



## THE IMPACT OF TASK-BASED METHOD ON TEACHING PHRASAL VERBS COLLOCATION AMONG IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS

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### **Abstract:**

This study is going to investigate the effect of task-based method on teaching phrasal verbs collocation among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To this end, 45 female EFL learners with the age range of 19 to 30 were selected from among 95 participants through Quick Placement Test. Its purpose was to homogenize the participants based on their proficiency level. Then they were randomly assigned into two experimental groups and one control group. The participants of the experimental groups were divided into two classes including 15 participants. Next, both experimental groups received task-based method for 15 sessions. During the treatment sessions some phrasal verbs pre-taught to the learners by the use of information-gap and opinion-gap tasks. Meanwhile, the control group received 15-session placebo that was the use of explicit instruction like Grammar Translation Method, and it was based on the structural syllabus. The related findings revealed that the experimental group who received the information-gap task performed better at learning phrasal verbs collocation. The findings showed that the role of information-gap of TBLT method leads the learners to more proficiency in learning phrasal verbs collocation, and it is more effective, because the learners have background knowledge. Consequently, the information-gap group had a better result in acquiring the phrasal verbs collocation.

**Keywords:** collocation, phrasal verb, task, task-based language teaching

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## 1. Introduction

Task-based method is enjoyable and motivates students. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be an efficient method in teaching phrasal verbs collocation to improve students' phrasal verbs collocational mastery. TBLT is a method that helps students to be more active in group or pair work activity. The activity that reflects the real life, such as solving a problem, playing a game, gap activity, making a decision, sharing information or experiences, can be considered as authentic tasks. The main emphasis of classroom activity is the task, and language is a means of communication that the students use it.

There has been a rising interest in TBLT approach (Ellis, 2009). By using a task-based method the students will be more interested in English learning and can more easily improve their phrasal verbs collocations mastery. Nunan (2004) believed that *"the point of departure for task-based language teaching is real-world or target tasks"* (p. 19). The notion of task has become an important factor in teaching and learning process.

According to Van den Branden (2006) TBLT is an approach to language education that students are given functional tasks that invite them to focus on meaning exchange and to use language for real-world, non-linguistic purposes. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 223) believed that *"TBLT refers to an approach/method based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching as a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)"*.

Phrasal verb collocations are couples or pairs of words that are usually used together. These combinations of words are obviously and frequently used by native speakers. Second or foreign language learners must make a special effort to learn and use them, because they are often difficult to learn. Consequently, learning phrasal verbs collocation is a necessary part of learning vocabulary of a language, because using phrasal verbs collocation is the most natural way of saying something. Woolard (2001, pp. 28-46) believed that collocation is *"the co-occurrence of words which are statistically much more likely to appear together than random chance suggests"*.

According to Koprowski (2005), a phrasal verb is a phrase that contains of a verb in combination with a preposition or an adverb or both, the meaning of which is different from the meaning of its separate parts, such as "look after", "call off", "look for", and "put up with" are all phrasal verbs. According to Oxford Collocations Dictionary (2009), collocation is the way that words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing.

Tajalli (2007) defines collocations from another view; he defines that collocations are fixed, no idiomatic expressions that their meaning reflects the meaning of their components. Therefore, it is different from idioms that meanings are not the combination of the individual words in them.

## 2. Literature Review

In recent years, great attempt has been dedicated to TBLT approach (Prabhu, 1987). Task-based approach in second language teaching was first carried out by Prabhu, who published the Bangalore research report in 1982 and advanced the notion of task-based approach (Wei, 2004). According to Richards (2006) trends toward language teaching can be organized into three phases in the last 50 years. They are “*Phase 1: traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s); Phase 2: classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s); Phase 3: current communicative language teaching (late 1990s to the present)*” (p. 6).

According to American Heritage Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (2005), a phrasal verb is a combination of a regular verb and a preposition or an adverbial particle that has at least one particular meaning that is not predictable from the combined literal meanings of the verb and the preposition or particle.

According to White (2012), the subject of unpredictability is clearly a difficult one for students of English. The meaning of phrasal verbs is not the simple addition of each component that is usually unpredictable. On the other hand, phrasal verbs are ambiguous. They may have a variety of meanings; lots of phrasal verbs may have the same or similar meaning. On the other hand, when we use it, its subject and object are often subject to the conditions of collocation. These characteristics of phrasal verbs increase the difficulties of foreign language learners.

According to Schmitt and Siyanova (2007), the use of phrasal verbs is crucial to fluent English and to sounding native-like. Because phrasal verbs are commonly used in spoken informal discourse, failure to use phrasal verbs in such situations is likely to make language sound unnatural and non-idiomatic.

Richards and Rodgers (2014) asserted that TBLT is an approach which aims to replace a traditional language-focused syllabus with one organized around communicative tasks as units of teaching and learning. In TBLT approach, language learning is a process that provides opportunities for learners to participate in communication, where making meaning is primary. Tasks are used as a means for engaging learning in meaning-making environment and thereby for creating the conditions for language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). TBLT is an instructional approach that the goals are to develop learners’ communicative competence, and it focuses on the use of tasks as the main unit of instruction. TBLT approach does not ignore the focus on form. In this approach, language is beyond a system of rules.

TBLT is an educational framework for the theory and practice of teaching second or foreign languages. TBLT developed within the CLT framework, and TBLT suggestions that the teachers support students with meaningful classroom tasks and help them complete those tasks through the modeling, experiencing, communicating, participating, cooperating, and practicing. The aim of task is to make a real purpose for language use and provides a natural context for language study. TBLT is a pedagogy, and that is based on the belief that “*the most effective way to teach a language is by engaging*

*learners in real language use*” through teacher-designed tasks that “*require learners to use the language for themselves*” (Willis & Willis, 2012, p. 1).

Nassaji and Tian (2010) performed a study in Canada with 26 students engaging in collaborative pair work with 16 English phrasal verbs. The students’ background knowledge of phrasal verbs was measured in a pretest. Then the students completed reconstruction cloze tasks and reconstruction edit tasks; one individually and one collaboratively in each. Students were to look for phrasal verbs and determine if the usage was correct, and then edit them appropriately. After a posttest and data analysis, the conclusion was that collaborative work has higher outcomes with also task than does individual work, but the difference in learning is not statistically significant.

Oe and Alam (2013) from Hosei University in Japan, developed a study to find a way to teach phrasal verbs whereas deny the interference from the learner’s first language. They chose to instruct “...*directly through nonverbal media such as pictures and sounds. A Web application was developed for the picture-based e-learning of phrasal verbs*” (p. 222). They used two different groups of college freshmen studying EFL, and they worked with 30 phrasal verbs per session, two sessions each. One session involved gloss-choice questions, and the other picture questions.

### **3. Methodology**

The research benefited from the quasi-experimental design. The pretest-posttest nonequivalent-groups design which is a subcategory of the quasi-experimental design was performed in this research. A placement test, a pretest and a posttest were conducted in two experimental and one control groups. This study tied to compare the impact of task-based, information-gap and opinion-gap on teaching phrasal verbs collocation among Iranian EFL learners.

#### **3.1. Participants**

The participants in the study were 45 female EFL learners selected from 95 learners who took part QPT, to ensure participants’ homogeneity in terms of general language proficiency and background knowledge at Elahe English Institute in Loshan, Iran. Their age range was from 19 to 30. They were recognized to be at intermediate level and were randomly assigned into three different groups, two experimental and one control groups. Each experimental group contained one class with 15 and the control group contained one class with 15 participants. One class of the experimental group (A) received the use of the information-gap of TBLT approach as the treatment, and the other class of the experimental group (B) received the use of the opinion-gap of TBLT approach as the treatment. The one class of the control group received a placebo that was the use of explicit instruction like GTM and was based on structural syllabus.

### 3.2. Materials

As a matter of fact, one instrument was used in this study to collect the required data. It was a multiple-choice test. Since this study is a true experimental design the required data were collected quantitatively. Furthermore, the main data gathering instruments in this study were paper and pencil tests. The following materials and instruments were used in order to respond the research questions and to test out the hypothesis of this study. This study tried to compare the impact of task-based method on teaching phrasal verbs collocation among Iranian Intermediate EFL learners.

### 3.3. Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

The present study followed an experimental design with a pretest-treatment-posttest design using EFL classes. The participants of the study were selected based on their scores in an administered QPT. After that, they were randomly divided into two different groups of experimental and one control group. Then three groups were tested by a pretest. The pretest included 40 items. After administration of the pretest, the treatment was carried out for 15 sessions on the experimental groups.

Each session was conducted three times a week and lasted around 60 minutes. During the treatment sessions some phrasal verbs collocation were pre-taught to the learners using task-based. One class of the experimental group (A) received the use of the information-gap of TBLT approach, and the other class of the experimental group (B) received the use of the opinion-gap of TBLT approach as the treatments. The control group, on the other hand, received a placebo that was the use of explicit instruction like GTM and was based on structural syllabus. At last, a posttest was administered to three groups in order to measure the effectiveness of the treatment.

## 4. Results

The descriptive analysis of the data for different groups of the study was put into SPSS. Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of the data of experimental group of the study. The mean value of collocational competence for the X1 (Information-gap) before the TBLT instruction is 12.26, while the mean for the X1 after the instruction via information-gap method is 16.21.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics for the X1(Information-gap)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	12.2667	15	1.74066	.31780
Posttest	16.2167	15	1.20833	.22061

It is obvious that the X1 performance on collocational competence test improved greatly after the treatment. It can be inferred that the instruction was effective in enhancing learners' collocational knowledge.

The result of descriptive statistics for the X2 (Opinion-gap) is presented in Table 2. This table indicates the mean for the X2 before TBLT instruction via opinion-gap

method is 12.86, while the mean of the control group after the treatment is 14.98. With regard to its performance on the posttest, the X2 also showed improvement in its collocational competence.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics for the X2 (Opinion-gap)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pretest	12.8667	15	2.02115
Posttest	14.9833	15	1.93196

Table 3 indicates the descriptive analysis of the CG for the pretest and posttest scores of collocational competences. The mean for the CG before instruction via traditional method is 12.74, while the mean of the CG after the treatment is 13.20. With regard to its performance on the posttest, the CG showed a small degree of improvement in its collocational competence.

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics for the CG (Control Group)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pretest	12.7422	15	2.12114
Posttest	13.2011	15	1.78239

The results of the inferential analysis of the data before and after TBLT instruction for the X1 of the study shows in the Table 4.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on students' scores on the collocational competence. There was a statistically significant increase in collocational test scores from the pretest (M = 12.26) to the posttest (M = 16.21),  $t(14) = 21.036$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two-tailed). The mean increase in collocational competence scores was 3.95 with a 95% confidence interval.

**Table 4:** Paired-samples T-test for the X1 (Information-gap)

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired1 X1						
Pretest-Posttest	3.9500	1.0284	.18777	-21.036	14	.000

Table 5 summarizes the inferential analysis of the data before and after TBLT instruction for the X2 of the study.

**Table 5:** Paired-samples T-test for the X2 (Opinion-gap)

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired1 X2						
Pretest-Posttest	-2.116	.970	.17728	-6.299	14	.000

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to investigate whether TBLT instruction via bilingual dictionary use improved students' scores on the collocational competence

measures as well or not. There was a statistically significant increase in collocational competence scores from pretest ( $M = 12.8667$ ,  $SD = 2.02115$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 14.9833$ ,  $SD = 1.93196$ ),  $t(15) = 6.299$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two-tailed). The mean increase in collocational competence scores was 2.116 with a 95% confidence interval.

Table 6 summarizes the inferential analysis of the posttest scores for the X1 and X2 to whether there was a significant difference between two groups in terms of their collocational competence after TBLT.

**Table 6:** Independent-samples T-test for the Posttest of both Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	T	F	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	6.18	.16	7.772	28	.000	3.23333	.41603	-4.06612	-2.40055
Equal variances not assumed			7.772	16.677	.000	3.23333	.41603	-4.06953	-2.39714

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the effect of two kinds of TBLT instruction on learners' collocational competence. The Sig. value for Levene's test is larger than .05 (.16), then the first row in the table should be consulted, which refers to Equal variances assumed. There was a significant difference in scores for the X1 and X2;  $t(28) = 7.772$ ,  $p = .000$ , two-tailed).

Overall, it can be concluded that the X1 performed significantly better than the X2 in the posttest measures of collocational competence which indicates the great effectiveness of TBLT instruction via information-gap method for the improvement of students' collocational knowledge. Therefore, in response to the first research question, it has been revealed that although both methods of TBLT instruction were effective in improvement of learners' collocational competence, the information-gap method of TBLT instruction was significantly more effective than the opinion-gap method. In order to see whether TBLT instruction was more effective than traditional approaches of collocational instruction, the results of the one-way ANOVA should be consulted.

In order to examine whether the differences among the posttest mean values of X1, X2, and CG is significant, a one-way ANOVA was calculated. The results of the ANOVA revealed that there are significant differences among these three groups in their performances on collocational competence measures [ $F(2) = 7.72$ ,  $Sig. = .000$ ]. To clearly determine which group or groups significantly outperformed the others, a *post hoc* test [Tukey] was conducted.

**Table 7:** Multiple comparisons for the results of the posttest

(I) Groups		(J) Groups		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>dimension2</b>	X1	dimension3	X2	1.23000*	.00000	.000	1.2300	1.2300
			CG	3.01000*	.00000	.000	3.0100	3.0100
	X2	dimension3	X1	-1.23000*	.00000	.000	-1.2300	-1.2300
			CG	1.78000*	.00000	.000	1.7800	1.7800
	CG	dimension3	X1	-3.01000*	.00000	.000	-3.0100	-3.0100
			X2	-1.78000*	.00000	.000	-1.7800	-1.7800
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.								

The result of the post hoc test [Tukey] revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between the X1 and X2 indicating that Information-gap method of TBLT was more effective than Opinion-gap method for the improvement of learners' collocational competence. It was also proven that both X1 and X2 performed significantly better than the traditional method of collocational competence instruction.

The results of the descriptive statistics of the groups indicated that the X1 outstripped the X2 on the posttest measure of collocational competence measure. Also, it has been revealed that the mean value of the CG is far less than those of X1 and X2.

The t-tests and ANOVA data analysis procedure concerning collocational competence of the three groups revealed that the X1 significantly outperformed the X2 and CG after the TBLT intervention indicating that the instruction of collocations via information-gap method was quite successful in enhancing the students' collocational competence. Also, the X2 significantly outperformed the CG on the posttest measure of collocational competence. Therefore, both hypotheses of the study were rejected at the significance level of .05.

## 5. Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study are congruent with the findings of some other studies such as Birjandi and Malmir's (2010). They examined the effect of task-based approach versus traditional approach on the narrative and expository writing of the Iranian EFL learners. Their study showed that that task-based approach was more effective in teaching narrative and expository writing compared to the traditional approach. TBI is regarded as an alternative method to traditional language teaching methods because it favors a methodology in which functional communicative language use is aimed at and strived for (Ellis, 2003).

The findings of this study are also similar to those of Thanh and Huan (2012). They have examined the task-based language learning and students' motivation in vocabulary acquisition. The findings of their study indicated that the participants were motivated to learn vocabulary and their vocabulary achievement improved. One other study that had similar findings to the results of this study was Sarini and Sahebi's (2012) study. They investigated the teaching of vocabulary in ESP courses within the



paradigm of TBLT. The results of their study showed that the task-based approach was more effective in teaching technical vocabulary items compared to the traditional one.

However, the findings of this study differ from the findings of Nourbakhsh, Kolaei, Yarahmadi, and Maghsoudi (2013). They investigated the efficiency of task-based and traditional instruction on improving Iranian EFL students' reading comprehension ability in their study. The results of their study indicated that both task-based approach and traditional method promoted the learners' reading comprehension. The findings achieved in this study lead to some pedagogical implications that are beneficial for different stakeholders in the field of language teaching and learning. Teachers, students, teacher trainers, course and syllabus designer, curriculum and material developers, are those that can use the findings of this study to improve the condition of language teaching in the context of Iran. Considering the findings of the current study, language teachers can use both types of activities of TBLT (information-gap and opinion-gap) to provide useful opportunities for learners to practice phrasal verbs collocation more effectively compared to traditional language teaching methods, and to incorporate TBLT approach into the language methodology and to encourage language teachers to draw the learners' attention to formal features of language while carrying out tasks.

In fact, using both information-gap and opinion-gap tasks of TBLT approach can provide wonderful opportunities for learners to increase their phrasal verbs collocation compared to traditional language teaching methods such as GTM. However, the information-gap and opinion-gap of TBLT approach can be compared with each other in terms of their effectiveness in improving the learners' phrasal verbs collocation. Otherwise TBLT for teachers can improve the procedures of teaching and enhance the structure of teaching methodology. It can also lead the teachers to have more active and motivated classes. Moreover, the findings of this study may be beneficial for curriculum developers and syllabus designers to incorporate the TBLT approach into the language methodology and to encourage language teachers to draw the learners' attention to formal features of language while completing tasks. So the focus of instructors in TBLT approach is on meaning more than form and improves the fluency better than other approaches.

## **6. Conclusion**

The aim of a teacher in the traditional language classroom is to assure that students learn the new vocabulary and grammatical rules of the new language, and their focus is on the language itself and explain the grammar deductively, it means that the teacher first explains the rules and then say some examples rather than focus on the information carried out by the language or the way it is processed and used. Actually, the students memorize the dialogs, question or answer to the practice, substitute the drills, etc. In contrast, TBLT environments have become a trend that involve learning

goals that put the emphasis on interaction, conversation, communication, and language use, not learning the language itself.

The students built up their self-confidence and self-fulfillment through the task-based activities, and learned to work together in class through the task-based activities. Not only their language ability but also their communicative ability improved rapidly. The results of the t-test performed to compare the mean scores of the two experimental groups and one control group's performance in the pretest and the posttest. It indicated that a significant difference between; the mean scores of the two experimental groups and one control group. Their performances on the posttest were considerably higher than that of their performances on the pretest. The result of this study showed that the students in both experimental groups are satisfied with TBLT.

Totally, the results confirm that task-based method had a significant effect on teaching phrasal verbs collocation, in contrast with traditional teaching. The students in TBLT were more satisfied and happy with TBLT classes. In general, teaching phrasal verbs collocation through the information-gap task is better than teaching them through the opinion-gap. The findings of the study showed that both information-gap and opinion-gap tasks of TBLT approach have positive effects on teaching phrasal verbs collocation.

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