

'SPEED UP YOUR READING!' THE EVALUATION OF TBLT APPROACH IN READING SESSION

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Abstract: Task-based-approach was primarily employed to creating a real-life experience in the classroom in order to develop students' language proficiency particularly on communication ability. Willis and Willis (2007) suggest that teachers should sharpen students' skill to read effectively and efficiently through this method, as they will face different types of reading inside and outside of the classroom. When it comes to academic reading, Grellet (1981) advocates that that skimming and scanning skills are very essential for learners as they will be able to quickly locate main information in the text with unnecessarily reading every single passage. Departed from the idea, in this present study, we attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the task-based approach to teaching intensive reading with scanning and skimming skills, as well as to elicit both lecturer's and students' perception in the University of Teuku Umar, Meulaboh of the implementation of this approach.

Keywords: TBLT, task, reading, skimming, and scanning

INTRODUCTION

TBLT or task-based language teaching has gained a lot of attention in teaching practice over a past decade ago (Long 1985, Prabhu 1987, Nunan 1989, Willis 1996). Gaining recognition as a cutting-edge pedagogical approach, in fact, TBLT was actually a continuation of the communicative approach. Accordingly, this approach has also been known as a strong version of CLT (Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Ellis, 2003).

Then, concerns have been raised by teachers' today on whether the activity which is designed for students will provide them with the opportunity to learn. In this case, Ellis (2003) suggests that the design of activity within task-based approach will not only promote students' acquisition but also engage students in a rich interaction hence the opportunity to learn is created. In addition, Willis and Willis (2007) state that the task in TBLT is well designed to aid students to practice the language and to develop their communication skill without being overanxious at the possible grammar mistake they may produce when conveying the message.

Nevertheless, the task-based approach was basically employed to creating a real-life learning experience in the classroom with the expectation that this experience will be adaptable into a real-life setting. With this in mind, the construction of pedagogical task in the task-based method is believed as a way to create a visible connection between inside and outside the classroom in which communication skill development is still being the focal point (Van Den Branden, 2006, Nunan, 2006).

However, interestingly, opponents of the task-based approach might argue that the implementation of the approach will isolate the development of linguistic structure because it focuses mostly on meaning rather than form. In my assumption based on Willis and Willis (2007)

notion, it is quite logical to say that the more freedom to communicate they have, the more likely the grammatical skill developed. Take an example when learners are trying to communicate in the target language to convey the message, they will be urged to call out their linguistics repertoire to produce more accurate form. This practice at some point will continually enhance their ability to communicate in the target language, as well as evolve their grammatical competence. Briefly, the development of language structure will be formed as the number of practices performed and will best be acquired if there is more exposure to the target language. ☐

Apparently, the heart of task-based teaching is the task. Some researchers have drawn their own interpretation of what a task should be in TBLT. Nunan (2004), for example, define the task in more pedagogical definition as:

“...involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form.” (p.4)

Shortly, it can be inferred that the focus of the task particularly in pedagogical context is on the communication or message conveyance. In line with that, some eminent researchers such as Samuda and Bygate (2008), Nunan (2004), Colpin and Gysen (2006) seem to agree in the light of our earlier discussion that the task should be based on real-life to provoke students' interest in learning as well as to guide students on how to cope with the real-life situation. ☐

Based upon the review of the TBLT approach, some questions to be addressed are:

1. Is the application of the TBLT approach in teaching reading skill more or less effective in promoting students skimming and scanning strategies?
2. What are the teacher's and students' perceptions about the implementation of TBLT approach in teaching reading?

METHOD

This empirical study was conducted in University of Teuku Umar during March 2018 in English 1 class. The selection of participants is following the convenience or opportunity sampling in non-probability sampling drawn by Cohen, et al (2011). The participants are one teacher (T) and four students (A, B, C, and D) who were available and accessible during the completion of research. Then, participants from students, two male and two female, were chosen randomly out of 32 students as they have enrolled in the session of reading via task-based approach. They were also selected on the basis of a degree of their homogeneity criterion over the population. The teacher, Rita (pseudonym), who taught reading by using a task-based approach was interviewed at the end of the classroom session. ☐

In gathering data for exploratory research, they were collected qualitatively through observation and interviews. After the data were collected, they were transcribed for further analysis. The process of this qualitative data adopts both inductive and deductive analysis. For example, some interview questions prepared in advance thus can be categorized into the deductive analysis. Meanwhile, the using of the open-ended question 'in which the theme emerge from the data' (McDonough and Chaikitmongkol, 2007) will allow the analysis to become inductive. ☐

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the application of TBLT approach to teaching reading in reading session and attempts to answer the above research questions. It begins with the findings of observing task-based teaching practice in the reading classroom. As it has been stated earlier 'task' is the core of task-based teaching, thus looking into the task to see whether the application of the approach may help to promote students learning would be useful. In line with that, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007), to evaluate a task cycle, looking through teacher and learners' perception and measuring the outcome students achieved will be helpful. To constructively evaluate the approach, I may elaborate it following Branden (2006) and Ellis (1997) in indicating a successful task by following elements: objectives, activities or procedures and outcomes.

To begin with, it is generally accepted that the task in TBLT should promote learners' language acquisition through interactive communication which encompasses negotiation of meaning and problem-solving elements. Most importantly, the task must be able to have students conceived the real-world situation and should promote an interactive and authentic language use (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011)

Samuda and Bygate (2008) have mentioned that a task design necessitates the teacher to examine the relevance between language use and the activity in order to promote learning. Based on the reading lesson plan, the objectives of teaching reading skill were set as follows:

1. To develop students' skills in skimming and scanning a text for specific information (intensive reading).
2. To engage students in critical thinking and through the process encourage them to develop their own opinions on whether technology aids or hinders communication.☐
3. To develop students' skills in presenting and defending their opinion.

Rita as lecturer admitted that it was quite challenging to select a topic to suit learners needs and meet TBLT condition. However, she believed that the goal through the task was implicitly conveyed, "I think it is easy for students to understand the goal and develop the reading strategies... In TBLT students learn by doing, so they have to actually apply the strategies in order to conquer them."

Sequentially, Rita designed a reading lesson plan in accordance with the TBLT approach through Willis and Willis' (2007) ideas followed the following phases: **pre-task, task, and post-task**. It has been stated in the lesson plan that the aim is to develop students' skills in skimming and scanning a text for specific information and to teach the strategies to read for gist, rather than to focus on the structure or vocabulary. To be specific, it is a top-down approach which is a way to understand text with the support of readers' existing knowledge and incorporate it with the texts which depend on the context.

There are some sequences of a task in a task-based approach which is highly appropriate to be integrated with the intensive reading scheme as proposed by Ellis (2006) and Hedge (2000):☐

- First of all, pre-task phase. In this phase, the teacher provides an overview of some sort activities or topic they will be doing. Willis and Willis (2007) also mention this initial learning stage as *priming*, as for example in reading activity it serves students to stay focus on the relevant topic given. Then, the aim is primarily to familiarize students with the context

provided and to introduce them with some vocabulary which appears in the reading in order to escalate language acquisition.

- Secondly, the task. The task is the main activity in a lesson cycle in which students are asked to prepare and to perform their work under a certain time limit. In this during-phase, as stated by Ellis (2006), students should be given more freedom to say what they want to say as long as it is within the context to enable the negotiation of meaning to take place. In addition, Hedge (2000) often refers this second task *while-reading* activities in which range of task provided to engage students in reading activity. ☐
- Lastly, post-task phase. In this phase students will be reporting how the task was accomplished or, if necessary, to repeat the task to further enhance their language accuracy. Another objective is to elicit students response to the previous task cycle in order to improve it in the future. In reading, this phase is called post reading (Hedge, 2000). In this stage, activities can be focused on the evaluation of how far the practice is successful in the classroom. ☐

In this part, we might agree that the teacher through the implementation and selection of a task, to some extent, was successfully meeting the essential condition of language learning by eliciting learners' previous knowledge of the topic and integrating it into the lesson. To elaborate it, at the beginning of the activity, Rita opened a pre-reading task session with humor and theatrical activity to bring students into a real-life situation. At the same time, it provided students of an overview about the context. This pre-reading stage, as Rita insisted, was also motivating the learners to interactively engaged in the activity as well as preparing them to the main task of scanning and skimming.

In the main task, first of all, each students' group was divided into two sub-groups, namely A and B. All students then were asked to read the article distributed previously. Then, students are assigned to work together in their sub-groups, namely A and B, and both groups are asked to scan the similar text carefully to identify arguments for and against using technology as a communicative tool respectively.

First of all, the **instruction** was clearly delivered by the teacher when implicitly introduced the skimming and scanning technique as follows:

T: A, we will be searching in the text and underlining arguments FOR using technology for communication. B, you will find out arguments AGAINST using technology for communication. You don't like communication. You've got 10 minutes to **underline** in text arguments FOR and AGAINST. And ask A, for example, this B, list up your arguments for using communication or against communication, in the list. Just note, **quick** note!

From the observation, it shows that all students were enthusiastically engaged in the reading activity and freely shared what they have found from the text to the opposite group. This is what most researchers agree on the essence of TBLT which emphasizes developing students' communicative competence. Similarly, the teacher admitted that the application of TBLT is effective not only in improving students reading skill, but also developing students' communicative competence. Regarding teaching skimming and scanning skills, the teacher

asserted that the application of the task, at some point, helped students to improve the skill. “I think TBLT helps readers develop their scanning and skimming skills because through tasks they can test these strategies and develop them. Then, they can also discuss them with their classmates and share ideas about how they dealt with the text, thus, they analyze the skills they use.” However, it seems that the lack of time in the reading session was becoming a problem in learning the skills, as illustrated on teacher’s reflective commentary column, “more time should have been given in pre-task and for the main task too.”

Evidently, for her TBLT is not only help students to gain scanning and skimming skills but also enrich their communicative ability through task and discussion. It has also been noted by Green (2005) as he states that the task-based teaching may help to promote learning through interaction. Then to reach that goal, Hedge (2000) asserts that negotiation of meaning must take place in order to help the students to scaffold for both meaning and accuracy. This may be an additional issue for scanning and skimming practice in reading classroom session, besides the time management problem stated earlier. ☐

However, despite all students were able to grasp the key information in the text as quickly as possible, however, the negotiation of meaning, such as clarification, confirmation check, etc, is not really apparent during the observation. Both students were only reporting the information they have underlined to further read them aloud, rather than to negotiate it. In other words, the teacher may have probably been succeeded in teaching the skills through the task-based approach, however the negotiation of meaning, as a goal of task-based teaching, should have also been taking place to create an opportunity in communicating an interactive authentic language.

Teacher and Students’ Perceptions

As it has been suggested by Ellis (1997) to elicit reactions from the teacher and students regarding the evaluation of this approach, thus after observing the learning process in the classroom, I also interviewed the teacher and students with regard to the implementation of TBLT as well as classified the emerging topics into the sub-themes below,

- Aims of the task

The teacher believes that the implementation of task-based teaching is really helpful to increase students’ skill as well as their communication ability. She argues, “I think TBLT helps readers develop their scanning and skimming skills because through tasks they can test these strategies and develop them. Then, they can also discuss them with their classmates and share ideas about how they dealt with the text, thus, they analyze the skills they used.”

However, student A thought it was better to explicitly explain that what they were doing was skimming and scanning techniques, regardless it was a task-based approach which suggests the teacher to implicitly introduce it, “showing how to use skimming and scanning is better. You know, I heard only a short introduction so some students may not understand it. But teacher instruction is OK.”

For Student B, the teaching of this skill is very helpful for her in the future, “It will be useful for me. I will read literature, newspaper or book and use this skill.”

- Teacher role

Based on classroom data from the reading session, the teacher has performed her role by providing students with a purposeful task and providing assistance to the students while they were accomplishing the task. Student C testimonial which is related to teacher role is as the following:

“I feel that he always tried to encourage us, you can see from her voice and instruction, and asked whether we understand about what we have to do. Then when we doing the task, ee, he walked through the class to meet our group. I think it is good.”

- Managing course material

For the teacher, setting material was not an easy job. She admitted, "This is the biggest problem in TBLT. The teacher has to struggle to find the right material for the students' level because the topic should be motivating and the article should be adaptable for task design. I am not sure if the teacher can do this in every lesson because of time restraints.”

Regarding the chosen of material given to the students with real-life context, student D has some points to make, “The text we used was from the BBC webpage. So, it was taken from real-life and the vocabulary was familiar too. Concerning skimming and scanning, these are mostly used by people in real life. So, I think that their adoption in the task is something that students knew how to do anyway “

- Adjusting TBLT: fluency and accuracy

Despite she recognized that using TBLT is beneficial in enhancing students' learning, however, the teacher felt that her students need more explicit grammar which is not thoroughly covered in TBLT task, “sometimes I think I would stick to what I am doing now. Combining communicative tasks with traditional methods of teaching. Some reasons for that is my considerations about our students' knowledge of grammar and time restraints when teaching.” Finally, she states, she will apply this approach to language teaching particularly for an intermediate or advance classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the reading activity must be purposeful, conceivable do outside the classroom and must be able to engage the learners in the interactive communication. Then, the integration of the task-based teaching approach into reading skill should provide the learners with the opportunity to learn and to communicate by allowing the negotiation of meaning to take place. However, despite some practical problems existed when applying this approach into the lesson, in fact, there are greater possibilities for the teacher to creating and modifying a lesson plan based on a task-based approach which eventually makes the implementation of the approach more successful in the classroom.

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