REAL WORLD TASKS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is: 1) to contribute to the overall effectiveness of the learning process because the learners see the activity as relevant to their learning needs, and 2) to derive from authentic sources reflecting real world tasks to involve learners in the practical use of the language.

Real world tasks or target tasks are communicative acts the learners achieve through language in the world outside the classroom which involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than forms. The priority is not the bits and pieces of language, but rather the functional purposes for which the language must be used.

The use of authentic materials and media can reinforce for students the direct relationship between the language classroom and the outside world. When lessons are centered on comprehending real world tasks, students tend to focus more on content and meaning rather than the language itself. This offers students a valuable source of language input, so that they are not being exposed only to the language presented by the text and the teacher. In addition, real world tasks increase motivation to learn in students as well as renew interest in the subject matter.

Keywords: real world tasks, teaching, learning

A. Introduction

One of the most challenging tasks faced by English teachers is how to capture the interest and to stimulate the imagination of their students so that they will be more motivated to learn. Most English teachers complain that their students have no good motivation and interest to learn so their achievement is not satisfactory. However, teachers never evaluate or reflect the cause of their students' attitude toward the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. To this end, the ongoing search for and the development of meaningful teaching materials and tasks, which often can be used to supplement the textbook or students worksheet, is a critical planning activity to be done by teachers. The teachers have to develop classroom and outdoor activities in which students can use authentic task-based materials to enhance their language learning.

Whatever situation a teacher may have, it is very likely that at some time the teacher will find the need to adapt a particular task with material that he or she feels is more useful for promoting learning. Many teachers often adapt or create activities that involve authentic materials and real world tasks to get positive impact the students have. When English teachers only tend to use classroom tasks during teaching and learning process, students tend not to be able to develop their ideas or imagination maximally. Students need to know what they

should do to `use a language as a means for communication. Involving students in a real world task will bring them in a real use of language.

Rather than practicing language for the sake of learning it, the task-based approach provides children or learners with tasks-to produce something or do a real-life function that requires the use of communication. Tasks are more open-ended, personalized, encourage creativity, have a real purpose and audience, provide opportunity for interaction and fluency and are cognitively demanding. Tasks are 'process-based'. They imply more emphasis on the process of doing things than the goals it aims at. Process and goal both belong to the nature of the tasks.

Nunan (1991) outlines five characteristics of a task-based approach to language teaching:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts (teaching materials) into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experience as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

The writer concludes that the task as a piece of meaning-focused work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing and interacting in the target language.

Furthermore, Nunan (1989) depicts a way to analyze the various elements of tasks.
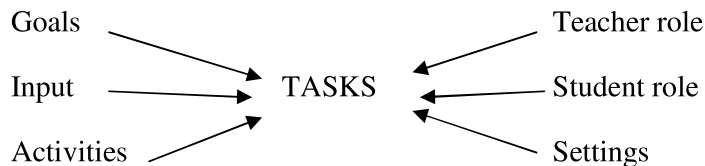
Goals refer to the general intention for the learning task. **Input** is the data that form the point of departure for the task. **Activities** specify what learners will actually perform with the input. **Roles** refer to the social and interpersonal relationship between learners and teachers in a task. **Settings** refer to the classroom arrangement like pair work or group work.

It is often mentioned that learning in natural environment centers on meaning more than on form. Both meaning and form are important. Meaning is contained and conditioned by the form in which it is inserted. From alone is useless for communication if meaning is not attached to it. How to keep both of them active when learning is a real challenge for teachers. When a teacher only considers that linguistics competence is more important than the others, communication will not run. In this case, content, meaning, and structure of sentences produced play important role in the tasks. Students must be trained gradually by various tasks in order to achieve the competences expected.

B. Theory of Constructivism

Constructivism is an approach to teaching and learning based on the premise that learning is the result of "mental construction." In other words, students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know. Constructivists believe that learning is affected by the context in which an idea is taught as well as by students' beliefs and attitudes.

The theory of constructivism suggests that learners construct knowledge out of their experiences. Moreover, constructivism is often associated with pedagogic approaches that promote active learning or learning by doing. Learners learn by experimentation, and not by being told what will happen. They are left to make their own inferences, discoveries and conclusions. It also emphasizes that learning is not an "all or nothing" process but that students learn the new information that is presented to them by building upon knowledge that they already possess. It is therefore important that teachers constantly assess the knowledge their students have gained to make sure that the students' perceptions of the new knowledge are what the teacher had intended.

The role of teachers is very important within the constructivism learning theory. The teachers in this theory function as facilitators whose role is to aid the student when it comes to their own understanding. This takes away focus from the teacher and puts it upon the student and their learning. The resources and lesson plans that must be initiated for this learning theory take a very different approach toward traditional learning as well. Instead of telling, the teacher must begin asking. Instead of answering questions that only align with their curriculum, the facilitator in this case must make it so that the student comes to the conclusions on their own instead of being told. Also, teachers are continually in conversation with the students, creating the learning experience that is open to new directions depending upon the needs of the student as the learning progresses. Teachers following Piaget's theory of constructivism must challenge the students by making them effective critical thinkers and not being merely a "teacher" but also a mentor, a consultant, and a coach.

Peck and Wilson (1999) in Jonassen write five categories presenting important components in the meaningful learning:
1. Opportunities for authentic learning.
2. Opportunities for active learning.
3. Opportunities for intentional learning.
4. Opportunities for constructive learning.
5. Opportunities for cooperative learning.
From the categories above it can be concluded that constructivism principles can be used to help to determine a meaningful and purposive learning atmosphere.

C. Overview of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to teaching that is directed at developing communicative abilities in the learners either by teaching aspects of communicative competence or by creating conditions for learners to learn through communicating.

According to Communicative Language Teaching, language is a system for the expression of meaning. It primarily functions as interaction and communication. Activities involve real communications and carry out meaningful tasks. The objective is to reflect the needs of the learners. Its syllabus includes structures function, notions, themes, and tasks. The lesson extract follows a method called Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) and a number of possibilities open to the teacher. It means that teachers are free to choose varieties for classroom and outside classroom activities which stimulate students to be more independent.

The activity types are engaging learners in communication involving processes such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction. The learners' role is as negotiator, interactor, giving and taking. Teachers are facilitators of the communication process. The role of material is primarily to promote communicative language use such as *text-based materials* (practicing exercises, reading passages, gap fills, recordings, etc.), *task-based materials* (to support 'real life' tasks such as role playing booking into a hotel, or a job interview or authenticity), and *realia* (magazines, newspapers, fruit and vegetables, maps or things from the real world outside the classroom).

D. Real World Tasks

It is admitted that most teachers only use exercises in the students' text book. They tend to be 'text-book minded'. What they think is simply finishing the content of the text book not 'mastery learning' itself. The students should be able to conquer the competences as stated in the Basic Competences, however, classical reasons always come up among teachers. They worry about the time allotment they have, mid-semester, semester or final examination, and National Examination. Rarely do the teachers consider about the real students communicative competence. Teachers often forget that the goal of teaching and learning English is enable them to use English as a means of communication. So, according to the writer, real-world tasks are tasks which are intentionally designed by teachers for students to actively involve themselves in English learning to gain the real use of language for oral and written communication purpose.

As English teachers we have to facilitate students with series of challenging language tasks. The students have to construct their own ability in using English. By giving students many various language activities, they will be able to use English in various purposes, too. What will happen if English teachers only give series of classroom exercises such as 'Change the following sentences into the passive', 'Write the past tense form of these verbs: go, have, study, make, buy, out, and work', 'Read the text and choose the correct answer', etc.? The students will feel bored. They have no interest to the subject. They will claim their teachers cannot teach well, etc. This condition will worsen if the teachers are really reluctant to improve their teaching technique or method. English teachers have to know their students' characteristics so they can apply the suitable method to use in and out of the classroom.

What is a task? What is an exercise? What is an activity? *A task* is a communicative act that does not usually have a restrictive focus on a single grammatical structure. It also has a non-linguistic outcome. *An exercise* usually has a restrictive focus on a single language element and has a linguistic outcome. *An activity* has not only a restrictive focus on one or two language items but also a communicative outcome. In this sense, activities have

something in common with tasks and something in common with exercises. The essential difference between a task and exercise is that a task has a non-linguistic outcome.

The target tasks are the tasks in which the students need to accomplish beyond the classroom. Some examples are buying a pair of new shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, making a hotel reservation, finding a street destination, etc. By applying real-world tasks, the teachers will know how much the students are able to use English for communicative goals.

1. Listening Tasks

Listening for comprehension is an important aspect of the communicative process, and it needs to be practiced. Students need to understand instructions, announcements, telephone messages, TV or radio programs, movies, and answers to questions they themselves ask.

Real world tasks for listening activities may include the direct use of radio and TV programs such as KangGuru Indonesia (KGI), NHK (Japanese TV) and some foreign TV channels (Tv commercials, cartoons, news clips, radio advs, songs, documentaries), and local TV (tvE). These ways are able to focus students' attention on developing real world listening skills. Another example is students are told that they are guests at a party. They listen to short segments of real world party conversations and complete a worksheet in which they note down what topic the people are talking about.

One of the TV programs which can be adapted as the real world task is the students listen to a weather forecast. After listening to an aural text about the weather, the students are asked to answer questions to comprehend the text they hear. Another task is real world setting where English is spoken (conversation) then the students have to take notes on what they hear and report it back to the class. Teachers can also present a video (news, films, advertisement, etc.) and students in pairs come together to retell, report or create a story).

From KGI materials, the teacher may select which materials are suitable with the students. The materials can be taken from interview, short speech, listeners' experience, listeners' letters or email, quizzes, etc. The teacher must create exercises the students have to do to stimulate them to listen to and catch what they hear.

2. Speaking Tasks

Do English teachers speak well? Let's ask ourselves to answer this question. If we do not, how about our students? Speaking fluently, accurately, and appropriately should be our goals, so do our students. What attempts have you done so far for yourselves and your students in speaking?

When an English teacher of junior high school has a recount text type as his material, he may develop his students' task by asking them to make a table of his students' activities for a week (diary). First, the students have to write down what happened to them by filling the table. After that, they have to tell what happened to them for a week to the class in turn.

The news item text for SMA students is simply by asking students to observe what is happening around them. For example, there was an accident that a student saw. She pretends

as a journalist of a newspaper, a radio or TV station. The student interviews a witness what is happening and reports class what he or she saw.

The teacher asks their students to watch a film on TV. He or she makes a form the students have to fill during watching the film for example the title of the film, who the characters are, where and when it happens, the conflicts, and the resolution. In group or individual, the students create the story of the film they watch.

Beside that, the teacher can use phenomenon of nature as the medium of the real world task like flooding, volcano eruption, tsunamis, landslide, crime, etc. as the resources for students to involve themselves in learning English.

3. Reading Tasks

Getting meaning from reading in an additional language is a complex skill that requires careful coaching. Authentic materials are everywhere. Internet is easy to get. Notices, labels, leaflets, brochures, advertisements, announcements, cards, invitations, instructions, maps, forms, stories, novels, newspapers, and magazines enable students understand the texts. The real texts are the real situation or culture. Culture bears genres and genres are influenced by situation in which field, tenor, and mode are parts in forming a text type. A single text is meaningful if it is used in a right context.

One example is when the teacher and the students discuss a functional text (label). The teacher asks the students to find out the label of the medicine (pills, syrup, tablets). They have to read and inform what it is then swap with their friends to know the other labels. Another task is asking students to brows a story from the internet and each student tells about the story.

4. Writing Tasks

Writing is generally considered the most difficult of the four skills. It demands a great deal of work and concentration. However, writing helps people to organize their thoughts. It is admitted that writing is the skill that shows how well we control language.

The teacher asks the students to interview their mothers about how to cook or make a traditional foods or drinks. The students, first, completing the table then they have to make a procedure text. A similar way is how to make handicrafts or a kite.

Another real world task is observing a plant or a tree in groups and the students write or make notes everything about it. After that they make a short paragraph based on their observation added the facts from books, magazines, or internet. Going to a public place is another interesting example of how a teacher encourages students to describe a particular thing.

For SMA students, the genre of *review* can be obtained by watching a film or a soap opera then the students write a critic about it. What's happening around us is also a good thing for students to report. For SMP students, the task can be taken by 'painting' program on computer. Every single student paints or draws for example an animal, a house, a person then

describes it. Going holiday or a day off to the beach can be another task for students to have a recount text.

5. Grammar

It is grammar that helps us to decide who bit whom and it is grammar that tells us who is to treat whom and how. Meanings, words, and social contexts all become clarified through appropriate structure. In short, we may not neglect the need for accurate structure.

An example is when he teacher has 'simple past tense' in the classroom. The teacher may ask students to tell or write several sentences of what the students did and didn't do last night or in the 'past continuous' to observe what was happening in a certain time in the past in their homes. Preposition is another example in which the students can make sentences by using prepositions about the position of things in their homes. Arranging sentences using adjective (noun phrase) can be also applied by the teacher or asking the members of family about their abilities or disabilities and likes or dislikes.

6. Vocabulary

To the average learner, learning a new language means learning words, words, and more words. Some real world tasks enable them to have more vocabulary. For example, when the text type discussion is about procedure (recipe), the teachers may ask students to write ingredients/materials, equipment at home by asking their mother or observing of what the students have in their homes.

Reading an English magazine or other media is also important for students to develop their words. They can read from authentic materials and write down some essential words.

E. Lesson Design

Ellis (2003) summarizes the design of task-based lesson into three principle phases. The first is *pre-task* which concerns various activities that teachers and students can undertake before they start the task. The second is *during task* which centers around the task itself and affords various instructional options and the final is *post-task* which involves procedures for following up on the task performance.

The purpose of the pre-task phase is to prepare students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition. Teachers must frame the activity. Lee (2000) describes the importance of 'framing' the task to be performed and suggests that one way of doing this is to provide an advance organizer of what the students will be required to do. What a teacher can do is performing a similar task, providing a model, or providing non-task preparation activities.

There are two basic kinds of during-task phase. First, various options how the task is to be undertaken such as *spot the difference, describe and draw, information gap, a story telling* and many others. Second, process options that involve the teacher and the students in making decision about how to perform the task.

The post-task phase affords a number of options. The major goals are to provide an opportunity for a repeat performance of the task; to encourage reflection on how the task was performed; and to encourage attention on forms.

F. Conclusion

Tasks may contribute to the production of a more refined and complete foreign language syllabus, helping to motivate the students and focus the attention of teachers and learners on meaning and communicative language use. Tasks in real life are fully holistic. People are involved and so are mind, body, thought, and action.

Real world tasks emphasize the use of the right strategies and rely on choosing the right actions to achieve the desired goal. Foreign language learning classrooms should be obviously centered on tasks that involve the use of language. Real world tasks also cover any aspect and field of human activity and they, of course, vary in level of complexity and focus.

It is admitted that the application if real world tasks also bears problems. The most obvious one is the students' ability in constructing sentences both in spoken and written forms. English has not been their language medium for daily communication. English is successful as the compulsory subject but still fails in its usage. Brave English teachers to do some innovative learning are necessary to reduce the weaknesses mentioned above. Speaking about various teaching and learning process starts from various materials and tasks. The difficulty in the implementation of the method in the classroom should be decreased by *try and error* attempts.

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