

Task-Based Approach: A Vocabulary Booster

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Abstract

The development of language skills—listening, reading, speaking, and writing—primarily depends on vocabulary proficiency. However, students still find it challenging to retain the vocabulary. Thus, the implementation of captivating, appealing, and interactive activities by teachers in language training is crucial for improving vocabulary skills. The Task-based approach is an effective strategy for teaching vocabulary. This approach prioritizes executing meaningful and authentic tasks in language learning activities. Also, the students engage in exercises or language assignments and simulate real-life situations. Therefore, this study employed a qualitative method to examine previous research on the effects of a task-based approach on vocabulary skill improvement. The investigation revealed that the task-based approach can improve the students' vocabulary skills and the students had a positive view of the task-based approach for boosting their vocabulary. Consequently, the study recommended that teachers strategically implement a task-based approach to facilitate learners' acquisition of an extensive vocabulary.

Keywords: Task-based Approach, vocabulary skills

Introduction

The most significant priority and concern that should be focused on improving four English language skills is vocabulary mastery. Limited, restricted, or insufficient vocabulary prevents the learners' capacity to acquire the basic concepts of reading, listening and practice or use the language in writing or spoken communication Nordin et al., (2024). Nguyen (2018) also mentions that adequate vocabulary knowledge is essential for learners to communicate in English and enhance learning chances effectively. In contrast, insufficient vocabulary becomes an obstacle in mastering a foreign or second language. It means that despite the students having an excellent understanding of grammar, an insufficient vocabulary constrains their language proficiency. Therefore, the teaching and learning process must be engaging and stimulating to enhance students' enthusiasm for English, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. However, conventional methods in teaching vocabulary training have recently faced criticism for providing insufficient opportunities for learners to engage in English communication (Dinh and Hoang, 2022). Thus, the teachers must have good, attractive, and interactive activities in teaching vocabulary. The task-based approach is one of the approaches that can be used in teaching vocabulary.

Task-Based Approach (TBA) relies on using tasks to plan and instruct language activity (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). According to Brenden (2006), a task is an activity undertaken by an individual to achieve a goal that requires the utilization of language. It has been considered a dynamic method that improves language proficiency by involving learners in significant tasks. When executing a task, the

students primarily emphasize the exchange and comprehension of meanings rather than the practice of forms or predetermined structures (Edward and Willis, 2005). It can be said that during the lesson, learners were assigned a task or problem to resolve without focusing on or generating any specific linguistic features in their performance. According to Prabhu (1987), a language task is an activity that requires a learner to attain a result through the processing and contemplation of specific material. The tasks are designed to be significant and relevant to the student's daily life, involving the application of language skills for their fulfillment. Involving students' tasks offers a more conducive environment for activating learning processes than form-focused exercises and enhancing prospects for language acquisition.

A tasks-based approach can facilitate vocabulary acquisition for the students and promote vocabulary acquisition within a contextual framework (Jose, 2022). This approach enhances the students' vocabularies while simultaneously fostering collaboration abilities. Fasih (2022) mentions that through a task-based approach, students may demonstrate their vocabulary knowledge and effectively use newly acquired vocabulary in real-life situations. It enables them to utilize contextually relevant vocabulary during communication and interaction. Moreover, it prevents students' mechanical repetition of vocabulary and structures (Jose, 2022). So, it enhances their communication abilities and capacity to apply learned knowledge.

A variety of research studies concentrate on the application of a task-based strategy to enhance vocabulary proficiency. The initial research by Khoshsima and Saed (2016) investigated the vocabulary acquisition of Iranian intermediate EFL learners within the framework of Task-Based Language teaching by employing jigsaw and information-gap activities. The findings demonstrated that task-based education significantly enhanced vocabulary acquisition. Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) documented students' perceptions of task-based vocabulary instruction in a high school. The data indicate that students believe task-based vocabulary learning benefited tenth graders utilizing the new textbook. Then, a study conducted by Huang and Gandhioke (2018) applied Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) to English vocabulary instruction in three non-English central classrooms at a Chinese university, incorporating several word games. This paper advocates for implementing Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the instruction of English vocabulary, as it is effective and facilitates vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. Nychkalo et al. (2020) also conducted a study identifying the effectiveness of a Task-based approach in teaching vocabulary to business English students and universities. The finding showed that a task-based approach to vocabulary learning allows students to learn the necessary business vocabulary on a particular topic more easily and quickly. The recent study by Nhu Ha et al. (2023) examined English majors' perceptions regarding using a task-based strategy to acquire English vocabulary. The results indicated that many students actively engaged in classroom activities and were driven to develop English vocabulary through this method.

Therefore, it is essential to emphasize the significance of teaching vocabulary in language teaching and learning. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the task-based approach in improving vocabulary skills and how the students perceive this approach in learning vocabulary. By analyzing the current literature, the researcher wants to explain the potential advantages, obstacles, and optimal strategies related to the task-based approach for enhancing students' vocabulary skills. This evaluation aims to encourage educators and stakeholders to use a task-based approach to improve students' language skills.

Methods

This research is a literature review which collected some previous articles. Five relevant studies examining the impact of a task-based approach on students' vocabulary acquisition and their perceptions of its efficacy in enhancing vocabulary acquisition were selected, primarily from recently published research. The analysis of the data encompasses a discussion of the study outcomes, focusing on task

types, the efficacy of the task-based approach, and students' perceptions of its impact on vocabulary skill enhancement

Result and Discussion

Based on the analysis of articles related to the effectiveness of the task-based approach in vocabulary skills and the student's perception of learning vocabulary, two themes emerged in support of the implementation task-based approach in teaching and learning the English language vocabulary. The first theme is task-based approach in teaching vocabulary. The second is task types in teaching vocabulary.

Task-based Approach in Teaching Vocabulary

Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) on their research argue that by integrating task-based instruction with vocabulary development enhances student participation in diverse communicative tasks. Collaborating with peers helps psychological strain for students, improves cognitive development through exchanging knowledge and dialogue, and fosters linguistic proficiency through the repeated application of newly acquired vocabulary and negotiation skills. They also mention that the task-based approach provides learners with genuine, contextually relevant information, practical communicative exercises, and encouraging feedback for vocabulary acquisition. It is essential to provide students with opportunities to utilize target vocabulary in the classroom, particularly in an Asian EFL context such as Vietnam, where students have limited chances to use English outside of class and lack daily access to the target language.

According to Nychkalo (2020), the tasks assist the students in distinguishing between words with similar meanings. The tasks assist the students in distinguishing between words with similar meanings. Also, the students are interested in doing the task. Additionally, after doing the task, students can quickly recall unfamiliar words without mechanical memorization, which allows them to expand their vocabulary, convince others, and start conversations on important topics. This can increase students' confidence in learning English because they gain vocabulary.

Task Types Use in Teaching Vocabulary

Huang and Gandhioke (2018) implemented various types of task in teaching vocabulary, as follow:

1. Fill in the word forms

In this task, each student grabbed a piece of paper. Then, student A found students whose papers differed from theirs, resulting in students A and B pairing up. Next, students explained the definitions of the missing words to each other, but they were not allowed to say the missing words when describing. Pairs worked together to fill in all the blanks with the correct spelling. When students spelt a word, their partner needed to check the spelling. The omissions in Paper A can be located in Paper B, and conversely, as demonstrated below.

A	B	C	D	E	F
1	uneasy		console		probable
2		excessive		reveal	
3	mourning		vitality		sympathetic

Table 1. Paper A – Word Bank

A	B	C	D	E	F
1		infancy		comprehend	
2	evolve		imitate		discipline
3		response		distinct	

Table 2. Paper B – Word Bank

(Huang and Gandhioke, 2018)

This type of task can build the students' communication skills. Also, the students effectively mastered the definitions and spelling of the words, and they enjoyed participating in the word game, and the words were employed in a real-world context, achieving the objective of the exercise.

2. Chain story

In this task, the students collaborated in groups to construct a narrative using the provided vocabulary. Throughout the 15-minute interactive session, students retrieved definitions, employed the language together, and collectively crafted an engaging story. This enhanced the students' storytelling skills and fueled their team spirit. The teacher ultimately invited the students, in groups, to present their stories to the class. The students demonstrated exaggerated attention and engagement due to the pressure of being required to deliver.

3. Pictionary

Pictionary is a game featured in the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, played by a character named Sheldon, who is portrayed as a science enthusiast. A Pictionary game was created for kids to practice vocabulary through drawing. Before the session, the teachers prepared a form for the students to complete and supplied them with color pens and A4 paper. Students initially formed groups of three, with a time limit of 15 minutes. Subsequently, Student A selected a vocabulary card, oriented face down, and illustrated an image corresponding to the card within one minute. Student A was directed to refrain from describing the word while sketching and to avoid writing in their artwork. Other group members inferred the word and explained its meaning, signing the English term and its translation on the paper. Each group experienced an identical procedure.

	Word + Meaning: <hr/> <hr/>
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Table 4 Pictionary (Form)

architect	assistant	calendar	co-worker
diaper	disorganized	forgetful	employer
impatient	punctual	requirement	schedule

(Huang and Gandhioke, 2018)

All group members rotated in illustrating images and completing the form. Upon completing the initial three paintings, the kids requested additional cards from the teacher. The group that earned the most words became the winner of the game. This game fosters creativity through paintings and makes the students not bored in the learning activity.

4. Charades

Charades is a game that is popular in Western countries and China. The activity's objective was to enable students to comprehend the vocabulary and do corresponding actions. Initially, pupils were organized into three groups and received word cards. They were permitted to use their body language solely, refraining from spoken communication and arranging themselves in a line. Student A selected a word card in each group and performed the word for Student B without verbal communication. Student B either replicated the movements of Student A or devised original gestures informed by their interpretation of the term, which were subsequently conveyed to Student C, who had turned around upon instruction. In each group, Student C faced away from the performing members throughout their group's time to pass the word. Student C was required to figure out the term and articulate its spelling. Following the initial round, Student A in each group proceeded to the back of the queue while Students B and C are in one position forward. Consequently, the students altered their locations and roles, alternating between acting and guessing.

This game prevented pupils from becoming bored and fatigued. Instead, they participated in the performance and textual analysis process. This game is advised for classrooms with predominantly dynamic and extroverted students to ensure participants do not feel uneasy while completing the task.

5. Knowledge gap

According to Koshima and Saed (2016), in this task, the students were assigned to a group or pairs depending on the task portions. Each student in every group was assigned a piece and later placed in talented groups with peers who had the same segment. They were instructed to collaborate inside expert groups to attain mastery of their separate sections, as they would later reconvene in their original groups. When engaging with expert groups, they returned to their original groups to explain their contributions to the other members. Afterwards, several images were displayed on the board, and each group was instructed to mark the name of the corresponding image that aligned with the activity they had undertaken. When paired, participants got distinct yet incomplete images and were tasked with completing their photos based on their partner's description; ultimately, each group was required to select the most accurate representation that aligned with the whole description. While completing the activity, they were asked to choose one relevant image to display on the whiteboard.

6. Jigsaw

Koshima and Saed (2016) state that in jigsaw method the teacher explains the work and detailed the unfinished image. Students were required to take notes based on the teacher's description and use them to finish their drawings. Each student was instructed to select the appropriate image related to the description when completing the task. The photos were displayed on the board, and participants were asked to match their image with the appropriate one among those provided.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the previous studies, it can be concluded that vocabulary can be improved by using a task-based approach, and most students can be more confident in learning English because they gain vocabulary. Some tasks that can be used in teaching language are filling out word forms, chain stories, Pictionary, charades, knowledge gaps, and jigsaw. These tasks not only improve the student's vocabulary skills but also improve their collaborative skills because they are required to work in groups while doing the task. Moreover, some tasks demand the students to draw, which can increase their creativity.

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