive dimension of the task, and the identification of conditions that affect task performance, in order to inform pedagogy (e.g., Brown & Yule, 1983; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Ellis, 1987; Crookes & Gass, 1993a; Robinson, 1995, 2001; Skehan & Foster, 1997, 1999; Yule, 1997; Skehan, 1998; Bygate, 1996, 1999, 2001; Lynch & Maclean, 2000, 2001; Bygate et al., 2001, among others).

TBLT is primarily motivated by the theory of language learning rather than the theory of language itself. However, there are several assumptions about the nature of language that TBLT underlies. The theories of language on which TBLT is based are widely explained in Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp. 226-228) and are put in brief hereunder.

Although EFL students in the Sudan learn English at basic education and secondary schools for eight years, they tend to be unable to reach the expected proficiency level when they join tertiary higher education. Since the EFL learners are poor in their English and lack confidence in their ability to operate in their own English that used it as a foreign language. The researcher searches for a suitable approach to build student's self-confidence, here the researcher pays attention to the task-based language which will solve the problem where learners are developed through performing. Task-Based Instruction (TBI) is purposely being used as an alternative approach to develop learning by doing. It will develop learners' accuracy and fluency so as to help them communicate effectively in English. Some teachers do not implement it as it was intended. They have tempted to insert a grammar presentation stage into the lesson before students do the task.

Teachers are doing their best efforts in order to help learners to use the language effectively and efficiently. But the problem stated above is still persisting. Therefore, it necessitates looking for another method to language teaching that enables students develop their proficiency in English language. Task-based language teaching has got great attention of teachers, linguists and researchers.

It has been introduced to a certain extent in colleges. It seems that there are misconceptions with regard to task, activity and exercise practiced by teachers.

Hence, this study is intended to explore the extent to which task-based approach is utilized and the factors that affect the implementation of the approach on student's performance.

The findings of this study are hoped to give valuable information for syllabus designers and material developers, also the relation between task-based instruction and syllabus. It is also to investigate the ability of the teachers for creating suitable ways or approaches to teach the students. It can also give insights for language instructors about TBLT. Furthermore, the study will lay a basis for researchers who are interested in the issue.

2. Literature Review

Language is primarily a means of making meaning, i.e., communication.

-Multiple models of language (structural, functional and interactional) inform TBI. In other words, TBI is not linked to a single model but draws on the three models of language.

-Lexical units are central in language use and language learning. Students need some vocabularies which are relevant to their task at hand and so as to report after the accomplishment of the task.

-Conversation is the central focus of language and the keystone of language acquisition. The use of language begins with simple conversation in real life situation. During this time, the learner's linguistic and communicative resources will be activated and the acquisition of language would be prompted.

It is believed, in TBLT, that tasks play a central role in learning language. Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp. 228-289) put its key theory of learning as follows:

- 1) Tasks provide both the input and output processing necessary for language acquisition.
- 2) Task activity and achievement motivate students to learn and therefore promote learning.
- 3) Learning difficulty can be negotiated and fine-tuned for particular pedagogical purposes.

Richards and Rodgers further explain that specific tasks can be designed to facilitate using and learning of particular aspects of language. More difficult, cognitively demanding tasks reduce the amount of attention the learner can give to the formal features of message, something that is thought to be necessary for accuracy and grammatical development. Sometimes, it is necessary to make tasks difficult deliberately to shift learners' attention from accuracy to fluency so as to develop fluency.

The role of learner, teacher and instructional materials are among the basic components of an approach. In line with this, TBLT identified the main role of the student as central who accomplish the task. In fact, through this process, the learner plays a number of specific roles such as group participant, monitor, risk-taker and innovator, strategy user, goal-setter and self-evaluator (Oxford, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The instructor also plays several roles. These include selector and sequencer of tasks, preparer of learners for task, pre-task conscious-raiser, guide, strategy instructor and assistance provider (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 236), "Instructional materials play an important role in TBLT because it is dependent on a sufficient supply of appropriate classroom tasks". Since language instruction begins with providing learners with tasks, the instructional material that consists of tasks is very important to give the context of learning for students. The material can be either pedagogic (meant to classroom use) or authentic (used in real life). However, authentic tasks are more favored as they train the learners with real world activities and skills. Furthermore, they take the learners to the real world where language is used naturally and, in turn; let them feel that what they are learning in the classroom is functional and relevant outside of the classroom.

In Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL), learning is fostered through performing a string of activities as steps towards successful task awareness. The focus is away from learning language items in a non-contextualized vacuum to using language as a vehicle for authentic, real-world needs. By

working towards task realization, the language is used straight away in the real-world context of the learner, making learning authentic. In a TBLL framework the language needed is not pre-selected and given to the learners who then practice it but rather it is drawn from the learners with help from the facilitator, to meet the demands of the activities and task.

TBLL relies seriously on learners dynamically experimenting with their accumulation of knowledge and using skills of deduction and independent language analysis to develop the situation fully.

In this approach, enthusiasm for communication becomes the major driving force. It places the emphasis on communicative fluency rather than the hesitancy borne of the pressure in more didactic approaches to produce unflawed utterances. Exposure to the target language should be in a naturally occurring context. This means that, if materials are used, they are not prepared especially for the language classroom, but are selected and adapted from authentic sources.

The Task-Based Learning Framework shown below has been adapted from the Willis framework (1996). This task is defined as an undertaking that is authentic to the needs of the learners.

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is basically a theory of learning rather than a theory of language. It is a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching. The principles involved are:

- 1) Activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning.
- 2) Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning.
- 3) Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. TBLT proposes the notion of “task” as a central unit of planning and teaching. Nunan (1989) gives the definition the communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also look complete, to be able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.

Tasks have long been part of the conventional language teaching techniques. TBLT, however, offers a different rationale for the use of tasks as well as different criteria for the design and use of tasks. The reliance on tasks as the primary source of pedagogical input in teaching distinguishes it from other language teaching approaches.

Task-Based Learning in language teaching has become an important approach in the last years mainly because it promotes communication and social interaction although “task” in learning languages dates back to the sixties. A well known and widely practiced PPP approach to teaching language items follows a sequence of Presentation of the item, Practice of the item and then Production, i.e., use of the item (Harmer, 2001, p. 80). This is the approach currently followed by most commercially produced course books and has the advantage of appearing systematic and efficient. Some researchers, however, argue that PPP approach only creates the illusion of learning because for any lasting learning to occur learners need much more communicative experience. The disadvantages with PPP that are raised by some members of language teaching community include:

- 1) too simplified approach to learning a language—assuming it consists of rudimentary blocks and manipulated by grammar rules,
- 2) overuse of the target structure,
- 3) usage of existing language resources,
- 4) Failure to produce the language correctly or not produce at all.

A Task-Based Learning (TBL) refers to activities designed for learners doing authentic tasks (Simpson, online). Learners are asked to perform a task without any input or guidance from the teacher. For task completion, learners have to use the language in a similar way as language is used in the real world outside the classroom. TBL approach does not contain predetermined language syllabus. Language items that learners need to complete tasks successfully emerge in the process and can be recycled at the end of activities. Among possible advantages of TBL the following have to be mentioned:

- a) there is no language control in production stage,
- b) learners use their language knowledge and resources,
- c) learners experiment with language during task completion,
- d) learners' communicate and collaborate during activities,
- e) target language emerges from students' needs,
- f) TBL offers reflection on language usage.

The main benefit of TBL is language usage for a meaningful communication. In this respect, TBL is closely associated with Content-Based Instruction that combines language learning and content of subject matter. Both methodologies allow integrating all language skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening, into development of fluency towards accuracy.

An extensive up-to-date monograph on Task-Based Learning and Teaching by Rod Ellis appeared in 2003. According to Ellis (2003, p. 65), "TBL is mostly about the social interaction established between learners as a source of input and means of acquisition, and involves the negotiation of meaning, communicative strategies, and communicative effectiveness". Ellis (2003, p. 320) also outlines the teaching principles: level of task difficulty, goals, performance orientation, students' active role, taking risks, focus on meaning and form, need of self-assessment of progress and performance.

Quite a diverse attitude to TBL is expressed by Nunan (1988, p. 44): "the focus is on learning process rather than learning product", and "there is little or no attempt to relate these processes to outcome".

TBLT has been utilized not only because it has well-grounded assumptions, principles, and theories of second language acquisition, but due to the sound rationale behind its implementation (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). The application of TBLT is really a consequence of a better sense of the nature and procedures of EFL learning and also owing to the insufficiency of other approaches, for example, Presentation-Practice-Product (PPP) (Hui, 2004). The result of employing a PPP model is that learners are still unable to apply the structure accurately though grammatical rules have been accounted for with care (Ritchie, 2003). Apparently, there exists a gap between students' mastering a rule and executing it in communication, and it is doubtful whether the grammar-based PPP model is effective to language

acquisition (Ritchie, 2003).

TBLT indicates that language learning is a dynamic procedure facilitating communication and social interaction rather than a product acquired by practicing language items, and that students learn the target language more effectively when they are naturally exposed to meaningful tasks (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Such a view of language learning caused the development of various task-based approaches in the 1980's (e.g., Breen, 1987; Candlin & Murphy, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Prabhu, 1987), and during the 1990's, developed into a detailed practical framework for communicative classrooms where students performed tasks through cycles of pre-task preparation, task performance, and post-task feedback (Skehan, 1996b). In particular, TBLT has been re-examined in recent years from distinct perspectives involving oral performance, writing performance, and performance assessment (Ellis, 2003b).

Despite its educational benefits in the language learning context, a task unnecessarily guarantees its successful implementation unless the teacher as facilitator of task performance understands how tasks actually work in the language classroom (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). It likewise suggests that TBLT as an instructional approach is more than giving tasks to learners and evaluating their performance. The teacher, who attempts to succeed in conducting TBLT, is requested to have adequate knowledge on the instructional framework related to its plan, process, and assessment (Hui, 2004).

3. Studies on TBLT

It appears that Prabhu's Communicational Teaching Project in Bangalore (Prabhu, 1987) was a major milestone in the process of "changing winds and shifting sands" (Brown, 2000, p. 13) towards this new language teaching paradigm (Leaver & Willis, 2004). In reality, the results of this project indicated that TBLT might represent a promising alternative to existing methods of the 1980s, as suggested by Tarone and Yule (1989).

Cathcart in Chaudrun (1988, p. 98) was one of the language oriented researchers who performed TBLT with empirical examinations. After observing eight Spanish-speaking kindergarten children in various activities for a year, Cathcart pointed out that "an increase in utterance length or complexity was found in those peer-peer interactions".

The results of a study conducted by Rulon and McCreary's (1986), which compared between teacher-fronted and group work negotiation for meaning also endorse the reliability of TBLT. The point they made was that through group work focused on meaning, interaction is promoted, and, eventually L2 learning ensues.

Fotos and Ellis (1991) demonstrated that the adoption of "task-based language teaching" to communicate about grammar is conducive to both learning and communication. They also found that communicative grammar-based tasks helped Japanese college-level EFL learners increase their knowledge of difficult grammatical rules and facilitated the acquisition of implicit knowledge.

Bygate (1996) found evidence that repetition of a task affected accuracy in some interesting ways that were consistent with this account. Without any prior warning or indication that the task was to be

repeated, and without any use of reference to the task in class of repeating a video narrative task, the speaker showed significant adjustments to the way she spoke. According to several experienced judges, her lexical selection, selection of collocates, selection of grammatical items, and her ability of self-correct was better when the task was repeated. During the first performance, the speaker was likely to have been more taxed by the task of holding meanings in memory, transferring the meanings into words and articulating them, under time pressure. During the second performance, the speaker was likely to have been able to take advantage of the familiarity of the content and with the processes of formulating the meanings, and was able to devote more attention to the lexico-grammatical selection. Bygate also concluded that repetition of similar tasks is more likely to provide a structured context for mastery of form-meaning relations than is a random sequencing of tasks.

Pica-Porter, Paninos and Linnel (1996) investigated the effect of interaction during the implementation of a task on promoting the process of comprehension between L2 students. The participants of this study were sixteen English-speaking intermediate students of French as a foreign language at the University of Hawaii. The findings of this study showed that the language produced by participants during the simulation was typical of negotiation for meaning. The results also indicated that the interaction between L2 students offer data of considerable quality, but may not provide the necessary input that would result in reconstruction of the learners' language. The study concluded that L2 students can be a source of modified and limited input and the interaction between them is not as rich as the interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers. Pica et al. (1996) recommended that negotiation for meaning may have a beneficial role when used in combination with other pedagogical principles that promote language acquisition.

Lochana and Deb's (2006) project in a school run by the Basaveshwara Education Society in India also revealed evidence in support of a task-based approach to language teaching and learning. They developed an experiment in which non-task-based textbook activities were converted into task-based ones in order to test two hypotheses: (1) Task-based teaching enhances the language proficiency of the learners', and (2) "Tasks encourage learners to participate more in the learning processes". Their findings suggest that TBL is beneficial to learners not only in terms of proficiency enhancement but also in terms of motivation.

Joen and Jung (2006) explored EFL teachers' perceptions of TBLT in Korean secondary school context. The data for their study were collected through questionnaires from a total of 228 teachers at 38 middle and high schools in Korea. The overall findings of their study revealed that despite a higher level of understanding of TBLT concepts, many Korean EFL teachers retain some fear of adopting TBLT as an instructional method because of perceived disciplinary problems related to classroom practice. They also concluded that teachers had their own reasons to use or avoid implementing TBLT. Based on the overall findings, they gave three important implications for teachers and teacher trainers: First, since teachers' views regarding instructional approach have a great impact on classroom practice, it is necessary for the teacher, as a practical controller and facilitator of learners' activities in the classroom,

to have a positive attitude toward TBLT in order for it to be successfully implemented. Second, given the research finding that teachers lack practical application knowledge of task-based methods or techniques, teachers should be given the opportunity to acquire knowledge about TBLT related to planning, implementing, and assessing. They suggested that teacher education programs, which aim at in-depth training about language teaching methodologies, should properly deal with both the strengths and weaknesses of TBLT as an instructional method ranging from basic principles to specific techniques. Third, when taking into account that one of the major reasons teachers avoids implementing TBLT is deeply related to a lack of confidence, much consideration should be given too overcoming potential obstacles that teachers may come across in a task-based classroom. They also recommended that teachers consider alternative solutions for classroom management such as leveled tasks, peer assessment, and a variety of various task types including two-way information gap activities as well as one-way activities such as simple asking and answering.

Suxiang (2007) explored the effects of combining task-based language teaching with online English language teaching on Chinese university non-major English graduate students. He examined whether this combination promoted the students' interest in English learning and if it improved the students' basic skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The results of the study showed that the students' interest in English gradually increased, and it stimulated the students' potential ability in English learning, particularly their reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Hitutozi (2008) investigated Liberal Arts TEFL undergraduates from the Federal University of Amazonas. A study was designed and implemented to experiment with clustered tasks as a means of maintaining peer-peer oral/aural interaction in the classroom levels. The results indicated that the learners were kept engaged in the meaningful interactions in the classroom for an extended period of time. A key assumption under lying the experiment is that the longer learners use the target language to communicate in the classroom the more their inter language is enhanced.

Birjandi and Ahangari (2008) examined the effects of task repetition and task type on fluency, accuracy, and complexity. The researchers assigned 120 students to six groups. The results and the analysis of variance indicated that task repetition and task type, as well as the interaction between these variables, resulted in significant differences in subjects' oral discourse in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity. Reports of research findings such as these are likely to encourage teachers to feel comfortable applying TBL to their classrooms. It also fulfills fundamental conditions for learning a second language, namely exposure, meaningful use, motivation, and language analyses, as pointed out by Willis (Willis, J., & Willis, D, 1996).

Narita (2008) conducted a research an elementary school in Japan where she taught English as a foreign language. The classes were given lessons and activities in which they experienced realistic communicative situations such as shopping tasks and an interview tasks. The results showed that many students had a feeling of contentment and strong willingness to continue to study English in the future after completing the tasks.

4. The Speaking Skill

It was noticed that two main approaches are adopted to define speaking, the bottom-up and the top down approach. Explaining the bottom up view, Bygate (1987, pp. 5-6) points out that traditionally the focus in speaking was on motor perceptive skills. Within this context, speaking is defined as the production of auditory signals designed to produce differential verbal responses in a listener. It is considered as combining sounds in a systematic way, according to language specific principles to form meaningful utterances. This approach is adopted by audio-lingualism. Eventually, in terms of teaching speaking, the bottom-up approach suggests that we should start with teaching the smallest units-sounds and move through mastery of words and sentences to discourse (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001, p. 18).

Bygate (1998, p. 23) advocates adopting a definition of speaking based on interactional skills which involve making decision about communication. This is considered a top- down view of speaking. This top-down view considers the spoken texts the product of cooperation between two or more interactants in shared time, and a shared physical context. Thus, proponents of this view suggest that, rather than teaching learners to make well-formed sentences and then-putting these to use in discourse we should encourage learners to take part in spoken discourse from the beginning and then they will acquire the smaller units (Nunan, 1989, p. 32).

4.1 Speaking Sub-Skills

One can say, most ELT course books do not deal with speaking by breaking it down into micro- skills. Instead, they often have the vague aim of “promoting learner’s fluency” (Sayer, 2005, p. 14). However, a fundamental issue to understand the nature of speaking is to analyze it in terms of competencies-underlying abilities that characterize the speaking proficiency. It is generally assumed that such underlying abilities have some sort of structure, made up of different components, with some sort of interaction and interrelationship between them. It is also assumed that different performances draw upon these underlying abilities in different but comprehensible ways (Bachman, 1990; Widdowson, 1998). Of course, identifying these competencies will help in teaching them and hence determining how far they have been achieved.

Communicative competence taxonomies: consider speaking a manifestation of the learner’s communicative competence (McCarthy & Carter, 2001, p. 58). Sub-skills underlying communicative competence are addressed by several researchers as follows:

The communicative competence model: Canale (1984) developed a framework of communicative competence based on an earlier version by Canale and Swain (1980). He distinguished among four elements in communicative competence: Grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence includes language rules such as vocabulary, formation of words or sentences, and pronunciation.

Sociolinguistic competence addresses the appropriateness in terms of both the meaning and form, which can vary with the status of participants, objectives of the communication and norms of the

communication.

Discourse Competence includes an understanding of how spoken texts are organized and is related to the cohesion and coherence of utterances.

Strategic Competence is compensatory in nature, drawn on when the developing language system of the second/foreign language learner is deficient in some regard. It refers to mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies.

4.2 Teaching and Developing Speaking Activities

Nunan (2003) defines the meaning of “teaching speaking” as teaching ESL learners to (1) Produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns; (2) Use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language; (3) Select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter; (4) Organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence; (5) Use language as a means of expressing values and judgments; (6) Use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called as fluency.

On the other hand, one day, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers teach speaking just in the forms of a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. It should be now extended that the goal of teaching speaking is not merely to force them to speak the English utterances but it should cover the mastery of students’ communicative skills due to the fact that only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance.

To do so, learners should be given an opportunity to work in interactive mode to talk about themselves in personally relevant ways. This demands such new dimension to the language learning process.

The students should feel relaxed in sharing their feeling and opinions even some cultures consider it as improper values to talk about one. Teachers’ attitudes to respond the students thought and opinion is also important as they should not be forced to speak, they should be heard and respected, and they should extend the same courtesy to their classmates. Teachers should realize that students many times live in difficult conditions, and as a consequence, teachers should avoid expressions of negative feelings. Such attitude is expected to reduce the student anxiety of making mistakes and they will have courageous to speak.

Anxiety, simply speaking, is a kind of troubled feeling in the mind. It is a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system (Horwitz, 1986).

Krashen (1985a, 1985b) maintained that anxiety inhibits the learner’s ability to process incoming language and short-circuits the process of acquisition. An interaction is often found among anxiety, task difficulty, and ability, which interferes at the input, processing, retrieval, and at the output level. If anxiety impairs cognitive function, students who are anxious may learn less and also may not be able to demonstrate what they have learned.

Furthermore, Crookall and Oxford (1991) reported that serious language anxiety may cause other related problems with self-esteem, self-confidence, and risk-taking ability, and ultimately hampers proficiency in the second language.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) found that speaking is by far the main agent of anxiety-arousal, and that students with high anxiety perform worse than those with low anxiety.

According to Young (1991), there are six potential causes of language anxiety that include personal and interpersonal, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures and language tests. However, to date, findings by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) have been the most influential. They identified three causes of language anxiety, that is, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. There are three causes of anxiety; they are (1) communication apprehension, (2) the test, and (3) the fear of making mistakes in producing the language.

Traditional classroom speaking practice often takes the form of drills in which one person asks a question and another gives an answer. The question and the answer are structured and predictable, and often there is only one correct, predetermined answer. The purpose of asking and answering the question is to demonstrate the ability to ask and answer the question.

In contrast, the purpose of real communication is to accomplish a task, such as conveying a telephone message, obtaining information, or expressing an opinion. In real communication, participants must manage uncertainty about what the other person will say. Authentic communication involves an information gap; each participant has information that the other does not have. In addition, to achieve their purpose, participants may have to clarify their meaning or ask for confirmation of their own understanding.

To create classroom speaking activities that will develop communicative competence, instructors need to incorporate a purpose and an information gap and allow for multiple forms of expression. However, quantity alone will not necessarily produce competent speakers. Instructors need to combine structured output activities, which allow for error correction and increased accuracy, with communicative output activities that give students opportunities to practice language use more freely.

4.3 Implementing Task-Based Instruction

This is the realistic stage of the approach. So far we have seen task components and task types. Whatever care is taken in setting goals and in designing or selecting tasks, it will be fruitless unless it is properly implemented. Every effort done before this stage would be fruitless unless it is put into practice as it is intended. This is why, as Skehan (1996, p. 24) says, "How a task is implemented can have a strong effect on task value". Therefore, considering issues of methodology is very essential. In this respect, it is evident here to discuss implementation principles and framework.

4.4 Principles for Implementation

Willis, cited in Skehan (1998, p. 126) offers five principles for the implementation of a task-based approach. The principles provide input, use, and reflection on input and use. They are:

- There should be exposure to worthwhile and authentic language.
- There should be use of language.
- Tasks should motivate learners to engage in language use.
- There should be a focus on language at some points in a task cycle.
- The focus on language should be more and less prominent at different times.

Skehan (1998, p. 132) restated the five general principles as a basis for pedagogic planning and design as follows.

- Choose a range of target structures.
- Choose tasks which meet the utility condition.
- Select and sequence tasks to achieve balanced goal development.
- Maximize the chances of a focus on form through attention manipulation.
- Use cycles of accountability.

5. Framework for Implementation

For task-based instructor, selecting good tasks is not enough. He/She needs to know how to implement them. Scholars of TBI such as Willis (1996) and Skehan (1998) identified what is done before attempting the task, during task completion and after the task. In this respect, the three main phases or cycles of task implementation are identified. They are pre-task, the task cycle and language focus (Edwards & Willis, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Oxford, 2006). Sometimes authors use the terms pre-task, during task and post-task to refer to the above phases. Since they refer to the same thing, we can use either of them or both of them interchangeably. In the three phases of tasks, the specific roles of teachers and learners are explained. In order for effective implementation of tasks, everyone should play his/her part properly. In the following sections, the three cycles of task will be seen in some details.

5.1 Pre-Task Cycle

The purpose of the pre-task phase is to prepare students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition. Lee (2000) describes the importance of “framing” the task to be performed and suggests that one way of doing this is to provide an advance organizer of what the students will be required to do and the nature of the outcome they will arrive at. Dornyei (2001) emphasizes the importance of presenting a task in a way that motivates learners. Like Lee, he sees value in explaining the purpose and utility of the task. This may be especially important for learners from traditional “studial” classrooms; they may need to be convinced of the value of a more “experiential” approach. Dornyei also suggests that task preparation should involve strategies for whetting students’ appetites to perform the task (e.g., by asking them to guess what the task will involve) and for helping them to perform the task. Strategies in this latter category are discussed below.

Skehan (1996) refers to two broad alternatives available to the teacher during the pre-task phase: an emphasis on the general cognitive demands of the task, and/or an emphasis on linguistic factors.

Attentional capacity is limited, and it is needed to respond to both linguistic and cognitive demands ... then engaging in activities which reduce cognitive load will release attentional capacity for the learner to concentrate more on linguistic factors (p. 25). These alternatives can be tackled procedurally in one of four ways;

- supporting learners in performing a task similar to the task they will perform in the during-task phase of the lesson,
- asking students to observe a model of how to perform the task,
- engaging learners in non-task activities designed to prepare them to perform the task or,
- strategic planning of the main task performance. We will consider each in some detail.

5.2 The Task Cycle

This is the phase in which students do the task in pairs or in groups and work towards the task outcome. Although students can use various skills and strategies, here the focus is principally on meaning (Oliveira, 2004; Willis, 2004). This phase is sub-divided into three stages: task, planning and report. In the task stage, learners do the task. In the planning stage, students plan how to report to the whole class on how they did the task and what solution/decision they reached. In the last, report phase, students present what they did and compare results with other groups (Oliveira, 2004; Ellis, 2006).

During-task phase the methodological options available to the teacher in the during-task phase are of two basic kinds. First, there are various options relating to how the task is to be undertaken that can be taken prior to the actual performance of the task and thus planned for by the teacher. These will be called “task-performance options”. Second, there are a number of “process options” that involve the teacher and students in on-line decision making about how to perform the task as it is being completed.

5.3 Language Focus Cycle

The post-task phase affords a number of options. These have three major pedagogic goals;

- 1) to provide an opportunity for a repeat performance of the task,
- 2) to encourage reflection on how the task was performed, and
- 3) to encourage attention to form, in particular to those forms that proved problematic to the learners when they performed the task.

5.4 Repeat Performance

Research has shown there is a case for asking students to repeat a task (e.g., Bygate, 2001; Lynch & Maclean, 2000). When learners repeat a task their production improves in a number of ways (e.g., complexity increases, propositions are expressed more clearly, and they become more fluent). A repeat performance can be carried out under the same conditions as the first performance (i.e., in small groups or individually) or the conditions can be changed. One interesting possibility examined by Skehan and Foster (1997) is that of requiring students to carry out the second performance publicly. As their study examined the “threat” of such a requirement on learners’ initial performance of the task, it technically constituted a during-task option. However, if students are not told to repeat the task publicly until after they have completed the first performance, it becomes a post-task option. There has been no research

comparing the learner production that results from a second performance carried out under “private” conditions, as in the initial performance, and publicly. Clearly, performing a task in front of the class increases the communicative stress (Candlin, 1987) placed on the learner and thus can be predicted to lead to a reduction in fluency and complexity. However, it is not without value if students need experience in using English in front of an audience, as, for example, might be the case with foreign academics training to give oral presentations in the L2. Public performance is likely to encourage the use of a more formal style and thus may push learners to use the grammaticalized resources associated with this style (Givón, 1979).

5.5 Reflecting on the Task

Willis (1996) recommends asking students to present a report on how they did the task and on what they decided or discovered. She considers this “the natural conclusion of the task cycle” (p. 58). The teacher’s role is to act as a chairperson and to encourage the students. The reports can be oral or written. Willis’ examples make it clear that the reports should primarily focus on summarising the outcome of the task. However, it would also be possible to ask students to reflect on and evaluate their own performance of the task. For example, they could be invited to comment on which aspect of language use (fluency, complexity or accuracy) they gave primacy to and why, how they dealt with communication problems, both their own and others, and even what language they learned from the task (i.e., to report what Allwright (1984) has called “uptake”). Students could also be invited to consider how they might improve their performance of the task. Encouraging students to reflect on their performance in these ways may contribute to the development of the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring and evaluating, which are seen as important for language learning (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990).

There is also a case for asking students to evaluate the task itself. Such information will help the teacher to decide whether to use similar tasks in the future or look for a different type. I have suggested that student-based evaluations of tasks can be carried out quickly and effectively using simple questionnaires (Ellis, 1997b).

6. Focusing on Forms

Once the task is completed, students can be invited to focus on forms, with no danger that in so doing they will subvert the “taskness” of the task. It is for this reason that some methodologists recommend reserving attention to form to the post-task phase of the lesson. Willis (1996), for example, sees the primary goal of the “task component” as that of developing fluency and promoting the use of communication strategies. The post-task stage is needed to counter the danger that students will develop fluency at the expense of accuracy. In part, this is met by asking students to report on their performance of the task, as discussed above, but it can also be achieved by a direct focus on forms. It should be noted, however, that this is not the position I have taken. I have emphasised that a focus on form constitutes a valuable during-task option and that it is quite compatible with a primary focus

on message content, which is the hallmark of a task. Furthermore, in some tasks (e.g., consciousness raising tasks) a linguistic feature is made the topic of the task. Attention to form, one way or another, can occur in any (or indeed all) of the phases of a task-based lesson. In the pre-task and post-task phases the focus will be on forms while in the during-task phase it will be on form, to invoke Long's (1991) distinction.

Two obvious methodological questions arise regarding attention to form in the post-task phase. The first concerns which forms should be attended to. The answer is fairly obvious; teachers should select forms that the students used incorrectly while performing the task or "useful" or "natural" forms (Loshcky & Bley Vroman, 1993) that they failed to use at all. It could be said, teachers should try to address errors or gaps in the students' L2 knowledge. Especial concern should be given to how many such forms a teacher should seek to address. Should the focus be placed on a single form that is treated intensively or a number of forms that are treated extensively? Both approaches are warranted and are reflected in the various options described below. As well, the second question concerns how the target forms should be dealt with. So, there is a whole range of options available to the teacher, and in many cases the effectiveness of these options has not been investigated.

6.1 Review of Learner Errors

While the students are performing a task in groups, teachers can move from group to group to listen in and note down some of the conspicuous errors the students make together with actual examples. In the post-task phase, the teacher can address these errors with the whole class. A sentence illustrating the error can be written on the board, students can be invited to correct it, the corrected version is written up, and a brief explanation provided. Lynch (2001) offers an interesting way of conducting a post-task analysis, which he calls "proof-listening". This involves three cycles based on repeated playing of a recording of the task. First, the students who did the task review and edit their own performance. Second, the recording is replayed and other students are invited to comment, correct or ask questions. Finally, the teacher comments on any points that have been missed.

6.2 Consciousness-Raising Tasks CR-Tasks

Constitute tasks in their own right and, therefore, can be used as the main task in a lesson. But they can also be used as follow-up tasks to direct students to attend explicitly to a specific form that they used incorrectly or failed to use at all in the main task. Willis and Willis (1996) and Ellis (1997a) offer descriptions of the various options that are available for the design and implementation of CR tasks. When used as follow-up tasks, CR tasks can profitably take their data from recordings of the students' performance of the task. For example, students might be presented with a number of their own utterances all illustrating the same error and asked to identify the error, correct the sentences and work out an explanation.

6.3 Production Practice Activities

An alternative or addition to CR tasks is to provide more traditional practice of selected forms. Traditional exercise types include repetition, substitution, gapped sentences, jumbled sentences,

transformation drills, and dialogues. Willis (1996, p. 110) offers a number of more novel ideas. The value of such production practice activities has been called into question (see, for example, VanPatten, 1996) on the grounds that they have no direct effect on learners' interlanguage systems. However, they may help learners to automatize forms that they have begun to use on their own accord but have not yet gained full control over.

6.4 Noticing Activities

A number of suggestions have been made for developing noticing activities as a follow-up to a task performance. Fotos (1993) used dictation exercises that had been enriched with the target structures that students had tackled initially in CR tasks to examine whether the subjects in her study subsequently attended to the structures. She found that they did so quite consistently. Lynch (2001) recommends getting students to make transcripts of an extract (90-120 seconds) from their task performance as a method for inducing noticing. After transcribing, they are required to make any editing changes they wish. The teacher then takes away the word-processed transcripts and reformulates them. The next day the students are asked to compare their own edited transcript with the teacher's reformulated version. In a study that investigated this procedure, Lynch found that students cooperated effectively in transcribing, made a number of changes (most of which resulted in accurate corrections of linguistic forms), and engaged in both self- and other-correction. Lynch also analysed the types of changes the students made, noting that the majority involved grammatical corrections, "editing" slips (i.e., removal of redundancies, literal repetitions and dysfluencies) and "reformulation" (i.e., changes directed at more precise expressions). Finally, Lynch comments that there was plenty left for the teacher to do after the students had made their changes.

So this is the last phase in implementing tasks. It is the phase "in which students examine and discuss specific features of the material used and the work done in the task cycle and the teacher conducts a practice session on new words, phrases, and patterns occurring in the data analyzed" (Oliveira, 2004, p. 256). It is here that proponents of TBI suggest teaching grammar implicitly or explicitly. This is considered to be essential for language development because it helps learner realize the system of a foreign language they are learning.

Language focus phase can be sub-divided into two parts: analysis and practice. Here also several scholars such as Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Willis (2004, 2005) identified the parts that should be played by learners and instructors as follows.

a) Analysis

Here the teacher plays the following roles.

- Reviews each analysis activity with the class.
- Brings other useful words, phrases and patterns to students' attention.
- May pick up on language items from the report stage.

The learners are expected to:

- Do consciousness-raising activities to identify and process specific language features from the task

text and/or transcript.

- May ask about other features they have noticed.

b) Practice

Here the teacher is expected to conduct practice activities after analysis activities, where necessary, to build confidence. The students, on their side, are expected to:

- Practice words, phrases and patterns from the analysis activities.
- Practice other features occurring in the task text or report stage.
- Enter useful language items in their language notebooks.

In summary, the three main phases of task, which are explained above, are very important for the development of learners' language. Each phase has its own purpose, e.g., pre-task phase is aimed to introduce the topic and theme of a given task and lays basis for other phases. Active involvement in each phase helps learners not only to accomplish the task successfully but also to develop different skills and strategies so as to develop their language proficiency of the target foreign language. Hence, it necessitates the instructors to let all learners pass through this process of learning language.

6.5 Factors Affected Implementation of TBI

According to Leaver and Kaplan (2004, p. 57), various factors that obstacle task-based implementation are reported by different teachers and administrators. These include significant investment of time, lack of predictability, obstacles related to students' teaching expectations, obstacles related to student testing expectations and lack of authentic materials. The main factor that affected the implementation of TBI in U.S government schools was the amount of time required to prepare lessons. In order to solve this problem some measures were taken like increasing experience in task-based teaching and providing direct assistance from administrators and other scholars. Another problem was the difficulty to predict how much time students would need to complete each task, but it was not always problem of learning. This problem can also be reduced gradually when students have lots of experiences in carrying out tasks. The third factor that affected TBI learners' dissatisfaction because they were never experienced with this approach. The students were expecting their teachers to teach them definitions of vocabulary and list of grammar rules that they were taught for long years. The students preferred tests of knowledge to achievement and proficiency tests as they were familiarized with these types of tests. This needed to work a lot to change the negative attitudes of students. Through time it was reported that students were able to learn with this approach and benefited a lot. The last factor mentioned above to affect TBI implementation is lack of authentic materials. As Leaver and Kaplan say, "Few textbooks are truly task-based". Therefore, teachers can get input from different sources like articles, magazines and newsletters and design their own tasks or can adapt books that are not truly task-based or else they can use tasks from internet.

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