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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract

Communicative competence is the declared goal of foreign language education worldwide, yet many classrooms still develop knowledge about grammar rather than the ability to use language. This article examines the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing learners’ communicative competence. Using a structured analytical review of foundational theory (Hymes, Canale and Swain, Long, Swain, Skehan) and of empirical and meta-analytic evidence (Mackey and Goo, 2007; Bryfonski and McKay, 2019), together with classroom-based studies of teachers’ implementation (Carless, 2004; East, 2012), the paper shows that TBLT promotes negotiation of meaning, pushed output and balanced gains in fluency, accuracy and complexity. It also identifies the conditions under which TBLT succeeds or fails: teacher preparation, task design, class size, assessment practices and the cultural-educational context. The article concludes with practical recommendations for English language teaching in Uzbekistan, where CEFR-aligned reforms make task-based approaches especially relevant.

Keywords

task-based language teaching; communicative competence; task design; negotiation of meaning; interaction; fluency, accuracy and complexity; CEFR; English language teaching.

Аннотация. Коммуникативная компетенция является общепризнанной целью обучения иностранным языкам, однако во многих аудиториях по-прежнему формируются знания о грамматике, а не умение пользоваться языком. В статье исследуется эффективность задачного подхода в обучении языку (Task-Based Language Teaching, TBLT) для развития коммуникативной компетенции

обучающихся. На основе аналитического обзора фундаментальных теорий (Хаймс, Канейл и Суэйн, Лонг, Скехан) и эмпирических и метааналитических данных (Макки и Гу, 2007; Брайфонски и Маккей, 2019), а также исследований внедрения подхода учителями (Карлесс, 2004; Ист, 2012) показано, что TBLT стимулирует согласование значений, «вынужденную» продуктивную речь и сбалансированный рост беглости, точности и сложности речи. Определены условия успешного применения подхода: подготовка преподавателей, качество заданий, численность групп, практика оценивания и социокультурный контекст. Даны практические рекомендации для преподавания английского языка в Узбекистане в условиях реформ, ориентированных на CEFR.

Ключевые слова: задачный подход; коммуникативная компетенция; проектирование заданий; согласование значений; взаимодействие; беглость, точность и сложность; CEFR; преподавание английского языка.

Annotatsiya. Kommunikativ kompetensiya xorijiy tillarni o‘qitishning asosiy maqsadi hisoblanadi, biroq ko‘plab sinflarda hamon o‘quvchilar tildan foydalanish ko‘nikmasi emas, balki grammatika haqidagi bilimlarni egallaydi. Mazkur maqolada topshiriqqa asoslangan til o‘qitish yondashuvi (Task-Based Language Teaching, TBLT)ning kommunikativ kompetensiyani rivojlantirishdagi samaradorligi tahlil qilinadi. Nazariy asoslar (Hymes, Canale va Swain, Long, Swain, Skehan), empirik va meta-tahlil natijalari (Mackey va Goo, 2007; Bryfonski va McKay, 2019) hamda o‘qituvchilar tajribasiga oid tadqiqotlar (Carless, 2004; East, 2012) asosida TBLT ma’no kelishuvi, majburiy nutq hosil qilish hamda ravonlik, aniqlik va murakkablik ko‘rsatkichlarining uyg‘un o‘sishiga xizmat qilishi ko‘rsatiladi. Yondashuvning muvaffaqiyatli qo‘llanilish shartlari — o‘qituvchi tayyorgarligi, topshiriqlar sifati, guruh hajmi, baholash amaliyoti va ijtimoiy-madaniy muhit aniqlanadi. Maqola oxirida CEFR asosidagi islohotlar sharoitida O‘zbekistonda ingliz tilini o‘qitish uchun amaliy tavsiyalar beriladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: topshiriqqa asoslangan o‘qitish; kommunikativ kompetensiya; topshiriq loyihalash; ma’no kelishuvi; o‘zaro muloqot; ravonlik, aniqlik va murakkablik; CEFR; ingliz tilini o‘qitish.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, language pedagogy has moved from the view that a language is a set of structures to be memorised towards the view that it is a means of doing things with other people. Hymes (1972) introduced the notion of communicative competence to stress that speakers need to know not only whether an utterance is grammatically possible, but also whether it is feasible, appropriate and actually performed. Canale and Swain (1980) turned this idea into a model for teaching and testing, comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence; Canale (1983) later added discourse competence. Today the same orientation underlies the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which treats learners as social agents who accomplish tasks in a given environment (Council of Europe, 2001; 2020).

Despite this consensus, the gap between curricular goals and classroom practice remains substantial. Where lessons follow the traditional presentation–practice–production sequence, learners often master isolated forms but cannot deploy them in unplanned interaction. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) addresses this problem by organising instruction around tasks, that is, activities in which meaning is primary, there is some kind of gap to bridge, learners rely largely on their own linguistic resources, and there is a clearly defined non-linguistic outcome (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). Language form is attended to in relation to the task rather than preceding it.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The issue is of direct practical importance for Uzbekistan. The Presidential Resolution No. PQ-1875 of 10 December 2012 introduced foreign language teaching from the first grade and emphasised communicative methods, and Resolution No. PQ-5117 of 19 May 2021 further set CEFR-based proficiency targets for learners and teachers (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2012; 2021). Uzbek methodologists have likewise described the communicative approach as the leading orientation in teaching English (Jalolov, 2012; Jalolov, Makhkamova and Ashurov, 2015; Hoshimov and Yoqubov, 2003). Implementing this orientation in lessons requires concrete instructional frameworks, and TBLT is one of the most thoroughly researched of them.

The aim of this article is to evaluate the effectiveness of TBLT in developing communicative competence. It addresses three questions: (1) What theoretical mechanisms explain why tasks should foster communicative competence? (2) What does empirical research say about the outcomes of TBLT? (3) Under what conditions is TBLT effective, and what are its limits? The study is a structured analytical review; it does not report new experimental data, and its conclusions are limited to the evidence discussed.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Origins and defining features of TBLT

An early and influential realisation of the task-based idea was the Communicational Teaching Project in southern India (the Bangalore Project, c. 1979–1984), led by N. S. Prabhu. Prabhu (1987) argued that learners acquire grammar most effectively when attention is directed to solving meaning-focused problems rather than to forms. The label "task-based" and the associated research programme were developed further by Long, who distinguished the real-world "target tasks" learners need from the "pedagogic tasks" used in class and proposed a needs-analysis-driven syllabus (Long, 2015).

In classroom practice, the best-known procedural model is that of Willis (1996), which divides a task-based lesson into three phases: a pre-task phase that introduces topic and task; a task cycle in which learners perform the task, plan a report and present it; and a language focus phase in which form is analysed and practised. Ellis (2003) offers a more general account of task-based lesson design and distinguishes a strong version (language is learned through tasks alone) from a weak, "task-supported" version in which tasks complement form-focused teaching. Ellis (2009) further clarifies several widespread misunderstandings, among them that TBLT excludes grammar or is suitable only for advanced learners.

Why tasks should develop communicative competence

Three strands of second language acquisition (SLA) theory provide the rationale. First, the Interaction Hypothesis holds that negotiation of meaning, through clarification requests, confirmation checks and recasts, makes input comprehensible and draws attention to gaps in the learner's knowledge (Long, 1996). Because information-gap and opinion-gap tasks require learners to exchange information in order to complete them,

they generate such negotiation naturally. Second, the Output Hypothesis proposes that producing language pushes learners from semantic to syntactic processing and lets them test hypotheses about the language (Swain, 1985). Tasks with a concrete outcome create a genuine need to produce extended, precise output. Third, cognitive models of task performance (Skehan, 1998) analyse learner production in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity, and suggest that task design and implementation, for example pre-task planning or task structure, can steer attention among these dimensions. Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2001) collect research showing how task characteristics shape language performance.

Together, these arguments link tasks to the components of communicative competence described by Canale and Swain (1980): tasks require strategic competence (compensating for lack of vocabulary, repairing breakdowns), discourse competence (organising extended turns) and sociolinguistic competence (adjusting language to a role or setting), while the language-focus phase maintains grammatical competence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EVIDENCE ON EFFECTIVENESS

Evidence on interaction

The mechanism most central to TBLT, interaction, has been tested meta-analytically. Mackey and Goo (2007), synthesising 28 primary studies, found that interaction had a clear positive effect on second language learning, and that its effects were durable on delayed post-tests. These results support the claim that tasks which prompt learners to negotiate meaning contribute to development, although the studies analysed concern interactive tasks in general rather than complete task-based curricula.

Evidence on task-based programmes

Bryfonski and McKay (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of more than fifty studies of TBLT implementation and evaluation. Overall, task-based instruction was associated with positive effects on learners' outcomes, and the size of these effects varied with context, including instructional setting, learner characteristics and how outcomes were measured. This variability is itself an important finding: TBLT is not a guaranteed method, and its success depends on how it is implemented. Where comparisons are made

with traditional form-focused instruction, the advantage of task-based instruction is most consistently reported for fluency, interactional ability and learner engagement, whereas gains in grammatical accuracy are more variable and depend on the presence of explicit attention to form (Ellis, 2003; Bryfonski and McKay, 2019).

Fluency, accuracy and complexity

Research in the cognitive tradition shows that learners' limited attentional capacity produces trade-offs: a task that increases demands on meaning may reduce accuracy or complexity (Skehan, 1998). Pedagogically, this means that teachers can design tasks and conditions to emphasise particular goals. Providing planning time before a task, repeating a task, or following it with a focused report stage are well-documented means of supporting more accurate and complex production while preserving meaningful communication (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996).

Learner engagement and communicative confidence

Practitioner-oriented studies consistently identify greater learner participation, greater opportunities to speak and increased willingness to communicate as strengths of task-based lessons (Nunan, 2004; Van den Branden, 2006). These affective outcomes are significant because communicative competence is realised only through use: a learner who avoids interaction receives little of the input and feedback on which development depends.

CONDITIONS, CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

TBLT has also been criticised. Swan (2005) argued that the case for strong task-based instruction rested on hypothesis rather than convincing evidence, and that it underestimates the value of direct teaching of vocabulary and structures, particularly for learners with limited exposure to the language. This criticism is largely directed at the strong version of TBLT; weak versions and the language-focus phase of Willis's framework address it directly (Ellis, 2009).

Studies of teachers' implementation reveal further obstacles. Carless (2004), studying primary schools in Hong Kong, reported that teachers reinterpreted task-based innovation because of concerns about classroom noise and discipline, large classes, examination pressure and a tendency of pupils to use their first language during tasks.

East (2012), examining teachers' perspectives in New Zealand, showed that teachers' support for task-based principles depended on their understanding of the approach, the match with assessment requirements and the practical conditions of their schools. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of TBLT depends as much on teacher training and institutional alignment as on the quality of the method itself.

Taken together, the literature points to five conditions for success: (1) tasks that are genuinely meaning-focused and have a clear outcome; (2) a systematic place for attention to form, before, during or after the task; (3) teacher education that develops understanding of task design, monitoring and feedback; (4) assessment aligned with communicative goals, for example performance-based assessment of speaking and interaction; and (5) classroom management strategies suited to large classes and to learners with a shared first language.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN UZBEKISTAN

Because Uzbekistan's language-education policy is oriented toward CEFR-based outcomes (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2012; 2021), the CEFR's action-oriented view of language use and TBLT's focus on realistic tasks are mutually reinforcing: CEFR descriptors can be transformed directly into pedagogic tasks such as arranging a trip, compiling a short report or resolving a problem in pairs. On this basis, the following recommendations can be made. First, universities and schools should include task design and task-based lesson planning in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Second, textbooks and curricula should combine tasks with explicit language focus, consistent with the strong-weak distinction discussed by Ellis (2003, 2009), so that learners accustomed to grammar-based instruction receive both support and communicative practice. Third, assessment should include task-based speaking and writing performance so that teaching and testing reinforce each other. Fourth, for large classes, structured pair and group work with clear roles and time limits, followed by a short whole-class report stage, can reduce the management difficulties noted by Carless (2004). Fifth, research on TBLT in Uzbek classrooms, in the form of quasi-experimental

and action-research studies, is needed to establish how far the international evidence applies locally.

CONCLUSION

This review shows that TBLT has a strong theoretical and empirical rationale as an approach for developing communicative competence. Tasks create conditions in which learners negotiate meaning, produce pushed output and integrate grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic resources, and meta-analytic evidence indicates that interaction-based and task-based instruction generally produces positive learning outcomes (Mackey and Goo, 2007; Bryfonski and McKay, 2019). At the same time, the evidence is not unconditional: the effects vary with context, accuracy gains depend on a systematic focus on form, and implementation is constrained by teacher understanding, class size and assessment practice (Swan, 2005; Carless, 2004; East, 2012).

The most defensible conclusion is therefore that TBLT is effective when it is implemented as a principled, well-supported framework, preferably in a form that combines meaning-focused tasks with deliberate attention to language form, rather than as a loose collection of communicative activities. For English language teaching in Uzbekistan, investing in teacher education, task-aligned materials and communicative assessment, and in local classroom research, offers the most promising route from CEFR-oriented policy to measurable gains in learners' communicative competence.

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