

Task-Based Language Teaching and its Evaluation

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Introduction

This study was designed to investigate how task-based language teaching (TBLT) is implemented in a classroom setting and to what extent I can evaluate its success based on the pedagogic task. In a society where a great number of people have been coming to an English-speaking country like New Zealand, it would be also valuable for me to expect how it can influence on learners of English in a real instructional setting. For this purpose of clarifying its effectiveness and usefulness, I would like to focus on some results or findings that I have gathered as a data collection from the participants. To do this, I will describe several key features about the task by pointing out a series of procedures like the teaching lesson plan, methods of the evaluation, the main results, and the discussion.

A brief description of my task

First of all, I would like to make a brief description of our group's task by referring back to the previous study "Developing a Task in the Context of a Task-Based Lesson." For the teaching lesson plan, we choose six international students with different cultural backgrounds. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) presented by the Council of Europe (2001), we regard our students to be B2 level of proficiency as a reference. As a main objective of our plan, we set up the title "Designing a Tourism Advertisement" as a task-based language teaching to focus on the students' speaking ability (Appendix A). For the teaching lesson sequences, we divide the whole class into four parts: Pre-task, Pre-task preparation, Task, and Post-task.

First, during the pre-task, presenting three questions, a teacher asks them individually to brainstorm their own ideas about the images of travelling. Here, the teacher tries to elicit as many words and phrases as possible from the students and uses a bubble scheme to brainstorm. After that, the teacher encourages them to watch a tourism promotional video on YouTube about "100% pure New Zealand." At the final step, they are given some tourism brochures about four different countries and places. All these activities play a key role in eliciting their ideas. It lasts for ten minutes.

Second, during the pre-task preparation, the teacher asks all six participants to work in pairs. Given some instructions regarding what to include in the advertisement, they are encouraged to make a best slogan to attract tourists to travel overseas. They are expected to make a sentence by putting some words together based on the words and phrases they brainstormed. It takes about two minutes.

Third, during the task, the teacher requires each of the pairs to discuss and design the tourism slogan with any help of the teacher and dictionary. Then, the teacher walks around the classroom, observes, and takes notes on the language mistakes the students made. After that, the students give a presentation about their tourism advertisements in front of the class. At the final step, there is a voting time to choose the best slogan out of the three groups. And the winner gets the reward. It takes about thirty-five minutes in total.

Fourth, at the post-task, the teacher gives all the students some grammatical mistakes they made during the discussion, presentation, and ideally writing version of the advertisements. There are four main features to address about their speaking ability: vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and cohesion. It takes about thirteen minutes.

Method

The aim of the evaluation of the task is to find out about how the task helps students' speaking skill develop in the classroom setting. To do this, our group sets up two research questions as follows:

1. Do the students enjoy the task?
2. What do the students say about the task in helping them to speak English?

Based on the research questions, as types of evaluation, we will use student-based evaluation to evaluate their speaking. This idea is derived from Ellis' notion (2009) that a student-based evaluation as one of micro-evaluation types aims to identify the students' attitude and opinions of the task that is being investigated. With regard to conducting a micro-evaluation of tasks, Ellis also stipulates that the primary focus should be on "meaning," in which there should be some kind of "gap" as well as a clearly defined "outcome." It seems to me that this notion of micro-evaluation is a supportive idea of conducting the task here as some speaking activities involve all these factors within the task.

An instructional setting where we carried out the task is the Art Graduates Center in which six international MA students with different cultural backgrounds are participated along with two ESL teachers (one takes care of the first two parts: Pre-task and Pre-task preparation, the other is in charge of the following two parts: Task and Post-task). As I have already mentioned about the task in the previous paragraph, based on the Common European Framework, the students' general level of language proficiency is placed in B2 level. This means that, as a spoken interaction, the target students can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. In terms of a spoken production, they can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to their field of interest. Data collection is done right after we have finished the sixty minutes' teaching lesson. Having focused on the students' speaking ability, a sheet of the questionnaire is handed out to the students. It takes about

ten minutes. As shown in the Appendix C, this questionnaire is designed to get a better idea about students' attitude toward task-based language teaching and its usefulness in helping acquire second language. In addition, we make sure that their answers will be used only for research purpose and all the information will be kept confidential. In analyzing the data we collected, both quantitative and qualitative data are used for the method of the evaluation of the task. The questionnaire consists of two parts: close-ended questions that evaluate students' attitude toward the task-based language teaching and its usefulness, and open-ended questions that ask them to express themselves more details about what they think or find in the task. The close-ended questions as quantitative data are made up of ten questions to which the students answer by using Scale numbers ranging from 5 to 1 with Scale 5 being for strongly agree. In contrast, the open-ended questions as qualitative data are made up of seven wh-questions that focus mainly on their speaking skill or some speaking activities. The two types of questions are considered to be complement data methods to each other so that we can analyze them more details on what they think about the task during the sixty minutes' lesson. In other words, the questionnaire can be good resources for us to evaluate the task in terms of the data analysis.

Results

I will describe the results of the evaluation of the task. The results I have got from the questionnaire as a data collection are presented here both quantitatively and qualitatively. Table 1 shows the quantitative results of questionnaire that involves the students' attitude toward TBLT and its usefulness (see the Appendix C for the data collection instruments).

Overall, almost all of the students enjoyed themselves learning in the TBLT setting. In fact, four of them responded that they really enjoyed the task and felt very comfortable in pair discussions with the mean score of 4.67. Next, three of them responded that they really enjoyed the opportunity to talk in the task with the mean of 4.5. Then, just two of them strongly agreed that they were confident in speaking English after they completed the task. The same students also felt they have practiced language that they could use in real life. Interestingly, two students replied "Scale 3 neutral" to question 4, and one student put "Scale 3" to question 5, respectively. On the other hand, in terms of the usefulness of the task, six participants had much more positive feelings compared to their attitudes toward the task. Five students said that they found the task useful to practice their English with the mean score of 4.83, which is the highest mean score of all the question items. Next, four students responded to two question items (No. 2 and No. 5) with the strong positive feelings along with the same mean score of 4.67. Third, half of the students put Scale 5, which means that the task gave them enough opportunities to speak. Fourth, as for the question item 4, half of them put Scale 5 that means they could understand what their partner said, though just one

Table 1: The Result of Questionnaire Student's Attitude toward TBLT

No. Resp	Item Score										Total
	Attitude					Usefulness					
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	50
2	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	38
3	4	4	4	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	44
4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	46
5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	47
6	5	5	5	3	4	5	4	4	5	5	45
Total	28	27	28	24	25	29	28	27	26	28	270
Mean	4.67	4.5	4.67	4	4.17	4.83	4.67	4.5	4.33	4.67	
Standard Deviation	0.47	0.5	0.47	0.82	0.69	0.37	0.47	0.5	0.75	0.47	

Research questions:

1. Do the students enjoy the task?
2. What do the students say about the task in helping them to speak English?

student said it was neutral.

The qualitative data gained from the questionnaire is another interesting result to consider. Given seven different types of open-ended questions about the task, a total of six participants wrote their own opinions on a sheet of the questionnaire paper. In general, most of them stated that they liked the task in terms of interaction with other students, collaboration with their partner, the engagement with some activities and facilitating their imaginations. From the point of view of their ideas about the topic in the task, they answered that discussion with a partner was very helpful and that brainstorming from their experience was a supportive activity. Half of them responded that having an opportunity to discuss and give a presentation contributed to their speaking skill. In addition, almost all of them wrote that the task helped them speak a lot because the presentation in front of the classroom focused them to talk. Finally, they followed to remark on the task that they want to do the task again as it helped them to express their ideas and even feel comfortable working with a partner.

Discussion

I will discuss both the quantitative and qualitative data by interpreting them altogether internally. Overall, from the results of the task (Table 1), I can say that the students found it an effective teaching method. Based on the quantitative data, a total of ten questions about attitude and

usefulness of the TBLT show that all the students enjoyed the task and found it useful to practice speaking English. From another perspective on the TBLT, Willis and Willis (2007) states about the justification of the task as follows:

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

Drawing on these questions, I have discovered some benefits about the task. When I look closely at the open-ended questions, all of the students agreed that an interaction with other students helped them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and speaking English during the discussion, designing, and presentation. This means working collaboratively in pairs assists them in speaking English. In other words, pair-working during some activities motivates them to speak more in a positive way. During the task, in fact, the information and opinion-gap activities were taking place. At the same time, what happened to them was negotiating the meanings about the unknown words and unfamiliar phrases that each of the partners brainstormed. At this point, I recognized that the three main activities like discussion, designing, and presentation at the main tasks played a key role in speaking out to somebody else in a real-world situation. There was one good scene where a fluent speaker talked with a non-fluent speaker about the slogan by paraphrasing one complex sentence into a simpler understandable sentence.

Second, the opportunity to present in front of the class is an influential factor. One student said, "The presentation helped me speak more than other activities I did in class." Unlike some other activities like discussing and designing the tourism advertisement in pairs, giving a presentation in front of the class is pretty much similar to public relations activities of the private company in real-life situations. In one classroom, actually, there were two speakers as a group at one side and some listeners as audience at the other side. Psychologically and linguistically, I think of a presentation as a place where the students had to be aware of their listeners and their own way of speaking in a more persuasive way.

Third, one of the students also replied that the topic of tourism advertisement is interesting as it attracts people to go abroad. After the presentation, all of them felt that they want to do the task again. These responses from the participants are good examples of the effectiveness of the task. It seems to me that the topic as the prompt has a strong relationship with the presentation as the part of the task in terms of the task outcome.

However, when I have to interpret those two data externally by referring to the previous research, I realized that there are some limitations about the student-based evaluation. Nunan, D. (2004)

points out that self-assessment has been criticized on the grounds that not all learners are accurate judges of their own ability, whereas he admits the fact that self-assessment has been becoming popular with teachers wishing to encourage learner autonomy and focus on learning processes as well as learning outcomes. This notion of the self-assessment is very suggestive to me in that our data collection is basically considered to be the only subjective judgements or introspective views each student had. This means that I can't simply rely on the student-based evaluation itself. More subjective data collection like an interview after the lesson or an observation during the lesson would be needed as a supplementary data analysis.

Two more or multiple-data analysis would be more reliable sources for me to investigate what is really happening under the classroom setting.

Second, the number of the participants can be also a sort of limitation for the task. As we have only six students in the teaching lesson, the data we collected are so limited in terms of the number of students. The matter of the size is a big factor in affecting the results. If more students are participated in this lesson, then the results of the lesson could be different both quantitatively and qualitatively from the ones of the original task.

Third, the timetable and the number of times could be other possible factors in determining the results. The teaching lesson that we carried out was in the afternoon time. The participants had already been engaged in doing something with their friends actively outside of the class in the morning before the task was implemented. So, it could have a major influence on their discussion and presentation in a comfortable way. From another point of view, if the task is implemented as the second times or third times, then the results would tell us the different story. That could be related to the matter of familiarity that leads the students to perform well. The more they have experienced, the more comfortable they feel, as compared to the first time.

Fourth, a clearer instruction about the task procedures would be needed. Just one student replied to the open-ended question that "the assessment table (Appendix B: Evaluation Form) has nothing to do with the slogan." The rest of the students might also have thought about it in the same way. The ambiguity of the instructions should have been avoided at the beginning of the task, so that any students could understand exactly what they should do to reach their goals. To put it another way, a clear comprehensible written instruction would be ideally necessary for the students to do the task within the limited time of the class.

Conclusion

To sum up, the aims of the evaluation of the task were, on the whole, successfully achieved. The task focused the students to speak spontaneously. The task sequences also boosted them to speak collaboratively from speaking individually. In this respect, the task sequences are the matter

of success. A series of activities like brainstorming, discussion, designing, and presentation lead them to the outcome of the speaking. The students' comment on the task shows that they enjoyed the task and found it useful to speak English. From their feedback on the task, working in pairs and presenting in pairs play a crucial role in performing a speech as an output. That's because working together in pairs elicits the students to feel a sense of teamwork during the task as well as a sense of achievement during the post-task. In fact, as I have discussed so far, I have learned that there are not only benefits but also limitations of the task through the results of the data and its discussion of the data. Reflecting on what I have investigated and found out about the task, I just want to know more about some benefits of the task. On the other hand, I want to analyze more about some limitations of the task by implementing the task again.

The evaluation of the task gives me a lot of useful things about how I should implement the task to make my teaching lesson much better. Specifically, the key thing about the task-based teaching is to know that evaluating the task involves a series of steps and that it needs to be analyzed elaborately based on the data. Furthermore, Ellis' informative idea (1997) that "the decision on what to evaluate is at the heart of the planning process" is very impressive to me in that his message is a reminder of what the task-based language teaching should be all about. I would like to keep his words in mind and step forward to carry out the task in the EFL classroom setting like Japan. That's my future goal.

References

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Appendix A: “Designing a Tourism Advertisement!”

- 1. Do you like travelling? What do you like to do when you travel?
- 2. Now think of a place where you might like to visit. What attracts you to it? Food, museum, scenery?
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Atf_Af1q5w (about 2 minutes)
- What do you like most about this promotional video?
- What do they want to promote in this video?

STAY
Best Tourist Locations:
 Metro Center
 Federal Triangle

Trendy Restaurants
 Logan Circle
 History & Government
 Capitol Hill
 Shopping & Dining
 Chinatown & Georgetown

Great shopping and dining @ Gallery Place
 Chinatown

OR Stay in Crystal City
 *close to metro
 *fun restaurants (like "the pizza")

Affordable Luxury Hotel Picks:
 Intercontinental The Willard (great)
 Hotel Monaco, Grand Hyatt

Top Attractions:
 National Mall
 Smithsonian Museums
 National Monuments
 The White House
 National Zoo
 Ford's Theater

Union Market, open year-round, features local products and a ton of fun food options.

Best Museums

Awesome Things To Do:

WHAT TO DO

A Shortstop Guide to LONDON
 by Savored Journeys

Best Tourist Locations:
 Metro Center
 Federal Triangle

Best Neighborhoods:
 Covent Garden
 Soho
 Chelsea
 Kensington
 Notting Hill
 Portico Place (best view of Big Ben)

Top Attractions:
 Big Ben & Houses of Parliament
 White Hall
 Trafalgar Square
 The British Museum
 The National Gallery
 The British Library

London's Top Markets:
 Covent Garden
 Portico Place
 Notting Hill
 Portico Place

Food Related Items:
 Baking London
 Food Tours
 Chocolate Escapes
 Celebrating Chef Restaurants

WHAT TO DO

WHERE TO STAY

Best Tourist Locations:
 Trastevere
 San Marco
 Piazzale Roma

Savored Journeys Hotel Picks:
 Ai Patrizi di Venezia
 Hotel Londra Palace
 Hotel Ai Rioni

You'll get around by foot and best! (ACTIV), so stay near the center for convenience.

Be sure to visit St. Mark's Square in the early morning. They love people.

Top Attractions:
 St. Mark's Basilica
 Doge's Palace
 Rialto Bridge
 Bridge of Sighs
 Grand Canal
 Museo Correr
 Torre del Orologio
 P. Guggenheim Collection

WHAT TO DO

Great views in Venice:
 Rialto Bridge
 San Marco Square
 Ponte dell'Accademia

Gondola Rides on the canals

WHAT TO DO

Beautiful Bali & Indonesia

BALI EXTENSION IDEAS!

ADD 2 DAY EXTENSION TO BALI FOR \$325 CAD per person
 Includes: airport transfers, 2 nights accommodation, breakfast, full-day private tour with lunch.

ADD 4 DAY EXTENSION TO BALI FOR \$645 CAD per person
 Includes: airport transfers, 4 nights accommodation, breakfast & 1 night on Bali, 2 meals, 2 nights on Bali, 2 nights on Bali, 2 nights on Bali.

ADD 5 DAY EXTENSION TO BALI FOR \$965 CAD per person
 Includes: airport transfers, 5 nights accommodation, breakfast, 2 days private tour with lunch.

ADD 6 DAY EXTENSION TO BALI FOR \$1285 CAD per person
 Includes: airport transfers, 6 nights accommodation, breakfast, 3 days private tour with lunch.

ADD 7 DAY EXTENSION TO BALI FOR \$1605 CAD per person
 Includes: airport transfers, 7 nights accommodation, breakfast, 4 days private tour with lunch.

5-Day Bali Small Groups
 from \$479 per person

Includes:
 7 nights/6 breakfasts, 6 nights/6 dinners, 6 nights/6 massages, 2 days taxi, a 7-day massage per person. Upgrade to 4-star to 5-star available.

WHAT TO DO

- Could you write down four things you can do based on the brochure you got?

Instructions for your ads:

- 1. It should include a slogan
- 2. it should include at least four things to do

Appendix B: Evaluation Form

No.	Question	Survey scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	The advertisement is informative.					
2.	The advertisement has a nice slogan.					
3.	The information in the advertisement makes me want to visit the offered places.					
4.	The information is useful for trip planning.					
5.	The advertisement provides attracting places to visit.					
6.	The advertisement provides the place to eat.					
7.	The advertisement provides the place to stay.					

ALL the groups will rank OTHER groups according to the standard above. The winner will be the one who gets the HIGHEST marks.

(Adapted from the source: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228782542> Andereck, L. K. *Evaluation of a Tourist Brochure*)

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Dear students,

This questionnaire is designed to get a better idea about students' attitude towards task-based language teaching and its usefulness in helping acquire second language. Your answers will be used only for research purpose and all the information will be kept confidential. Thank you for your cooperation and time!

Part 1 Closed-ended questions:

Scale 1 is for strongly disagree.

Scale 2 is for disagree.

Scale 3 is for neutral.

Scale 4 is for agree.

Scale 5 is for strongly agree.

No	Questions	1	2	3	4	5
	Attitude					
1.	I enjoyed the task.					
2.	I enjoyed the opportunity to talk in the task.					
3.	I felt comfortable in pair discussion.					
4.	I feel I am more confident in speaking English after I completed the task.					
5.	I think I have practiced language that I can use in real life.					
	Usefulness					
1.	I found the task useful to practice my English.					
2.	I found the task helped me to speak.					
3.	I found the task gave me enough opportunities to speak.					
4.	I could understand what my partner said.					
5.	I could use my own knowledge to complete the task.					

Part 2 Open-ended questions:

1. What did you like about the task compared to other activities you do in class?

2. What did you not like about the task compared to other activities you do in class?

3. How did you come up with your ideas in doing this task?

4. To what extent did the discussion / presentation contribute to your speaking skill?

5. To what extent were you able to give your personal opinion during the discussion?

6. To what extent did the task help you speak more than other activities you do in class?

7. Would you like to do a task like this again? Why / why not?

Part 3 Personal Information:

Name _____ Major _____