

## **TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: THEORY AND GUIDANCE FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICES**

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### **ABSTRAK**

*Task Based Language Teaching* (TBLT) merupakan salah satu pendekatan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris yang berfokus kepada upaya pembelajaran bahasa melalui penyelenggaraan kegiatan berbahasa di dalam kelas, sebagai reaksi terhadap paradigma lama yang mengajarkan bahasa di dalam kelas. Pada umumnya *task*—kegiatan berbahasa yang dimaksud—disyaratkan harus memiliki pemakaian di dunia nyata, terkecuali sejumlah pola bahasa dan interaksi penting yang sulit dicari aplikasinya dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Konsepsi tentang *task* merupakan fokus dan titik tumpu pada pendekatan ini, sehingga bisa dikatakan bahwa *task* sebagai mata pelajaran, rangkaian *task-task* sebagai silabus dan penguasaan rangkaian *task* tersebut sebagai tujuan instruksional jangka panjang. Pendekatan ini pada mulanya diciptakan oleh N. Prabhu di India pada tahun 1980-an dan sekarang paradigma dan aplikasinya sudah mengglobal.

**Kata Kunci:** *Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) was a reaction to the belief and the practice of language teaching which focuses on teaching the language that was applied in the prior methods. In this way, language is taught and learned consciously in the classroom. Part of the experts had a different view on language teaching that is by teaching language through activities. Differently, it is suggested that learners should acquire language as result of doing the activities, unconsciously, instead of learning it on purpose. An effort to prove the effectiveness of ‘the activity approach’ was carried out in India which is later known as the ‘Bangalore Project’, conducted by N. Prabhu, initiated in 1979 and

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completed in 1984.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, N. Prabhu is commonly acknowledged as the originator of TBLT. Upon this approach, classroom process emphasis on meaning and learning by doing instead of language matters to learn applied in the decade in India<sup>3</sup>. In the next turn, the emergence of TBLT and other approaches under CA contributed to the falling of the dominating methods at that earlier era such as GTM and ALM.

Task Based Language Teaching is closely related to experiential learning<sup>4</sup> that is learning through experience, which strongly supports famous John Dewey's jargon '*Learning by Doing*'. In this point of view, learning is posited as activity conducted by students for acquiring certain knowledge or skills instead of teacher's activity to transfer them to students' mind. It commonly distinguishes students from being active or passive in the classroom. When students are seeing and hearing teacher's explanation or only responding mechanically to teachers' stimulus, they are considered passive. On the other hand, when students are doing activities physically and or mentally which can be considered as their own effort to process knowledge and skills, they are active.

Taking advantage of students' experience of the world is the focal point of experiential learning. Instruction is design as an effort to bring about students' experience from the real life into the classroom by providing media, real products and the sorts, rehearsing situations and digging up their knowledge related to the teaching materials, and then they do activities related to it similar to what they should do when they meet the situations in the real world. Kolb points out that in experiential learning, immediate personal experience is seen as the focal point for learning, giving "life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning

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<sup>2</sup>Sanchez, Aquilino, "The Task-Based Approach in Language Teaching", IJES, vol. 4, (1), 2004, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Aquilino Sanchez, *Log. Cit.*

<sup>4</sup>David Nunan, *Communicative Task and The Language Curriculum*, (New York: TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 25, No. 2, Summer 1991), p. 280.

process<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, Kohonen affirms that learning is thus seen as a cyclical process integrating immediate experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization and action<sup>6</sup>. And then, establishing learning experience in part of the students requires teacher's effort to make a special kind of activity carried on by the students in the classroom which is called 'the task'<sup>7</sup>.

'Task' is now taken as an important feature of communicative approaches in language teaching and the teaching of language skills in most levels. Almost all of the current approaches such as CLT, The Natural Approach, CBLT, CBI and The Post Methods Era are language teaching paradigms which support and encourage the use of task in the enhancing proficiency in their classrooms. Besides, by analyzing and comparing the nature of activities which are designed to make happened communication in term of the four skills in the classrooms with the nature of TBLT, one should be aware that the activities are task-based in variety of directions and forms.

In the level of policies, TBLT also had been applied for English teaching in many countries. In China, task-based language teaching was introduced in the late 1990s<sup>8</sup>. Then, in 2001, the New Round National Curriculum Innovation was launched by the Chinese government, and TBLT was advocated as part the official syllabus<sup>9</sup>. Indonesia, since English teaching applies CBLT and GBLT since 2004, TBLT is thus naturally part of the curriculum.

In spite of the wide world use of this approach, TBLT indicates a number of weaknesses. According to Skehan, task-based learning holds some dangers if implemented carelessly. Especially, it is likely to create pressure for instant communication rather than inter-language change and growth<sup>10</sup>. Besides, Buyukkarci points out that while Task-Based Instruction may fruitfully develop

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<sup>5</sup>David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as The Source of Learning and Development*, (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1984), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>David Nunan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>7</sup>Aquilino Sanchez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup>Yang Suxiang, *A study of Task-based Language Teaching in Online English Language Teaching*, (Department of Foreign Languages, Henan Polytechnic University, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Chunrao Deng and David Carless, *The Communicativeness of Activities in a Task Based Innovation in Guangdong*, (China: Asian Journal of L. T, 2009), p. 114

<sup>10</sup>Kagan Buyukkarci, "A Critical Analysis of Task Based Learning", January 2009 Vol:17 No:1 Kastamonu Education Journal, p. 319

learners' authority of what is known, it is significantly less effective for the systematic teaching of new language<sup>11</sup>. This condition provokes Muller to suggest that students should be supplied with language at phase Pre-Task and During Task in the classroom process<sup>12</sup>. To summarize, TBLT has weaknesses in term of sequencing interlanguage change and teaching of the new language matters. Above all, the following discussion concerns with a broad discussion of TBLT in language teaching.

## **B. DISCUSSION**

In general term, task refers to all activities that people do in the real world, unless necessarily to involve any language use. Long, points out that task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book and so on.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Nunan states that tasks have a non-linguistic outcome<sup>14</sup>. Based on the two definitions, the term 'task' addresses all activities that people have in daily life to fulfill their needs at work, at play and at all surrounding society, which is not essentially to make them accomplish a certain communication or master language. From Long's examples above, 'painting a fence' or 'filling out a form' for instance can be done without uttering a word at all. Thus, the prominent idea to emphasis here is that a task must be a purposeful activity of mankind in the real world.

In the next turn, defining task in term of language teaching must comprise a number of linguistic features or communication activities. It means that the activities must tolerate the goal of language teaching as to develop communicative competence which involves the accomplishment of communication activities and involvement of certain language components. If the activities do not include any

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<sup>11</sup>Kagan Buyukkarci, *Log. Cit.*

<sup>12</sup>Theron Muller, "Researching the Influence of Target Language on Learner Task Performance", *Asian EFL Journal*, Volume 8, Number 3, 2006, p. 165.

<sup>13</sup>M. H. Long, A role for instruction in second language acquisition: Task-based language teaching. In K. Hyltenstam and M. Pienemann (Eds.), *Modeling and Assessing Second Language Acquisition*, (Multilingual Matters: Clevedon, 1985), p. 89.

<sup>14</sup>Nunan, David, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

language or communication, they will not be usable to teach language or to develop communication ability, although they may belong to the teaching of competence or skills in other disciplines out of language. For that reason, Prabhu defines task in TBLT as conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, Breen requires tasks to be a range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning—from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision making.<sup>16</sup> More comprehensively, Nunan defines a task is a piece of classroom work that 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. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end.<sup>17</sup> In brief, a task is activity that students conduct in the classroom for developing their communication ability, which has function in the real world.

To summarize, Nunan points out that task-based language teaching has strengthened the following principles and practices:

1. A needs-based approach to content selection.
2. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
3. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
4. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
5. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.

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<sup>15</sup>N. S. Prabhu, *Second Language Pedagogy*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987), p.

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<sup>16</sup>M. Breen, *Learner Contributions to Task Design*. In C. Candlin & D. Murphy (Eds.), *Language Learning Tasks*, (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1987), p. 23.

<sup>17</sup>David Nunan, "Task-Based Language Teaching in the Asia Context: Defining Task", *Asian EFL Journal*, Volume 8, Number 3, 2006., pp. 12-18., p. 17

6. The linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom.<sup>18</sup>

### **1. Learning Theory**

Fundamental theory of CBLT dates back to ‘cognitive psychology’,<sup>19</sup> which posits human as thinking being. It is contrast to the preceding ‘behaviorism’ which argues that human learns through habituation as adapted in the Direct Method and ALM. Applied in TBLT, advocates of TBLT claim that language learning will result from creating the right kinds of interactional processes in the classroom, and the best way to create these is to use specially designed instructional tasks,<sup>20</sup> in which students do familiar task by using the target language,<sup>21</sup> which directly linked to curricular goals they serve...extend beyond the practice of language for its own sake<sup>22</sup>, with that language learning will take care of itself.<sup>23</sup> In brief, in TBLT, language learning is viewed as performing language use activities in the classroom instead of learning language for its own sake.

### **2. Language Theory**

In TBLT, language is viewed as means for accomplishing certain communicative goals which is bound in specific discourses. Richards and Rodgers list a number of views on language in CBLT as follows:

1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.

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<sup>18</sup>David Nunan, *Task Based Language Teaching: Excerpt*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Wang Cheng Jun, *Designing Communicative Tasks*, (Chongqing Normal University: Thesis Dissertation, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>20</sup>Jack C. Richards, *Communicative Language Teaching Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup>Kagan Buyukkarci, *Op. Cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>22</sup>Douglas Brown, *Teaching by Principles*, (London: Longman, 1994), p. 83.

<sup>23</sup>Wang Cheng Jun, *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.<sup>24</sup>

Illustration above indicates that TBLT doesn't support that language possesses a certain order of sequence in term of grammatical complexity; on the other hand language order is based on task sequence of complexity, which students need to accomplish based on an assessment, no matter what language needed to accomplish them.

#### **a. Goal and Syllabus**

Goal of TBLT is to develop students' communicative competence which is specifically defined as accomplishing a range of tasks. The goal is conceptualized in term of curriculum they need to serve,<sup>25</sup> consisting of communicative tasks which students need to engage outside the classroom,<sup>26</sup> however by referring to the definition of Richards<sup>27</sup> about pedagogical task, the syllabus of TBLT may include tasks which somewhat less connected with the real life communication but useful for developing certain type of language and interaction.

#### **b. Materials and Development**

Teaching materials in TBLT are the tasks either which involves other media or which comes alone. Richards<sup>28</sup> divides task into two kinds:

1. Pedagogical task; refers to designed classroom tasks that are intended to require the use of specific interactional strategies and may also require the use of specific types of language (skills, grammar, vocabulary). In other words, the activities are designed to enable students' accomplish communication with pre-determined linguistic and interaction features.
2. Real-world tasks; refers to tasks that reflect real-world uses of language and which might be considered a rehearsal for real world tasks. The tasks

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<sup>24</sup>Richards and Rodgers, *Op. Cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup>David Nunan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>26</sup>Wang Cheng Jun, *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup>Jack C. Richards, *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup>Jack C. Richards, *Log. Cit.*

are taken from the real world into classroom and then addressed to the students to accomplish, linguistic features involved in the classroom processes depends on what are available within each task.

According to Willis<sup>29</sup> the tasks can come in six types as follows:

1. Listing tasks. For example, students might have to make up a list of things they would pack if they were going on a beach vacation.
2. Sorting and ordering. For example, students work in pairs and make up a list of the most important characteristics of an ideal vacation.
3. Comparing. For example, students compare ads for two different supermarkets.
4. Problem-solving. For example, students read a letter to an advice columnist and suggest a solution to the writer's problems.
5. Sharing personal experience. For example, students discuss their reactions to an ethical or moral dilemma, and
6. Creative tasks. For example, students prepare plans for redecorating a house.

No matter types and kinds of tasks a teacher prepares in his classroom, it must contain a number of necessary elements inside, which makes the application runs well in the classroom. Nunan underlines two important additional elements in tasks, they are the roles for teachers and learners implicit in the task, and the settings and conditions under which the task takes place.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Willis and Willis list a number of guiding questions for developing a good learning tasks as follows:

1. Does the activity engage learners' interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?
3. Is there an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome? Is completion a priority?
5. Does the activity relate to real world activities?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup>David Nunan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>31</sup>Dave Willis and Jane Willis, *Doing Task-based Teaching*, (New York: Longman, 2007), p. 7.



More progressively, Shavelson and Stern<sup>32</sup> suggest that task design should take into consideration the following elements:

1. Content—the subject matter to be taught
2. Materials—the things that learners can observe/manipulate
3. Activities—the things that learners and teachers will be doing during the lesson
4. Goals—the teacher’s general aim for the task (they are much general and vague than objectives)
5. Students—their abilities, needs and interests are important
6. Social community—the class as a whole and its sense of groupness

As an extension, Nunan exemplifies steps in developing pedagogic-task as follows:

<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
1. Identify target task	Giving personal information in a job interview	To give learners the opportunity to develop language skills relevant to their real world needs
2. Provide model	Students listen to and extract key information from authentic/ simulated interview	To provide learners the opportunity to listen to and analyse ways in which native speakers or users of the target language carry out the target task
3. Identify enabling skill	Manipulation drill to practice WH-questions with do-insertion	To provide learners with explicit instruction and guided practice in those grammatical elements needed to perform the target task
4. Devise pedagogic task	Interview simulation using role cards	To provide learners the opportunity to mobilize their emerging language skills through rehearsal

Figure 1: Steps in developing pedagogic task<sup>33</sup>

### c. Learning Experience

In TBLT, language is used for transmitting messages, in which content, and association of meaning and language is perceived as close to reality.<sup>34</sup> It is contrast to the traditional practices which present language without emphasis on

<sup>32</sup>R. Shavelson and P. Stern, *Research on Teachers' Pedagogical Thoughts, Judgments, Decisions and Behaviour*, (England: Review of Educational Research, 1981), p. 34.

<sup>33</sup>David Nunan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup>Aquilino Sanchez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 41.

context and real use of the language. The following figure describes the comparison between the traditional paradigms to task-based pedagogy.

<b>Traditional Form-Focused Pedagogy</b>	<b>Task Based Pedagogy</b>
Rigid discourse structure consisting of IRF (initiate-respond-feedback)	Loose discourse structure consisting of adjacency pairs
Teacher controls topic development	Students able to control topic development
Turn-taking is regulated by the teacher.	Turn-taking is regulated by the same rules that governed everyday conversation (i.e. speakers can self-select).
Display questions (i.e. questions that the questioner already knows the answer)	Use of referential questions (i.e. questions that the questioner does not know the answer to)
Students are placed in a responding role and consequently perform a limited range of language functions.	Students function in both initiating and responding roles and thus perform a wide range of language functions (e.g. asking and giving information, agreeing and disagreeing, instructing).
Little need or opportunity to negotiate meaning.	Opportunities to negotiate meaning when communication problems arise
Scaffolding directed primarily at enabling students to produce correct sentences.	Scaffolding directed primarily at enabling students to say what they want to say.
Form-focused feedback (i.e. the teacher responds implicitly or explicitly to the correctness of students' utterances)	Content focussed feedback (i.e. the teacher responds to the message content of the students' utterances)
Echoing (i.e. the teacher repeats what a student has said for the benefit of the whole class)	Repetition (i.e. a student elects to repeat something another student or the teacher has said as private speech or to establish inter subjectivity).

Figure 2: Stereotypical classroom processes in traditional form-focused pedagogy and task-based pedagogy (Ellis)<sup>35</sup>

**d. Teacher roles:**

<sup>35</sup>Rod Ellis, "The Methodology of Task Based Teaching", Asian EFL Journal, Volume 8, Number 3, 2006, p. 30.

Teacher in TBLT class is generally posited as provider, starter and controller of the task in the classroom process. Richards and Rodgers<sup>36</sup> describes the teacher roles in TBLT as follows:

1. *Selector and sequencer of tasks*: The teacher takes part in selecting, adjusting, and creating tasks and then shaping these tasks in keeping with learner needs, interests, and language skill levels.
2. *Preparing learners for tasks*: Some training for pre-task is important for learners. These training activities may contain topic introduction, describing task instructions, helping students learn or recall useful words and phrases to make the task completion easy, and providing partial display of task process.
3. *Consciousness-raising*: The teacher uses a mixture of form-focusing techniques, which include attention-focusing pre-task activities, studying the given text, guided exposure to parallel tasks, and use of highlighted material.

**e. Learner roles:**

At the same time, learners take part as doer of the task in which their activities and the result are specified. Richards and Rodgers<sup>37</sup> identifies students' general role in TBLT class as follows:

1. *Group Participant*: The students complete many tasks in pairs or small groups. Pair or group work may require some adaptation for those who are more accustomed to whole-class activities and/or individual work,
2. *Monitor*: In Task Based Learning, tasks are used as a means of making the learning easier. Classroom activities should be planned in order that students have the chance to observe how language is used in communication. Learners themselves need to "attend" not only to the message in task work, but also to the form in which such messages typically come packed.
3. *Risk-taker and innovator*: Many tasks will require learners to create and interpret messages for which they lack full linguistic resources and prior experience. In fact, this is said to be the point of such tasks. The skills of

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<sup>36</sup>Jack C. Richards, *Op. Cit.*, 236.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 235.

guessing from linguistic and contextual clues, asking for clarification, and consulting with other learners may need to be developed.

**f. Techniques**

TBLT does not give any specification to what techniques to perform in the classroom. As far as it satisfies characteristics of learning experience of TBLT, it will be acceptable. The techniques can be teachers made or packages which linguists and practitioners have created in the field of language teaching.

**g. Procedures**

Instructional process in TBLT is generally divided into three phases: pre task, task cycle/whilst task/during task and post task/language focus. An example procedure is presented by Richards<sup>38</sup> extracted as follows:

1. Pretask activities; introduction to topic and task. It comprises clarifying the themes, objectives include recalling the students' knowledge or experiences related to the task.
2. The task cycle, consists of three sub-stages. First, task stage; pairs or group of students perform the task while the teacher monitors, encourages, corrects, and helps students to complete it. Second, planning stage; students prepare draft report about how they did the task to the whole class for the sub-stage 3. Teacher suggests improvement, correct the language, suggest peer editing for clarity, accuracy and appropriateness for public presentation. It is chance for students to question about language item. And the last, report; ask pairs to report their work to the whole class. Teacher gives comments about the report without overt public correction.
3. The language focus consists of two sub-stages. First, analysis; teacher set language-focused task based on the text or transcripts. And second, practice; activities made based on the language analysis work, or using examples from the text or transcript.

**h. Evaluation**

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<sup>38</sup>Jack C. Richards, *Op. Cit.*, p. 34-35.

Assessment in TBLT focuses on the outcome: how much students master language and able to communicate by using it. Skehan suggests that the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.<sup>39</sup> It covers students understanding of language and words, and their ability to reproduce the texts and basic messages,<sup>40</sup> while performing the communication activities in the classroom and time after it. Types of the assessment may involve teachers' assessment in the learning process and students' assessment on their achievement by themselves after the instruction.

### C. CONCLUSION

TBLT was originated by N. Prabhu in 1980s in Bangalore India. It is an approach in language teaching which focuses on making happen communication activities in the classroom, which is required to possess relationship with the real world. At the same time, this approach was a reaction to the old paradigm of language teaching which focus on form.

The term 'task' is generally defined as purposeful activities in the real world and then when this term is adapted to language teaching, it demands involvement of a certain features of language and communication inside. Task is further perceived as lesson and satisfaction of a range of tasks generated from need analysis become the long term goal of instruction. This approach allows all techniques and strategies to apply in the classroom as far as it can bring about the accomplishment of the task requirements. And then, evaluation is focused on the outcome in term of students' mastery of the language material as well as their ability in communicating by using it orally and or literally. After so far analysis, experts give positive response on this strength in making students develop their communication ability, but look it down due to inappropriateness in developing communication which involves new language materials.

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<sup>39</sup>David Nunan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup>Kent Basque, "TBLT: Teacher's Workbook (p. 6)" (Retrieved from [www.tbl-basque.com](http://www.tbl-basque.com) at October 12, 2011).

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