

# Task-Based Approach and English Language Training Course for English Majors

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English Language Training Course is now taken as a reform to be widely used in English teaching. But without a good approach, the teaching is still not effective. Task-Based Approach is relatively novel, which can arouse the learners' passion for English learning. The paper, based on the Task-Based Approach, discusses application procedures in teaching English Language Training Course to prove the effectiveness of improving the students' pragmatic and communicative ability in learning English.

*Keywords:* Task-Based Approach, English Language Training Course, English majors

## Introduction

English Language Training Course mainly focuses on students' practice in class to avoid teacher-centered way of teaching in which teachers usually stick to the course books, talking all through the class. It is quite a creative and initiative course to modify course content in training students' practice competence of mastering a foreign language. There are probably some methodologies to be used in teaching English Language Training Course, but the Task-Based Approach is of great feasibility.

## About Task-Based Approach

Task-Based Approach (TBA) is also named as Task-Based Instruction (TBI) or Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). According to Shehadeh (2005), TBA is not a new approach in language teaching; it has been in place for more than three decades. It was firstly raised by Prabhu (1987) from the aspect of teaching, stressing that students study languages by fulfilling the tasks in the process of language use. Since then, many educators and scholars in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have paid more attention to it. According to Willis (1996), tasks are activities in which the target language is used for a communicative purpose to achieve an outcome. On the other hand, Nunan (2004) uses the word "task" instead of "activity". Ellis (2003) emphasizes that Task-Based Language Teaching is a form of teaching that treats language primarily as a tool for communicating rather than as an object for study or manipulation. Willis (1996: 23) said that a task is all activity "where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome". In the 1990s, Task-Based Approach was introduced to English teaching by Xia Jimei and Wu Xudong, since then, many scholars have put more efforts on the research from different aspects. Ge

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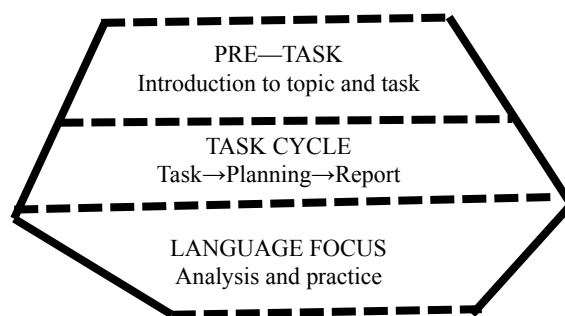
Wenshan (2003) thinks that TBA is the development of Communicative Language Teaching Approach. Qin Xiugui (2004) claims TBA absorbs the second language acquisition theory. Xia Jimei (2001) thinks tasks as communicative activities and process. Jia Zhigao (1999) claimed tasks are communicative activities. The researchers hold the different classifications of tasks, but they have the agreement that the aim of task is to create a real purpose for language practice and provide a natural context for language study.

### **The Feasibility of TBA in Language-Practicing Course**

With the development of economy and the deepening of reforms and opening up, more and more foreign languages colleges in many universities began to put more stresses on promoting students' abilities to use English through practice. But unfortunately, most of the teaching approaches are still teacher-centered or examination-oriented; the students cannot fully play the role in such kind of learning environment. Task-Based Approach is a new teaching theory in the framework of communicative language teaching and learning. The important concept of TBA is to plan and instruct the language teaching on the base of tasks. According to Swain, TBA can improve learners' ability of observation, involvement, inquiry, induction, cooperation, and creation (Swain, 1985). So compared with the previous traditional teaching method, it is relatively new and emphasizes more on the interactive and initiative activities both from teachers and students, for the process of completing tasks both need the teacher's instruction and the students' cooperation through interactive activities. Only in such a free, easy, and harmonious environment do the students play their dominant role and fully apply the knowledge into positive communication as well as team work. Thus, it is feasible and effective to implement TBA in English Language Training Course.

### **The Application of Task-Based Approach in English Language Training Course**

Willis once put forward three stage phases of task-based learning including pre-task, task cycle, and language focus (Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* The framework of task-based teaching approach (Willis, 2002, p. 53).

During pre-task phase, various language activities relevant with tasks are provided to help students understand task instructions and prepare. This phase is also called scaffolding or warm-up phase. Task cycle phase includes assignments, projects, and reports. In the process of fulfilling the task, students do the task in pairs or in a small group and prepare to report how they did and what they discovered, finally they need to present by means of written or oral form in class. In language focus phase, students do some self-promoting tasks such as correcting mistakes under the analysis and guidance of teachers and then practice the right language expression.

Based on the above theoretical framework, English Language Training Course can be taught effectively through TBA.

As innovative research, English Language Training Course for English majors is set up to improve the students' competence of language use. It can be divided into three stages with different objectives. The primary stage aims to improve the students' language proficiency of listening by teaching phonetic knowledge and listening skills about dictating and note-taking. Intermediate Stage mainly involves language practice of reciting, informative speeches such as storytelling, self-introduction, and speeches on given topics. Advanced Stage is intended to cultivate and enhance students' competence of effective communication. In order to achieve the expected goal, TBA is the most effective way to be used in the courses. The specific applications are as follows:

In pre-task phase, teachers decide the topics and assign the tasks to students, and then divide the students into different groups to practice on the materials that the teacher gave them beforehand. By doing so, students can make full preparation for the topic and discuss with the team members to make the topic more clear and understandable which can build up their confidence and develop interest in the task. Pre-task of topic training includes (1) The primary stage: phonetics, recitation of English poems, singing English songs, English movie dubbing, and drama playing; (2) Intermediate Stage: recitation of famous speeches, storytelling, tourist attraction introduction, and prepared speech on given topics; (3) Advanced Stage: restating, impromptu speeches, debate, and argumentation on the given topic.

The aim of pre-task is to impress students on performing better listening and a speaking act and guarantee the later implementation of locutionary act.

In the task cycle phase, students begin to present the information they have prepared and express themselves in pairs or groups. The teacher not only plays the role in guiding and encouraging the students to fully implement the language, but also skillfully manage group and pair work to make activities well-structured and intervene on time when students have some troubles in presenting or imbalance in the participation. Since teachers are not dominant in the process, students can become the center in finishing the task and consider the language a tool for information collection and view expression. Because they have plans and preparations in groups, each member in one group has their own roles. When they are asked to give the report or performance, they will have a clear mind in what they are going to do with the supplemented materials related to the topic, so they can quickly get access to the goal in different stages and also learn from other groups to express the same meaning by listening to their reports so that they can gain a better perception of the use of target language. Finally, based on the students' performance, the teacher makes a simple comparison and evaluation accordingly.

In the language focus phase, students need to analyze and practice consciously for the important project. Analysis doesn't get students to learn some language knowledge, but to cultivate their awareness of language, that is, after the analysis and guidance with the help of the teacher, they need to realize the importance of the language and systemize the observed language features so that they can continue to finish other practices such as repetition, listening skills about dictating and note-taking, movie dubbing, drama playing, storytelling, speaking on given topics, debating, and argumentation, etc.

### **Conclusion**

English Language Training Course mainly focuses on the application of the language no matter which

stages the students are learning in. TBA just helps students to achieve the goal through perception, experience, practice, participation, and cooperation under the guidance of teachers and finally improve their language practical application ability. By using TBA, teachers should try their best to create a light-hearted atmosphere, design tasks that are related to the real life, and finally guide the students to use correct ways to complete their tasks, while students can enjoy success, achieve emotional experience, and adjust learning strategies through the process of language practice. In a word, TBA can not only provide harmonious environment for students' learning, but also stimulate students' interests in learning English, thus, students can get benefit from class and form a positive learning attitude in the process of learning

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