DẠY NGÔN NGỮ DỰA TRÊN TÁC VỤ
NHẰM NÂNG CAO NĂNG LỰC GIAO TIẾP CỦA SINH VIÊN

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Việc giảng dạy tiếng Anh cho sinh viên chú trọng vào khả năng giao tiếp thay vì chỉ học ngữ pháp và từ vựng thông thường đã và đang là xu hướng phổ biến ở nhiều trường đại học. Trong các phương pháp giảng dạy ngoại ngữ tập trung vào khả năng giao tiếp, phương pháp dạy dựa trên nhiệm vụ thực tế (hay tác vụ được giao) đã chứng tỏ được nhiều ưu điểm vượt trội. Bài viết này trình bày về thực tế áp dụng Phương pháp dạy ngoại ngữ dựa trên tác vụ trong giảng dạy kĩ năng Nghe-Nói cho sinh viên tại Trung tâm Giáo dục Quốc tế, Trường Đại học Hà Nội nhằm nâng cao khả năng giao tiếp bằng tiếng Anh của các học viên. Thời gian nghiên cứu diễn ra trong 5 tuần, hai công cụ khảo sát được tiến hành bao gồm các bài kiểm tra kĩ năng giao tiếp qua hình thức đóng kịch, và phỏng vấn. Nghiên cứu cho thấy bằng phương pháp này, sinh viên đã củng cố được khả năng sử dụng tiếng Anh trong giao tiếp của mình, đồng thời dữ liệu thu thập được cũng ghi nhận thái độ tích cực của sinh viên khi phương pháp này được áp dụng trong các giờ học kĩ năng Nghe-Nói.

Từ khoá: *Phương pháp dạy ngoại ngữ dựa trên tác vụ được giao, khả năng giao tiếp.*

There has been a popular trend to focus on communication skill rather on grammar translation when teaching English at tertiary settings. Among different approaches to obtain this focus, Task-based Language Teaching appears to be prominent in helping learners improve their communicative competence. This paper presents a research on the use of TBLT in teaching Listening and Speaking skills for students at International Education Center, Hanoi University in order to enhance their communicative competence. The treatment with TBLT lasted for 5 weeks; two instruments to collect data were employed namely Pre-Role-play Test and Post-Role-play Test, and Individual Interview. The study reveals that after the experimental time, the students' communicative competence improved considerably and their attitudes toward TBLT were rather positive.

Key words: *Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), Communicative competence.*

TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

I. Introduction

Along with the world development, English has become one of the most important and popular language used in different fields. Especially, among different foreign languages, English is the most popular specified in the programs of universities, colleges or vocational schools (Nguyen Thi Ngan 2012). However, with the traditional methods of teaching English, the learners' needs seem not to be

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fulfilled since their knowledge of this language is just limited into the classroom environment. Therefore, it is necessary to implement a pedagogical method that can enhance learners' ability to transfer what they gain in the classroom into the specific situations in real life. In other words, there is an urgent requirement that learners of English can master the competence of using English so as to communicate with other people in different settings. In fact, the communication skill is worth paying attention since it is the way for learners to follow the social and cultural rules (Kayi 2006). Among various useful approaches to obtain such goal, Task- based Language Teaching (TBLT) has shown its benefits in improving learners' communicative competence, focusing on the meaning rather than forms. In fact, this approach has been used for a long time and improves its strengths in many countries. This study is conducted to seek the question of whether or not Task-based approach can help promote the communicative competence of Vietnamese learners at tertiary level.

II. Literature Review

2.1. Task-based Learning

2.1.1. Definition of Task

Task-based language learning has its origins in communicative language teaching, and is a subcategory of it. Different scholars own different definitions and perspectives on TBLT and "task". On the first place, Prabhu (1987) is considered as one of the first and most significant people to raise the concept of TBLT into EFL (English as Foreign Language). He defined a task as an activity to require learners to reach "an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process" (p.24). This is in line with Willis (1996)'s opinion, i.e. a task is an activity in which the target language is applied for communicative purpose to achieve the final learning outcome. Meanwhile, Nunan (1989) conceptualized a task as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language".

2.1.2. Types of Task

The researcher in this study decided to apply a comprehensive list of activities raised by Willis (1996) when creating tasks for learners.

- Listing, brainstorming

- Ordering and sorting

- Comparing and matching

- Creating project work

- Problem solving, analyzing, and decision making

- Sharing personal experiences, expressing opinions

2.1.3. Phases of Task

According to Willis (1996)'s TBL Framework, there are three stages of implementing Task-based learning lesson as follows:

- Pre-task: In this stage, teacher gets involved in introducing topic, providing instruction and having class brainstorm vocabulary related to the topic. According to Willis (1996), the main aim of Pre task is to recall and activate students' linguistic resource that can be occupied in the Task cycle.

- Task cycle: Students implement the task assigned by applying their existing linguistic resources. In this phase, teacher only plays a role of a facilitator providing assistance when needed. Once completing the task, students prepare a report on their own finding, then present that report to the rest of the class.

- Language focus: Students are directed to analyzing the language forms during the task. The author stated that this stage is the chance for students to "study the forms" that realize the meaning they are already familiar with (1996, p.102). Teacher makes use of this part to enable learners to notice and practice using language forms in different activities.

2.2. Theoretical Framework to Assess Communicative Competence

This study is designed to assess communicative competence in Vietnamese context under the multifaceted framework adopted from Poyatos (1976; 1982). According to these scholars, communicative competence of learners should be judged by looking at both verbal and nonverbal channels. This can be illustrated in the following figure:
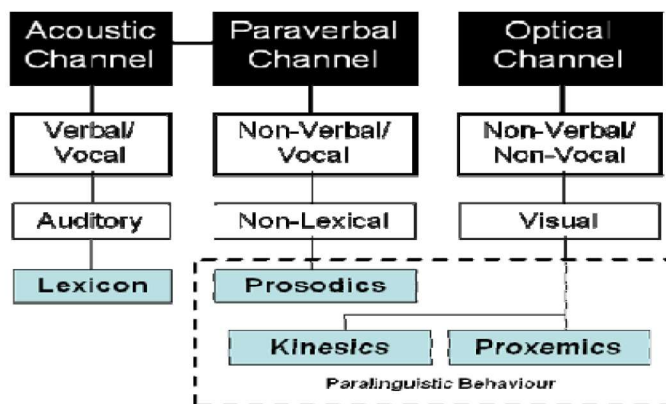
Figure 1: Integrated Multi-channel Framework for Conveying and Perceiving Information and Meaning in Spoken Interaction (Adapted from Poyatos, 1976)

As demonstrated in the figure 1, *Kinesics* refers to facial expression, gesture, posture, or eye contact (Hurley 1992). *Proxemics* refers to "social and

personal space and man's perception of it" (as cited in Pennycook 1985, p. 259). Both Kinesics and Proxemics are conveyed through body movement and perceived through Optional channel. *Prosodics* is referred to accent, stress, intonation, and rhythm (as cited in Gassin 1992, p.2). It is conveyed through vocal articulation and perceived through Para -verbal channel.

III. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The study aims to focus on two main research questions:

(1) What are influences of TBL on Vietnamese learners?
(2) What are Vietnamese learners' opinions toward TBL?

3.2. Research Design

The participation of 30 students of a lower-intermediate level English class in a public university in Northern Vietnam was called for. The participants' IELTS scores ranged from 5.5 to 6.5. The task they implemented focused mainly on Listening and Speaking skills. At the beginning of the study, the research purpose was informed thoroughly, and verbal consent was sent to every participant.

TBL approach was applied in the participants' lessons for 5 weeks. It is important to operationalize the construct of *communicative competence* through an instrument that can be measured. In fact, although there are so many acts

constituting such competence, the researcher decided to restrict them to just one of these, i.e. role-play performance. The reason for this choice is that role-play can require learners to use their background knowledge and communication strategies to interact with others in life-like situations. Besides, by judging students' role-play, the researcher can evaluate both their verbal and non-verbal communicative competence. Therefore, the study was designed as follows: In week 1 and week 5 of the study, the participants were given various situations to implement *role-play pretest* and *role-play posttest*. Their performance was captured by the use of video, then assessed by two independent raters based on the *Rating schedule for scoring communicative performance* adapted from Poyatos (1982) (see Appendix). This scale aimed to quantitatively evaluate their role-play performance with the overall score of 65points. Specifically, in the schedule, six main items related to both verbal and nonverbal channels were rated with 25 points for total *Fluency*, 5 points for *Range*, 15 points for Total *Accuracy*, 5 points for *Kinesics*, 10 points for *Prosodics,* and the last 5 points for *Proxemics*. After that, 10 participants were chosen randomly for an individual interview in which the researcher makes uses of recorder.

3.3. Designing Listening Lesson according to TBLT

The book called "Real Listening and Speaking 4" published by Cambridge was

chosen during the experimental Listening lessons. Following is the sample of how TBLT was applied to teach Unit 3 in that book. The lesson was about two patients, Anne and Brian, who described their symptoms to the doctor, and the doctor then diagnosed their diseases. The teacher decided to divide the lesson into three main stages: Pre -listening stage, While-listening stage, and Post- listening stage.

A. Pre -listening stage

This is the stage in which students' background knowledge is recalled before they attempt to listen to the text. Since the main theme of this exercise is about symptoms and ailments so for warming up, teacher showed different images of illnesses and treatment in the Projector, then asked the students to work in pairs, matching the illnesses with the corresponding solutions. The students also had to discuss with their partners to find any possible answers for the question of *"why do we need to go to the doctor?"*(This is for review symptom-related vocabulary: *checkup, depression, cough, stomach ache, rash…*). The aim of these activities was to provide the learners with opportunities to make uses of their own schematic knowledge as well as to be engaged in active interaction and problem solving.

B. While listening stage

As for listening activities, there were various forms used in the lesson to train students' listening skill. Specifically, in this experimental lesson, the teacher asked the students to put their pens down and simply listen to the recording for the first time, then they had to call out any symptoms they could remember. After teacher collected their answered and wrote them all in the board, the learners were asked to guess what could be the matter with each person and the advice the doctor would probably give them. In the second time of listening, the students could take notes on the conversations, and checked their notes with their friends. After that, teacher went through the answers with the whole class, and played the CD the third time for double-checking. When all questions in the exercise were responded, what the students needed to do was summarizing the whole situation happening in the recording, and then reported it to the class.

The reason why these activities were designed was to motivate students to listen for particular purposes. This also helped vocabulary and structured learnt from the lesson content imbedded deeply into their mind.

C. Post listening stage

This stage principally includes various tasks designed for learners to practice communicative output. In other words, students have chances to apply what they gain and know from the lesson content into the real life situations.

Therefore, the students were grouped in pairs then implemented communicative activity namely role-plays. In this activity, one acted as a doctor giving diagnosis and advice, one acted as a patient having problem with his/her health. Together they had to share and exchange information as well as promoted their imagination. By doing that, their ability of using the target language was encouraged while their non-verbal communicative channel was also improved.

IV. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The influence of TBLT on learners' communicative competence

What received from the results of the Rating schedule reflects the positive influence of TBLT on the participants' communicative competence. After 5 weeks of implementing this approach, their interaction ability gained a considerable improvement. The differences between *before* and *after* the treatment with TBLT were presented in the figure 2 and figure 3 as follows:

Figure2. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	43.67	30	6.354	1.160
	Pretest	40.50	30	7.243	1.322

Figure 3. Statistics of Pretest and Posttest

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Posttest - Pretest	3.167	1.913	.349	2.452	3.881	9.065	29	.000

The gap between Pretest (M=40.50, SD=7.243) to Posttest (M= 43.67, SD= 6.354) was considerable with the sig.(2-tailed)=.000<.001. This suggests that there was a relative difference between the performance of the participants before and after TBLT was applied. To be more detailed, in terms of verbal channel or Linguistics ability, the students' Fluency mean score increased from 13.34/25 to 16.60/25 points, meanwhile the percentage of those who got 10-12/15 points for Accuracy grew by 19%, and those got 3/5 for Range was up by 10.8% (Figure 4)

	FLU (Mean Score)	ACC (% participants)	RANG (% participants)
Pretest	13.34 points	40.0%	42.5%
Posttest	16.60 points	59.0%	53.3%

Figure 4. Differences in Verbal Channel between Pretest and Posttest

As regards Non-verbal channel or Paralinguistic ability, Proxemics means score of the participants before and after the exposure to TBLT showed no change (more than 95% got 4/5 points for each period). Nonetheless, what worth noting is the proportion of the sample earning 6/10 points for Prosodics item climbed from 39.8% to 46.7%, and 4/5 points for Kinesics item increased from 43.3% to 46.7%. This can be summed up in the following table:

Item	PROX	PROS	KIN
Pretest	95.7%	39.8%	43.3%
Posttest	96.7%	46.7%	46.7%

Figure 5. Differences in Nonverbal Channel between Pretest and Posttest

The critical explanation for such improvement is that TBLT did provide learners with many chances to practice interacting with friends and teacher, enabling them to make best uses of their own existing knowledge while encouraging them to gain new knowledge from others. When communicating with people in the class frequently, the students became more confident and relaxed to express themselves. That is the reason why the participants obtained the significant progress in both linguistic and paralinguistic channels.

4.2. The learners' attitude towards TBLT

Besides the quantitative rating schedule for scoring communicative competence, qualitative individual interviews were also employed to investigate students' attitudes towards TBLT. Two main questions asked in these interviews were: (1) What do you think about TBLT application in the lessons? (2) What progress in communicative competence do you gain from learning with TBLT?

For the first interview question, most participants voiced their positive views on TBLT method as expressed in following quotes:

I am quite happy with the method (TBLT). I love the atmosphere in the class, and I can do the task my own way".

The lessons are interesting thanks to various active tasks. I feel closer to my classmates. We can help each other finish the task given.

I used to feel bored and sleepy in my listening lesson because the teacher only let us listen to the CD and then answer the questions. Now it is different as my friends and I can do other activities such as guessing word meaning, role-play, and presentation after listening to the audio texts.

The tasks are very useful and funny. I really wish that teacher will continue to use this approach to teach us in the future.

The worth-noting point from this is that students feel satisfied with the application of TBLT. They get more excited with the lesson as different skills related to communication (Listening, Speaking, Vocabulary) were integrated, creating relaxing and motivating learning atmosphere for learners to promote their best potentials. Unlike the traditional contrasting method PPP (Present-Practice-Produce) that is often used in Vietnamese educational settings, TBLT enables learners to be free of language control, implementing the task with their own understanding and existing knowledge.

As regards the second interview question of *"What progress in communicative competence do you gain from learning with TBLT approach?"*, once again the responses recorded were really positive. This can be well illustrated by the quotes as follows:

I feel more confident in presenting my opinions than I used to be in last semester. Though sometimes I do not know what to say to lengthen the conversation in role-play activity, at least I can say something relevant to the context

I used to feel so shy when standing in front of the class to present something, or talk to the classmates that don't sit next to me. But now after 5weeks, teacher makes us do different tasks that require communication skill so I get used to doing

this, and just get a little bit nervous (laugh)

Well… TBLT really helps me get confidence in interacting with teacher and my friends. I can also use what I learn in class to interact with people in real life when I do my part time job in a restaurant in the Old Quarter (Hanoi, Vietnam).

This can be inferred from the finding that by applying TBLT, students became more exposed to language in natural context. This helps them gain more confidence in interacting with others in English. Obviously, in the TBLT lessons, students spend much time on communicating with peers rather than simply doing drill exercise or answering questions. That is the reason why their communication improvements are somehow realized by themselves.

V. Implication and Conclusion

Lucidly taken, what can be inferred from the study is that TBLT helps improve the communicative competence among students. Especially in Vietnamese context, when students are familiar with the traditional teaching method, i.e. *present- practice-produce* which somehow makes them feel bored of doing exercise in the book and passive in receiving knowledge due to little interaction in the classroom, TBLT with the interdependence of three stages namely Pre-task, Task Cycle, and Language Focus comparatively helps contracts such drawbacks. This approach requires students to apply both verbal and

nonverbal factors simultaneously to interact with peers and teacher, hence, their communicative competence becomes better in terms of both linguistic and paralinguistic channels. The implication underlying here is that teacher should prepare lesson plan carefully with different activities in a class so that the students' potential competence can be promoted best.

What is more, the attitude of students towards the treatment of TBLT is significant since this is the key factor to decide the success of lessons. That TBLT creates a relaxing and motivating environment for learners can encourage them to participate enthusiastically in different activities, thus, their learning outcomes might be relatively positive. It can be implied from this is that students should not be ignored in the process of using TBLT or any pedagogical methods. Rather, their voices need to be heard so that teacher can base on that to create suitable appropriate classroom activities for their long term learning path and future success.

However, this study still suffered limitation. The problem was related to quality control. As stated by Denzin (1978), in order to guarantee the quality of a research, one needs to consider method triangulation that is using at least three methods to collect data to strengthen the reliability of the findings. In this current study, only two were employed, so the existence of another research method would be excellent to enhance the confidence of the conclusion. Thereby, it is hopeful that the limitation will be minimized when further studies are conducted in the coming time.

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Appendix 1.

RATING SCHEDULE FOR SCORING "COMMUNICATIVE PERFORMANCE"
Topic code:…………….. ……………… Assessor:……………………………..
Student's name:……………………………. Date:…………………………
Role-play
ACC= Accuracy, FLU= Fluency, RANG= Range KIN= Kinesics, PROS= Prosodic,
PROX=Proxemics
1= Never, 2= Infrequently, 3= Frequently
4= Mostly, 5= Always

a, Responds with little hesitation (FLU)	1	2	3	4	5
b, Speaks in complete sentences (FLU)	1	2	3	4	5
c, Sentences are well structured (FLU)	1	2	3	4	5
d, Speak without reliance on written text(FLU)	1	2	3	4	5
e, Speech is clear and comprehensible (FLU)	1	2	3	4	5
f, Speaks only in English (ACC)	1	2	3	4	5
g, Pronounce words competently (ACC)	1	2	3	4	5
h, Speaks with little influence of Vietnamese (ACC)	1	2	3	4	5
i. Speech is expressive and appropriately intonated (PROS)	1	2	3	4	5
j, Flow of speech is rhythmic and continuous(PROS)	1	2	3	4	5
k, Displays confidence in the interactive process (PROS)	1	2	3	4	5
l, Displays effective use of body language and facial expression (KIN)	1	2	3	4	5
m, Is aware of per, and interpersonal space (PROX)	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score out of 65: _____

Appendix 2.

ONE ROLEPLAY TEST SAMPLE

Student A role	Student B role
You are a manager at a famous restaurant in Hanoi. A customer wants to speak to you. Go to her/his table to see if there is anything wrong and try to fix the problem if necessary	You are having dinner at a popular restaurant in Hanoi but you do not feel happy with it. Think of problems that you can complain about then talk to the manager about those problems and try to get a refund

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(Toà soạn nhận bài viết ngày 12/10/2016, duyệt đăng ngày 21/12/2016)