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I Made Rai Jaya Widanta (Corresponding Author)
Mechanical Engineering Department
Politeknik Negeri Bali, Jalan Kampus Bukit Jimbaran
Kuta Selatan, Badung-80364, Bali
Indonesia
E-mail: rai_widanta@yahoo.com

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Title: Can the Task-Based Learning Improve Students' Communicative Competence?

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Literature review is adequate	√	
Analysis and findings support objectives of the paper	√	

Decision regarding the paper

(*) Accept the paper in its current format
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Comments and Suggestions

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Can the Task-Based Learning Improve Students' Communicative Competence?

Ni Putu Somawati

Ni Wayan Wahyu Astuti

I Nyoman Kanca

Tourism Department
Politeknik Negeri Bali
Jalan Kampus Bukit Jimbaran, Kuta Selatan
Badung-80364, Bali
Indonesia

I Made Rai Jaya Widanta
Mechanical Engineering Department
Politeknik Negeri Bali
Jalan Kampus Bukit Jimbaran
Kuta Selatan, Badung-80364, Bali
Indonesia

Abstract

There have been two contradictive conclusions whether (or not) task-based language teaching (TBLT) effective to improve students' communicative competence, i.e. effective and not effective. The dichotomy was promoted by a number of differences in aspects of research undertaken, such as location, subject, and object of the research. This empirical study was aimed at investigating effectiveness of TBLT for vocational college students. Two groups of research participant (experimental and control groups, each of which consists of 26 female people) were involved in the research. Both groups were given pre-test or T1which is the same as T2 prior to treatment to see each group basic competence. The treatment which used TBLT model and approach was undertaken for experiment class for two sessions, while control class was taught with conventional model. T1 and T2 were designed in form of an Indonesian-English translation test which focused on simple past tense sentences with verb. Test result was scored in terms of the use of simple past tense sentences (positive, negative and interrogative forms). Students' mistake on the use of simple past tense pattern was scored minus 1, while the used of other aspects, such as conjunction, preposition, article, noun, adjective, and adverb phrase were scored minus 0,5. Based on statistical analysis, it was found that minimum and maximum score for experiment group on T1 were 1,3 and 6,3 respectively, while score of control group were 1,3 and 6,0 respectively. Up on the treatment, experiment group competence exceeded the control group with percentage increase of 1%. Minimum and maximum T2 score of control group were 3,0 and 8,0, while score of experiment group were 6.0 and 8.6 respectively. This finding proved that TBLT was effective to improve student competence even though experiment group was given only a-two-session learning. Additionally, they could show better strategic, sociolinguistic, discourse and linguistic competence than the control group.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching, English, vocational, communicative competence

1. Introduction

In spite some issues promoting that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is still indecisive toward learners' performance, some scholars still attempt to prove whether the notion is fully worth believing. Sato's study to prove effectiveness of task-based English learning to achive learners' communicative ability resulted in the condition that TBLT failed to promote communicative competence in the laerning activity (Sato). The experiment group consisting of Japanese university students given the treatment with TBLT did not succeed in improving their language performance.

Based on Satos' investigation, conventional approach was found to be more effective and practical to implement. Conventional approach, in this case, includes Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Presentation Practice Production (PPP), Test Teach Test (TTT). This is in line with findings of other scholars who found that those approaches were supportive to learners performance and competence and found that TBLT was not productive (Bruton, Sheen, and Swain).

However, a number of studies are irronically contradictive to those findings. A number of linguist clearly stated taht TBLT was effective to enhance learners' language performance and competence. The study even found that PPP failed to improve students' communicative competence and TBLT was suitable for second language acquisition (SLA) process (Ellis[1], Skehan, and Willis). Additionally, TBLT has a number of excellences, such as: (1) the approach it has is very supportive to the communicative language teaching; (2) it is a reaction of of the failure of implementation of PPP and TTT; (3) it considers the language learned as the target or a tool to communicate more than a learning object; (4) it does not dominate students with presentation and practice where they are dominated with grammar better than meaning as PPP. Other studies whose result are also in accordance with this finding were undertaken by Samuda & Bygate, Mackey, Little & Fieldson, Takimoto. Samuda & Bygate stated that task is an activity which is holistic enabling involvement of language use to achieve a non linguistic goal. In addition, the learning type prioritize a context where task is a center for learning which provides activity of using English to students, guides teachers to design curriculum and syllabus specifically to determine a model of assessment. TBLT was considered a successful aproach to the English language teaching as: (1) it can provide students with learning language naturally; (2) it is an alternative approach to the problem faced by students in Japan (3) it can provide overt input and out put; (4) it utilizes input-based task to help students improve their communicative competence; (5) it facilitate students with meaningful English use: and (6) is can be adapted with situation and contidion (Mackey, Little & Fieldson, Takimoto, Samuda & Bygate[2]).

According Seyyedi dan Ismail, TBLT is very effective as students and activities are intergrated in a meaningful communicative activity which is a goal-oriented to solve problem, fix project as well as reach agreement. In order for it to be more effective, TBLT shall be supported with analytic syllabus focusing on students' ability to do task as the target lagunage without any grammar learning explicitly (Rahimpour). Precedural syllabus strerres on forms or grrammra which can be learned at class through "focus on meaning" and "grammar construction" in a class done unconsciously (Prabhu). In its implementation, TBLT shall contain critaria where learning is suitable with cognitive, which involve students, and meets students' needs (Ellis[2]). In addition, it is able to make students "to notice" syntsctic aspects, vocabulary and phonological aspect (Schmidt). Both conclusions on the effectiveness of TBLT is contributing to a bit questioning result. The facts which is swinging like pandulum shall be clarified further to find a clearer result. This study was attempted to see whether (or not) TBLT is effective to improve students' communicative competence is vocational college.

2. Some Important Concepts

There are some concepts used in this study. The concepts are used to give clear scope based on which this study was undertaken.

a. Task in Task-Based Language Teaching

Task is referred to as any structural language learning endeavour which has a particular objectives, appropriate content, a specific working proccdure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the tasks (Breem). It is also said to be a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities, such as group problrm solving or simulation and decission making. Ellis stated that task, in this case pedagogical task, is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whethre tha correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed (Ellis[3]). However, Willis and Willis viewed task from the other side and stated that taks is differ from grammar exercise in that learners are free to use arange of language structures to achieve that task outcome (Willis and Willis). This view point give clearer track that task used in the English learning is not mere grammar exercises which has goal to measure students' grammar mastery, but goal-oriented and planned activities in purpose to practice using a part of grammar or language function with a real life situation.

b. Communicative Competence

Competence competence (CC) is a complex aspects of language assessment which does not only focus on communicative ability. CC basicaly is viewed a bit differently by some linguists. It can be placed in one side of the dycotomy of "competence and performance" (Chomsky), or parole in "langue and parole" (Saussure), or socio-pragmatics in "pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics" (Leech), and fluency in "accuracy and fluency" (Richards). Chomsky put CC in the side of performance, ability of a learner to use the language in a communication. Saussure put it in the part of parole as real use of the language. Leech categorized CC as aspect of socio-pragmatic which focuses on the use of language based on social aspects. And Richards put it as part of fluency rather than accuracy.

However, Krashen stated that language is acquired through experience. The acquisition hypothesis affirms that the ability to use a language is gained through exposure to using it, participation in using it as well as experiencing. The notion underlined that learning language requres students involvement in practicing the langauage. It is in line with Nunan's view point that is in the class room-learning shall be linked with language out side it. In addition, there are important concepts which shall be put into consideration: learners' experience in using the language is the most necessary thing; introducing authentic learning materials which can connect learners' imajination with the real world; there is opportunity for learners not only to focus on language but also learning process; and empahsis shall be on learning to communicate through interaction in target language (Nunan). In other word, the learning shall be involving other students or participants to enable the learner to practice the language with, not with a self-directed learning approach (Widanta). Basicly, the learning activity should be enhanced so that students are able to express what they want to say not merely make sentences which are grammatically correct. Therefore, the learning will be successful if the process of the language acquisition activated by introducing a relevant context (Skehan) and if it is able to energize students to negotiate meaning, modify and paraphrase something they have learned (Richards & Rogers).

Krashen further introduced that CC covers four major aspects, they are linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse and strategic competence (Krashen). In line with this, Canale & Swain introduced three aspects CC is based on, such as gramatical competence, strategic competence, and sociocultural competence (Canale & Swain). Linguistic or grammatical competence is that includes knowledge of language code, lexical, semantic, grammar, and orthopraphic. Sosiolinguistic competence includes the apropriate application of vocab and politeness, the way how linguistic resources are used in communication pursuant to social aspects, describe language and the use of language, perform basic rule of communication, select verbal and non verbal means of expression. Discourse competence is the ability to combine language structure into different type of cohesive texts. And strategic competence includes the knowledge of communication strategies to overcome communication breakdown, the way how to speak fluently, use different language functions for specific goal. This research used CC proposed by Canale & Swain.

3. Research Method

a. Respondent

The research was done in a vocational college in Denpasar Bali. There were two group of students involved in the research, one was control and one was experiment group. Each group consisted of 26 students who were from the same class. They were in 4th semester. The determination of respondent was done as they have the same characteristic, such as: (1) they are from the same class; (2) they have been having the same pedagogical intervention; (3) they have the same semester, almost the same age, and the same level of English competence.

b. Test

There were two tests given to both groups of respondent, both of which were the same one another. Test 1 (T1) was given prior to learning implementation and test 2 (T2) was given upon the learning implementation. The test was designed in accordance with the learning materials. The material used for the test and learning was "the simple past tense with did and verb (V)". The test was made in form of translation test to see how competent participants were to make sentences using past tense. The tests (T1 and T2) consist of 15 Indonesian sentences which should be translated into well constructed English sentences. The Indonesian language used in the test was in purpose to attract the students to expose their English competence.

c. Test and Treatment Implementation

T1 was given one day prior to the treatment. The test took place for 1 hour. Both groups were given T1 in at the same time but in different place. The test was done by students individually in a very conducive situation. Upon the test execution, students' work were collected and grouped in accordance with their group to ease to check and explicate them.

The treatment was undertaken for two days. The learning topic which focused on "simple past tense with did and verb" was designed in such away to meet the needs of learning, using task-based approach and conventional approach. During the treatment, both groups were given handouts to use as learning materials. Experiment group was given materials with task-based approach. Basically, any activity done was pursuant to the approach. On the other hand, the control group was given materials in form of handouts with conventional approach. The conventional approach is the one which has been used in every session of learning. Each session lasted for 90 minutes. On the first day, the experiment group was given introduction to past tense and input about vocabulary, expression, and terms. The session was also filled with speaking activities, such as question-answer, filling in the form or interview activity. On the second day, the session was filled with other tasks, like doing role-play, filling in grammar game, and other related activity.

Test 2 was given one day after the second session was undertaken. One day free for pedagogical intervention was intended to give students free time for calming down after learning. It was also in purpose to avoid students' possibility of remembering the topics as they are given the test on the same day with the treatment.

d. Analysis

Result of students work was checked, scored, calculated and reported in form of quantitative data. The data was inserted into table. The table consisted of two sores for each group, score of T1 and score of T2. The scores were analyzed using descriptive statistic to see their comparison. The analysis was undertaken to see students minimum, and maximum scores in T1, students minimum and maximum score in T2, as well as percentage of increase.

4. Data and Discussion

Up on analysis using descriptive statistic, it was found the results as follows. Minimum and maximum scores of experiment group in T1 was 1,3 and 6,3 respectively. Minimum and maximum scores of control group in T1 was 1,3 and 6,0 respectively. Minimum and maximum score of experiment group in T2 were 6,0 and 8,3. While the minimum and maximum score of control group in T2 were 3,0 and 8,0. The means of increase of students' score was 1%. The result T1 of the both groups indicates that students' basic ability in English was generally similar, even though students of experiment group weighed out a bit the control group. It is proved by the fact that students' maximum score of was 0,3 higher than students of control group.

The teaching of English using task-based approach was considered effective to improve student communicative competence. It can be seen from the fact that experiment group's achievement higher that the control group. In T2, the experiment group achieved 6,0 (minimum score) and 8,6 (maximum score) and the control group achieved 3,0 (minimum score) and 8,0 (maximum score). The minimum score of the experiment group was 3,0 higher than the control group. The maximum score of experiment group was 0,6 higher the control group. Most students in experiment group achieved scores between 80 until 83. However, most students in control group achieved score between 60 until 63. Even though the means increase between both groups was 1%, it indicated that the 2-session treatment was meaningful to improve their English competence. It is assumed that the slight increase of the means between both groups' scores was resulted by the very limited treatment using the TBLT approach (2 sessions). It would have certainly increased significantly if the treatment was given more frequently.

In addition, the treatment successfully enabled the students of the experiment group to produce varied sentences. It can be seen from the fact that they show better communicative competence (Canale & Swain 2). The improvement could be observed when they practice producing utterances when doing the task. They obviously could produce sentences with better forms and structures, better and more appropriate use of words and politeness, better combination of language structure into different type of cohesive text. In addition, they also could expose better strategies in speaking English, such as to use embedded expression, to use strategies in requesting, in giving opinion, in asking further question in order to be polite and overcome communication breakdown.

This condition proposed that there are other aspects that can be investigate through the implementation of TBLT apart from grammar aspect, such as students speaking ability, students' politeness, and discourse competence. Thus, the research shall be further undertaken to see those aspects.

5. Conclusion

The research result clearly indicated that task-based language teaching was effective to improve students' communicative competence. The experiment group students' achievement was shown slightly improved pursuant to the scores they have achieved as the treatment was undertaken insufficiently. They were given English learning for two days prior to the T2. However, they were able to show improvement proved by their increase in score obtained on T2 and an increase in means percentage. In addition, the research participants of experiment group were able to perform a lot better competence during the learning sessions. Apart from linguistic competence, they were able to perform better sociolinguistic, semantic, and strategic competence. The facts pointed out that the research worth continuing to investigate further possibility. The three aspects of communicative competence should be further investigated to see whether (or not) the approach is proved to be effective.

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