Task-Based Learning Enhancing 21st-Century Learning Outcomes

L'apprentissage basé sur la pratique pour développer les compétences de l'apprenant au 21ème siècle

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Abstract

The present work aims at presenting a practical and effective way of developing communicative skills within English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms by making EFL learners move from abstract learning to real context through Task-Based Learning (TBL). This approach uses tasks that include problem-solving situations and games that reflect real-life situations. It makes learners acquire the language in context and become less reliant on their teacher, who moves from the role of assistant and controller of the teaching/learning process to a guide and feedback provider. Though many teachers are more familiar with the traditional Present, Practice, Produce (PPP) approach, there is a new concept that should be introduced in EFL classrooms for broad exposure to the language and to minimise language difficulties.

Keywords: TBL, 21st-century skills, learner-centered, EFL classroom

Résumé

Ce travail vise à présenter une façon pratique et efficace de développer les compétences communicatives dans les salles de classe d'anglais comme étant langue étrangère (ALE) plutôt que se concentrer uniquement sur l'assimilation de connaissance théorique en encouragent les apprenants à s'engager activement dans des situations qui reflètent la vie réelle à travers l'apprentissage basé sur la pratique. Cette pédagogie utilise des compétences pratiques qui permet aux apprenants d'acquérir la langue dans son contexte et de développer leur compétence linguistique afin de devenir moins dépendants de leur enseignant, qui passe du rôle d'assistant et de contrôleur du processus d'enseignement/apprentissage à celui de guide et de fournisseur de rétroaction. Bien que de nombreux enseignants soient plus familiers avec l'approche traditionnelle Présentation, Pratique, Production (PPP), l'apprentissage basé sur les tâches permet aux apprenants de mettre en pratique leurs connaissances et leurs compétences de manière significative et une exposition plus large à la langue qui minimise les difficultés linguistiques.

Mots clés : Apprentissage par la pratique, Compétence du 21éme siècle, centré sur l'apprenant

Introduction

English Foreign Language teachers have always been searching for modern ways of teaching to include them in their lesson planning. This can make learners more engaged in the learning process, allowing them flexibility and developing their creativity and interest in learning the language. According to McCarthy, "Learner training in certain explicit areas can broaden the horizons of the learner and may empower him or her to become autonomous in some or all aspects of language learning." (McCarthy 1998, cited in Gok 2013: 6).

Involving the learners in the lesson through modern techniques and methods that are part of their world improves learning, and learners are more engaged during the lesson. In fact, when designing courses, the teacher should consider the learners' interests and needs. In the teaching/learning process, effective strategies are considered a key component in training learners to take more responsibility for their learning to become less dependent on the teacher.

EFL learners should be exposed to the language and develop their communicative skills involving the four language skills. Task-Based Learning, which is part of Communicative Language Teaching based on language competence, can do this. In the early 1970s, Breen and Candlin emphasized on the importance of including real-life situations through tasks in language teaching. Prabhu's work in the 1980s was based on the work of Breen and Candlin and focused on developing a task-based language teaching approach emphasizing that language learning should be task-drive, tasks should be authentic and meaningful, learners should be actively involved in the learning process, and that feedback is provided to help learners improve their performance. TBL is seen as an opportunity for language learners to focus on the meaning and the use of their language resources and the use of the target language correctly; they are also free of language control with various exposure to language that strengthens their ability to interact easily with each other and develop their competencies and skills.

Task-Based Learning and 21st-Century Skills

Education is changing in the new millennium; it aims at preparing learners to deal with rapid changes in employment and learning style. Undoubtedly, 21st-century learning requires mastering content when learners produce, synthesise and evaluate any given information. Arguably, new skills are considered to ensure that our learners integrate into the global community. These skills, called 4C's, include communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

Critical Thinking: It is a crucial skill. It requires asking questions, analysing, evaluating, and judging based on the information provided. Critical thinking involves acquiring and evaluating information to reach a well-justified conclusion or answer**.** It takes learners beyond memorising and simple comprehension of information. "A critical thinker uses logic and evidence to prioritise and classify information, find relationships, make judgments, and solve problems." (Oxford University Press ELT 2013: 3). It allows the development of autonomy and the promotion of lifelong learning.

Communication: Learners have to be given chances to practice the communication skill in the classroom through role play, group work and available teaching technologies, and also when the class is over, the teacher has to teach the students how to handle and use all outside sources such as the internet and social media to continue communicating.

Creativity is the ability to build new things or think about original ideas. It is not a selected talent held only by a few learners it is an ability that everyone has. The teacher's

role is to encourage learners to be creative throughout each lesson by giving challenging activities. It powerfully engages them both emotionally and intellectually**.**

Collaboration: Learns learn how to work in pairs and collaborative teams that employ and develop all the group members' listening and speaking skills. Through this collaboration, they are taught how to achieve goals together effectively.

(Lansari 2016: 44)

Task-Based Learning Framework

Task-Based Learning was initially used by ESL and EFL teachers; this approach aims to make more learner-centred classrooms. Willis 1996 describes TBL as a global-oriented act that leads to an outcome or a result. It is also defined as a completed work plan which can be assessed (Ellis, 2003). The 4C's can be developed inside the classrooms through Task-Based Learning Approach. This approach is divided into three main parts, as shown in the table below:

Table: A component of TBL Framework Jane Willis (1996: 5)

Pre task phase

Introduction to the topic and task
The teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights valuable words and phrases, and helps learners understand task instructions and prepare. Learners may hear a recording of others doing a similar task or read part of the text a led to the task.

Task cycle

Task	**Planning**	**Report**
Students do the task in pairs or small groups. The teacher monitors from a distance, encouraging all attempts at communication, not correcting. Students feel free to experiment since this situation has a "private" feel. Mistakes do not matter.	Students prepare to report to the whole class (orally or in writing) how they did the task, and what they decided or discovered. Since the report stage is public, students will naturally want to be accurate, so the teacher stands by to give language advice.	Some groups present their reports to the class, exchange written reports, and compare results. The teacher acts as a chairperson and then comments on the content of the reports.

Language focus

Analysis	**Practice**
Students examine and then discuss specific features of the text or transcript of the recording. They can enter new words, phrases and patterns in vocabulary books.	The teacher conducts practice of new words, phrases, and patterns occurring in the data, either during or after the Analysis.

1- The first part is the pre-task, which engages learners, giving them a clear idea about what they will be expected to do and preparing them for the upcoming tasks. A pre-task activity is presented through brainstorming or a lead-in that introduces the desired

topic and uses the learner's prerequisite knowledge; this can be through pictures, a video or audio. The teacher can also present needed vocabulary if necessary.

2- The task cycle comprises three steps:

a- Task: Learners are given an activity where the target language is used to achieve an outcome in pairs or groups. Mistakes need to be corrected, and the teacher should encourage communication.

b- Planning: Learners must prepare an oral or written report about what happened during the task. At this stage, the teacher's role is to observe, monitor, facilitate and advise the learners if needed.

c- Report: Each group shares the report orally or by exchanging their written report. The teacher can provide them with some feedback related to the content.

3- Language Focus:

a- Analysis-specific features are discussed

b- The teacher provides the learners with practice.

The lesson should be planned for effective communication, and learners should be allowed to move around for cooperative learning; the activities should also be related to real-life situations where inductive learning is encouraged.

Task-Based Learning Activities

The lesson chosen to apply the TBL is a grammar lesson related to the Astronomy and the Solar System theme designed for Third-Year Secondary school learners. It can be used as a modal where TBL is tested.

Before using the three stages of TBL, the teacher ensures that the learners are equipped with the necessary vocabulary for the lesson. It can be through pictures and questions to recall learners' background knowledge to pave the way to the lesson about predictions about astronomy and the solar system. The lesson is based on the following

- Four skills: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.
- Competencies include interpretation, interaction, production, and
- Comprehension skills through picture interpretation and answering questions.
- Analysis skills through conclusions made from tasks to complete the rule.
- Writing skills through composing sentences using conditional type2.

Pre-task phase:

Scavenger hunt prediction cards:

Materials: (See appendix)

Solar system prediction flashcards and result flashcards

Preparation: The teacher prints prediction flashcards with if-clauses and their matching results-clause on other flashcards.

Activity

During this activity, learners are asked to work in groups of four; each group receives 2 or 3 prediction flashcards where the desired language points are included, that is conditional type 2. The learners must search for the result clause flashcards hidden by the teacher around the classroom. The learners should be given enough time to read them and understand the instruction of the activity before they start hunting for the result clause cards (**each group gives the answer related to the flashcards they have)**

A- Prediction flashcards: What would happen if….?

Card 1: If the Sun disappeared, ……..

Card 2: If Mars had an atmosphere, ……

Card 3: If astronauts were not sent to Space, ……..

Card 4: What would the result be if the Moon did not brighten at night?

Card 5: If Uranus were closer to the Sun, …..

Card 6: If the Earth lost its gravity, ……

B- Result flashcards:

Card 1: Earth would be in complete darkness.

Card 2: people would live on it**.**

Card 3: researchers would not invent the ear thermometer to examine the body temperature in 2 seconds**.**

Card 4: nocturnal animals (who live at night) would not hunt.

Card 5: it would be a warmer planet.

Card 6: everything on the Earth would float.

When each group obtains the adequate "result flashcard" related to the "if clause flash card", the teacher encourages student/ student interaction and communication through pictures interpretation and sentences analysis. At this stage, 3 of the 4 skills mentioned above, communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity, are in use. Communication is based on learners' discussion about the findings and how they interpret the sentences, and then they collaborate by trying to understand the rule. As far as critical thinking is concerned, it starts during the first step of the lesson when they remember and recall their background knowledge and understand the language point at hand.

Task cycle

In the task cycle, learners will examine the rule more deeply with the teacher's supervision. Learners should be able to apply another critical thinking stage, the rule they obtained from the activity in the pre-task stage to achieve the upcoming activity. Mistakes are allowed, and the teacher intervenes only when needed. Learners can move around and collaborate with the other groups if necessary. Learners of each group write the report, share their conclusion about the sentences they obtained, and draw the rule of conditional type2.

Activity: Cross the wrong form of the verb (s) in each sentence

1- If the Sun disappeared/ would disappear right now, there would be/was an eternal night
2- Life on Earth **would disappear/disappear** if the Moon crashed into the Earth.
3- If life **were possible/would be possible** on Mars, tourists would make trips.
4- If the Moon went closer to the Earth, tsunamis **devastated/would devastate** coastal areas.
5- The Earth would explode and break into pieces if gravity **became/would become** zero.

Language focus

The last step of TBL concerns the analysis and practice of the rule to check learners' understanding of the rule of conditional type 2. Analysing is another component of critical thinking skill which is in use during this sage.

Activity

group work: Match each beginning of card "1" with the proper ending of card "2"

the card should be kept face down; pick up card 1, try to guess a suitable ending, and then pick up card 2. If they match, they keep the pair; if not, they replace the card face down, and the next learner continues till the end of the cards. The alternative is that one of the group members is given the result by the teacher, and the others are given the if clause; then, they have to guess through mimicry. The teacher can score the activity to make the activity more challenging.

1- If Venus had an atmosphere, many people would live there.
2- If a comet collided with the Earth, it would cause a deep crater
3- If you were out in Space**,** you would see the Earth as a tiny ball
4- If NASA did not spend huge amounts of money on space research, there would be less poverty
5- If I were rich, I would explore Space with astronauts

More practice is necessary to have learners more familiar with the rule. At this stage, they evaluate their mastery of the lesson and should be able to check their accurate understanding of the rule.

Activity: Choose the correct answer

1- If I were you, I ……. astronomy.
   a- Would study b- studied. c- will study
2- If I ……. wings, I would fly.
   a- would have b- have c- had
3- Weather prediction ……. if scientists did not explore Space.
   a- would not exist b- will not exist c- existed
   If you ……. into a black hole, you would find yourself in another dimension.
   a- fall b- would fall c- fell
4- Things would work differently if the Earth……. flat
   a- would be b- were c- is

Activity: Give the correct form of the verbs in brackets

1- If the Earth (stop)……. orbiting the Sun, the northern hemisphere (keep)……getting hotter.
2- If Earth (cease) ……. rotating about its axis but (continue) ……. revolving around the Sun, the length of a year (remain) ……. the same, but a day (last) …….as long as a year
3- What (happen)…….. to us if a giant asteroid (smash) ……. into the Earth?
If the sun (stop) ……shining, we (never) ……. see the moon again

The last step of the lesson concerns the learners' creativity through a piece of writing, mainly three sentences, using the rule appropriately. Creativity is considered as the highest level in Bloom's taxonomy.

Activity: Now make your own predictions about the following topic:

The budget devoted to space exploration can be used to solve many problems on Earth. Imagine which problems you would solve if you had these sums of money.

The teacher can help the learners to make a list of problems and then asks them to produce sentences using conditional type 2. The sentences obtained are going to be used in a written expression in which learners should express their own opinions about the vast sums

of money that are devoted to space exploration rather than solving the problems on Earth

Conclusion:

Task-Based Learning is an effective way to engage learning and maximise language use; it can also be a way that enhances 21st-century learning outcomes, an approach where the students can communicate and interact when completing the task. It is more learner-centred that involves the four language skills through authentic use of language. Effective teaching starts when the teacher provides challenging lessons that contribute to building 21st-century skills inside the classroom through competition and collaboration to shape global citizens. Education in the new millennium requires skilful teachers who are no longer in control of the learning process. Through TBL, the teacher can promote more autonomous learning, leading to less dependence on the teachers. The choice of topics and activities should engage the learners and motivate them to develop their language efficiently. Tasks aim to enable the learners' interaction and thus help language learners improve their communication skills.

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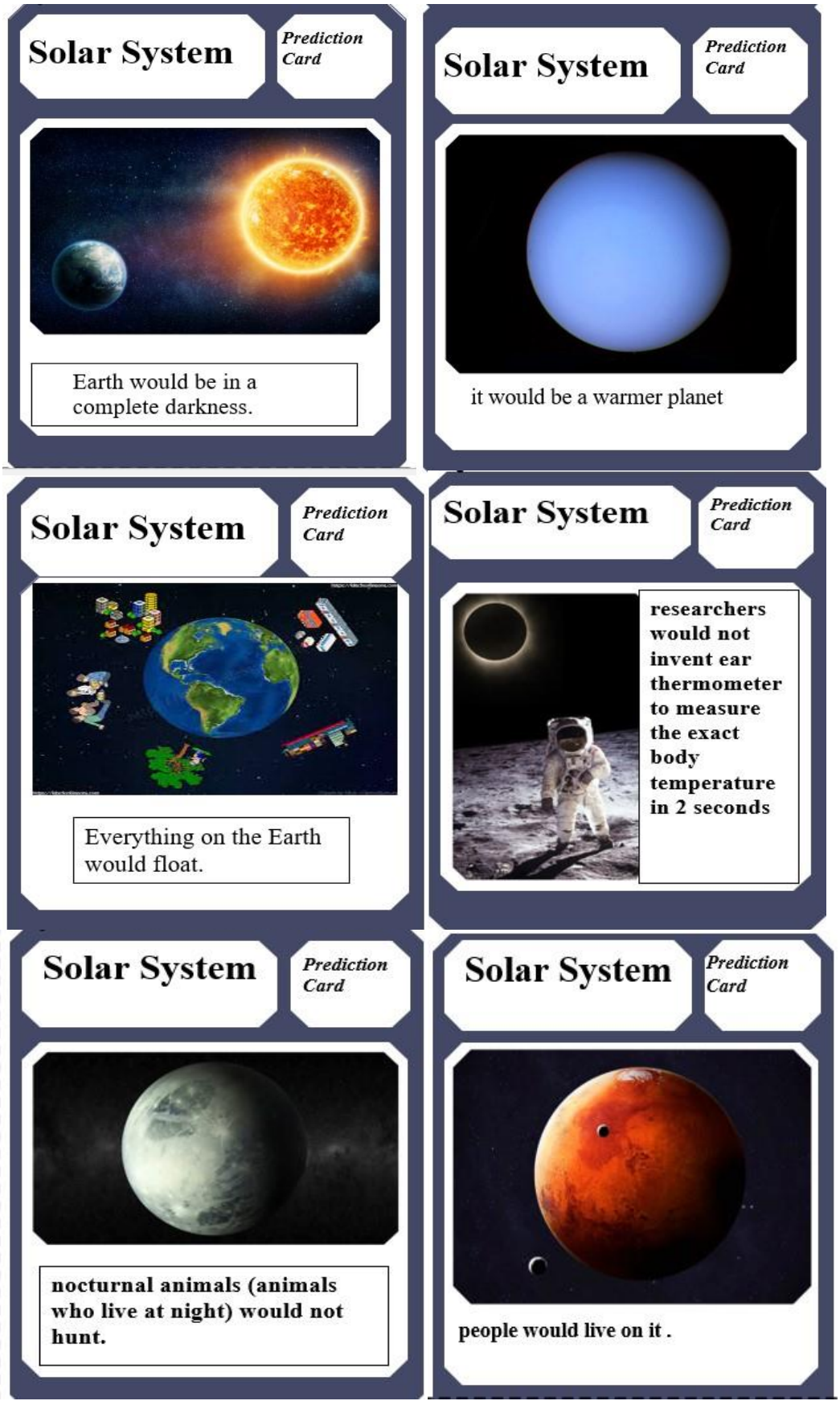
Appendix A. Prediction flashcards

Adapted from www.superteacherworksheets.com



Appendix B. Result flashcards

Adapted from www.superteacherworksheets.com