

THE INFLUENCE OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EFL READING CLASSROOM

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Abstract: *This study is set out to investigate the influence of task-based language teaching implementation to teach reading comprehension to EFL students. It involved the first-year students of SMAN 3 Padang as research population. They were consisted of eight classes. Two groups were assigned as experimental and control class. There were 36 students in each class. The groups were taught by using different teaching instruction. Experimental group were taught by using task-based language teaching while control group were taught by using conventional teaching. After several treatments, these groups were given reading comprehension test in order to see their comprehension quality toward reading text. The test was in form of short answer response and consisted of 26 valid and reliable items. As prerequisite analysis, normality and homogeneity testing were conducted in order to analyze the result of the test. Subsequently, independent sample t-test was conducted in order to test the research hypothesis. Based on the result of analysis, it was found that $t_{obtained}$ (3.503) was higher than t_{table} (1.669). It designates that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. Otherwise speaking, task-based language teaching gives positive influence toward students' reading comprehension.*

Keywords: *task-based language teaching, reading*

INTRODUCTION

The role of task in language teaching and learning is to some extent overlooked. Task is often considered and used by language teachers as

supportive unit to the whole stages of learning process (Ellis, 2003). Put another way, task is not the center of the learning and is often used to check students' understanding of content

material at the end of the learning stage. In this regard, task is similar with test, exercises, and language drills teachers give to their students.

Fundamentally, task can be more functional and plays important role than simply acting as supportive unit of language learning. When carefully designed and organized, task is “lethal” in which it can be used to help students to develop communicative language ability in remarkable way. An effective task stimulates students to use target language and to focus on language for meaning (Ellis, 2003). It means the task will engage the students in order to produce more target language for the purpose of meaning/message conveyance. It also means that the students should not be too anxious and afraid of being restricted by inaccurate language form during meaningful language production. Thus, task is remarkably fruitful for communicative language development of the students.

Designing and organizing a task into effective one is part of task-based language teaching field of work. Task-based language teaching, also known as TBLT, is one of teaching methods which uses task as the core unit of planning and instruction (Richard &

Rodgers, 2001). Thus, without a task, teaching and learning cannot be proceeded.

Within decades, the studies about task-based language teaching have been flourished and most of them indicate that the use of task as primary tool in teaching and learning process gives positive influence on students' language development (Stepani, 2016; Albino, 2017; Munirah & Muhsin, 2015). However, the trend on task-based studies still revolves around productive skill like speaking whereas it is actually plausible for TBLT to be employed to teach other language skills such as listening, reading, and writing (Ellis, 2003). Accordingly, an attempt to task-based language teaching practice to teach other language skills should be explored. This is what the present study concerns about.

At this point in time, the study about task-based language teaching, especially dealing with reading comprehension in Indonesia is, to some extent, narrow. Needless to say, little is written about task-based language teaching to teach reading comprehension. To illustrate, Hakim (2015) conducted research about the possible task-based teaching design in

reading lesson. However, it still covers theoretical base so that the influence it gives to students' reading comprehension quality is unreported.

Moreover, Irfan (2017) also conducted research about task-based language learning to teach reading comprehension for second graders of senior high school. This study exerts grammar translation method to control class whereas the present study employs method that the teachers usually use when teaching English. Moreover, since task design is creative work, task form will emerge differently from one TBLT practice to another. Therefore, to conduct this research is paramount in order to enrich the form of task in TBLT field of work, especially reading task.

To put it all together, the present study is aimed at finding out the influence of tasks which have been designed and organized under task-based language teaching method to teach reading comprehension to senior high school students in EFL context.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an integration of some important aspects.

Anderson (2003:68) states that reading comprehension is the integration of reader's background knowledge, the information from the text, fluency, and reading methods performed by readers. Based on this definition, it can be said that reading comprehension cannot be performed unless readers have ability to integrate and connect these aspects all together. Readers have to work with his background knowledge, information in the text, reading methods and fluency. This integration, especially integration of background knowledge and information in the text, will help readers to obtain the meaning of the text.

In different place, Hallman (2009:39) mentions that reading comprehension is more than a word-calling activity. This reflects of what has been perceived by people in today's perception of reading. She argues that people used to see reading from the achievement point of view rather than the complex process of reading itself. Whereas, instead of word calling, reading comprehension requires reader's individual skills to confront complex process such as solving the problems, decoding the unknown and unfamiliar words, phrasing passages, adding expression and tone as

appropriate, and creating a fluent dialogue. Thus, reading comprehension and skillful readers are closely related. Skillful readers are more likely to be able to comprehend the text than readers with inadequate skills of reading.

Yet, Hennen (2009:44) says that reading comprehension is all about making connections with the texts. She argues that the failure to comprehend the texts is due to an absent connection the readers experience during reading activity. This argument tries to designate that reading comprehension is a kind of reading in which readers have to try to make connection between themselves and the content of the text. Indeed, connection is very important in reading since it will help readers to join themselves in the story to internalize the text.

Among the ways of making connection is to bring readers' background knowledge while reading. Therefore, it can also be said that reading comprehension needs readers' background knowledge to make connection. When connection is present, then, meaning can be easily obtained.

Then, Wolley (2011:15) claims that reading comprehension is the process of

making meaning from the texts. She argues that the goal of reading comprehension is to gain overall understanding of what is described in the texts rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences. This argument is in line and actually has the same idea with the previous one proposed by Hennen.

Thus, combining these two experts' arguments, connection and background knowledge is important to make meaning from the texts. Wolleys' argument also implies that reading comprehension requires readers to be able to understand reading text as a whole, instead of certain parts of the text only.

Denoting to the arguments above, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is the process in which readers try to connect and engage themselves with the content of the texts by activating their background knowledge and performing certain reading methods in order to obtain the meaning of the text as a whole. Good reading comprehension ability helps students to deal with different genres of reading text in the school such as exposition, descriptive, narrative, report and etc.

The Nature of Task

Task-based language teaching is a language teaching strategy which tries to engage learners in real language use in the classroom by counting on the two concepts of tasks; real-world task and pedagogical task (Willis and Willis, 2007:1; Richards and Rodger, 2001:223, Nunan, 2004:1). Since task is pivotal in this teaching strategy, thus, the concept of it should be defined comprehensively.

In many instances, definition of task and other common classroom activities are overlapping. Many teachers assume that task is similar with other common classroom activities. However, it is not always true. There are some criteria which make task different from common classroom activities.

Richards and Rodgers (2001:224) mentions that task is an activity or goal which is carried out using language, such as finding a solution to a puzzle, reading a map and giving direction, making a telephone call, writing a letter, or reading a set of instructions for assembling a toy. From this definition, it can be noted that the main difference between task and other classroom activities is the involvement or the use

of target language during its completion.

Involving target language in an activity is, however, not enough to make a big difference between task in TBLT and task outside of TBLT. Thus, Ellis (2003:2-10) and Willis and Willis (2007:12) state that there are some criteria which make task in TBLT unique in its own way.

Firstly, task is a workplan in which it constitutes plan for learners' activity. In this case, task cannot be given in all of the sudden. Course of teaching is important to sequence the task. Secondly, instead of form, the primary focus of a task is meaning. It means task should encourage the students to use target language for the purpose of message conveyance rather than language display. Thirdly, task involves real-world language use or real-world activity such as making a reservation, buying a ticket, making a telephone call, and etc.

The next criterion is that a task should involve any of the four language skills. Task can require students to listen and read and then display their understanding, or produce an oral or written text. Then, task should have priority of completion. It is related to the

outcome of the task. The next one, task should engage the learners, especially in cognitive process. It can be found during a task which requires students to select, classify, order, and etc. The last one is that a task should have outcome which is non-linguistic ones, and priority of completion. The stated outcome of a task serves as the means for determining when participants have completed a task, for example being able to order events in a story chronologically. Below is the summary of the criteria which have been mentioned.

Table 1

The Criteria of Task-like Activity

No	Criteria
1	Engage the learners
2	Focus on meaning
3	Had an outcome
4	Be judged in terms of outcome
5	Has the priority of completion
6	Relate to real-world activity

Based on the criteria above, it can be argued that task in TBLT is not always the same with the task or exercise which is usually given by teachers to the students. In TBLT, task should focus on meaning, relate to real-world activity, has non-linguistic outcome and priority of completion, and

etc. The criteria may not considerable all together within a task. However, some of them can be carefully considered.

Task Types

In task-based language teaching, task has many types. It almost depends on the experts who discuss and write about what task-based language teaching is. In other words, different experts may have the same, different, or even complex types of the task. Ellis (2003:23) mentions that task can be classified in term of the language skills they focus on. In this research, the task types which will be discussed are real-world task, pedagogical task, general task, and reading task.

Real-World Task (Target Task)

In simple words, real-world task is task conducted by people in daily life. According to Long in Nunan (2004:2), real-world task is piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others. This definition is very broad since it includes either thing conducted by using language or without the use of language. The examples of these tasks are painting a fence, dressing a child, making an airline reservation, and etc.

Nunan limits the definition above by involving the use of language in real-

world task. Therefore, according to Nunan (2004:1; 2010:138), real-world task is things that people do in everyday life (beyond the classroom) using a language. Based on this definition, painting a fence which literally uses no language is not classified into target task at all. In contrast, activities like making a hotel reservation, retell a story, and typing a letter are classified into target task or real world task.

Pedagogical Task

Pedagogical task is classroom work which requires learners to use target language. In more detail, according to Ellis (2003:16), pedagogical task is a workplan which requires learners to use target language pragmatically to achieve outcome. By using language pragmatically, students are therefore focused on meaning rather than form. This is in line with one of the criteria of task mentioned before that a task should focus on meaning.

In different place, Nunan (2004:2) states that pedagogical tasks are real-world tasks which are transformed into classroom tasks. In different occasions, Nunan (2010:138), states that pedagogical tasks are those which are connected into real-world activities. Based on these definitions, it can be

implied that activities in the real setting, which are brought into classroom for the purpose of learning, are called pedagogical tasks. Therefore, activities such as making a telephone call, buying a ticket, inviting someone to dinner, are called pedagogical tasks when they are practiced in the classroom. Since these activities occur in real life setting, the meaning is thus mainly concerned.

However, despite of the fact that meaning is important in pedagogical task, focus on language form should not be neglected. As Nunan (2004:4; 2010:138) argues, pedagogical task is what learners do in the classroom to activate and develop their language skills.

It is classroom works that involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing grammatical knowledge to express meaning, and in which the attention is to convey meaning rather than form.

From this definition, it can be said that, in regard with meaning, focus on language form should also be given since to express the meaning properly, a good grammatical knowledge is important.

Cognitive Tasks

The cognitive tasks are classified based on cognitive processes of the students in conducting the tasks. The three common cognitive tasks that many people pay attention to are those proposed by Prabhu (1987), Willis (1996), and Nunan (2004). Prabhu in Nunan (2004:57) and Ellis (2003:213) argues that there are three types of task which have been used in the early curricular of task-based language teaching in Bangalore project. The tasks are information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap. Information gap involves a transfer of given information from one person to another or from one form to another. Reasoning gap involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships and patterns. Finally, in opinion gap activity, it involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude, in response to a given situation. These tasks are classified based on cognitive operation of the students.

Then, Willis (1996:26) mentions that in task-based language learning, there are at least six tasks which can be

implemented by teachers generally. She argues that these varieties can involve reading and speaking skill in the implementation. Finally, many of them can lead naturally into writing stage. The intended tasks are:

- a. Listing. In listing task, learners tend to generate a lot of talk as they will explain their ideas.
- b. Ordering and sorting. These tasks involve four main processes: first, sequencing the items, actions, or events in a logical or chronological order. Second, ranking items according to personal values or specified criteria. Third, categorizing items in given groups or grouping them under given headings. Finally, classifying items in different ways, where the categories themselves are not given.
- c. Comparing. This task can be comparing information of the same topic but with different sources in order to identify the common point, or the differences.
- d. Problem Solving. This task requires people reasoning power to solve the problem. Problem solving task is believed to be engaging and satisfying.

e. Sharing Personal Experiences.

This task encourages learners to talk more freely about themselves and share their experiences with others. It close to casual social conversation.

f. Creative tasks. It is usually called as project and involved pairs or groups of learners in free creative work. It can combine other types of task such as listing, ordering, and problem solving.

Comparing Willis tasks varieties and Prabhu's tasks types, the two experts seem compliment their work to each other. Prabhu's task types may be lesser compared to Willis', however, it can be noticed that Prabhu's task such as reasoning gap is somewhat the same with Willis' problem solving which requires reasoning power. Thus, it can be inferred here that some of Willis' task types cover the three Prabhu's.

Yet, in the same book, according to Willis (1996:28), beside above types, task can also be classified based on how specific its goal. He argues that the task which has highly structured and specific goal is categorized as closed tasks. On the other hand, the task which has loosely structured and less specific goal are known as open task. From this

classification, it can be said in a simple word that open tasks are those in which the instructions, demands, goals and etc. has been very clear so that learners can focus on those in a structured way. While open tasks, such as sharing personal experience, are those which have no tight rules or prescription and there is a sense of free for learners to express their ideas and creativity on within the tasks.

Then, in different place, Nunan (2004:62) states that there are some tasks which can be used to deal and focus with reading comprehension for students. The tasks proposed by Nunan are slightly the same with those proposed by Willis. However, some differences can be noticed as Nunan suggests another task types such as completing a document, jigsaw task, summarizing and note taking. All of these tasks are applicable to any language skills. As for reading (task based on the text), there are some special types of the tasks which will be discussed below.

Text-based Task

This task is simply defined as tasks which are particularly designed and adjusted based on written text (reading passage). According to Willis

(1996:68), when carefully chosen, texts can become a starting point, or one of good sources to start designing communicative tasks. It thus will make reading activity more communicative. Willis (1996:74) further proposes six different kinds of task which can be use specifically in teaching reading to the students. The tasks are prediction task, jumbles task, restoration task, jigsaw/split information task, comparison task, and memory challenge task. In addition, Willis & Willis (2007) also suggest some tasks which are designed based on text. The tasks are reading task, discussion task, prediction task, jigsaw task, and students as question master task. In this study, some tasks have been designed based on recount and narrative text genre. The tasks are:

	tasks (cognitive task)	the text, students list/describe/write about what they can remember from the text to show to other pairs
4	Drawing task (creative task)	Drawing pictures which represent their comprehension of the text and predicting the end of the story through pictures
5	Making a simple script task (creative task)	Create a simple drama script to be played based on the text. The ending of the story is scripted differently as creative as possible from its original version

The tasks above were designed based on some considerations namely the criterion of a good task (interesting, has outcome, reflect to real-world activity, and etc.), students' ability to complete the task, and the complexity of the task itself.

METHOD

This study takes quasy-experimental with post-test only design. It involved two active groups as the sample, i.e. experimental group and control group. These groups were chosen by using cluster random

Table 2
Text-based task

No	Task	Description
1	Gap filling task (corrupted text)	Identifying words/phrases omitted from or added to a text
2	Making a simple timeline task (ordering task)	Identifying correct order of events in the text to show to other pairs
3	Memory challenge	After a single brief exposure to

sampling technique. Experimental group was taught by using task-based language teaching while control group was taught by using conventional teaching. After six meetings of the treatment, both groups were given the same reading comprehension test in form of short answer response. The result of this test was then analyzed statistically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Result of Students Reading Ability

The data analysis of students’ reading comprehension was taken from the result of reading comprehension test which has been deployed to experimental and control class after the treatment. The two classes have received different treatment of teaching during the research. Experimental class has been taught by using task-based language teaching while control class has been taught by using conventional teaching. The result of data analysis of both classes can be seen in the following table.

Table 3

The result of students’ reading comprehension test in experimental and control class

	Experiment	Control
N	36	36
Mean	83	78

Max	92	96
Min	70	63
SD	5	7
Sum	2982	2791

From the table above, it can be seen that the mean score of the students in experimental class is 83. The maximum score is 92 and the minimum score is 70. The standard deviation is 5. The sum of the students score in experimental class is 2982. While in control class, the mean score of the students is 78. The maximum score is 96 and the minimum score is 63. The standard deviation is 7. The sum of the students’ score in control class is 2791.

Then, these data were analyzed. Normality and homogeneity of the data were tested in order to be able to conduct hypothesis testing using independent sample t-test.

The normality of the data was analyzed by using Shapiro-Wilk test at the level of significance 0.05. The result of normality of the students’ reading comprehension score can be seen in the following table:

Table 4

The result of normality test of students’ reading comprehension scores

Class	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Experimental	.945	36	.071
Control	.943	36	.064

From the table, it can be concluded that the data of students' reading comprehension score in both experimental and control class were normally distributed since the significance value is higher than the significance alpha 0.05.

The data of students' reading comprehension score of the two classes were also analyzed in order to determine whether they are homogenous or not. The result of homogeneity testing of the data can be seen in the table below.

Table 5
The result of homogeneity test of students' reading comprehension

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
3.422	1	70	.069

Based on the table above, it was found that the significance value of the students' reading comprehension scores in experimental and control class is 0.069. It is higher than significance alpha 0.05. It indicates that the data are homogeneous.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses in this study are:

H₀: The students who are taught by using task-based language teaching do not have better result in reading comprehension than those who are taught by conventional teaching.

H_a: The students who are taught by using task-based language teaching have better result in reading comprehension than those who are taught by conventional teaching.

H_a is accepted if t_{observed} is higher than t_{table} and H_a is rejected if t_{observed} is lower than t_{table}. The result of data analysis of the students' reading comprehension score by using independent sample t-test is presented in the following table:

Table 6
The result of independent sample t-test of students' reading comprehension score in experimental and control class

t-test analysis	t _{observed}	t _{table}	Note
Students' reading comprehension score	3.503	1.669	t _{obtained} > t _{table} H _a is accepted

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the value of t_{observed} is 3.503 while the value of t_{table} for df 70 in the level of significance 0.05 was 1.669. Since the value of t_{observed} is higher than the value of t_{table}, it can be inferred

that H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted. In other words, the students who were taught by using task-based language teaching have better reading comprehension than those who were taught by using conventional teaching.

Discussion

Based on the first hypothesis testing, it was found that the mean score of the students in experimental class (taught by using task-based language teaching) were higher than the mean score of the students in control class (taught by using conventional teaching). It indicates that task-based language teaching gives significant effect toward students' reading comprehension.

Based on the finding, it can be interpreted that the use of tasks, which is carefully designed based on written text, helps students to understand reading text easier. Basically, task gives students reason and purpose to read.

As Willis & Willis (2007:32) argue, reading task helps to provide context and purpose or challenge for the students to read, which are basic to reading in the real world. Likewise, Willis (1996:75) states that task based on written text encourages to a natural and efficient reading which focus on meaning. Thus, when the students are

assigned to a task based on written text, they are basically directed into purposeful reading as in real world activity. For this reason, task should therefore reflect real world activity. In the real world, people read text for a purpose. They may read because the topic is interesting, want to learn more about a topic, want to know what authors think about a topic, or simple want to satisfy curiosity. Once the students have purpose to read, engagement toward the text is exist, and comprehension is likely to be gained.

As opposed to the students in task-based language teaching treatment, students who were taught by using conventional teaching did not get better result in reading comprehension. In this case, the students were likely to read without purpose.

When they were assigned to read a text, they have a sort of confusion of what they were going to do with the text, how they read the text, and why they should read the text. Due to these fuzzy thoughts, it was easy for them to give up on reading challenges. As the result, their comprehension is not as good as the students in experimental class taught by using task-based language teaching. Then, the finding of this research is

relevant with other previous findings on task-based language teaching and students' reading comprehension. Amer and Demirel (2017) have conducted a study about the effect of task-based language teaching and reading comprehension of EFL students. Based on the study, it was found that task-based language teaching is more effective to teach reading comprehension for EFL students. In different place, Dollar (2017) also conducted a study about the effect of task-based instruction and reading comprehension. The result shows that there is a significant different between experimental group and control group. Experimental group, taught by using task-based instruction was more successful in post-test.

Further, the finding of this research also confirms the existing theories about the importance of task-based language teaching in students' language learning. This finding fits with theory of Richards and Rodgers (2001) who argue that task-based language teaching can promote language learning. In addition, Ellis (2003:1) also argues that task helps students to elicit language use for meaning exchange. In other words, students will focus on how to use and

understand language meaningfully rather than grammatically correct. Since reading text concerns with meaning exchange between the author and the readers, thus, the role of task is pivotal. In nutshell, the finding of this research agrees with the previous related theories about task-based language teaching.

Finally, based on the finding of this research, the practical implication which can be drawn is that teaching reading should have provided students with purposeful activity. In classroom context, students seem to start reading without purpose. As the result, they are lack of engagement toward the text. There is no connection between readers and the text. Task-based language teaching method is therefore one of the ways which can be used to get the students into purposeful reading.

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to seek the influence of task-based language teaching to teach reading comprehension to EFL senior high school students. Based on the data analysis, it was found that the designed tasks give positive influence on students' reading comprehension quality. These tasks have helped the

students to engage with the text, and focus mainly on non-linguistic outcomes. As the result, it helps to develop their language skills, including reading comprehension. Based on this result, it implies that language teachers should be able to utilize a task appropriately and make it as the core of teaching process to get the best out of the students, especially in reading comprehension.

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