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# Task-Based Learning (TBL) in EFL classroom: from theory to practice

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## Abstract

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is one of the contemporary approaches, which has attracted a great deal of study in recent decades. It is a language education approach that offers students the opportunity to use authentic target language use by tasks. Task-Based Learning drives skill-based teaching and learning, engages students in the learning process, motivates and enhances student imagination. This paper focuses on some fundamental aspects of TBL in literature: (1) the task-based learning definition, (2) the task-based learning characteristics, (3) the task-based learning framework, (4) the task-based learning benefits, and (5) a proposed task-based learning practice for EFL learners. The paper gives useful suggestions to EFL teachers who have similar teaching strategies to help students meet such learning goals in their classrooms and continue positive TBL patterns in teaching and learning.

## Keywords:

Task-Based Learning (TBL); task; EFL classroom

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Task-Based Learning is commonly applied in the SLA sense in the language learning field. In recent decades or so, task-based learning has evolved to a high level in English teaching (Willis & Willis, 2007; Ellis, 2011). TBL has a strong vision of CLT and aims to develop students' second language linguistic repertoire by enabling them to participate in dynamic classroom activities (Ellis, 2011). Language learning is the product of creating practical classroom communications activities (Richards, 2006), which suggests a form of learner center in which students become more involved in the learning process. TBL focuses on credible content, language skills, and cognitive processes (Ellis, 2003) and facilitates constructive communication in language learning. When performing tasks, students can become more exposed to the target language by reading or listening. This exposition can help them observe and note how significance is expressed (Willis, 1996).

Task-based learning is an approach that includes students in constructive communication and interaction that allows them to gain grammar knowledge via authentic language use (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). As one of the offshoots of CLT, TBL also experienced a distinction between its predecessor's weak and strong versions. In the weak version of TBL recognized as task-supported teaching, tasks are considered a way to provide students with communicative language skills in their traditional grammar classroom, such as PPP. In the strong version, known as TBL, tasks are regarded as fundamental to preparation and instruction delivery. Tasks in this version are appropriate and adequate for themselves (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). Willis (1996) says that TBL is the solution to the conventional PPP approach problems because it offers acceptable language learning conditions. With TBL, students can acquire language efficiently because they are exposed to authentic spoken and written language, can use the language to do things, process the use and exposure, and focus on forms. Other scientists are also trying to suggest TBL as a modern approach to language education that could resolve the psycholinguistic and communication needs of language learners in the 21st century (Long, 2014).

Prabhu was the first person to implement task-based learning. Prabhu (1987) says that learners can learn more straightforward if they concentrate on the task, not the language form. Students utilize the process of thinking to generate a result from the inputs they obtain. TBL helps teachers monitor and control the process of thought and learning (Van den Branden, 2006). The key objectives of TBL are to involve learners of language through a series of tasks in authentic language use when communicating with others. It will help learners develop new language skills and coordinate their current awareness (Ellis, 2003). This method also gives language teachers an option. It means that teachers should not decide the students' language forms in classrooms to carry out tasks dominates language forms (Frost, 2004).

TBL embraces educational theory focused on learners (Ellis, 2003) and encourages meaningful content-oriented practices instead of linguistic types (Beglar & Hunt, 1999; Carless, 2002). In task-based language learning, students focus on meaning communication through interaction with the task (Long & Crookes, 1992). Language in TBL is used for authentic purposes, and learners should not concentrate on a distinct form but recognize the linguistic form in general. The goal of TBL is to combine all four skills and shift from fluency to precision (Alavi, 2003). Richards and Rodgers (2001) described TBL as an approach that emphasizes how tasks are used as a central part of language planning and instruction. Ellis and Shintani (2014) also reported that TBL improves learners' communication skills through their dedication to meaning-oriented communication through task success.

This approach seeks to promote language learning through interactive participation of learners, the use of authentic language, derived from the execution and execution of various tasks. A task may include strategies for explaining grammar, questions initiated by students, operating in a small group, and oral reporting processes (Brown & Heekyeoung, 2015). In carrying out the tasks, students must be able to manipulate the examples given by the teachers or by the textbook into a creative language by recombining common words, phrases, and frameworks in which they

attempt to build their language. The ingenuity in doing these tasks demonstrates how they can maximize language learning (Nunan, 2004). Students may utilize the word efficiently by positioning language as the critical communicative resources in language learning.

Therefore, this paper provides a short description of task-based learning in EFL context. It presents (1) the definition of task-based learning, (2) task-based learning features, (3) the task-based learning framework, (4) the task-based learning benefits, and (5) a proposed task-based learning practice for EFL learners. To a certain degree, answering these questions allows teachers and professionals who are prepared to use TBL in their teaching practice and increase implementation efficacy.

## 2 METHOD

The approach used in the study is the analysis of literature. Articles and information are accessed in various online databases, including ERIC, Research gate, Semantic Scholar, Google Scholar, Academia, and other information. The following combinations of keywords were performed: task-based, task-based learning, TBL, TBI, TBLT, ESL, EFL, ELT, and language acquisition. The papers, studies, and other documents published will be reviewed to provide suggestions that English teachers can implement, especially in EFL context. This analysis is only focused on task-based learning and how it relates to EFL students.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Definition of Task-based Learning

The Definition of Task-based Learning The task description should be addressed before discussing the definition of task-based learning. However, the concept of tasks differs significantly in TBL, and thus, approaches to TBL are different. Long (1985) defined the task as work is done freely or for some benefit for oneself and others. Skehan (1996) described tasks as activities that are essential to them. Task success is measured in terms of obtaining outcomes, and tasks typically mimic real-life language use. Ellis (2003) provides an extensive overview as a work plan of language and learning activities, which enables students to process language pragmatically to obtain a result that is calculated in terms of whether the right or acceptable proposal material has been communicated. Willis (1996) describes a task as a communication activity that the students use to achieve results. TBL offers various ways of teaching languages. By putting language students in different real-life contexts, they will use their language skills by using language as a method to accomplish an objective and thereby use language interactively.

Task-based learning (TBL) is seen as an alternative way of teaching conventional approaches, if it prefers a technique for functional communication of the language (Brumfit, 1984; Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). According to Ellis (2003) and Willis (1996), TBL is an efficient approach that provides a learning environment and encourages learners to use target-language forms that they believe are most likely to achieve communicative objectives. Richards and Rodgers (2014) said that task-based learning had received great emphasis in applied linguistics. Still, it is not widely used and has little data on its effects or efficacy as a basis for curriculum creation, materials development, and education.

Widdowson (1983) claims TBL is a teaching technique intended to enable language students in the form of purposeful problem-solving practice. When language learners engage in problem resolution or work to achieve the goal, they are highly excited, less tense, anxious or fearful, and are often well prepared to participate in self-conceived classes. In other words, the TBL is based on this logic that these language learners will efficiently learn English, whose mind focuses primarily on performing the assigned tasks rather than on getting involved in language types (Prabhu, 1990).

According to Willis and Willis (2009), task-based learning is generally considered an innovative teaching approach superior to traditional methods. Benevides and Valvona (2008) describe TBL as a communicative approach to language education. It uses its primary organizational theory to complete communicative tasks. Willis (1996) claims TBL learners can encounter conditions that help them experience their natural exposure (input), use language to show what they mean (output), reflect on developing their language and evaluate and practice types. Task-based learning is a practical approach that allows students to use real-world language as a communication tool. It begins with a task review of needs to decide what to do in the new language for a defined group of students (Long, 2014).

The teaching approach requires learners to do some tasks using the target language for communication in a real interactional language environment (Murad, 2009). The task activities ought to lead to everyday work. The task should focus on a real-life teaching approach where the language's principal goal is communicative competence. However, TBL aims to allow students to gain new language skills and improve their existing language during the learning process. Therefore, from this point on, TBL involves inputs and outputs, which are the first to use a simple task-based on the input to improve the target language skills. Therefore, the characteristic of TBL emphasizes meaningful learning, participation in the real-world language process, and the involvement of the cognitive process (Ellis, 2003).

### 3.2 The Features of Task-based Learning

According to Scrivener (2011), task-based learning is a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) variant based on work cycles in planning, execution, reflection, and review of tasks representing real-life requirements and competencies. Feez (1998) summarizes the main elements of the TBL: (1) the emphasis is on the process instead of product, (2) fundamental components provide goals for activities and tasks stressing interaction and meaning, (3) language learners learn through contact and intentional communication when participating in activities and tasks, (4) the activity and tasks may include those which students will need to accomplish or have a clear pedagogical goal in the

classroom, (5) the tasks may be measured with difficulty, and (6) task difficulty lies upon on several factors such as experience, task complexity, the language of the learners.

Nunan (1991) says task-based learning features. The first aspect is the focus on communication learning through engagement in the target language. It lets students communicate in a new language. Many language learners are bored and excited about learning a foreign language because they do not get to know the language learning process they expect. If however, the learning process suits your needs, you will escape these feelings. Task-based instruction will solve those sentiments and in turn, the difficulties of students speaking in the new language.

The second feature of this approach is the incorporation of authentic texts into the learning situation. Since language learners feel that the materials or texts given to them are needed in their daily lives, the tasks assigned to them are taken utterly to solve them. They face the same situations or problems in their everyday lives.

The third factor is that students should focus both on language and the process of learning. TBL would encourage students to understand that they need to learn the new language if they want to communicate in the language. Therefore, they must make the best use of the resources given by their English language instructor during the learning process. They are stronger language learners by pursuing the procedure as they use the language learned unconsciously. The method helps them resolve English speaking challenges since they used to tackle them in their classroom.

The fourth aspect is that students can improve their experience as fundamental elements of learning. As students are given tasks like in their everyday lives to do things, they can enhance their personal experiences through the new language. They would then know what to do and whether they face the same issues as their English teacher during their classroom learning and learning experience.

The next feature is that it attempts to connect language learning in the classroom with language activation outside the classroom. By assigning language learners assignments to meet outside the schools, they must automatically trigger the language they have learned before. Benson (2001: 143) notes that learner development activities cannot be isolated from the actions of language learning. In other words, language learning activities performed by language students should conform to their age and ability. If not, they will be irritated and easily bored. Therefore, this must involve a level challenge suitable for perceived ability so that skills are tested accordingly (McInerney & McInerney, 1998).

### 3.3 The Framework of Task-based Learning

Task-based learning framework includes considering the phases or lesson components, which is primarily a task. Prabhu (1987) initially proposed a TBL model comprising three stages, including pre tasking (pre-task), task cycles (meaning concentrated operation or interactive action of the process), and post-task (form attending activity). Willis (1996) expanded the model further and developed a framework to support language teaching in three main phases: pre-task, task cycle, and language use (see Table 1).

Table 1. Three-stage model (Willis, 1996, p.380)

<b>Pre-task</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher introduces the topics and tasks.</li> <li>Teacher discusses the topics with the students and stresses essential vocabularies.</li> <li>Students can be exposing some examples.</li> </ul>		
<b>Task Cycle</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Report</b>
<b>Task</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In pairs or small groups, students do the tasks.</li> <li>In this stage, teacher tracks what the students are doing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are getting ready to report the task.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students encourage or report the tasks.</li> <li>The teacher listens, then comments.</li> </ul>
<b>Language focus</b>	<b>Practice</b>	
<b>Analysis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students then analyze and discuss</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The students practice new words.</li> </ul>	

According to Willis (1996), the pre-taking stage aims to enable students own language resources to set them up for the stage of the task cycle. The task cycle involves students working in groups, pairs, or individuals in the main task according to the task's interactivity. In this stage, students use their current language skills to accomplish the task. The teacher assists students if possible. Once the task cycle has been completed, each group shall prepare a joint report and submit the report to the other class. The teacher will comment if it is required. Finally, the students are led to examine the language types used in the assignment in the language emphasis portion of the lesson. In this section, students are encouraged to learn new language styles and then practice them in different activities. Therefore, students play an active and primary role in the TBL model and are responsible for inspiring and promoting the learning process.

According to Hashemi et al. (2012), task-based learning has three key phrases that represent the task-based learning chronology: pre-task, during-task, and post-task. In pre-task, students train in a way that encourages their acquisition. It is understood that addressing an assignment in a way that motivates students is very necessary. During-task phase, teachers in the task phase have a methodological choice in two specific forms. First, there are different choices for how the assignment is to be carried out, which can be done before the actual task. These are termed "options for task performance." Second, several method options involve teachers and students to decide online how the assignment is to be accomplished. In the post-task phase, it provides several choices. These three main pedagogical objectives: (a) give opportunities to repeat the task and (b) encourage a reflection on the task's accomplishment.

### 3.4 The Benefits of Task-Based Learning

TBL's success is possible due to its significant advantages. In this respect, Willis (1996) states that TBL offers language learners four successful conditions for learning languages, namely visibility, use of the language, encouragement, and preparation. For Willis, TBL enables learners to engage in the target language through listening, reading or both. This participation would allow students to produce learning output later (use of language). In other words, the exhibition gives students greater scope for negotiating and interpreting the meaning of the task or the purpose of the partner performing the same task and receiving implicit feedback from colleagues or teachers, sensitivity to the disparity between learner output and input, and accumulation of the memories of past language outputs (Robinson, 2011). Subject language exposure and use would also increase students' motivation (Robinson, 2011; & Willis, 1996) and reduce the education of teachers (Willis, 1996).

According to Willis and Willis (2007), the implementation of TBL in English classes has advantages. First, students are free to express themselves. They must use all their language tools instead of merely performing one pre-selected object. Secondly, from the students' experience with customized and appropriate language, a natural context is created. Thirdly, students would be even more exposed to TBL terminology. A wide variety of lexical sentences, collocations, patterns, and language forms are exposed to them. Fourthly, the language investigated derives from the needs of the students. This need determines what the lesson will cover instead of an instructor or coursebook decision. Fifth, it is a strong approach to communication in which students spend much time talking. TBL is also fun and inspiring.

Besides, Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011) demonstrated TBL's strength to ESL/EFL students. Considering that the purpose of teaching was not only to help learners achieve their goals, it was more important to provide them with the true meaning and condition of language acquisition. The introduction of TBL was beneficial to give students more opportunities to introduce themselves to the target language and internalize language skills. In short, task-based learning blocks the divide between fact and the classroom. It provided a lot of advantages both to students and teachers.

Research has also revealed that TBL is successful in language instruction (Douglas & Kim, 2014). Douglas and Kim suggest students have had their learning successes and processes. Another research (Bao & Du, 2015) found that students perceived improved attendance in classrooms, and the willingness to utilize the language decreased fear and enjoyed classroom learning. Moreover, the other advantage of TBL is teachers and learners (Nunan, 2004). Nunan suggests that TBL students should engage in deciding what and how to learn. This means a change in the position of the learner and the teacher in the classroom. Students monitor their own mechanism while the teacher is the facilitator. Put merely, TBL is more student-focused (Ellis, 2009). This is illustrated by Douglas and Kim's research (2014). Douglas and Kim indicated that most teachers consider TBL to be a learner-centered approach because it encourages students to participate more in learning. Students' behaviors can also contribute to the validity of tasks that enable students to communicate and participate in their learning process (Guariento & Morley, 2001).

### 3.5 A Proposed Task-based Learning Practice for EFL Learners

This is an example of how to practice task-based learning in the EFL classroom context, especially for elementary learners. It is adapted from POOLS-M LLP-LdV-ToI-2009/DK-902 (2009). In their English class teachers will change teaching and learning activities. The teaching and learning topic are "What is this device?"

#### 3.5.1 Pre-task activities

- The teacher requests that students give device names. The students write the names down on the whiteboard. Change the words into sentences like "This is a screwdriver.," "This is pliers,," etc.
- The teacher takes a toolbox. He/she put and show the tools to the students. They are asked to say, "This is a screwdriver.," etc.
- If it is necessary, the teacher may demonstrate a simple video with those devices. The teacher should use simple words and sentences. Students are asked to add new tools names on the whiteboard.
- The teacher practices a memory game using the chosen devices. The game needs to contain images and written tool names.
- The teacher breaks the class into 3-4 student groups. The students allow two groups in memory games to play with each other.
- The students pursue the "What's this device" memory game for the whole group, as in Table 2. The teacher should perform this exercise.
- Let students see a single sentence in turn (see sentences below, ask them to cover the rest. Each sentence must be read and understood. The teacher asks a student to read a phrase and invites others to add to the translation to make it a collaborative exercise.
- Once all phrases are revealed, the students will ideally guess the name of the device/tool.

At this point, the teacher could verify that students have memorized the various names of tools by showing them the photos and asking for their names. This ensures that students, especially the poorer ones, have enough words to choose from to perform the main task.

The list of questions related to the games in Table 2 are as follows:









#### What's this device?

- You use the device to cut woods.
- For this device, you must use energy.
- This device can be kept in your hand.



- This unit is made of metal and wood.
- This device may be of various sizes.
- If you want to put other things in place, you need this tool.
- To make this device fall, you must raise your arm.
- You have to put something on the wall with this unit.
- This device is used to hammer items.
- Try to guess this device's name.

Table 2. Devices for memory games

ruler		hammer	
screwdriver		saw	
pliers		tester	
jack		drill	

At this point, the teacher could verify that students have memorized the various names of tools by showing them the photos and asking for their names. This ensures that students, especially the poorer ones, have enough words to choose from to perform the main task.

### 3.5.2 Task cycle activities

- Students may now be divided into 2 or 3 groups. Each group should build its own sentences "What's this device." The groups must select a device from the memory game.
- If necessary, the teacher should provide helpful words or phrases on the whiteboard.
- The teacher tracks the development process in the various groups and only assists if it is necessary.
- Students' exercise must be enrolled, so it is possible to use a speaking or reading exercise.
- The group will assess the exercise and other groups when all groups completed the exercise and are pleased with the results.

### 3.5.3 Language use activities

- If the groups have tried their activity with multiple groups many times, the teacher must call attention and resume the classroom process.
- The teacher should point to a group. The group is asked to repeat its practice. Then it displays each sentence on the whiteboard. The goal is to give attention to this group's language development and to examine the sentences, word selection, and grammar structures.
- The teacher can choose good examples from the output of the students at this point and can open specific grammatical points at the same time. Other groups may give advice and ask questions.
- It is the teacher's time and place to reflect on these things, which the teacher has monitored during group work.
- This exercise should be replicated, and training should be demanded by at least two or three classes.

## 4 CONCLUSION

The change from conventional, teacher-faced approaches to learning has led to an increasing CLT trend, where languages can be acquired through authentic action of contact, communication, and meaning negotiation. TBL is designed to be fluent rather than precise, as a strong CLT version. It promotes the process of language learning as students learn how to communicate in that language by exploring the language system. Task-based learning emphasizes learning to convey using the target language through interaction; thus, the study is meaning-focused. Language is the center of attention. TBL's central concept is that language learning happens in a natural learning environment, and more success in facilitating language acquisition is students are exposed to practical experiences with authentic materials. Language learners are interested in effective communication in TBL through target language exercises and should improve their communication skills.

In summary, this article presented basic TBL definitions. In the study of meanings, the significance of meaning when using tasks revolves around a term that is fundamental to it all. First, the article discusses TBL's outstanding functionality. Conversation encourages language as a constructive weapon. Likewise, the degree of truth in the creation

of tasks offers real contact possibilities. Then the article discusses how TBL can be applied in the EFL classroom. Finally, TBL provides some advantages to provide a detailed perspective of TBL. Finally, an example of how this technique can be practiced in EFL classrooms. In their English class, teachers will change teaching and learning activities.

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