THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TASK-BASED TEACHING ON CHINESE

STUDENTS' COMPETENCES: PART 1

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of task-based English teaching on Chinese students' competences, such as reading comprehension and writing. The mixed methods approach involving an experimental part and a qualitative part based on interviewing the participants are applied in this study. The procedure for the experimental part was developed giving attention to the design, implementation, and assessment of task-based English language instruction activities. A growing body of literature suggests that task-based English teaching has gained significance in recent decades because of its perceived relevance in augmenting linguistic and non-linguistic competences of learners. The study results indicate that the use of tasks in language learning classrooms promotes students' learning, the development of skills in reading and writing, social interaction, and the motivation to use English in real life situations. These findings can be used to promote learning the language in students studying English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching (TBLT), EFL and ESL learners' competences, writing, reading comprehension, oral communication

Table of Contents

The Impact of English Language Task-Based Teaching on Chinese Students' Competences:

Part 1

Introduction

The adoption of task-based language teaching (TBLT) methods in linguistic instruction has increased in the past decade (Bava Harji and Gheitanchian, 2017; Derakhshan, 2018). The technique entails the use of pedagogic tasks that learners undertake in the manner of communication to attain forecasted results for evaluation. The tasks can also involve opinion gaps in authentic texts performed by students to achieve predetermined objectives (Derakhshan, 2018; Pierson, 2015; Viriya, 2018). According to Mohammadi and Safdari (2015), TBLT methods provide students with natural resources of meaningful content, ideal contexts for communicative activities, and avenues for support to provide better opportunities for the language use and interaction.

Currently, there exist multiple definitions of task-based teaching and learning. For instance, Mahdieh and Farnaz (2015) describe pedagogical tasks as structured language learning activities that encompass appropriate content, specific working procedures, pre-set objectives, and different outcomes, and such tasks have basic features. Derakhshan (2018) notes that in a pedagogical task, the meaning is supreme, participants should construct own purposes, the task should relate to real life, and the outcome should be evaluated. Therefore, TBLT is viewed as guaranteeing more successful learning of English in comparison to other methods.

TBLT has been defined as a work plan that requires pragmatic language consumption to attain an outcome that is assessed following the accuracy and suitability of content. Ellis (2017) posits that TBLT is a thoroughgoing approach that targets communication, relates to real-world endeavors, prioritizes task completion, and assesses outcomes. Thus, assessment forms an

integral part of task-based language teaching. The consistent student assessment and feedback framework boost the effectiveness of TBLT. Derakhshan (2018) maintains that TBLT has a plethora of alternatives characterized by its fundamental objectives of enhancing students' learning process, establishing learners' autonomy, and self-control strengths. In addition, it promotes students' cognitive competences in an intensive reading course and analytic writing, especially in EFL and ESL classrooms (Ellis, 2017). It is noteworthy that task-based English language teaching encompasses collaborative assessment, which boosts students' self-regulative capacities and learning cognition. The approach encourages a suitable written-plus-spoken feedback framework that enhances students' motivation and language use competence.

The above brief overview shows that TBLT is essential for influencing the improvement of students' competences at cognitive and language acquisition levels. Nevertheless, there exists scant empirical evidence of the practical application of the approach in English teaching practice (Ellis, 2017). According to Pierson (2015), it is essential to integrate communicative tasks systematically to develop second English learners' speaking competences. This research study is based on a basic reconceptualization of task-based English language teaching to determine its influence on students' competence. The paper attempts to examine the relationship between applying TBLT and changes in students' competences as well as learners' perceptions of the usefulness of tasks provided according to this approach.

<div align="center">Literature Review and Theoretical Framework</div>

There exists a strong consensus among researchers specializing in second language teaching and acquisition that task-based language teaching benefits students by providing an opportunity to produce the intended language in meaningful settings. TBLT moves away from traditional teaching approaches and adopts a more communicative framework and encourages

realistic interactions among learners (Yildiz and Senel, 2017). Supporters of collaborative learning emphasize that tasks should be goal-oriented, have several possible outcomes, and permit students to interact with one another during execution beyond their current level of knowledge of the intended language (Bava Harji and Gheitanchian, 2017). Such frameworks ensure that students are involved proactively in the learning process.

The effectiveness of task-based English language teaching has been explored broadly in the field of second language acquisition. Over the past three decades, there has been a surge of interest in task-based language instruction, which is evidenced by multiple published articles, journals, and special issues in English language teaching (Yildiz and Senel, 2017). The growing interest in TBLT has been attributed to the inherent qualities of tasks such as a significant focus on meaning, motivating students to draw on their linguistic and cognitive resources, and goal-adaptation concepts, which mandate learners to use language to accomplish real-world tasks (Setayesh and Marzban, 2017). NamazianDost, Bohloulzadeh, and Pazhakh (2017) carried out a study to investigate the effect of TBLT on motivation and grammatical attainment of learners in EFL junior school and reported positive results. The researchers designed activities to assess learners in real-world contexts that mandated the use of English in everyday situations. The study aimed at examining the impact of task-based English language teaching on promoting grammatical proficiency among Iranian junior high school students. The authors report a significant influence of TBLT on grammatical achievement.

Furthermore, task-based language instructional approaches promote the motivation of students to complete assignments related to English language learning. Herraiz-Martínez (2018) postulates that task-based education encourages students to learn as well as retain language skills and creativity. In addition to improved grammatical achievement, TBLT plays a central role in

enhancing the degree of interactivity, which is an effective way of attaining important educational outcomes by boosting learners' motivation to learn and use a foreign language (Bava Harji and Gheitanchian, 2017). Mohammadipour and Rashid (2015) used a cognitive approach to study the effectiveness of TBLT on fostering the oral proficiency of EFL learners. The authors' motivation to carry out the study emanated from the fact that speaking is the most frequently utilized language skill compared to listening, reading, and writing (Mohammadipour and Rashid, 2015). The study reveals positive results, which proved that task-based teaching program grounded in the cognitive framework was useful in fostering learners' speaking proficiency.

Thus, there has been extensive research carried out in foreign language settings to determine the impact of TBLT on enhancing learner's competence (Córdoba Zúñiga, 2016; Setayesh and Marzban, 2017). Derakhshan (2018) notes several aspects of task-based English language instruction. Notably, teaching should ensure well-adjusted development in various aspects of language performance including accuracy, fluency, and complexity that contribute to the sustainable progression in students' language abilities. Learners are likely to achieve such complexity if they develop control over newly acquired linguistic skills as well as integrating them into fluent performance (Ahmed and Bidin, 2016). Furthermore, according to Pierson (2015), task-based English teaching is effective in enhancing students' speaking and analytic writing skills because it uses real-life activities such as story-telling, problem-solving, and giving directions. Task-based language instruction uses real-world activities that promote situational authenticity (NamazianDost, Bohloulzadeh and Pazhakh, 2017). The emergence of TBLT can be ascribed to the need of language instructors to help learners with both acquisition and knowledge of the language.

Additionally, task-based language educators use the approach to help learners in developing their skills and abilities to utilize language in real-world endeavors. The technique adopts three critical strategies proposed by Bygate, including the task-supported approach, task-referenced approach, and task-based approach (Mahdieh and Farnaz, 2015). The task-supported approach entails the use of tasks to complement prevailing language teaching methods while the task-referenced tactic utilizes tasks to characterize the competencies that students are supposed to acquire after the course (Herraiz-Martínez, 2018; Setayesh and Marzban, 2017). In his review of empirical findings on cognitive and socio-cognitive perspectives of TBLT, Ellis (2017) stresses the essence of a synergetic connection between practice and research. Most researchers agree that task-based English language teaching represents an innovative scheme to encourage the involvement of teachers in practical classroom demonstrations.

Most researchers adopt Ellis' (2017) three-phase model of TBLT, which includes pre-task, during the task, and post-task (Chen and Wang, 2019). The pre-test task stage seeks to introduce new themes of the task to partakers and prepares them with properly-organized setting constructions and systems of language by setting up the task's requirements. Primary activities of the pre-task stage encompass planning, raising awareness, and teaching. In this stage, students have adequate time to plot on the way to carry out a given task (Pierson 2015). In the pre-task phase, teachers should make learners comprehend the theme. It is worth noting that the whole process of obtaining meaning from texts presents a significant challenge to ESL and EFL learners because of their cognitive deficiencies, which emanate from the difficulties of processing information in a foreign or second language (Ellis, 2017). According to Chen and Wang (2019), failure to provide adequate background information to ESL or EFL students can prevent them from processing and acquiring a second language.

Such activities are crucial to developing students' receptive skills, self-autonomy, and motivation in high-level reading scenarios. Mohammadipour and Rashid (2015) argue that the phases developed by Ellis (2017) are critical to determining the outcomes of task-based English language teaching and for example, providing EFL and ESL learners with explicit instruction before the task fosters an understanding of spoken language in practical performance. Moreover, Córdoba Zúñiga (2016) stresses the importance of raising awareness in the pre-task stage before involving learners in communicative tasks. Such activities improve students' linguistic, discourse, and pragmatic competences.

The during-task phase showcases the activities being carried out by learners and their requirements during the session. This stage specifies that students should carry out a particular task under time pressure (Herraiz-Martínez, 2018). For example, a task may require students to prepare an in-class presentation in a limited time-frame. Each learner is expected to report findings independently while the audience asks questions about any identified grammatical errors, incomplete content of the submission or logical fallacy (Pierson 2015). In essence, tasks should be challenging enough to allow students to engage thoughtfully and foster balanced mental processing. Instructors can manipulate the degree of difficulty of tasks and amend procedures to improve outcomes.

The post-task stage involves a period of feedback and assessment. It features feedback, which underpins the progression of second language writing, speaking, and analytic skills. Feedback plays a leading role in influencing the potential for learning and student motivation (Yildiz and Senel, 2017). Post-task stages focus on self-regulation, peer evaluation, and teacher assessment. Mainly, post-task phase involves three principal activities. First, students use self-reflection reports to review their performance in the previous stage. Further, learners evaluate

their peers' performance (Herraiz-Martínez, 2018). As well, an instructor writes an assessment based on three dimensions, namely comments, language focus, and in-class presentation. Comments adhere to the principle of acknowledgment, approval (praise), and proposals (suggestions) (Yildiz and Senel, 2017). It is essential for teachers to provide valuable recommendations, use affirmative and incentivizing language rather than criticism to boost students' confidence in undertaking additional tasks. Tasks vary widely depending on the focus of instruction (Ellis, 2017). Teachers can evaluate students on a variety of demonstratable outcomes, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, intonation, sentence structures, confidence, and other non-linguistic aspects.

Furthermore, researchers have attempted to investigate the effect of integrating technology in task-based language teaching approaches on improving learners' competences. In particular, Bava Harji and Gheitanchian (2017) studied the impact of multimedia TBLT on accuracy, fluency, and oral production. In the modern era of hyper-digitization, instructors need to adopt evolving technologies in their design and implementation of task-based language teaching approaches. In the past three decades since the emergence of TBLT, a vast body of studies reports favorable outcomes on oral language production with limited integration of multimedia technologies. Bava Harji and Gheitanchian (2017) conducted a study to investigate the influence of technology-mediated TBLT on EFL learners' speaking proficiency using different levels of task intricacy. The researchers measured the rate of correct clauses, error-free verbs, and plural forms among Iranian EFL students.

The literature reviewed for this study indicates that instructors can benefit for applying TBLT in their practice in order to develop linguistic skills in students. However, there is still limited research on the impact of TBLT on developing and enhancing students' competences.

Furthermore, there is the lack of research indicating students' attitudes toward this specific

teaching approach, and more research is required in this field.

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