

Empowering Facebook in Applying Task-Based Instruction to Teach Writing for EFL Learners

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to give an overview of how to take an advantage of using facebook in applying the methodology of Task- Based Instruction (TBI) to teach writing to EFL learners in order to stimulate them create written texts. To address the topic, the article is arranged in the following way: (a) defining task, (b) the methodology of task- based instruction, (c) how to use facebook in applying TBI to teach writing.

Key words: Facebook, Task- based instruction, writing.

1. Introduction

With the beginning of digital era in the last decade, technology becomes somewhat that cannot be avoided in everyday life. It also plays significant roles in the development of education. By taking advantages of technology, especially facebook, teaching and learning process turns into easier process either for teachers or students as it provides various features which can help them in accessing knowledge and information, and makes the teaching learning process more enjoyable.

Some teachers have already made use of technologies to help them in their teaching process, but only few of them utilize facebook in order to improve their teaching method. On the other hands, students are getting familiar with the use of facebook, but unfortunately most of them do not maximize its feature to improve their language skill. So it is important to create a new way of teaching which empowers facebook, as well as teaching writing.

Nowadays, teaching and learning process gives much emphasis on learners' communicative abilities which makes the term Task-based Instruction (TBI) widely used by teachers in applying curriculum. This method has purpose to encourage students to communicate and use their actual language during the process of accomplishing task given by the teachers. Task- based instruction is a methodology which claims that the best way to create interactional processes in the classroom is to use specially designed instructional tasks. [1]. Brown [2] clarifies that TBI puts task at the center of one's methodological focus. It aims to provide learners with a natural context for language use [3]. By applying TBI, students are engaged in the use of the language they learn, and they are actively involved in producing communication and negotiating meaning to solve the task given.

Based on the fact that language acquisition is influenced by the complex interactions of a number of

variables including materials, activities, and evaluative feedback, TBI has a positive impact on these variables. As said by Jeon and Hahn that TBI provides learners with natural sources of meaningful material, ideal situations for communicative activity, and supportive feedback allowing for much greater opportunities for language use [4]. When applying TBI, students are given a task to perform and only when the task has been completed does the teacher discuss the language that was used, making corrections and adjustments which the students' performance of the task has shown to be desirable [5].

By combining Task-Based Instruction and facebook in teaching writing will make the students fully engaged in the use of the language they are learning during the process of solving the given task and motivate them to create more written texts.

2. Defining Task

The notion of task is a somewhat fuzzy one, various definition have been presented to describe it. Richards clarifies that task is something that learners do or carry out using their existing language resources [1]. Furthermore, Oxford [6] classifies task into numerous perspectives below. Each one is discussed in turn in this article.

- Task as an Imposed Task, Duty, or Piece of Work
- Task as a General Activity for Learners and as an Outcome-Oriented L2 Instructional Segment.

2.1 Task as an Imposed Task, Duty, or Piece of Work

The word task derives from Old North French *tasque*, which meant a duty, a tax, or a piece of work imposed as a duty. *Tasque* originated from the Latin *taxe*, to evaluate, estimate, or assess (Barnhart 1988:1117, cited in Oxford [6]). This suggests a task is obligatory and might be tedious.

2.2 Task as a General Activity for Learners and as an Outcome- Oriented L2 Instructional Segment

We frequently find several textbooks which contain many exercises and activities that expect the students to accomplish them. Sometimes these activities or exercises are discussed as tasks. A task focuses on an outcome that learner is expected to produce or achieve. In this perspective, the task is an outcome-oriented segment of work in a curriculum or lesson plan. Richards adds that a task has an outcome which is not simply linked to learning language, though language acquisition may occur as the learner carries out the task [1].

These definitions underscore the idea that a task is a structured instructional plan that requires learners to move toward an objective or outcome using particular (teacher-given) working procedures or processes. Again, a task is imposed from the outside and does not come from the learner.

3. The Methodology of Task- based Instruction

There are two basic kinds of methodological procedures for teaching tasks. First, procedures that are relating to how the tasks specified in a task-based syllabus can be converted into actual lessons. Second, procedures that are relating to how the teacher and learners are to participate in the lessons. This article deals only with the first of these.

The design of a task-based lesson involves consideration of the stages or components of a lesson that has a task as its principal component. There are various designs have been proposed. Ellis proposed three principal phases; pre-task, during task, and post-task [7].

3.1 Pre-task

Ellis explains that the purpose of the pre-task phase is to prepare students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition [7]. Furthermore, Harmer adds that in the pre-task, the teacher explores the topic with the class and may highlight useful words and phrases, helping students to understand the task instruction [5].

In this phase, the teacher might help the students to recall some language that may be useful for the task and also encourages the students. So, they understand the theme and objectives of the task. It can be done by doing brainstorming ideas with the class, using pictures, telling the teacher's personal experience to introduce the topic, or hear a recording of others doing the same task. This gives the students a clear model of what will be expected of them. The students can take notes and spend time preparing for the task.

3.2 During Task

In this phase, the students complete a task in pairs or groups using the language resources that they have, whilst the teacher monitors and offers encouragement. During the task, Harmer explains that the students plan how they will tell their friends in their class what they did and how it went, then they report the task either orally or in written form [5].

Thus, this phase trains the students to practice the language. As stated by Lochana and Deb that this phase gives students opportunities to use whatever language they have, both in private (where mistakes, hesitations, and approximate renderings do not matter so long as the meaning is clear) and in public (where accuracy of form and meaning are highlighted) [8].

3.3 Post- task

The post-task phase has a number of options. Ellis points out these options have three major pedagogic goals; (1) to provide an opportunity for a repeat performance of the task, (2) to encourage reflection on how the task was performed, and (3) to encourage attention to form, in particular to those forms that proved problematic to the learners when they performed the task [7].

3.3.1 Repeat Performance

It gives a positive impact when the students are asked to repeat their performance, as they become more fluent, the tasks are expressed more clearly, and complexity increases (Bygate 1996 and 2001; Lynch and Maclean 2000, cited in Ellis [7]). A repeat performance can be carried out under the same conditions as the first performance (i.e. in small groups or individually) or the conditions can be changed. For example, in the second performance, the students are asked to report the task they have accomplished in front of a larger audience instead of their class.

3.3.2 Reflecting on the Task

In this phase, the teacher may ask the students to present a report on how they did the task and on what they discovered. The reports might be in form of spoken or written. Besides, Ellis says, it is also possible to ask students to reflect on and evaluate their own performance of the task. He also points out the role of the teacher is as a chairperson and also to encourage the students [7]. Here, the students could be encouraged to observe the language aspect they use (i.e. fluency, complexity, accuracy, lexical density, cohesive, or cohesion), and what language they learned from the task. These could be done both their own or others.

3.3.3 Focusing on Form

This stage concerns on how the target forms should be dealt with. Ellis states this stage is needed to

counter the danger that students will develop fluency at the expense of accuracy [7]. Here, the students are also required to observe the cohesiveness, dictions, and cohesion on their writing. While the students are performing a task, the teacher may review the errors students make. Then ask the students to identify the error, correct the sentences and work out an explanation.

Moreover, Ellis gives an example, a sentence illustrating the error can be written on the board, students can be invited to correct it, the corrected version is written up, and a brief explanation provided [7].

4. Phases of Teaching Writing by taking advantage of facebook in Applying TBI

English has a position as a foreign language in Indonesia. This fact makes the students somehow face difficulties in learning it, including when they

should create written texts. Moreover, perhaps writing is the most demanding skill to learn as we often find the students lose their ideas whenever they are expected to write. Thus, the roles of teachers to help students write in the language are very challenging and the decision to select a suitable task for the students cannot be considered as an easy thing to do.

The selected task mostly depends on the kinds of the writing activity and the goal of the teaching. This statement is in line with Nation's opinion that written work is usually done for a purpose and for a particular audience [9]. Kern said that writing in the foreign language classroom covers a continuum of activities as follows [10]:

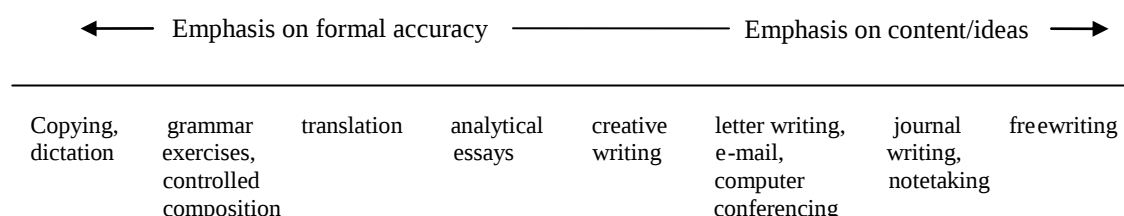


Figure 1. Continuum of Writing Activities

By taking advantage of facebook in applying task-based methodology, the teacher may provide a topic and then ask the students to post their comments and opinions toward the given topic, and in the next meeting, the students together with the teacher discuss the posted students' opinions.

These comments and opinions are then used as to help students gather ideas to write. Nation called this process as group brainstorming, when the students get together in small group and suggest as many ideas about

the topic as possible [9]. In the term of TBI, this very phase is known as Pre-task. Later, the students are required to accomplish the task and report it in written form.

The phases of combining facebook and TBI can be seen in the following table. For example, the teacher asks the students to choose their two favorite novels and then ask them to create a text which reflects their opinions about the novels, and it should elaborate the reasons why do they choose the novels, and then they are required to report it in written form.

The table below presents the example of activities in each phase during the lesson:

Table1.
Example of Phases Activities in TBI

Phase	Activities
Pre-task	- The teacher posts several titles of best seller novels in facebook group. - Asks the students to post comments and opinions toward the novels in the facebook group. - This step is done through the whole class interaction through facebook's wall in the form of teacher questions and students response. - The teacher posts some statements to help the students to understand the task instruction (i.e. ask the students to choose their two favorite novels, and give the reasons why do they like the novels). The task should be accomplished in the next class meeting. - In the next class meeting, the teacher and the students discuss the opinions and comments posted by the students in the previous days (group brainstorming). - Teacher provides a model of how to accomplish the task, including the report of the task in written form. - The teacher lets the students to complete the task.
During-task	- The students complete the task using the language resources that they have, whilst the teacher monitors and offers encouragement. - The teacher encourages the students to share their reasons why do they choose those novels. - The students report the task in written form (in which the content is the reasons why do they choose the novels as their favorite novels)
Post-task	- Ask the students to reflect on and evaluate their own or their friends' performances of the task.

5. Conclusion

Combining facebook and the methodology of task-based instruction provide the learners with a natural context for language use. It also helps the teacher prepares and presents the teaching material in a well structured form and in a more interesting way, so that the students enjoy the class and they are encouraged to practice the target language more, especially during the interaction within their groups in the facebook. This methodology could be applied in teaching writing, as the task given is used as the guideline for the students to compose their writing. And it is not impossible to apply the combination of facebook and the methodology of TBI to teach other language skills.

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