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Task-Based Learning Approach: From Theory to Practice

Grazib Mohamed
University of Saida Moulay Tahar -Algeria
mfgrazib@hotmail.com

Abstract: *The field of teaching has witnessed the elaboration of bounteous approaches and methods, eached influenced by a learnig theory and a teaching theory. The task-based approach is an example of these innovations in teaching in general and English language teaching in particular. With its three-phase procedure, pre-task, task and post-task phases, the task-based approach fits project-based learning and is consistent with the competency-based approach. This paper aims to popularise the use of the task-based learning as an approach in ELT classrooms. The focus will be also on the way teachers switch from theory to practice keeping the same pedagogical objectives. The paper sheds light on the main phases of the task-based learning approach, its advantages if used with students having different abilities and how to evaluate their tasks.*
Keywords: *Task-based learning, English language learning, project pedagogy, evaluation, classroom's different abilities.*
Résumé : *Le domaine de l'enseignement a vu l'élaboration d'approches et de méthodes multiples, chacune influencée par une théorie de l'apprentissage et une théorie de l'enseignement. L'approche par tâches est un exemple de ces innovations dans l'enseignement en général et l'enseignement de la langue anglaise en particulier. Avec sa procédure en trois phases, les phases pré-tâche, tâche et post-tâche, l'approche par tâches s'adapte à l'apprentissage par projet et est cohérente avec l'approche par compétences. Cet article vise à populariser l'utilisation de l'apprentissage par tâches comme approche dans les classes de l'enseignement de la langue anglaise. L'accent sera également mis sur la façon dont les enseignants passent de la théorie à la pratique en gardant les mêmes objectifs pédagogiques. L'article met en lumière les principales phases de l'approche d'apprentissage par tâches, ses avantages s'il est utilisé avec des élèves ayant des capacités différentes et comment évaluer leurs tâches.*
Mots clés : *Apprentissage de la langue anglaise, approche par tache, evaluation, pédagogie de projet.*

1. Introduction

Didactics has witnessed many important innovations in what concerns approaches and methods that can go hand in hand with both teachers and students' needs and aspirations. The task-based learning is among the recent methods adopted by teachers in many pedagogical fields, simply because it gives many opportunities to students with different abilities and competencies within the same classroom.

2. Task-Based Learning Principles

The task-based learning originality is that at the end of the learning process, the lecture will be crowned by a production. This production will be strongly related to what was seen and explained by the teacher. Students can exploit the best of this method by enlarging expanding their knowledge and making further research in the

classroom and/or at home. The use of many resources is possible such as: Internet exploration, hard books, PDF books, videos, audio files….

Students can restrict their investigations by using their own capacities as they can ask for the help of teachers, parents, friends…. They will have a full autonomy to select the way they manage their work by adopting the adequate and necessary methodology.

During the investigations, the students can enrich their vocabulary, lexis, new patterns as well as different grammatical forms. Generally, teachers do not pre-determine the content of the lesson to be taught but the details of its content will be drawn according to the immediate needs expressed by the students.

3. Task-Based Learning Phases

Most of teachers adopting the TBL opt for the tri-dimensional form of this method. It consists mainly on dividing the lesson into three distinctive parts:

Phases	Main recommendations
Pre-task	- Task identification - Pedagogical objectives - Main definitions
Task	- Teacher's recommendations/advice/support - Collecting/selecting/organising and arranging data - Task analysis and finalisation
Post-task	- Presentation and display - Evaluation - Comments /argumentations and critics

Table1. A Framework for designing task-based lessons

- Pre-task phase: It is the task presentation, where the teacher will introduce the main features of the task. The identification of the task, the definition of its characteristics, the main pedagogical objectives expected at the end of the task. Students will be trained with new situations of the target task such as new expressions, new vocabulary.
- Task phase: This phase will minimise the teacher's role from almost 100% in the pre-task to just 10% in the task phase. This rate consists mainly on the new role of the teacher from the owner of knowledge in the pre-task phase to just an observer, collaborator, and adviser in the task phase. Students perform individually, in pairs or in groups their work. They can consult their teacher when really necessary. A free working atmosphere should be created in the classroom environment where the students may be motivated to perform the expected tasks in very suitable conditions.

- Post-task phase: also called the production phase. It consists on the exhibition and the display of the students' tasks. All the students' activities should be reviewed or displayed in order to motivate them. During the evaluation phase, the positive sides should be mentioned and rewarded first. The mistakes and the negative sides may be corrected anonymously. Teachers should give opportunities to their students to express their argumentations towards the choice of the content, the way and the methodology adopted.

4. Task-Based Learning and Projects

The task-based learning fits elegantly the project based-learning. The recent curricula are characterized by the integration of projects at the end of each unit or file. Projects are considered as real and true ways to measure and evaluate competencies through students' realisations; whatever the ways, methods, tools and means used to achieve and realise these projects.

Projects are used to initiate students to research and investigation. Generally, they are given multi-topic projects, where they can choose and opt for the appropriate one which will suit their levels, motivation and intelligence. Teachers may opt for open-ended projects rather than structured projects or topic-related projects. The open-ended projects cannot limit students' imagination and creativity, they permit them to express and show to which extent they can apprehend a research; however, with structured projects and topic related projects, the expected outcomes will be almost the same for all the learners; then, teachers can't feel any important difference between projects prepared by students of different levels.

Projects urge students to revise and assimilate the pre required information from the related lessons of the project. They have many indirect pedagogical aims and objectives, they make them able to use their own methods and strategies to think, solve, create, design and present their projects. They can feel really autonomous when working outside the classroom; they can satisfy their curiosity without obstacles. They learn how to make the right choice and decision when opting for such project rather than another one as well as the methods and strategies used to achieve it…. Time notion is also not neglected in project pedagogy, it trains students to respect the deadlines and manage the time duration to realise the project in a pre-determined period.

Projects are considered as the final learning step that could be introduced as main objectives. It is the result and the fruit of many pedagogical parts; it could be applied to many levels according to competencies and abilities. A project could be achieved by realising the following steps:

- The choice of the theme and the form of the final presentation (written report, oral…)
- The choice of the adequate strategies and methodologies
- Data collection
- Organising and arranging collected data
- Analysing and studying findings
- Project presentation

- Project discussion and evaluation

As in real life situations, sometimes pupils know only what they want and why they want it, but the way to get it will differ from one person to another, from one situation to another. What will make final differences in the results could be without any doubt: motivations, personality, psychological and intelligence differences.

5. Teachers and Students' Roles in TBL

The main aims of TBL tend to give more autonomy to students so it lessens teachers' interventions from 98% (pre-task) to just 10% (post-task) in and promote learners' interventions from 2%(pre-task) to 90% (post-task).

Rate	Pre-task phase	Task phase	Post-task phase
Teachers' roles	98%	25%	10%
Students' roles	2%	75%	90%

Table 2. Teachers and Students' Roles in TBL

As seen from the table above, students' roles move from 2% in the pre-task phase to 90% in the post-task phase. Students have an important role in the task phase; they need assistance, supervision and collaboration from their teacher. However, teachers' roles lessen from 98% (dominator) to just 10% in the post task phase. In certain cases, the teachers' roles can reach 50% or more in the task phase with some students who have difficulties. In these cases, the teachers are considered as partners. The figure below gives more illustrations

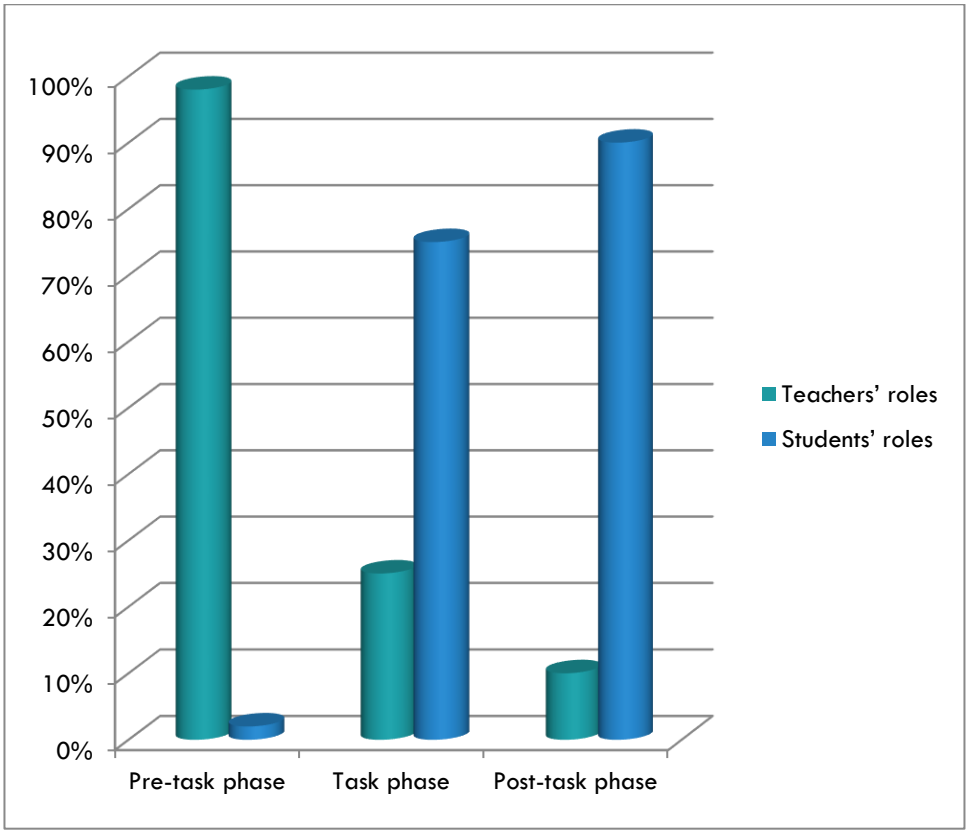

Figure1. Teachers and Students' Roles in task-based learning

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- Project presentation
- Project discussion and evaluation

Main Phase	Teachers' Participation	Students' Participation
The choice of the theme and the form of the final presentation (written report, oral…)	80%	20%
The choice of the adequate strategies and methodologies	70%	30%
Data collection	20%	80%
Data organization and arrangement	10%	90%
Analysing and studying findings	5%	95%
Project presentation	0%	100%
Project discussion	0%	100%
Project evaluation	50%	50%

Table 3. Teachers and Students' Participation Rates

As in real life situations, sometimes students know only what they want and why they want it, but the way to get it will differ from one person to another, from one situation to another. What will make final differences in the results could be without any doubt: motivations, personality, psychological and intelligence differences.

From the following figure we can easily notice that: The objectives of the TBL are set to diminish the large disparity between teachers and students' interventions. The teachers' roles slide from 98% to 2% hence the students' roles slide from 10% to 90%. The strength of the TBL resides on the way that makes students' participation more important than in other approaches and methods.

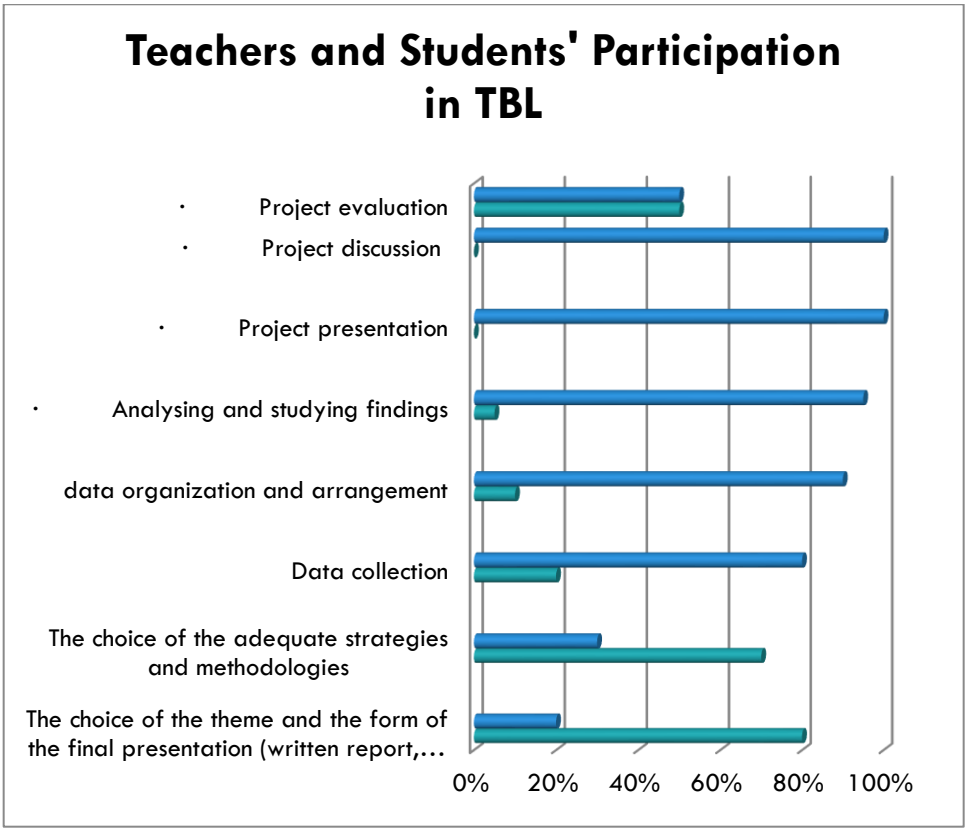

Figure 2. Teachers and Students' Participation in TBL

Teachers' participation is objectively limited in order to give more autonomy and flexibility to students. Teachers are neither the owners of the knowledge nor the leaders of the learning process but they are full participants in all the different phases of the projects. They must intervene to assist students, give advice and guide them to solve the confronted difficulties. However, students have more flexibility in the choice of the project and how to realise it.

6. Project Methodology in TBL

Almost all the projects follow the same methodology which consists of three distinctive parts[1]:

- Pre-phase project
- During the project
- Post-phase project

In the pre-phase, teachers will present and explain briefly the most important parts of the project. During the project, students will choose a topic, make a plan, collect information and data, select and organise data. In the final phase, students

[1] Jane Willis " A Framework for Task-Based Learning" Oxford University Press 2007

will present and display their project and make a self evaluation for their realisation. According to the results of the classroom observation[2]:

	Passive participants	Hesitating Participants	Active Participants
Pre-phase	70%	20%	10%
Task-phase	10%	30%	60%
Post-phase	5%	5%	90%

Figure 4. Students' Participation in TBL Phases

As expected, and as shown from the below figure, students are more active during the project. This will prove strongly the famous saying: "Involve me and I will learn"[3]. In contrast, students are passive learners and passive observers during the pre-phase where teachers will explain everything to their students. Finally, and in the post-phase of the project, almost all the pupils are active, and more motivated. This category of pupils is known as the "full members" or the "core of the groups"[4].

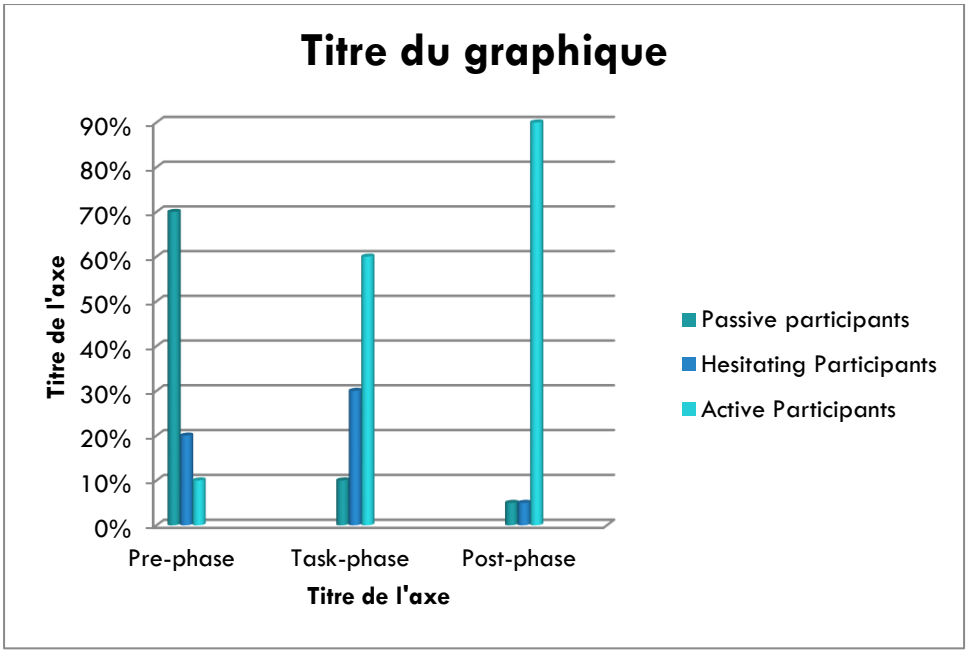

Figure 3. Students' Participation in TBL Phases

[2] statements made during many classroom observations in TBL sessions
[3] Benjamin Franklin
[4] T. Karalis (2010): Situated and Transformative Learning

7. Projects Based Learning Expected Outcomes

As mentioned before, all the projects fall in one main goal which is: research oriented approach where students will use their own methods and strategies to reach the research objectives.

It is worthy to mention the other important expected outcomes of project pedagogy:

- Making and taking decisions
- Respecting time and deadlines
- Opting for cooperative learning
- Sharing information
- Developing self-esteem and self confidence
- Solving problems
- Learning by their own
- Developing linguistic intelligence
- Developing interpersonal intelligence (for cooperative learning)
- Developing intrapersonal intelligence (for individual learning)

8. Task/Project evaluation

During the evaluation phase, the way tasks/projects are designed, presented and displayed will inform teachers about students' hobbies and preferences. Teachers may be astonished when evaluating some tasks/projects; they will detect some hidden characteristics of their students such as their multiple intelligences. Tasks and/or projects permit easily to recognise the students' intelligence. In the following taxonomy, Gardner presents eight ways to detect learners' intelligence:

- Verbal/Linguistic intelligence: Reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence: Working with numbers, and abstract patterns.
- Visual/Spatial intelligence: Working with images, mind mapping, visualising, and drawing.
- Musical/Rhythmic intelligence: Using rhythm, melody, patterned sound, song, dance.
- Bodily/Kinaesthetic intelligence: Processing information through touch, movement, dramatics.
- Interpersonal intelligence: Sharing, cooperating, interviewing, relating.
- Intrapersonal intelligence: Working alone, self-paced, instruction, individualised projects.
- Naturalist intelligence: Spending time outdoors, sorting, classifying, noticing.

Teachers should pay attention to the way the students prefer presenting their tasks, by this way they may detect their multiple intelligences. The ordinary way of presenting tasks by listening, speaking, reading and writing is mainly related to the verbal/linguistic intelligence. The use of numbers, statistics, mathematical charts, tables and formula show that the student has a logical or a mathematical intelligence.

The presence of images, maps, visualisations and drawings lead to the visual/spatial intelligence. Students who use music, songs, rhythms, melodies and special sounds have inevitably a musical or a rhythmic intelligence. If the students' tasks processing or presentations are based on movements, bodily gestures, touch…This category of students is a kinaesthetic intelligence type.
The students working in groups, sharing resources, cooperating are of interpersonal intelligence type; however, those working alone, self-paced, not cooperating with their friends are of intrapersonal intelligence type. The naturalist intelligence type is of students preferring the outside tasks where they spend their time in classifying, observing, noticing…

9. Conclusion

Through this paper, we have seen that the task-based learning is strongly related to the project based learning which goes hand in hand with the pedagogical objectives of the competency based approach. The task based learning can fit easily any of the basic methodologies adopted in many domains and fields: Mathematics, exact sciences, social sciences, literature and languages.

Both teachers and learners' roles are affected in project pedagogy. Teachers act as associate participants and partners in the project realisations, they offer suggestions and propositions. They can just intervene to assist students, give advice and guide them to solve the confronted difficulties. Students have more flexibility and have more autonomy in all the different phases of the projects, they become more active if compared to the traditional classroom activities

The task-based learning is a true barometer that can measure effectively the students' multiple intelligence. The use of the task-based learning approach has redefined learners and teachers' roles. It has reinforced learner-centred methodologies. Teachers move from the position that considers them as sources of knowledge and providers of input, towards one of teachers as guides and facilitators, or even co-researchers. Learners will be very interested by the tasks they can choose to realise and achieve because they incarnate really their competencies, capacities and skills.

Project based learning activities play a vital role in the development of the students' outcome capacity and quality. They will be initiated to research activities and learn how to solve learning problems and difficulties. Consequently, students become more active, more motivated, more autonomous and more cooperative during the project phases.

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