

## Task-based Language Teaching in Second Language Teaching: Literature Review

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### Abstract

Task-based language teaching is one of the second language approaches in which learners' main focus is on the use of real language terms rather than just focusing on grammar. In other words, it is supposed to be as one of the branches of communicative approaches as the teachers in task-based language teaching use tasks that are related to real world, such as; booking a table in a restaurant, taking doctor's appointment or buying a cinema ticket..., etc. One of the teachers' responsibilities is to provide their learners with useful materials to achieve the main learning targets. There are many approaches of second language teaching which has changed by the time according to the purpose of learning the language, such as moving from learning a language for reading proficiency to communication purposes. Task-based language teaching approach is considered as one of the communicative approaches that are designed especially for obtaining effective language learning. Moreover, communication is the most crucial aim of learning a language. Task-based language teaching approach suggests using 'task' as the main tool in preparing and teaching a new language. However, there is an argument about the definition of task in task-based language teaching approach which says that the meaning of task is varying according to what is the main goal which the task is provided for. Task-based language teaching is one of the most effective approaches in the field of language learning and teaching as it provides learners with opportunities to practice real communication if teachers planned the tasks carefully and provided the learners with supportive environment for task completion in order to gain the required objectives.

### Keywords

Task-based language teaching, second language teaching and learning.

### المهام في عملية تعلم اللغة الثانية من الناحية الأدبية

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### الكلمات المفتاحية

التدريس اللغوي القائم

على المهام

تدريس وتعلم اللغة الثانية

### الملخص

يُعد التدريس اللغوي القائم على المهام (Task-based Language Teaching) أحد المناهج المتّبعة في تعلم اللغة الثانية، حيث ينصب التركيز الرئيسي للمتعلّمين على استخدام اللغة الحقيقة بدلاً من مجرد التركيز على القواعد النحوية. بعبارة أخرى، يفترض أنه فرع من المناهج التواصلية، حيث يستخدم المعلّمون في التدريس القائم على المهام مهاماً مرتبطاً بالعالم الواقعي، مثل: حجز طاولة في مطعم، أو تحديد موعد مع طبيب، أو شراء تذكرة سينما، وما إلى ذلك.

من مسؤوليات المعلّمين توفير مواد تعليمية مفيدة ل المتعلّمين لتحقيق الأهداف التعليمية الأساسية. لقد تغيرت مناهج تدريس اللغة الثانية العديدة بمرور الوقت وفقاً للغرض من تعلم اللغة، مثل الانتقال من تعلم اللغة لغرض إتقان القراءة إلى أغراض التواصل. ويعتبر منهج التدريس اللغوي القائم على المهام أحد المناهج التواصلية المصممة خصيصاً للحصول على تعلم فعال للغة. علاوة على ذلك، يُعد التواصل المُدفَّع الأهمية لتعلم أي لغة.

يقترح التدريس اللغوي القائم على المهام استخدام "المهمة" كأداة رئيسية في إعداد وتدريس لغة جديدة. ومع ذلك، هناك جدل حول تعريف المهمة في منهج التدريس اللغوي القائم على المهام، حيث يُقال إن معنى المهمة يتّبّع وفقاً للهدف الرئيسي الذي قدّمت المهمة من أجله.

يمكن القول إن التدريس اللغوي القائم على المهام هو أحد أكثر المناهج فاعلية في مجال تعلم اللغة وتدريسيها، لأنّه يزود المتعلّمين بفرص لمارسة التواصل الحقيقي، شريطة أن يقوم المعلّمون بخطيط المهام بعناية و توفير بيئة داعمة لإكمال المهام المتعلّمين من أجل تحقيق الأهداف المطلوبة.

## Introduction

Teaching a new language requires hard work; one of the teachers' responsibilities is to provide their learners with useful materials to achieve learning targets. There are many approaches for second language teaching which change by the time according to the purpose of learning a language, such as moving from learning a language for reading proficiency to communication purposes. One of the most famous approaches in second language teaching is task-based language teaching approach which is considered as one of the communicative approaches which are designed especially for obtaining effective language learning. Moreover, communication is the most crucial aim of learning a language. Task-based language teaching approach suggests using 'task' as the main tool in preparing and teaching a new language. However, there is an argument about the definition of task in task-based language teaching approach which says that the meaning of task is varying according to what is the main goal which the task is provided for, there is a notion which explores that task is an activity which carries out a goal by using a language. Despite the fact of the benefits that task-based language teaching provides to the language learning and language teaching process, there is still an argument about the challenges which accompany using it.

This paper is going to review task-based language teaching approach as one of the

language approaches that are used in second language teaching and learning. It is divided into seven parts. The first part identifies task-based language teaching approach as one of second language approaches that is used in second language learning and teaching. Furthermore, it highlights the definition of the term 'task' which is the most important tool in this approach. The second part discusses learner's role as an important participant in task-based language teaching and learning and how learner's role moves from one to another during all task procedures. As well as the third part presents teacher's role as another important factor in this approach. In the fourth part the framework which task-based language teaching follow will be explored in details: three main procedures: pre-task, task cycle and post task. The fifth part explores the benefits of using task-based language teaching approach as a method used in teaching and learning a new language. The sixth provides principles that should be done in order when using task-based language teaching materials in teaching a new language, such as, scaffolding, task dependency, recycling, active learning, reproduction to creation and reflection. While the seventh part presents the challenges of implementing task-based language teaching.

### Identifying task-based language teaching

Task-based language teaching is one of the

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most famous approaches in the field of second language teaching which is basically focus on using tasks in teaching a language. Willis (1996) stresses that task-based language teaching approach draws attention for using tasks that involve communication activities which are important and promote language learning. Richards and Rodgers (2001) maintain that tasks are the vehicles which provide real and meaningful communication to language classroom. In task-based language teaching approach learners are supposed to be provided with tasks that need to be performed or by problem to be solved.

### **Definition of 'task'**

Many researchers in the field of second language learning attempted to give a specific and clear definition for the term task as a tool to teach a language. This section will explore task definition and look at it from different points of experts' view.

According to Nunan (2004) there are two types of tasks; the target tasks (real-world tasks) which are related to the use of language outside of the educational settings and the pedagogical tasks which take place in second language classroom. Target tasks are all the tasks that people do in their everyday life, such as buying something from the shop, writing a letter, etc (Long 1985). However Nunan (2004) criticizes Long's definition by claiming that this definition is non-linguistic because it focused only on persons' daily life activities and these activities may or may not include any language uses. In addition, what

people do in everyday routine is completely different from what they do in second language classroom.

Nunan (2004) demonstrates that when learners altered from their daily life to the educational conditions, tasks turn out to be pedagogical tasks, in which is defined as "an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e. as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape...Tasks may or may not involve the production of language" (Richards 1986, 289) From this definition it is clear that tasks are described as all the things that learners do in the classroom which is away from the real world. This is another definition of the pedagogical task 'any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task" (Breen 1987, 23). Nunan (2004) describes this definition by saying it is very broad as it defined the task as all the things that learners do in the classroom. (Willis and Willis 2001, 173) suggest a limited definition of the task: a classroom undertaking "...where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome". This definition describes the use of language in communicative tasks as a way of carrying out an outcome through exchanging meaning. Another definition of the pedagogical task which established the five characteristics of the task:

"-Meaning is primary

-Learners are not given other people's meaning to regurgitate

-There is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities

-Task completion has some priority

-The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome" (Skehan 1998, Cited in Nunan 2004, p. 3).

From the previous different task definitions, it could be argued that there is no one meaning of task as it basically depends on the main objectives which the task used for. Branden (2006) suggests that there should be relationship between classroom tasks and real-world tasks. In other words what learners' practice in the classroom should be relevant to what they do in their daily life (target tasks). Therefore task-based language teaching materials and syllabus designers should consider this idea and create materials and tasks derived from real-world tasks.

### **Learner's role in task-based language teaching**

The term 'role' means the role that learners as well as teachers are supposed to function during carrying out a particular task and the relationship among these two categories. (Nunan 2004)

According to Richards and Rogers (2001) there in analyzing language teaching methods and approaches there is a massive

consideration to learners and teacher's role, moreover they also establish that the method or the task that is used in language learning have the ability to reflect on learners' progress. According to the fact that learners and teachers are the most crucial elements in the process of second language learning,

Richards and Rodgers (2001) explore that learners are supposed to act different specific roles in task-based language teaching. Some of these roles have common characteristics with the general roles that are assumed for communicative language teaching learners' while the rest are specifically concentrate on task completion. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) there are three primary roles which are implied for working with task:

**Group participant:** according the fact that task-based language teaching is derived from the communicative approach which depends on communication, tasks will require from the learners to work in pairs and small groups.

**Monitor:** Richards and Rodgers (2001) establish that language tasks should be designed to provide learners opportunities to see how language is used for communication. As language learners they need to attend sessions and focus on different issues such as how tasks work and to the form in which these tasks occur.

**Risk-taker and innovator:** most of language tasks need learners to create and understand language as many of them have less or no experience with the language as well as lack

of linguistic resources. Therefore, learners should practice appropriate restarting, using paralinguistic signals and paraphrasing. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) learners are supposed to use their language skills for understanding and guess from linguistic and contextual signs.

Moreover, asking for clarification and practice developing skills of how to consult with other learners. Nunan (2004) expresses that tasks outcomes will be influenced by learners attempt during task performance. There is a gap between what teacher expects from task outcome and what learners actually learn from it. In addition, Breen (1987) clarifies that learners will have impact on task outcomes by what they should do in task completion, the perspective in which they look at the task such as its definition, demands and the conditions in which task take place. However there is still an argument about how each learner carries out tasks. It is generally assuming that the way that learners and teacher look at task is the same, however it could be argued that teacher might focus on meaning while learners focus on language point. Consequently, learners should be engaged in planning and monitoring learning process, however this idea does not explore that learners and teacher roles will be the same, but it gives teachers opportunity to ensure that learners and learning are on the right track.

### **Teacher's role in task-based language teaching**

Teacher plays important elements in language learning classroom. In task-based language teaching teacher is expected to play different roles, however teacher's roles in task-based language teaching could be different from roles that teacher plays in the other language teaching approaches. Avermaet, Colpin, Gorp, Bogaert and Branden (2006) stress that teacher's role is crucial in all language methods and approaches. Teachers have two important roles which should be taken in order for enhancing and drawing learners' attention to deal with the task as an actual learning. The first action is motivating learners to use their intellectual power in task completion and the second one is to support the task performance by focusing on meaning, content, form, input and output which are considered as main aspects of second language learning. These actions which are required from the teacher should be noticed through the three phases for the teachers' activity, which are planning phase, performance phase and post-task phase.

According to Nunan (2004) there many tips that teacher will think about by using his/her intellectual energy while preparing for the task. In this stage teacher will think about the prepared task whether it is adopted from another source or it designed by the teacher, can arise learners' motivation and enhance their cognitive and interaction to promote language learning process. Breen (1987) demonstrates that teachers at planning stage looking at some crucial issues for assessing the potential of the task such as the

following:

-Task objectives such as developing specific skills, providing a particular form and if the objectives related to learners' needs or not.

-Is the task content is familiar and interesting to the learners or not.

-The situation in which the task will be carried out, e.g. learners will work individually, in pairs or in groups.

In the performance stage of the task the cognitive and the interactional process that may consolidate the learning process are expected to take place. In addition, the teachers' role will draw out the potential of the task for individual or group of learners. In post-task stage, the teacher with the learners will assess to what extent everyone engaged in the activity and to what extent was the task efficient for spontaneous and planned learning outcome. Avermaet, Colpin, Gorp, Bogaert and Branden (2006) suggest that during the three task stages both teachers and learners should consider the contextual settings which consist of learners characteristics such as, age, level, needs, interests, etc and teachers' characteristics such as, experience, level of proficiency, beliefs, etc. Moreover, classroom conditions, such as, number of learners, facilities, and materials. In addition to many factors which related to curriculum, timetables, school regulations, etc. Consequently, it could say that teachers play a crucial role in providing tasks and they seek through their attempts to motivate learners to devote intellectual

power during performing task and support them in the performance stage. Teachers should establish scaffolds to support learners' attempt towards learning and to create good language learning atmosphere.

### **Framework of task-based language teaching**

As the situation with language approaches task-based language teaching have specific procedures. According to Willis (1996) there are three main stages for teaching through task-based language teaching: pre-task phase, task cycle and post task. The next section is going to explain the three stages that in which learners and teacher are going to follow when using task-based language teaching.

**Pre-task:** this is the first stage for the task in which the teacher introduces and identifies the topic to the learners and focus on the important words or phrases by using pictures, listen to the recorder, texts, videos..., etc. Moreover, learners might need a short time for this phase and they should highlight the words, brainstorm such as, make lists, compare and share ideas. In this stage the teacher has to ensure that the learners are familiar with the topic and they realized the task instructions carefully. Richards and Rodgers (2001) maintain that this stage could be very useful for the learners as it gives them time to think about the topic before they have to engage in the task and expect what they are going to practice and learn from the next step.

**Task cycle:** according to Willis (1996) this stage is very crucial as the learners start taking part in the task and Willis divided this stage into three parts; task, planning and report. At the beginning learners work in pairs or in groups, in fact this depends on task type and in which way the teacher planned for the situation of carrying out the task. In addition, in this stage learners are free to communicate use any language to take part in the task. This time the teacher monitors and supports the learners by encouraging them to say what they want but without correcting errors. Richards and Rodgers (2001) stress that learners can built their confidence while discussing in small groups before they speak in front of the whole class. In planning phase each pair or group of learners start preparing a report for the whole class about how they performed the task and what decisions or outcomes they have came up with and prepare what they are going to present to the class may be by giving them written drafts to read as well as they focus on form to practice complex language. Willis (1996) demonstrates that in this time the teacher help advice the learners to use the right language for the oral or written report as well as make sure that the learners' objective of the report is obvious, well organized, accurate and appropriate. Learners' success in getting task purposes could raise their motivation.

Reporting is the last stage in task cycle phase, in which the learners provide what they have prepared in task and planning parts whether in spoken or written language when

the teacher decide which group is going to start presenting their report to the whole class and other learners take notes. Usually not all the groups give presentation while the other learners have the chance to comment and ask about specific language items. Willis (1996) described the teacher in this part as a 'chairman' who gives some comments and feedback about the report or the content without giving overt correction.

**Post-task:** this the last stage for the task and known as language focus which include analysis and practice. Willis (2024) suggests that at this time the teacher should analyze the language by asking the learners about words, phrases, or any misunderstanding points that they faced during the previous stages and this kind of feedback may lead the learners to look again at the task language to focus on language features from the given task and to get better understanding. In addition, the learners also are supposed to take part and ask the teacher about specific language features. Moreover, it is important for the teacher to get feedback from the learners because this will be useful in preparing the next task. Finally, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001) the teacher encourages the learners to practice the language that they have learnt already from the task. Practice activities could be done in different ways, such as, drilling, matching, or divide the learners into teams and play games by using the prior task.

Willis (2024) demonstrates that task-based language teaching framework give learners

chances to practice fluency, accuracy and then complexity which are the crucial aspects of the process of second language learning. However it could be argued that the previous idea is basically depends on how individual teachers carry out tasks with their learners according to educational conditions such as, learners' age, level, available materials and teacher's experience.

### **Benefits of using task- based language teaching**

One of the evidences that task-based language teaching approach has many benefits that it is one of the famous communicative approaches that used in language teaching and learning. Van den Branden (2022) maintains that task-based language teaching is supposed one of the approaches that provide effective language learning. Jordan & Long (2022) maintain that task-based language teaching offers the learners the chance to engage with the natural use of the language through classroom context as well as it contributes to developing learners' communicative fluency without neglecting accuracy.

### **Principles for using task-based language teaching**

#### **Scaffolding:**

All materials and lessons should support language framework when language learning take place. Learners are not supposed to use a new language which is has not been used and introduced before. One of teacher's

responsibilities is to provide learners with supporting framework in which learning and teaching take place. According to Nunan (2004) this specifically crucial with task-based language teaching approach in which learners are supposed to use a language which beyond their current capacity. Teacher should provide learners with scaffolds to give them chance to build up their learning process. Scaffolding should not be removed prematurely because this collapsing the learning progress. However, it should not last for too long as this reduce developing the required independency for the autonomous use of the language.

#### **Task dependency:**

Choosing task for current lesson should be build up on the previous task that learners learnt recently. Task dependency is considered as one of the most important principles because it explains how tasks should be in a logical sequence and each task is built on the last task, in other words tasks should be relevant to each other to provide effective learning. Nunan (2004) describe this logical sequence in tasks by maintaining that it is like telling 'a pedagogical story' as learning progress is built step by step until learners have the ability to carry out the required pedagogical target. When task dependency is in operation there are many principles should take place, such as, receptive to productive principle. This noticed when learners spend sufficient time engaging with receptive skills which are listening and reading during instructional

cycle. Moreover, learners in the cycle are supposed to spend long time in productive skills such as, speaking and writing. According to Nunan (2004) there are another principles should appear in task dependency which is reproductive to creative language to develop tasks chains.

### **Recycling:**

Recycling language provide learners with opportunities for activating language learning. According to Nunan (2004) learners are not supposed to acquire one hundred per cent of a specific linguistic item when they learn the language the first time as they still waiting for reintroducing the same item for a period of time. This kind of recycling gives learners opportunities to obtain language items in different times and environments. Furthermore, recycling allows learners to learn how these linguistic items function in different contexts.

### **Active learning:**

Learning a language through active learning could be one of the best ways that promote language learning. Nunan (2004) demonstrates that learners learn effectively through practicing and they prefer using their own knowledge and experience with the language as well as not being passive and receive instructions from the teacher. For this reason classroom time should be dedicated to chances for learners to deal with the language. Furthermore, varying and maximize these opportunities is very important. However, the previous suggestion

does not mean that ignoring teachers work in the classroom but learners should be engaged with language to the possible extent.

### **Reproduction to creation:**

One of the most important principles in task-based language teaching approach is that encouraging learners to move from reproduction stage to creativity stage of using a language. Nunan (2004) expresses that learners in reproductive tasks are supposed to start reproducing language items that have been provided by teacher, textbook or by listening to the tape. In addition, this kind of tasks is intended to provide learners with opportunities to focus on form, function and meaning as well as the basics of creative tasks in which learners will be able to use the language creatively.

### **Reflection:**

Reflection is very important for effective language learning as learners should be able to reflect about their learning and their progress. One of reflective learner characteristics is being able to move from content to learning process. Nunan (2004) maintains that task-based language teaching is one of the pedagogical approaches that draws attention to make learners more attentive about their learning. In addition, it helps learner to think about the rationale for using new approaches.

### **Challenges of implementing task-based teaching**

According to Van den Branden, (2022) task-

based language teaching has some challenges which may hinder its implementation.

Time consuming is supposed to be one of them, as task preparation takes a very long and significant time in choosing the suitable task that suits learners' age needs, backgrounds and culture. Moreover, as task-based language teaching activities support communicative tasks and collaborative work, some students may lead the conversation while others may stay passive or involve in conversations that are not linked to the given task. This may reduce the expected goals from the task.

To avoid the previous challenges, one of the teacher's roles is to monitor all groups to ensure that all participants actively take a part in the dissection. However, task-based language teaching supports communication and fluency tasks; this might lead to unconscious ignorance to the accuracy. This may affect learners who need to enrich their grammatical skills negatively. Likewise, task-based language teaching may not fit all language learners, as some of them may prefer structured tasks rather than the open-ended tasks.

## Conclusion

This paper has considered the use of task-based language teaching in second language teaching which is considered as one of the communicative approaches that draw attention to focus on teaching and learning the language through communication. The paper has been divided into seven parts, the

first part identified task-based language teaching approach and provided different various definition for the term 'task' and it has been highlighted the two kinds of task; real-world tasks which are tasks that related to everyday life and pedagogical tasks which take place in language learning classroom. Furthermore, task definition is depending on the aim of the task. However, there should be strong relationship between real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks which provide learners with opportunities to practice real and meaningful communication in language learning classroom. The second part of this paper highlighted learner's role in task-based language teaching and found that learner is a crucial part in this approach and has many different roles during all task procedures as well as learners have chances to practice three main issues during the task; fluency, accuracy and complexity which lead to real communication. The third part explored teacher's role during task procedures and found that teacher should be as facilitator while using task in the classroom. The fourth part discussed task-based language teaching framework in details which should be followed in order to provide effective language teaching and learning. The fourth part provided benefits of using task-based language teaching approach as a method of language teaching and learning. However, there are some language researchers who claim that it is not professional approach as it is suit only high-level learners and not useful for beginner level, its advantages outweigh its drawbacks especially if task procedures followed in logical order and both learners

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and teacher play their supposed roles in the right way.

The fifth part was the most important part in this paper as it provided six important principles for implementing task-based language teaching approach. Moreover, all these principles are important for effective use of task, in other words, scaffolding could not be enough without reflection or recycling. The sixth part has presented the most common challenges of implementing this approach which should be taken into consideration in order to avoid them while implementing the tasks.

Task-based language teaching is one of the most effective approaches in the field of language learning and teaching as it provides learners with opportunities to practice real communication which is the main aim of language learning especially for high level learners.

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