

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: A LESSON PLAN PROPOSAL FOR INDONESIAN ELT CONTEXT (A CONSIDERATION BEFORE INTEGRATING ICT IN ELT)

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Abstract

This paper discusses a lesson plan proposal for a task based language teaching approach supplemented by its critical rationale and evaluation. It reflects the English Language Teaching (ELT) context in Indonesia based on the personal background knowledge of the author and a long list of relevant references. The lesson plan was created accordingly to Willis's (1996) task-based framework by integrating some principles proposed by Nunan (2004). Furthermore, the four principle of learning conditions suggested by Willis (1996) are well considered in order to ensure successful learning. It also provides sufficient modelling and substantial amount of opportunity for a recycling process. Thus, expected objectives of the lesson are projected to be achieved where students are able to understand the intended language form with meaning and context incorporated as well as automaticity in language production. Nonetheless, the author also reviews its weaknesses critically.

Key Words: Task-Based, Lesson Plan, ELT, ICT

Introduction

An unfortunate fact about Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) in Indonesia, the integrated TEFL in the national curriculum from primary school to high school, seems to have not worked effectively. It leaves more students to have low level of English proficiency after high school graduation compared to those who have a sufficient or a higher level. Aunurrahman (2013) explains that TEFL atmosphere in Indonesia has not yet provided enough exposure on its practicalities (language learning and language use). He adds that it has become a reason on why university students are still highly encouraged to keep learning English even after nine years of learning English, from the fourth grade in primary school to the twelfth grade in high school.

This lesson plan (can be downloaded from www.bitly.com/taskbasedlessonplansalam) is designed to deal with that particular situation, it is for a group of first year university students taking an English class at a private English school on the weekends. Apparently, the learners this lesson plan is intended to, have learnt English as a compulsory subject from primary school to high school but they have not mastered it well. In accordance to that, the type of the course is General English since the students' motivation is to add a language skill which will open opportunities for them and will 'give them better job in the near future' (Masuhara & Tomlinson, 2008: 18). They have sat in a placement test for grouping purpose so that they join a class where all other learners are judged to have the same level of English proficiency (Nation & Macalister, 2010). The lesson plan is made for teaching third conditional sentence as they have learnt the first and second conditionals in previous meetings with an integration of reading, speaking, and grammar as the main focuses. The integration of different focuses is important so that learners are taught clearly about 'the relationships between linguistic form, communicative function and semantic meaning' (Nunan, 2004: 37).

Rationale

Task based approach is used as the foundation in creating this lesson plan. Willis (1996) explains tasks as activities where the target language is utilized to reach the communication function which is achieving the intended outcomes. Differently, Harmer (2001: 31) defines tasks as activities where language activation takes place at the very first place before students learn something. According to Ellis (2003: 3) 'tasks are activities that call for primarily meaning-focused language use'. Further, he adds that as tasks are concerned with the pragmatic meaning, then the students as participants need to act as language users instead of

language learners to simulate real world activities. The three definitions above focus on language outcome, language activation, and language meaning separately which can be compiled in a more comprehensive definition where a task is proposed as ‘a pedagogical task’ which occurs in the classroom that enforces learners in ‘comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting’ in the target language while focusing in delivering meaning Nunan (2004: 4).

In the implementation of tasks in the task based language teaching (TBLT), there are two major frameworks that I have studied which are the one proposed by Willis (1996) and the one suggested later by Nunan (2004). Willis’s framework employs three stages or cycles of the task based approach used in language teaching. The first step is a pre task cycle, which is a stage of preparation for the students to explore the topic (Willis, 1996). Ellis (2003) suggests that teachers may consider giving students time to plan and prepare for the coming task. Secondly, task cycle stage where the students do the main tasks with various instructional options in pairs or groups (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). Lastly, a language stage is done to focus on language form (Willis, 1996) which does not necessarily have to be in fixed proportion of form-focused but depends on the learners’ performance in which Ellis (2003) explains as encouragement by saying ‘to encourage attention to form, in particular to those forms that proved problematic to the learners when they performed the task’ (p. 258). This framework is preferred because it gives a space for flexibility to its users which allows them to adjust and adapt it to the classroom situations, so that the needs of diverse contexts and learners are achieved (Long, 2009). However, a source of difficulty for unskilled or possibly new teacher may emerge in terms of deciding which type of task suits each cycle best. It results in a need of extra time for preparation since they have to measure the need to organize the order of activities (Huang, 2010).

Differently, Nunan’s framework proposes six stages in task based language teaching: schema building, controlled practice, authentic practice, linguistic elements focus, freer practice, and introduction of pedagogical task (Nunan, 2004). With the six stages, Nunan also explains that there are seven principles for his proposed TBLT sequence which are scaffolding, task dependency, recycling, active learning, integration, creation, and reflection (p. 35-38). These principles will later be observed in Willis’ framework to investigate its ‘content rationale and complexity rationale’ (Norris, 2009: 581).

As the foundation of language learning in TBLT, an approach Kohonen (1992: 37) calls as ‘experiential learning theory’, facilitates a learning concept where teacher-student knowledge transfer is abandoned. On the other hand, the learners try to make sense of learning by themselves by literally doing it in form of tasks. This approach requires learners to have direct personal experience from the beginning of learning process (Nunan: 2004). In experiential learning, Dymoke & Harrison (2008) emphasize that the learning happens through experience because people learn from their experience. This statement makes the bond between TBLT and the experiential learning approach seems stronger since tasks represent real world experience that is brought into the classroom in pedagogical format.

Pre-Task

Before coming to Pre-Task cycle, a short time for reviewing the previous lesson is provided. It is very important to ensure the learners to have understood the second conditional language item by looking at its strong connection to the current lesson. This is a reminder for the learners in which Thornbury (2002) calls as repetition that helps the language learning to stay in learners’ long term memory. Nunan (2004) says that the learners need to be reintroduced to the learning items from time to time because they will not a hundred person be able to master it in the first time. The previous lesson’s reflection that takes place through this review activity, allows learners to connect the previous language item to the current item, especially when the two language focus is strongly connected to each other, ‘makes sense of all learning’ experience Dymoke & Harrison (2008: 11).

Pre-Task cycle is the stage where the students are prepared to go through the whole teaching and learning process. That they are being introduced, familiarized, and exposed to the topic of the lesson through various starter activities. There are two activities in the Pre-Task Cycle of this lesson plan. The first activity is picture matching, where the students are presented with a number of pictures followed by a number of sentences in the third conditional form. This activity is aimed to introduce them to the form of third conditional sentence and to get them familiar with it and to provide the support to do the task further (Beglar & Hunt, 2002). Willis (1996) explains the first step in the Pre-Task cycle is to define the topic area which is the third conditional.

The second activity is asking the students to create their own sentences by providing samples and clues which are very close to their real life experience. This activity is intended to introduce to them the function of third conditional by knowing its meaning and to recall their background knowledge regarding vocabularies and contexts. Therefore, the samples and guiding cards are selected from the closest topic and

presented in the most enjoyable way. What is meant by the most enjoyable was is that the selections of excuses in the card are made and intended to be unique and funny so that the learners may not get too much pressure in the very first place. Willis (1996) says that the focus of this kind of activity is not to teach them grammar but to support them to gain confidence in participating in the task. This activity covers the second and third steps in the Pre-Task cycle explained by Willis, which are to help students to activate their background knowledge and to give a clear Pre-Task instruction. It activates learners' background knowledge 'schemata' of the field of whether vocabularies, phrases, or simply knowledge (Nunan, 1995; Ellis, 2003). This activation will later be useful and helpful in the whole learning process. In addition to preparation, the presence of Pre-Task cycle makes 'learners become motivated and begin to establish essential linkages to the contexts in which the target tasks occur' (Norris, 2009: 583).

Task

The task cycle is dedicated to provide more space for learners to use the target language in order to execute the tasks given. With this stage prioritized in terms of time proportion, it is expected that the learners have as much opportunity to 'both exposure and use' of target language which then contribute to the L2 acquisition (Willis, 1996: 53). Students will work in groups during the whole Task cycle so that they exchange meaning and are engaged in a real communication where there is a 'relationship to the real world', this activity is what so called 'meaningful communication' (Skehan, 1996: 38; Ellis, 2007: 4). There are three main parts classified in the Task cycle: task, planning, and report (Willis, 1996). These three components of the Task cycle are closely related to each other and since it makes a good sequence of learning activities to the TBLT framework major cycle. Five activities are presented to comply with the function of Task cycle where the three components are well accommodated.

Activity 3 belongs to 'task' category where learners are put in small groups and do a comprehension game regarding reading skill development. Students are exposed to the text where the learners will find out the function and the meaning of the third conditional feature. The second 'task' activity is activity 4, the students are asked to read with comprehension that they carry out a task to identify the main message of the text and to locate the language feature which delivers that particular meaning in the text. Further, as a group they are required to identify the causes of the main message in the text which is the possible past situation, and check if the language feature learnt can be used to modify the sentences. Activity 5 is the last activity in 'task' category when they as a group produce language output in written form.

These activities are carried out in an exciting way, as the continuation of Pre-Task Cycle, the first activity from the Task cycle still needs to trigger the student's motivation and attract their interest toward the lesson further. It is suggested that motivation 'provokes a decision to act' which is needed in TBLT because tasks completion is the purpose (Skehan, 1996; Harmer, 2007: 20). The focus of 'task' activities is to develop students' reading skill. Therefore, it is designed to simulate the real reading activity they will find outside of classroom. There are two reading models applicable in this lesson plan, both are strategic reading and comprehensive reading. Baker (2002) suggests that successful reading instruction helps the learners read strategically. He identifies several strategies to help the learners and three of them are identified to present in this lesson. The three strategies implemented in this lesson plan are clarifying the purpose of reading, activating background knowledge, identifying and attending to important aspects of the text.

Grabe (2004) proposes six focuses on comprehensive reading model which are fluency, vocabulary and word recognition, language knowledge (grammar), general comprehension skills, text structures and discourse organisation, strategies. These points can be seen throughout all task activity from the comprehension game to reading for detailed comprehensive and the identification task, where reading for detailed comprehension concerns on either seeking detailed information or 'picking out particular examples of language use' that is made explicit (Harmer, 2007: 101). In reading for detailed comprehension, an aspect of reading for specific information is automatically established. It is very important for the students to have this particular reading skill since reading for details behaviour is a situation they will need after the course (Willis, 1996: 72).

Considering the text used in this activity as one of the major materials, the text's authenticity is ensured. Authenticity in texts characterize 'a quality of the language used in them' which are not designed for classroom use but for real world's (Buendgens- Kosten, 2014: 1). Undoubtedly, it provides 'rich exposure to language in authentic use' and 'help learners to notice for themselves salient features of the text' with presence of the intended language item in the text (Tomlinson, 2008: 5). Regarding the number of 'task' activities, Hedge (2000) explains that to achieve language acquisition, it takes a number of processes. Therefore, one task activity does not seem adequate, instead three tasks are appropriate for better acquisition process.

As discussed earlier, the second component of the Task Cycle is planning. Students are given a privilege to have some times to prepare themselves in activity 6 for the next activity which is reporting. In this part, students rehearse and practice language outcome they have produced earlier with scaffolding continuously provided. The scaffolding is given from the beginning of the lesson and continues to 'task' activities while at this point is the peak of where scaffolding is needed because it helps learners to make their report presentation more effective and their learning experience is maximized (Willis, 1996). The basic role of teachers in TBLT is 'to provide a supporting framework within which the learning can take place' (Nunan, 2004: 35). Therefore, the teacher will still help the learners by giving inputs and suggestions in groups' discussion on preparing their reports.

Lastly, in activity 7 students are to report the outcomes of the group work conducted during the Task Cycle. Each group will have a representative to give a report to the whole class. In addition, this is an extra practice for them providing them with more space to actually utilize the language to achieve their learning intentions and to gain feedback on the effectiveness of their attempts at communication. In accordance to that, teachers need to be as encouraging as possible (Willis, 1996). In one of his principles Nunan (2004) says that learners are best at learning when they are active and maximize the possibility of using the learned language. Speaking skill development takes bigger proportion in both activity 6 and 7 where there more discussions, group presentations, and peer feedbacks after the report. It is well considered that speaking task takes place in group activity because 'when people talk and listen to each other, they are driven by a quest for meaning' (Luoma, 2004: 21). Further, regarding the feedback and comment opportunity after 'report', the concept of awareness raising applies here. It involves the students in three processes which are 'attention, noticing, and understanding' (Thornburry, 2005: 41). Awareness raising activities help the learners to uncover the knowledge gaps, which means things the students do not know.

Language Focus

In this cycle, students are led to analyse and to identify certain feature of language form which is the intended one as aimed by the lesson plan. Willis (1996) suggests the teachers to ensure that selected activities will help learners to understand the meaning and use of the selected feature in a better and deeper understanding. Language Focus Cycle has only two components of activities, analysis and practice.

As the students are already familiar with the meanings expressed and the forms which assemble them, in this cycle learners have the chance to study the forms specifically. In activity 8, language form is emphasized. The teacher asks students about their understanding related to the language feature by using confirmation questions which then lead the class to further discuss it if the class are engaged actively. In learning a language form, it is done in inductive way where learners are presented with a text which then learners infer the rules from the text or where learners search for the rules which is called the discovery approach (Thornburry, 1999; Jean & Simard, 2013). The difference between inductive and deductive approach in teaching English will be in its presentation to the students. Unlike inductive approach, deductive approach requires teachers to present the rules to the students explicitly (Ellis, 2008). This approach opens a patch for noticing to happen in learning the form which is believed to be very important. Noticing directs to the process of comparison and integration of language item which fits the implicit learning as proposed by Ellis (2002).

Lastly, activity 9 represents practice activity for the students to practice what they have learnt about specific language feature through the analysis activity in the previous session. It is a follow up practice to enhance the learning process which has been done earlier in the TBLT (Norris, 2009) where more production is facilitated. Learners have to be supported to move forward 'from reproductive to creative language use' (Nunan, 2004: 37). In this practice, as the sequence of activities in terms of complexity has got higher, the students are asked to think beyond classroom which is to think critically from the lesson learnt. They are asked to talk about real life issue which can be presented by using the target language feature learned in the lesson. It is essential because education at schools functions as a ground of ongoing efforts over what will be accepted as genuine knowledge and culture (Darder, 1995). Kelner defines criticality as an aspect encourages students 'to better themselves and strengthen democracy, to create a more egalitarian and just society, and thus to deploy education in a process of progressive social change' through education (2000: 197).

Evaluation

In this evaluation part, the effectiveness of the proposed lesson plan in achieving the goals will be investigated. There are two main discussions to be presented in this section, as successful language teaching can be viewed from two perspectives which are the achievement on lesson objectives and the language learning effectiveness. The former involves the investigation of whether the targeted

language item can be successfully mastered by the students. The latter focuses more on whether the language learning has been successful or not in terms of integrating reading, speaking, and grammar focuses in one lesson plan.

The lesson objectives are expected to be achieved through the presence of proper and authentic materials supporting the learning process. However, in main reading passage for example, the exposure to the intended form seems insufficient because it only happens once at the very end of the passage. The selection was made due to the challenging text selection as third conditionals are rarely used despite its importance. In such confusion I read Wallace (2003) argues that each text has its own embedded discourses which then helped me in making decision. Although, there is only one form in the text, the whole story focuses on leading the readers to the conclusion which is in the intended form. With that being presented, the students are able to understand the function and use of the text with high understanding and deep learning (Hattie, 2002). Besides, it avoids the notion of being too form-focused since students understand the lesson not from explaining the form but presenting the meaning of it. To cover that possible issue, some additional form exposure are provided through extended activities.

In terms of activities variety, this lesson plan seems to have been planned accordingly to the concept of effective learning as proposed by Willis (1996) which is comprised in four conditions: exposure, use, motivation, and instruction. These conditions will then contribute rich language input, variety of everyday language use they will encounter outside classroom, motivation, as well as language forms to the students (Willis, 1996; Hattie, 2002; Hess et al, 2009). Students interact with the text through varied activities, not only they extract the meaning but engaged with the text (Wallace, 2008). The activities are designed to not be boring for the students so that they are ready and motivated to go through each stage of the lesson. This is in line with how Cooper (1990) defines teaching as a result of planned preparation. Unfortunately, there seem to be one possible weakness of the planned activities which is its topic. The students are fresh university students who might not be interested in talking about a topic related to job, yet. If the topic is not of interest of every student then they might not be motivated to be fully engaged in the lesson (Dörnyei, 2001).

Regarding successful learning, the evaluation will refer to Ellis's (2005) 10 principles of instructed learning:

1. Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence.
2. Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning.
3. Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form.
4. Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the second language but should not neglect explicit knowledge.
5. Instruction needs to take account of the learner's built-in syllabus.
6. Successful instructed language learning requires extensive second language input.
7. Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output.
8. The opportunity to interact in the second language is central to developing second language proficiency.
9. Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners.
10. When assessing learners' second language proficiency it is important to examine free as well as controlled production.

Out of the 10 principles, this lesson plan reaches most of them even at some point in a minimum level of accomplishment. Exceptions are made for point number 7 and 8, they do not seem to be catered well since the time availability for every students to have opportunity for output and interaction is very limited. For instance, activity 9 allows students to be critical about the topic related to their own, unfortunately it does not require all students to take part but only some of them who will. There should be more time and chance given for all students so each can get equal time and space for both language production and interaction to make their lesson learnt becomes automatic (Huang, 2010).

The assessment of the lesson is made formative and to be taken home as homework by the students. The assignment checking will be done in the next meeting before starting a new lesson. Like activities and materials, the worksheet is made attractive so it will be effectively sufficient to encourage learners to be engaged (Tomlinson, 1998).

Conclusion

The lesson plan is tailored in accordance to Willis's (1996) task-based framework by integrating some principles proposed by Nunan (2004). In addition, to ensure successful learning, the four principle learning conditions suggested by Willis (1996) are also taken into account. The four conditions are the

presence of language exposure, language use, motivation, and instruction. This lesson plan integrates multiple skills as well as language item focus, social processes through group interaction, and criticality which requires students to think beyond classroom contexts. Therefore, in implementing those contributing points, activities are varied and made carefully considering learners' learning differences and interests. Sufficient modelling was provided and significant amount of opportunity for recycling is present. Thus a higher goal of the lesson is expected to be achieved where students are able to understand the intended language form with meaning and context incorporated as well as automaticity in language production. However, some possible weaknesses may emerge such as the ability of the selected passage in presenting the language focus or of whether the chosen topic is interesting enough to each students. These can be an issue because material's relevance to the learners is essential for it to be successful (Wallace, 2003). Despite the possible weakness of this lesson plan, I have tried to integrate my learning and experience which I believe as an improved understanding of how good teaching and learning should happen.

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