A Study on Task based Language Teaching and Learning through Design Thinking approach

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Abstract

Task-Based language Learning and Teaching has become popular in the field of English Language teaching since 20th century and significant scholars have joined the discussion to enhance the amount of analytical studies on this issue. Communicative Language Teaching is the base for Task-based language teaching, wherein the teacher is expected to be open minded and creative. Pair work, group work and teacher tailored tasks are provided in classes. TBLT has all the four major skills within its domain and language is used in order to be learnt. Such being the case, it trains autonomous learners who can use English outside the classroom in real life circumstances. Learners are involved in classroom assessments and negotiation of meaning which increase teachers' and learners' awareness of learning and test taking strategies, respectively. Task-based teaching is a way of giving opportunities for writing by providing a natural context. Learners work to complete a task through interaction with their peers. As in natural situation, learners comprehend the meaning and seek clarifications, if they have not understood. Students are not penalized for their mistakes in language, unlike in the traditional class. This study brings out the criticality and advantages of TBLL with Design thinking approach to enhance the communicative competence in ELT classroom.

Keywords: *task based learning and teaching, learners, communicative language teaching, communicative competence.*

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I.   Introduction

Task is defined by the dictionary as 'a piece of work that somebody has to do.'

According to David Nunan (1989: 10), 'a task is a piece of work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form, the task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.'

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a teaching approach which is based on the use of communicative and interactive tasks in order to plan and deliver instruction. Task based language teaching is an extension of the characteristics of communicative language teaching and an attempt by its supporters to apply principles of L2 to teaching. It has been regarded as an innovative approach. Such an approach is "a development of CLT". This approach relies on three major notions in terms of tasks. Richards and Rogers (2002) introduce such criteria as:

1. Activities involve real language 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.

As a matter of fact, tasks gained importance as the most major part of instruction since the 1970s to challenge traditional methods. In TBLT learners face language in various ways in comparison with previous approaches; thus, it has been claimed that they are more interested in learning the target language. Teachers, too, can select and make innovatively helpful class activities. This approach provides learners with an authentic context in which they can use language. In such an approach, they have abundant chances to interact with each other and acquire the language as a result of attempting to understand each other and to be understood.

According to Rod Ellis (2003:16), 'a task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. It requires to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their linguistic resources.'

An authentic task is about relating the task to the real world activity, e.g. ordering food in a restaurant, booking a show, etc. in order to attain communicative competence in any given situation, the teacher needs to engage the learners with authentic tasks which relate to the real-world and the learner's experience. This kind of experiential learning will enable the learner's communicative ability easy, while solving the task or trying to complete it successfully.

Authentic materials are materials that are produced for the purpose of communication not for the purpose of language teaching (David Nunan, 2004:49).

II.   Principles of Task based Language teaching

There are several principles of Task-based language teaching according to David Nunan. They are

1) **Scaffolding:** In the beginning learners need more support from the teacher; therefore, it is duty of the teacher to provide supporting framework for that learning to happen, for example, how parents support a young baby to stand.

2) **Task dependency:** The task should build on the task that has gone before.

3) **Recycling:** It maximizes opportunities for learning. Recycling allows learners to encounter the target language item in various situations.

4) **Active learning:** Learning happens best when the learners use the task purposefully or actively.

III.   Framework for describing a task

The following is the framework given by Rod Ellis:

a) Goal: The general purpose of the task, e.g. to practice the ability to describe an object concisely; Use of relative clauses.

b) Input: The verbal or non-verbal information supplied by the task, e.g. pictures; a map; or a written text.

c) Conditions: The way in which the information is presented, e.g. split vs.   shared information, or the way in which it is to be used, e.g. converging vs. diverging

d) Procedures: The methodological procedure to be followed in performing the task e.g. group vs. pair; planning time vs. no planning time.

e) Predicted outcomes; product: The 'product' that results from completing the task, e.g. a completed table; a route drawn in on a map; a list of differences between two pictures. The predicted product can be 'open' , i.e. allow for several possibilities, or 'closed', i.e. it allow only for one 'correct' solution.

f) Process: The task is hypothesized to generate the linguistic and the cognitive process.

IV.   TBLL through Design thinking

Task-based language learning (TBLL) integrated with design thinking presents a dynamic approach to language acquisition, emphasizing practical, real-world tasks within a creative problem-solving framework. Design thinking, with its focus on empathy, ideation, prototyping, and iteration, aligns seamlessly with the principles of TBLL, fostering active engagement and meaningful language use. In this article, we delve into various tasks exemplifying the synergy between TBLL and design thinking, showcasing their efficacy in language acquisition.

1. **Empathetic Interviews**: Students engage in empathetic interviews, assuming roles to gather information and understand the perspectives of different stakeholders. For instance, in a scenario where students design a language learning app, they conduct interviews with potential users to uncover their needs, preferences and pain points. This task enhances students' listening and speaking skills while promoting empathy and cultural awareness.

2. **Ideation Sessions:** Following the interviews, students participate in ideation sessions where they generate diverse ideas for solving identified problems or meeting users' needs. Through brainstorming and collaboration, learners practice expressing opinions, suggesting solutions, and justifying their choices, thereby honing their communicative abilities and critical thinking skills.

3. **Prototyping Language Solutions**: In this phase, students create prototypes of language learning materials or resources based on the ideas generated. For instance, they might develop a prototype for a language learning game, a digital flashcard app, or a conversational practice platform. This task integrates language production with creative design, allowing students to experiment with language in authentic contexts while applying newly acquired vocabulary and structures.

4. **User Testing and Feedback:** After prototyping, students conduct user testing sessions to gather feedback on their language solutions. They interact with peers or target users, eliciting responses, observations, and suggestions for improvement. Through this process, learners practice interpersonal communication skills, active listening, and incorporating feedback into iterative design cycles.

5. **Pitch Presentations:** To culminate the design thinking process, students deliver pitch presentations where they showcase their language solutions, highlighting their features, benefits, and value propositions. This task develops students' presentation and persuasion skills, requiring them to articulate ideas coherently, engage their audience, and respond to inquiries effectively.

6. **Collaborative Projects:** Students collaborate on larger-scale projects, such as designing a language immersion program or creating multimedia content for language learners. These projects simulate real-world scenarios, fostering teamwork, negotiation, and project management skills alongside language acquisition.

7. **Problem-Based Scenarios**: In problem-based scenarios, students tackle authentic language challenges, such as navigating a foreign city, resolving a cultural misunderstanding, or participating in a simulated business negotiation. These tasks promote language use in context, encouraging learners to apply linguistic knowledge and strategies to solve practical problems.

8. **Reflective Journals:** Throughout the TBLL process, students maintain reflective journals to document their learning experiences, insights, and language development. They reflect on their progress, challenges encountered, strategies employed, and lessons learned, fostering meta-cognitive awareness and autonomy in language learning.

Here's an example of a Writing task designed using the model of design thinking approach:

Task: "Create a Travel Blog Post"

1. **Empathize:**

a. Understand students' interests in travel and their proficiency levels in English.

b. Consider cultural backgrounds and experiences related to travel.

2. **Define:**

   Learning Objectives:

a. Develop writing skills by composing a travel blog post.

b. Practice descriptive language, narrative structure and engaging storytelling.

c. Constraints: Limited word count, focus on using appropriate vocabulary and grammar.

3. **Ideate:**

a. Brainstorm potential travel destinations or experiences students may have.

b. Generate ideas for blog post topics, such as a memorable trip, favorite destination, or dream vacation.

c. Consider incorporating multimedia elements like photos or videos to enhance the blog post.

4. Prototype:

a. Select a specific travel destination (e.g., a weekend getaway to a nearby city).

b. Develop a template for the blog post, including sections for introduction, itinerary, highlights, and reflections.

c. Provide vocabulary and language structures relevant to travel writing.

5. Test:

a. Assign the task to students, providing guidelines and resources.

b. Monitor students' progress and provide feedback on language use, structure, and content.

c. Encourage peer review and collaboration to enhance the quality of blog posts.

6. Iterate:

a. Review student feedback and identify areas for improvement in the task design.

b. Adjust language support or scaffolding based on student needs.

c. Consider integrating more opportunities for reflection or revision in future iterations.

7. Implement:

a. Finalize the task instructions and materials.

b. Assign deadlines and provide support as needed during the writing process.

c. Create a platform for students to publish and share their blog posts with peers.

8. Evaluate:

a. Assess student blog posts based on criteria such as language accuracy, creativity, and engagement.

b. Reflect on the effectiveness of the task in achieving writing objectives.

c. Gather student feedback on their experiences and suggestions for future writing tasks.

Through this task, students have the opportunity to practice writing skills in a meaningful and engaging context while sharing their travel experiences and interests with their peers.

V.   Syllabus design in TBLT

In more recently developed proposals on syllabus design three approaches receive more emphasis, namely, procedural syllabus, process syllabus, and task based language teaching. In TBLT, however, a significant departure point from procedural syllabus and process syllabus is the necessity of conducting a thorough needs analysis beforehand. In this regard, attention must be paid to recognizing possible difficulties that might tamper with or completely block the applicability of the syllabus in terms of sources task complexity, grading and sequencing learners' level and teaching materials. The last two items are believed to be the most challengeable criteria ahead of syllabus designers in TBLT.

VI.   Advantages of TBLT

TBLT benefits from a dynamic syllabus which is determined by both teachers and learners. Such a syllabus is an outcome of a careful needs analysis which is the base for devising and developing a curriculum. Multiple frameworks have been offered for syllabus design. These include authenticity, form function integration, and task dependency (Xin Ming, et al., 2010). Another consideration is learners' level. Ellis (2004) believes that as learners' advance, their main concern shifts from meaning and lexis to form. Hence, attention must be paid to the fact that as learners further in their language proficiency, they tend to work with usable language not explicit description of language.

Willis (1994, cited in Cadorath and Harris, 1998) claims that there is a six stage cycle in task-based teaching.

The first stage is "**introduction to both topic and task",** where the teacher helps the students to understand the objectives of the task and he/she organizes the collection of ideas or information about the topic. For Bowen (2004) in this stage students take part in activities that either helps them to recall words or phrases which will be useful during the performance of the task.

The second stage is the "**task**" itself. Students work in pairs or groups using whatever language resources they have to express themselves. Teacher encourages them but there is no correction. Emphasis is on fluency and getting things done- the purpose.

The third stage is "**planning**". Students spend some time on putting together in written or spoken form a report on what they did and what conclusions they reached. Teacher can help with language here, if it is required, with the emphasis on ability to communicate the results.

The fourth stage is "**reporting**" where the teacher organizes feedback, with the groups reporting to the class, either orally or in writing their results. Again, there is no overt correction.

The fifth stage is "**language focus and practice**", where the teacher sets up a language focus task, which draws attention to one or more of the following: a) language which students could have used but they did not use, b) language they used but not as well as they might have used, c) any other language that is related to the topic and task which the teacher considers important and wishes to focus on. This stage can include drills, dialogues or typical activities from the practice stage of Present Produce, Practice (PPP). In all cases, the goal is to focus students' attention on key language points.

The last stage is the "**parallel task**" where the students have a chance to try out the task again, but with different materials, which will necessitate the same kinds of language.

VII. Planning a Task Sequence:

How to go about a task is important like the design or selection of a task. Following is a way of building a task sequence

1) **Priming/pre-task:** At this stage, there is a teacher-led discussion or written or listening input given to the learners which has some link with the main task and related vocabularies are introduced.

2) **Planning:** Planning for the main task (how to express or narrate etc)

3) **Target task:** Performing the main task.

(**Dave Willis & Jane Willis, 2012:24**)

VIII. Types of Tasks

A task based lesson goes far beyond a single task and incorporates a sequence of several overlapping tasks that back up one another. These fall into several classifications.

From one perspective, tasks can be real world tasks and pedagogical tasks. In a broader sense tasks, according to (Richards and Rogers, 2002: 234) can be:

"1. One way or two way tasks in terms of exchange of information and ideas

2. Convergent or divergent tasks based on similarity of the final goal or goals

3. Single or multiple possible outcomes

5. Concrete or abstract language based on the use of concrete or abstract language

6. Simple or complex processing based on cognitive processing

7. Simple or complex language

8. Reaching based or not reality based"

Another perspective can be tasks which are centered on everyday English. These can include conversation, storytelling, discussion, etc. learners' attention must be raised regarding the link between the task and real life activity. However, learners should be given the choice for the topics of discussions. Another case for this perspective can be electronic communication in writing and reading, in a sequence of mails. However, some other tasks, though real world in nature is that they sometimes involve real world meaning and discourse, can be called "artificial tasks" because they do not reflect the real world in which learners want to use English. For instance, describing or recalling objects or asking partner to clarify what has been said are used as this type. Similar to real world tasks, pedagogic tasks are essential to any TBLT classroom. These are naturally derived from and designed and sequenced to lead to target tasks. These tasks are graded according to their level of complexity.

IX. Conclusion

Since the emergence of communicative approaches there have been a lot of views on the nature of language teaching and learning. Nowadays, teaching is not seen as a product but as a process. In TBLT classes, the responsibility of a teacher shifts from "knowledge provider". To put it in Widdowson's words, the teacher's role has been dwindled into a "facilitator" or to put it in other words to function as an 'authoritative' rather than an 'authoritarian'. So activities in which students are involved in real communication and which promote learning are considered very important. TBLT has proved itself useful in meeting learners' needs and in providing lots of interaction opportunities in EFL classes.

In conclusion, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) through design thinking offers a transformative approach to language learning, integrating authentic tasks with creative problem-solving methodologies. By prioritizing empathy, creativity, and collaboration, this innovative

framework empowers learners to engage meaningfully with language in real-world contexts. Through iterative design processes, learners develop critical thinking, communication, and cultural competence skills essential for success in today's interconnected world. TBLT through design thinking fosters intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and lifelong learning mindsets, shaping learners into proficient and adaptable language users who are equipped to thrive in diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes.

X.   References:

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