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Tasks used in teaching English language skills at the preparatory stage

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المستخلص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تحديد ووصف الأنواع المختلفة للمهام التي يستخدمها معلمي المرحلة الإعدادية في تدريس مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية (الاستماع، التحدث، القراءة، الكتابة). ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة تم استخدام المنهج الوصفي. وتم جمع المعلومات من خبراء التخصص من خلال استخدام استبانة كأداة للدراسة. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أنه يوجد أنواع عديدة من المهام المفيدة في تدريس مهارات اللغة الانجليزية الرئيسية الأربعة (الاستماع، التحدث، القراءة، والكتابة) وتختلف هذه المهام وفقاً لنوع المهارة، فالبعض منها مرتبط بمهارة الاستماع مثل مهمة "استمع وافعل"، ومهمة "الاستماع للفكرة الرئيسية"، والبعض أيضاً مفيداً في تدريس وتنمية مهارة التحدث مثل مهمة "الغناء"، مهمة "المحادثة"، مهمة "تبادل الأدوار" ومهمة "رواية القصة"، والمهام المستخدمة في تنمية مهارة القراءة مثل مهمة "الإجابة على الأسئلة" ومهمة "ترتيب الأفكار" ومهمة "التلخيص"، والبعض الآخر مفيداً في تدريس وتنمية مهارة الكتابة مثل: مهمة "كتابة الكلمة"، ومهمة "كتابة الجملة"، ومهمة "كتابة الفقرة"، ومهمة "كتابة ملخص"، ومهمة "كتابة موضوع إنشاء". ولذلك توصي الباحثة باستخدام المهام في تدريس المهارات الرئيسية للغة نظراً لأهميتها في جعل الطلاب نشطين داخل الفصل، وكونهم مسئولين عن تعلمهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية، المهام اللغوية

Abstract

This study aimed at identifying and describing the different types of tasks that are used in teaching English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). The descriptive method was used to achieve the aim of the study. The data was collected from language experts through using a questionnaire as an instrument of the study. The results showed that there are several types of tasks that are useful in teaching the main four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). These tasks differ according to the type of the skill. Some of these tasks are related to listening skill such as "Listen and Do" task, "Listening for the main idea" task. Also, some tasks are useful in teaching and improving speaking skills such as "Singing" task, "Conversation" task, "Role-play" task, "Narrating a story" task and tasks used in improving reading skill such as "Answering questions" task, "Arranging ideas based on the text" task, "Summarizing" task. Finally, some tasks are useful in teaching and improving writing skill such as "Writing a word" task, "Writing a sentence" task, "Writing a paragraph" task, "Writing a summary" task. So, the researcher recommended using tasks in teaching the four basic language skills because of its prominence in making students active in the classrooms and being responsible for their learning.

Key words: Teaching English language skills, language tasks.

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Introduction

Language is a valuable means through which human beings in the society communicate. In this context, English language occupies a unique, prestigious and an important role since it is a means of communication, seeking knowledge and conveying thoughts. Learning English language necessitates mastery of the four basic language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are classified into two receptive skills (listening and reading) and two productive skills (speaking and writing). In fact, these skills are related to each other and one of them is a prerequisite of the others like the links of a chain. Moreover, English language demands good knowledge in each skill and skills integration because understanding the message from what is being read or heard is not enough to say that students have satisfactory knowledge about language.

Due to the importance of learning English language, there is usually a need to find out new methods to improve the students' language skills. Modern approaches have gained popularity as alternative methods for the traditional ways to improve English language skills to make the process of teaching practical and enjoyable such as: Audio-lingual method, Present-Produce-Practice approach, and Grammar-translation method where the focus is on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary and translation of texts. Recently, the ever-increasing importance of tasks and the prominent role they play in facilitating the foreign language learning have been taken into consideration in recent task-based language teaching (TBLT) studies (Ellis, 2003; Foster, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Van den Branden, Bygate(2006) , & Norris, 2009, Willis & Willis,

2007). Task based instruction stems directly from communicative language teaching that focuses on meaningful language use (Van den Branden, 2006).

Questions of the study

The present study will answer the following questions:

- What is a task?
- What are components of the task?
- What is the teacher's role in the task?
- What is the student's role in the task?
- What are types of tasks used in teaching English language skills?
- What are the listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks that are appropriate for teaching English language at the preparatory stage?
- How a task is performed?
- Where a task is performed?
- To whom tasks are useful?

Delimitation of the study

- This study was delimited to the following skills: (listening, speaking, reading and writing)

Defining task

During the last few decades, there have been various approaches in the teaching process that facilitates language learning and rely on communicative tasks through which students exchange information and ideas. In this context, many different linguists defined a task according to their point of views through concentrating on the important aspects of language learning process. Nunan (2004: 4) stated that the "*task is a piece of classroom work that involves students in understanding,*

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manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning". In this vein, Nunan expresses that when tasks are transferred from the real world to the classroom, they become pedagogical in nature. In a similar context, Willis (2007) pointed out that "a task" in TBLT is an objective oriented activity that enables students to use the target language in a genuine context. According to his definition, a task should be a pedagogical task that comprises students' interaction in the target language while their attention is on expressing meaning. So, new language is learned unconsciously and students almost construct their own knowledge. According to Ocku (2015) tasks mean that students should learn by experience through connecting the previous knowledge with the new information. In this regard, he sees instruction through tasks is more beneficial than traditional Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) approach. This method fosters meaningful communication and makes students more active. To conclude, the researcher sees that a task is an objective oriented activity that has specific outcome.

Teaching English language skills

For the present study English language skills mean the skills that enable students to use the language appropriately in the classroom. These skills include four major skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Components of the task

The task includes five components as follows: objectives, tasks input, the activities included in the task, settings, teacher's role and student's role in the task. Every component is related to one another. Ellis (2003), Chalak (2015) mention the following components:

a) Objectives

Objectives refer to general intentions behind any given learning task. For example, the purpose of communicative tasks is to improve students' English language skills. Consequently, any task has an objective and an outcome. Therefore, objectives belong to the nature of task. Objectives can be classified into socio-cultural, process-oriented, and social skills. In this manner, Nunan (2004) defined the objectives as clear instructions behind any given task. For instance, in the teaching of reading comprehension, the goals may be to read a story, identify the main idea of the topic or finding supporting details.. etc.

b) Tasks input

Tasks input refers to verbal material such as spoken or written language or non-verbal materials such as maps, pictures, charts, diagrams. Input tasks come from a variety of resources such as journals, letters, newspaper or films. If the teachers want students to understand the written materials in the genuine world, then the students need opportunities for engaging in the real world outside the classroom and maximize the scope of communication through the task-based approach. Input can come from a wide range of sources including letters, menus, postcards, and bus timetable or picture stories.

c) Activities included in a task

The activities refer to what the students actually do during the task. They have to involve some significant aspects such as: the distribution of information, the prominence of exchanging ideas and the tasks interaction (information gap activities, opinion gap). In this vein, Mao (2019) mentions that the activities have two purposes: a) to make the students active in the learning process through presenting them to decision-making activities (for example, drawing a diagram with the information given in the text, completing a table), b) to devise activities which are as natural as the real world such as answering a letter through using information in the text, and comparing two different texts. Activities which involve real communication are vital for language learning.

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d) Settings

Settings refer to the classroom organization either specified or implied in the text. Settings can be varied either inside or outside the classroom.

e) The teacher's role in the task

Teacher's role refers to the part that teachers are expected to play in carrying out learning tasks. There are several roles that the teacher plays during the task based learning. These roles are varied according to the task as follows:

Willis & Willis (2007) mention that during the task: a) the teacher is a facilitator, a supporter, a participant, an observer, a learner and a motivator. b) Additionally, the teacher should be creative to set up, design tasks, and arouses students' interest through being a facilitator. c) Besides having the responsibility to enrich the students' language. d) The teacher is an advisor and a monitor. e) The teacher has to choose the suitable and appropriate tasks to reach the expected result. f) Teacher should take into account whether tasks are executed inside or outside the classroom. To conclude, the teacher's role is very important in the task-based learning.

f) The students' role in the task

The role of the students during the task-based approach is different when it is compared with some other teaching approaches like Grammar-translation method. Student's role can be summarized in the following points:

a) The students are active participants. They express their thoughts freely even if the language is inaccurate.

- b) The priority is to the student's role in the learning process. Learners are autonomous to talk, negotiate content when doing or performing the task. For example, the teacher may suggest a series of topics and the student decide which one to begin with.
- d) Students plan and set up their purposes.
- e) Students are risk takers. Students want to improve their language while performing the task. Learners are responsible for increasing the classroom interaction. In short, task-based approach is a student-centered classroom.
- f) It gives learners confidence in trying out whatever language they know.

Task types

Tasks are of different types as stated by several experts' different opinions such as Nunan (2004) who divided the tasks into two kinds: pedagogical tasks and real-world tasks. Pedagogical tasks are tasks through which students perform communicative tasks inside the classroom. These tasks require interaction among the students. For example, students talk about the picture on their book or the preparation inside the classroom for a role-play. While real-world tasks named as rehearsal tasks.

On the other hand, Griggs (2005) divided the tasks into three types of tasks as follows: a) **Information-gap activity**: includes transfer of given information from one person to another, one place to another, or one form to another. e.g. pair work through which each student of the pairs has a part of the total information, incomplete picture and attempts to communicate it verbally. b) **Reasoning gap activity**: includes using the processes of inference and deduction to construct new information from given one. c) **Opinion gap activity** includes identifying personal preferences, feelings towards a given situation.

Examples of English language skills tasks

There are several examples of tasks in English language such as:

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Examples of listening tasks

Listening tasks can be considered as non-reciprocal tasks. Reciprocal tasks are the ones that require the learners to interact or in other words reciprocate. According to Saricoban and Karkurt (2016), there are different types of listening tasks such as:

- a) "Note-taking while listening to a text" task
- b) "Listen and Do" task.
- c) "Listen and Answer an oral question" task
- d) "Pair-question discussion" task
- e) "Listen to the main idea" task
- f) "Listening for details" task
- g) "Listen to guess the meaning of unfamiliar word" task (

Examples of speaking tasks

- a) "Conversation" task
- b) "Interview" task
- c) "Singing" task
- d) "Role-playing" task
- e) "Pronunciation" task
- f) "Narrating a story" task

Examples of reading tasks

According to Mao (2019), the reading tasks include:

a) "Read and Think" task

Students read a text, studied an accompanying visual and decided whether or not the visual aid facilitates comprehension of the text.

b) "Read, Note and Discuss" task

Students read a text and carried out several activities including creating a visual to accompany a text.

c) "Problem-solving" task require the students' reasoning power. The processes will vary enormously depending on the type and complexity of the problem.

d) "Answering Questions" task

Answering questions involves showing the students how to find, and use information from a text to answer the teacher's questions so; they can understand the text better.

e)" Generating Questions" task

Generating questions is an influential skill to improve reading comprehension because it allows students to read for a purpose, motivate them to read without stopping and pay attention to what have been learnt in the text. In addition, generating questions allow students to interact with the text. It can help students revise the content, think about what they learned and relate it to their experiences. For example, a reader may be taught to generate questions about the text as it is read. These questions are "Did, why, what, where, How" and try to answer them so the reader processes the text more actively. This process improves their understanding and retention.

f) "Arranging the ideas based on the text" task

A good reader can arrange the events in a sequence either logically or chronologically, identify the relationships among the sentences or events in the text and how a writer introduced the text and what keywords that he used such as first, then, next, later and finally.

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d) "Recognizing the story structure" task

Recognizing the story structure refers to how the text is written and organized. In this regard, Coe (2009) mentioned that real information include several patterns such as identifying the story introduction, the body, and the conclusion. Hence, recognizing a story structure or the way its events are organized enables the readers to become aware of the important story elements (setting, characters, events, goals....) and facilitates their understanding and recall.

e) "Summarizing" task

Summarizing refers to a reader's ability to put a written text in a shortened version through using his or her own words. To do this, a reader should concentrate on the most important points of the text and some supporting details too. Summarizing can be highly influential to help students identify the main ideas, remove unnecessary information and organize the ideas after reviewing.

Examples of grammar tasks

According to Ganta (2015), the grammar tasks include the following tasks:

- a) "**Structure-based production**" tasks are designed to elicit a particular target language feature or structure. For instance, in tasks like Picture difference, picture sequencing, picture drawing etc. Tasks like the simple present tense or future tense are elicited.
- b) "**Comprehension**" tasks are based on the assumption that language acquisition takes place as a result of input-processing. The learners are required to pay conscious attention and notice the linguistic form that is presented as input and based on the responses made by the learner in the input phase a task is given.

c) **"Consciousness-raising" tasks:** Consciousness raising tasks are designed to cater to explicit learning. The learners are required to talk about language, they are asked to frame their own grammar rules.

d) **"Spot the difference" tasks**

e) **"Determining the references of the pronouns" task**

Examples of writing tasks

According to Sidek (2012), the writing tasks include:

a) "Writing a word" task

b) "Writing a sentence" task

c) "Writing a paragraph" task

d) "Writing an answer to a written question" task.

d) "Writing a summary" task

e)"Writing a composition" task

The factors that lead to the success of the task

Herrero (2006) mentioned that several factors can lead to the success of the tasks such as:

a-The task has to be meaningful to the students.

b-The task must improve the students' motivation.

c- Also, the task has to provide the students with opportunities to exchange opinions and increase students' interaction to use the target language.

d-The task has to address the students' needs.

e-The task has to be challenging. This means the task shouldn't be too easy or too difficult.

f-The task should have a purpose that goes beyond the classroom exercise.

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- g- The texts in tasks should be authentic such as TV, a trip, and birthday party.
- h- Familiarity of the topic, time pressure, using pictures, body language and gestures.
- i- Tasks promote the process of negotiation, modification and experimentation.

Literature Review

There are several studies that described the criteria of tasks such as Nunan (2004), Littlewood (2004), Ellis (2013) who mention that a) the task should focus mainly on meaning, and have a gap (information gap, reasoning gap, opinion gap), b) the task shouldn't be ambiguous, c) the task should consist of a clear nonlinguistic output, d) the task should have a clear communicative outcome. On the other hand, the study of Ellis (2003) describes the tasks principles as follows: a) Interaction in the target language to reach meaningful communication. b) Completing the task is the final objective while learning English language. c) Authenticity: refers to the essence of task-based learning. d) The form-function principle indicates that tasks emphasize not only on the language forms but also meaning. This clarifies that language which is meaningful to the students supports the learning process therefore memorable. Therefore, language learning depends on immersing students not only in comprehensible input but also in tasks which require them to negotiate meaning and engage in meaningful communication. e). Students are required to complete the tasks in a communicative way. To this end, students have a deeper understanding for the linguistics form.

There are several studies that dealt with the tasks in teaching English language skills such as: Branden, Bygate & Norris (2009), Branden & leuvean (2016) who state that task-based learning is a student-centered approach that aims at improving the students' reading comprehension skills and meaningful communication. Also, Marashi and Dadari (2012) who mention that the tasks are useful in teaching and improving students' writing skills. In this context, Suharanto (2012) describes the importance of using the tasks in improving students' reading comprehension skills. Abduh (2013) supported the idea of using the information gap tasks to improve the preparatory stage students' speaking and reading skills. In a similar vein, Salah El-Din (2013) investigated the effectiveness of using a strategy based on the task- based learning to teach and improve the students' listening comprehension skills in Cairo. Finally, Fallahi et.al (2015) investigated the effectiveness of using the information gap and opinion gap tasks to improve the students' reading comprehension skills. To conclude, the tasks were found to be very effective in teaching English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

Performing the task

a- **Pre-task stage:** this stage is the shortest stage that ranges from 3 to 5 minutes. Pre-task stage includes introduction to the topic and task supported with a picture, a poster, highlight useful words, and phrases, provide task with clear instructions. Students may describe a picture to predict the topic, asking and answering questions, reading a text related to the topic. Students are announced what they will expect to do in the final task.

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- b- **While task stage:** this stage includes three components task, planning, and report. In this stage, students use their knowledge to do the main task either in pairs or in groups, teacher monitors from a distance, assists students if necessary, and encourages students to communicate without correcting mistakes (Beglar and Hunt, 2002). The second component is planning through which students prepare to report to the whole class either orally or written so the student becomes more accurate. The teacher gives advice. This stage offers the learners the chance to use whatever language they already know to carry out the task. Some groups present their reports to the class either written reports such as e-mails, or oral speech such as dialogue. The teacher listens then comments and gives feedback on the content of the reports.
- c- **Post-task stage:** At this stage students evaluate what they have learned in the previous stages. This stage includes three components: analysis, practice and evaluation. This stage has some goals to provide an opportunity for repeated performance of the task, to encourage reflection on how this task was performed, to encourage attention to form which indicate when learners have accomplished the task. In the analysis phase, the teacher highlights relevant parts from students' work. He /she may ask students to notice interesting features within their work. The teacher can also draw attention to analyze the language that students have used during the presentation. Additionally, the teacher does a post-task explicit focus on a form by bringing phrases and forms to students' attention. Students examine then

discuss. At the end of the lesson, the teacher conducts practice stage through selecting language areas to practice based upon students' needs that emerged in the stages of planning and performing the final task. After that, students practice activities to become more confident and language users (Qin,2007), (Veselinova,2017) . Finally, the teacher gives students feedback. Students reflect upon their final understanding of the task.

Significance of the study

The significance of the present study can be summarized as follows:

(A) For EFL teachers

1. The study is important for EFL teachers in different stages as they can get benefit from using tasks in teaching the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).
2. The study may be significant to EFL teachers because it can provide them with solutions so as to they can overcome the problems that they encounter during teaching the course.
3. The study is significant for EFL teachers as tasks promote the genuine use of the target language inside and outside the classroom.

(B) For course designers

The course designers may be directed to the importance of tasks to the course design and the activities concomitant with this promising approach especially with young learners.

Instrument of the study

The researcher made a questionnaire for the teachers. The descriptive statistical method was used to achieve the aim of the study. The numerical Likert statistics was used to compute the means and standard deviation.

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No	Items	Always	sometimes	Never
1	Using tasks is useful when teaching listening			
2	Using tasks is useful when teaching speaking			
3	Using tasks is useful when teaching reading.			
4	Using tasks is useful when teaching writing skills.			
5	Using different types of tasks make students participate actively in classroom.			
6	Using tasks helps students learn English easily.			
9	Using English language skills in a genuine context is enjoyable for students.			
10	Using tasks makes students feel bored.			
11	Using tasks in classroom is not an interesting thing when teaching different types of skills.			
12	Working in groups helps students to be active when teaching process.			
13	Taking notes helps students remember the ideas included in the text.			
14	Using tasks helps the teacher teach the content better.			
15	Tasks help the teacher teach the language structure better.			
16	Using tasks makes students feel confident and motivated.			
17	Using tasks in the classroom makes students feel shy when speaking English.			
20	Tasks help students enrich their vocabulary.			
21	Using tasks when speaking English makes students feel embarrassed			
22	Using tasks helps students write a summary correctly.			

Conclusion

This study gave a description of different types of tasks that are important in teaching the four basic English language skills (Listening, speaking, reading and writing). These tasks differ according to the type of the skill. Some of these tasks are related to listening skill such as "Listen and Do" task, "Listening for the main idea" task. Also, some tasks are useful in teaching and improving speaking skills such as "Singing" task, "Conversation" task, "Role-play" task, "Narrating a story" task. Others are useful in improving reading skill such as "Answering questions" task,

"Arranging ideas based on the text" task, "Summarizing" task. Finally, some tasks are useful in teaching and improving writing skill such as "Writing a word" task, "Writing a sentence" task, "Writing a paragraph" task, "Writing a summary" task. So, the researcher recommended using tasks in teaching the four basic language skills because of its prominence in making students active in the classrooms and being responsible for their learning due to authentic materials that are used in teaching process provide real-life examples of language used in everyday situations. Moreover, tasks add more interest for the learners, comfortable and supportive atmosphere. They can serve as a reminder to learners that there is an entire population who use the target language in their everyday lives. Using tasks and authentic materials in teaching process can provide information about the target culture and provide that culture's perspective on an issue or event. These result goes in line with Marashi and Dadari (2012), Suharanto (2012), Abduh (2013), Salah El-Din (2013), Fallahi et.al (2015).

Recommendations of the study

In light of the results of the study, the researcher recommended the following:

- EFL teachers should be aware of the prominence of using different types of tasks to make their students active in the classrooms.
- Using tasks in teaching reading arouse the students' curiosity.
- EFL teachers should pay attention to the instructional materials as well as time allowance during teaching skills that depend on tasks.
- EFL teachers should take into consideration the familiarity of the task, and the grammatical problems to overcome it.

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