

A Task-Based Approach for Teaching English Vocabulary Skill to Iraqi EFL Learners

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The present study scrutinizes the effect of applying Task-based language teaching (TBLT) on the English Foreign Language (EFL) learners' vocabulary performance. The topics of the current study were 50, 11th graders at Shahid Fakhir Mergasori high school in Arbeel, Iraq. The researcher adopted pre-test/post-test and control/experimental group design. Both groups were given the pre-test before the treatments, then, the students were selected to control and experimental groups randomly. The results were investigated statistically. They confirmed the first and second research questions but disconfirmed the third. The significant difference was discovered between the groups in favor of the experimental group learners. The negligible difference between the groups were seen on the part of the learners in the experimental group.

Introduction

Teaching task is one of the remarkable parts of the second/foreign language (L2) learning process. Ellis states that tasks are considered as a vital aspect of the contemporary second language acquisition (SLA) studies and language teaching as well (2003). Therefore, TBLT is characterized as an approach that arranged for learners to utilize L2 through communicative actions. Besides, in this approach communication is more significant than using the right grammatical forms. This approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) seems to be best applied for vocabulary, because vocabulary is considered to be the main component of language mastery, it allows the learners to master the entire learning skills, mainly listening, speaking, reading and writing (Richards and Renandya, 2002).

Therefore, one of the first and foremost problems of this study is to conduct a study in a country like North of Iraq where the students only have chance to learn the new words of the L2 inside the class. This indicates that the learners' choice of learning vocabulary is quite restricted. The purpose

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of this experimental study is to scrutinize the effective impacts of TBLT approach on the students' vocabulary development in classes at Shahid Fakhir Mergasori high school in Arbeel, Iraq.

Literature Review

Task-Based Language Teaching

Rendering to Richards and Rodgers (2001), TBLT is represented as a prototype in teaching communicative language methods in a result of its concentration on basic communication skills as an essential part of learning languages and teachings. Nunan considers that tasks are actions ‘‘things people do’’ to attain some goals (1988, p.5). Also Ellis states that tasks are considered as a vital aspect of the contemporary second language acquisition (SLA) studies and language teaching as well (2003). Willis (1996a) states that a task is the purposeful act of employing the L2 communicatively by the learner for making a desirable result. Also in TBLT, students have the chance to exchange meaning in order to classify and clarify a problematic that happens in their statement (Ellis, 2003; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). ‘Task’ is considered as a fundamental concept in task-based teaching and learning. Firstly, it has been proposed by a number of language teaching scholars that the traditional approaches encompass pre-arranged stages that lead teachers to have a perfect plan of whatever they need to deliver (Skehan, 1996). Therefore, TBLT is characterized as a methodology that is arranged for learners to use L2 in communicative actions. Besides, in this methodology communication is more significant than using the right grammatical forms. In other words, in TBLT communication in the L2 is more valued than the grammatical structure uses of the language. TBLT offers real learning language frameworks in the usage of tasks (Willis, 1996a). TBLT lesson comprises of three stages pre-task, during task, and post-task.

Vocabulary

Richards and Renandya (2002) believe that an essential part of language skill is vocabulary which gives many basis for how learners listen, speak, read and write well. There are some reasons why vocabulary richness and strength is a vital. Firstly, learning vocabulary is an important part in developing the understanding skill. As it was, the more vocabulary the learners have, the better they can understand their reading task. Secondly, students who have robust vocabulary are able to attain more educational

achievements because vocabulary is comprised of words that are the tools, not only for improving reading, but for improving writing, speaking, listening, and thinking too. Thirdly, appropriate vocabulary skills will help you to get best result in life along with academic success to express one's needs, desires and exchange ideas more properly. In addition, TBLT provides an opportunity for L2 learners to learn vocabulary, which can give attentiveness and truthfulness, language progress through more discussion of meanings. It can also create an atmosphere of closeness and profound helpfulness that are essential for students' emotive and cognitive development.

Research Questions

1. Is it task-based language teaching more effective than the traditional method of teaching vocabulary?
2. Will the students in the TBLT group outperform in pairing the collocations than those in the traditional group?
3. Will the students in the traditional group be more successful in finding out the word classes of the given words when compared to those in the TBLT group?

Methodology

Fifty 11th grader at Shahid Faxir Mergasory high school in Arbeel, Iraq participated in this study. They were assigned into control and experimental groups, 10 males and 15 females. They were trained Sunrise course book at school five lessons in a week.

The instructional period of the treatment lasted for eight weeks. In this study, pre and post-tests were the same included five parts, two of which required recognition and the rest was for production. In the control group, the participants learn the same words based on the traditional method, the participants in the experimental group studied the same passages with TBLT approach. In this study, the researcher chose six different tasks from different units. Actually the class time was divided into three stages: pre-task, during-task and post-task. In pre-task stage, the researcher highlighted useful words for activating the students' background knowledge. In during-task stage the learners were required to read the text and instructed by the teacher. Post-task stage is considered as a kind of feedback and comment on the students' performance.

Results

To answer the first research question and for checking any significant difference in the vocabulary performance of the two groups before and after the instructional materials, an independent t-test was done.

Table 1: Paired Samples Test of Experimental Group

Group Mean		Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Pre-test Post-test	18.560	7.906	1.581	15.297	21.823	11.738	24	.000

As shown in the Table 1, the t-test results, $t = 11.738$, and $p\text{-value} = .000$ it is a strong evidence that TBLT improves students score. This research is improved students score on average by approximately 18.560 points, because p value is less than 0.05.

Table 2: Paired Samples Test of Control Group

Group Mean		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair1	Pre -test Post-test	13.280	5.941	1.188	10.828	15.732	10.177	24	.000

According to the above results of the t-test amid the pre/post- test, we can notice that the $t = 10.177$ and $p\text{ value} = 0.000$. Meanwhile, the analysis of the t-test revealed that the progress that was achieved by both groups was significant.

For answering the second research question which reads, the students in the TBLT group outperform in pairing the collocations than those in the traditional group.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Second Set of the Questions Overall Scores

Group	Number	Test	Mean	SD	SEM
Control Group	25	Pre-test	13.92	3.49	0.69
		Post-test	16.64	3.2	0.640
Experimental Group	25	Pre-test	13.60	3.65	0.73
		Post-test	18.08	2.34	0.469

The mean scores of second set of the questions in the pretest for control and experimental groups were (13.92), (13.60), these mean scores indicate that both groups had nearly the same back ground knowledge. While the mean scores of posttest were (16.64), (18.08) respectively. This progress implies that the participants were able to get benefit from the treatment materials, but the development in the experimental group is significant in comparison with control group. This can be endorsed to the effect of TBLT.

To simplify presenting the answers related to the third research question, the students in the traditional group seem to be more successful in finding out the word classes when compared to students in the TBLT group.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Fifth Set of the Questions Overall Scores

Group	Number	Test	Mean	SD	SEM
Control Group	25	Pre-test	13.28	3.78	0.76
		Post-test	18.4	2.83	0.56
Experimental Group	25	Pre-test	13.44	4.6	0.92
		Post-test	17.16	4.01	0.8

The results in table 4 illustrate that the mean scores of fifth set of the questions in the pretest for control and experimental groups were (13.28), (13.44), these mean scores show that both groups had nearly the same back ground knowledge. While the mean scores of posttest were (18.04), (17.16)

correspondingly. This improvement implies that the participants were able to get benefit from the treatment materials in the traditional teaching, but the development in the control group is significant in comparison with experimental group.

Discussion

In order to measure the development, a contrast was carried out between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test of both control and experimental groups. The outcomes show that the progress was attained by the participants in both groups. The results demonstrate that the subjects in the experimental group overtook those in the control group. Then, the post-test comparison was made between the two groups' mean scores the objective of this comparison was to reply the first research question. Regarding the second research question the findings revealed that an important and obvious progress can be seen by the subjects in TBLT group, but in the third part of the study the results indicated that students in the control group outperformed than the ones in the experimental group because the latter constructed on the conviction that learners can acquire more efficiently when their minds are concentrated on the task, more than on the language they are utilizing. The current results support the arguments that are stated by (Willis, 1996a; Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 2003) who claim that "tasks" offer a context for discussing and comprehending the meaning of language provided in task input.

Conclusion

In general there was an encouraging quantitative data on students' answers to tasks and TBLT, at the end students in both groups and their teacher said that they wished to carry on with TBLT after the treatment period was accomplished.

Keywords: *Task, task-based language teaching, vocabulary*

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