Original Research Article

Historicity, Significance, and Implication of Adopting Task-Based Learning Framework in the Teaching of English: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Task-based language methodology has drawn the attention of second language acquisition researchers and teachers across the globe. The notion of task is central to task-based language teaching. Comprehensive theoretical and empirical study has established its effectiveness in developing language skills. What makes this approach stands unique is the introduction of a task-based learning framework by Jane Willis in 1996. The procedural syllabus propounded by N.S Prabhu(1987) serves as the precursor to the TBL framework. This article aims to review the historicity, significance, and implication of adopting a task-based learning framework in learning and teaching the English language.
Keywords: Task-based language teaching (TBLT), Task-based learning (TBL) framework, Historicity, Implication, Exposure, use, Motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Second-language researchers have consistently made deliberate attempts to develop approaches/teaching methods that can foster English Language acquisition among ESL. The journey starts from a grammar-translation approach to notional, functional, communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching, and further entered into the post-method era with the common objective in mind of how to make learning, teaching, and acquisition of the English language easy and effective, so that second language learners become like native language user. In the pursuit of the aforementioned objective, it has been proved through multiple research findings that task-based language teaching is one of the most effective teaching methods with the optimum desired result. The birth of task-based language teaching is credited to N. S Prabhu, who is the pioneer of this approach. At the top of it, what, in essence, revolutionized this particular teaching approach is the task-based learning framework introduced by Jane Will (1996) through her decade-old teaching experience. She was more of an educationist than a researcher. In the coming sections, we will discuss the historicity, significance, and implication of adopting a task-based learning framework and putting it into practice. This framework in itself is referred to as a task-based language teaching methodology.

The historicity of task-based learning framework

The notable Bangalore Project (Prabhu, 1987) provided the impetus for TBLT, which was a reaction to both the traditional version of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) employed in India and the form of communicative language teaching done in Europe (Cook, 2001). Prabhu and his colleagues were among the first second language acquisition researcher to introduce the idea of task-based instruction to a countrywide EFL program project in India. The type of syllabus established by Prabhu and his colleagues is the procedural syllabus, which comprises a set of pedagogic tasks. Richards *et al.*, (1992) these two terms synonymously and describe them as "a syllabus which is organized around tasks, rather than in terms of grammar or vocabulary" (p. 373).

He (Prabhu,1987) noticed that children who had been taught English using S-O-S for several years at school were unable to employ it for communicative purposes outside of the classroom. As a result, Prabhu chose to incorporate communicative language teaching methods into his well-known experimental project. This experiment, which began in 1979 and lasted for five years, featured eight classrooms of 8 to 13-year-old students. These children got an English education

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according to what Prabhu refers to as the procedural syllabus. The syllabus does not emphasize any specific linguistic element. Instead, class time is focused on a variety of problem-solving activities designed to facilitate language learning. According to Prabhu (1987), language learning takes place when learners focus on meaning rather than linguistic forms. This is done most effectively when students are invited to participate in a variety of activities that emphasize the significance and lead to natural classroom dialogue. In fact, it is Prabhu firmly believes that the best learning occurs when the target language is taught through communication rather than just for communication. According to him (Prabhu,1987), language acquisition occurs when learners focus on meaning rather than language forms. This is best achieved when learners are asked to do a number of meaning-focused activities, which result in natural communication in the classroom. It is, in fact, a firm conviction of Prabhu that optimal learning takes place when the target language is taught through communication and not simply for communication.

Communicative teaching in most Western thinking has been training *for* communication, which I claim involves one in some way or other in preselection; it is a kind of matching of notion and form. Whereas the Bangalore Project is teaching *through* communication, the very notion of communication is different. (Prabhu, as cited in Long & Crookes, 1993, p. 29).

Prabhu (1987) contends that communication-based teaching occurs when students engage in a series of tasks. A task is an activity that shows the direction through a thought process to arrive at a conclusion from given information while allowing the teacher to regulate this process. As can be seen, this definition of a task is cognitively oriented, requiring learners to engage in a thought process.

Each lesson in the procedural syllabus comprises a pre-task, a task, and a quick-marking component. The task and the pre-task are two concurrent activities that need identical thinking processes, question forms, scenarios, and so on. The pre-task, on the other hand, is a teacher-led, whole-class activity that assists students in overcoming any obstacles they may encounter during the task itself. Thus, the preceding work might be considered preparation for the subsequent task.

After publicly completing the pre-task, students do the task individually or are permitted to work in pairs and groups. It is permissible for them to complete the activity in pairs or in groups; nevertheless, this is neither encouraged nor suggested due to the likelihood of fossilization. According to Prabhu (1987), the internal system of learners must be strengthened by

quality input, that is, information from native or native-like sources.

Marking is the final component of each lesson. At this stage, the instructor evaluates the student's performance and provides comments based on their precision in doing the task, not their accuracy in constructing whole sentences.

Historically, task-based language seems to gain currency with the publication of Willis' (1996) task-based learning framework. A Framework for Task-Based Learning is a comprehensive reference to the theory and application of task-based language teaching. It provides an alternate model to the "presentation, practice, production" paradigm for those who prefer to adopt a truly student-centered approach to their education.

The rationale for using Task-Based Language Teaching
It draws from a variety of theoretical perspectives. It assumes that the objective of language instruction should be to establish procedural knowledge that enables learners to participate in conversation effortlessly and spontaneously. And the information necessary for this is implicit linguistic knowledge instead of explicit knowledge. Therefore, TBLT is a method for assisting students in developing implicit knowledge.

Second, the awareness that TBLT caters to incidental language, i.e., language learning that occurs without the learners' conscious aim. It is thought that most learning is accidental as opposed to deliberate. Because there are limits to how much one can learn consciously, such as pronunciation mastery, vocabulary memorization, and language rules. Consequently, most learning must be accidental, and TBLT accommodates incidental learning.

Task and Task-based learning frameworks:
One of the earliest persons to apply TBLT in the Bangalore project, Prabhu (1987, 24) Defines a task as: "An activity that requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process."

By task, J. Willis means a goal-oriented activity with a clear purpose. A communication task involves achieving an outcome, creating a final product that others can appreciate. Examples include compiling a list of reasons, features, or things that need doing under particular circumstances, comparing two pictures and texts to find the differences, solving a problem, or designing a brochure.
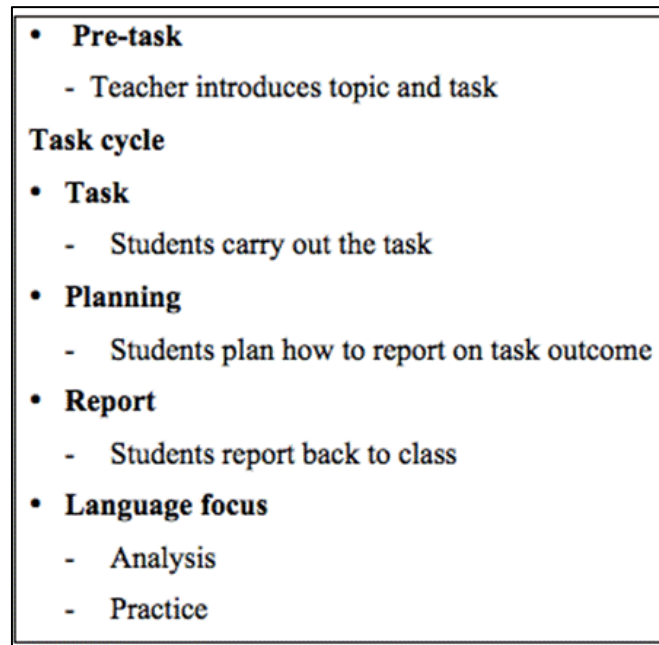
Tasks can serve as the vital component of a three-part framework consisting of "pre-task," "task

cycle," and "language emphasis." These components have been meticulously designed to establish four optimal circumstances for language acquisition, providing diverse learners with many learning opportunities.

Ellis (2003) held that the notion of task is central to teaching English. This approach gives

paramount importance to the performance of the task. The task is the point of intersection among teachers, students, and materials who assume the role needed in different stages of the task.

Three phases in the task-based learning framework have been sketched out in a square box for explanation and interpretation.

> - **Pre-task**
>   - Teacher introduces topic and task
>
> **Task cycle**
> - **Task**
>   - Students carry out the task
> - **Planning**
>   - Students plan how to report on task outcome
> - **Report**
>   - Students report back to class
> - **Language focus**
>   - Analysis
>   - Practice

The implication of adopting a task-based learning framework

These components have been meticulously crafted to establish four optimal conditions for language acquisition, so offering different types of learners abundant learning opportunities.

Conditions for Learning

The implication of a task-based learning framework has resulted in putting forward the primary essential condition for language learning. It does not simply cater to developing competence. Instead, it also focuses on form in the analysis phase. This framework stands unique because it encompasses many previous approaches and methods into a whole one. It has blended long discussed binary in ELT such as structural/functional, focus on form or meaning, accuracy or fluency, use or usage. Thus, this single framework has addressed all the relevant differences and proved itself to be applicable to every type of learner, catering to the needs of each. Upon careful examination of three different phases, certain language acquisition conditions have been inferred and illustrated.

Exposure:

Exposure is an essential condition for language acquisition. It entails appropriate meaning understanding and the ability to observe others' usage of

the target language when reading and speaking. Students isolate words and phrases during exposure to the target language to comprehend their meanings and applications. 'It is only when such characteristics are identified that they are processed in the learner's brain. (Schmitt,1990)

The quantity and quality of exposure to the target language should be maintained with attention to promoting a comprehensive learning process since it is the input that determines the quality and relevance of output. Textbooks that are acceptable for one group of students may not be suitable for another. The TBL framework can aid the instructor in diagnosing the progress and challenges of students. Thus, the instructor may quickly offer relevant guidance for a particular task, even if it is from a different textbook.

Adequate exposure is correlated with accurately evaluating tasks designed for various learner groups. As the aim of the activity and the comprehension of the text are inseparable, the teacher may need to grade the activities according to the needs and status of the students to make the text and the tasks more engaging and manageable. On account of Vagueness and inconsistency, Often, basic tasks are challenging to accomplish.

As exposure to the target language is vital, learners should be exposed to it in a random manner through the use of strategic methods. Reading and listening are two distinct methods of acquiring the target language. Reading should not diminish motivation. Occasionally, readers struggle with words and phrases as they attempt to understand and match the dictionary's meaning. They lose speed and ultimately become irritated as a result. The instructor should convey to the students that understanding and employing the lexical meaning of every individual word is not always essential to comprehending the context; rather, the contextual meaning is sometimes much more significant. Recordings of the daily interactive session should be played in the class, which will serve as real-life-based authentic input for the learners. This would raise their motivation level to learn the language.

Use:

The second pertinent condition for optimum language learning is receiving input in production through speech and writing. While 'exposure' is primarily concerned with reading and listening, 'use' focuses on speaking and writing. Through extensive exposure, students receive the required input, and through the use of the target language, they are driven to produce the desired output. The expectation is, in a way, the core motivation, as it prepares the learners to take in what they read or hear more consciously, allowing them to process the input more analytically and recognize the relevant features of the intended language. Therefore, it is essential to ensure the quality of feedback received in terms of authenticity, relevance, and, most importantly, the learners' needs. Motivation comes from necessity.

It may be stated, based on the research of R. Ellis (1999), that through interaction and interpersonal interactions, creative language use plays a vital role in meeting the mutual needs of learners. J. Willis points out, 'learners need opportunities to communicate what they want to say and express what they feel or think'. According to Willis (1996), learners develop the variety of conversation skills necessary to continue oral communication and regulate the level and kind of input through the verbal use of language. Thus, students learn how to initiate and conclude a discussion, communicate and take turns, organize the discourse in preparation, reach an agreement jointly, and change the subject. These abilities assist learners in acquiring a language more quickly and effectively. According to Skehan, there is abundant evidence that students who are encouraged or challenged to "go public" will work harder to improve.

So, use of language through tasks prepares learners to make free and meaningful use of the target language.

Motivation

The third essential condition is that students should be motivated to learn, comprehend the exposure they get, and use the target language as frequently as possible to capitalize on the advantages of disclosure and use. A person's interest in a specific topic or idea may not last forever. Consequently, at the introductory level, students can engage in things requiring less time and effort, such as making new acquaintances, socializing, etc., to keep the learners motivated. It is crucial to ensure the input material is attractive enough to maximize language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

Task-Based Learning provides more benefits than drawbacks. A TBL framework emphasizes language acquisition and learning through various tasks that seek a precise aim. The notion of task bears special attention and is paramount in all three phases of the task-based learning framework. While performing the tasks, learners do not focus on linguistic elements but on achieving the intended outcome. Learners are engaged in each activity because their life experiences and prior knowledge facilitate their learning. The use of language in everyday life and pupils' interests are taken into account while teaching language.

The most crucial aspect of task-based learning is the implication of adopting this TBL framework. This creates avenues for exposure, use, and motivation, which is essential for second language acquisition. Thus, teaching English using a task-based learning framework effectively develops all the basic language skills. Richard and Rodger (2014) expressed their belief that the task-based language teaching method is an elixir in teaching English. This has fused more or less all the methods and approaches into a single whole.

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