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Task Based Learning Applied

A Collection of Research Papers by Mehran Esfandiari, Paul Knight, Julia Molinari and Sally Zacharias

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Task-Based Learning Applied

It would not be an exaggeration to say that since its early development in the 1980s Task-Based Learning (TBL) has grown to be among the dominant teaching methodologies in the area of second language teaching. This role is reflected in the increasing amount of commercially published teaching materials that claim to follow a task-based approach, the increasing attention given to the notion of tasks in the development of national curriculums, and the greater focus on TBL in initial and in-service language teacher education. Yet many teachers still feel uncertain as to what TBL is, why it might be appropriate for their teaching, and how to actually apply TBL principles in their teaching. The papers collected together here represent an attempt to provide language teaching professionals with both an overview of TBL and examples of TBL in practice.

The first paper in this collection, *In Search of Task-Based Learning*, presents a synthesis of the core TBL approaches and, by highlighting the key areas of agreement between them, provides the reader with an understanding of the defining characteristics of TBL. Furthermore, it draws attention to the differences between the approaches and considers the significance of these in order to allow the reader to understand current key debates within TBL.

The second paper in this collection, *The EAP Writing Process: Exploring Ontology, Methodology and Assessment*, argues in favour of a process genre approach to teaching writing in EAP. It does this by firstly defining the ontological nature of academic writing. Specifically, it highlights its dialogic nature in the cycle of knowledge description and transformation. TBL is then suggested as a suitable approach to the teaching of academic writing because of the humanistic educational principles that underlie its pedagogy. Finally, an authentic, integrated, task-based form of writing assessment which tests discourse synthesis is considered.

The third paper in this collection, *Towards a Task-Based Methodology for Reading-to-Write Using Academic Sources*, evaluates alternative approaches for teaching students the task of writing using academic sources on pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. By drawing on recent research, and the author's own experience of pre-sessional teaching, this article will present a rationale for a TBL methodology to teach EAP writing.

The final paper in this collection, *An Investigation into the Impact of Task-Based Writing Instruction upon the Reading Skills of PET Candidates*, considers the interrelationship between reading and writing for exam candidates. In doing so, it investigates the impact of task-based writing instruction on the reading skills of PET candidates and sees whether or not it has a positive effect on their reading comprehension.

Through this outlining of theory and consideration of practice in a variety of differing contexts, this collection of papers seeks to promote greater understanding of the potential of TBL, its implementation, and the conducting of research into its effectiveness. In doing so, it hopes to contribute to both the effective adoption of this methodology and its further development.

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In Search of Task-Based Learning

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Since the publication of Jane Willis' A Framework for Task-based Learning in 1996 (J. Willis 1996), the word 'task' has appeared in more and more ELT publications. Although this was not the start of discussions of task-based learning (TBL), it can be seen as the point when TBL changed from being an approach investigated and discussed by academics to one increasingly adopted by classroom teachers and promoted by publishers and institutions. As Nunan has observed:

If official documents are to be believed, TBLT has become a corner-stone of many educational institutions and ministries of education around the world. It seems to be the new orthodoxy with major publishers, most of whom claim at least one major series to be 'task-based'. (Nunan 2004: 13)

Yet, despite increased familiarity with the term TBL, the definition of this methodology is not fixed, but in general it has been observed that TBL methodologies:

..share a common idea: giving learners tasks to transact, rather than items to learn, provides an environment which best promotes the natural language learning process. (Foster 1999: 69)

However, concerning the actual definition of tasks, and how and why these are embedded within a programme of language teaching, certain variations between different approaches to TBL exist.

As TBL's influence is clearly increasing it is perhaps now pertinent to offer an overview of the area and to ask the question of whether TBL is a coherent unitary methodological approach, or whether it is in fact simply an umbrella term for a disparate variety of approaches, which may in fact be mutually exclusive. This paper seeks to do this by first identifying the common features of approaches to TBL advocated by leading scholars in the field. It then highlights possible areas of disagreement. Finally, it attempts an analysis of the situation before concluding whether or not these approaches can be considered part of a coherent whole or not. This paper is not attempting to promote one approach to TBL over

another, and will therefore only consider areas of contention between approaches that would directly influence classroom practice, rather than those which exist at a more theoretical level.

By necessity, an analysis of this kind has to be selective in what it chooses to include. This analysis has taken as its guiding principle current relevance, either theoretically or directly upon classroom teaching, when choosing what to include. Two theoretical approaches to TBL have been selected. The first, which was developed by Breen, Candlin, and Murphy, grew out of Communicative Language Teaching and emphasises an educational and psychological model of TBL (Breen & Candlin 1980; Candlin & Murphy 1987). This model will be referred to as the 'Breen & Candlin' model throughout this paper as they have been its most consistent advocates. The second theoretical model to be considered will be that proposed by Long, Crookes and others (Long 1989; Long & Crookes 1992). This model takes as its base research into second language acquisitions (SLA). This model will be referred to as the 'Long' model throughout this paper as he has been its most consistent advocate.

In addition to these two theoretical approaches to TBL, the two most significant attempts to realise TBL in practice will be considered here. The first of these is the approach advocated by Dave and Jane Willis (D. Willis & Willis 2001, 2007; J. Willis: op.cit.), and the second is that proposed by Nunan (Nunan 2001, 2004).

Although neither Ellis nor Skehan have outlined or sought to promote their own fully developed model of TBL, they have a significant impact on the current work of others in the area and are also included here (Ellis 1997; Skehan 1996, 1998). Conversely, even though his 1987 *Second Language Pedagogy* was influential at the time, the work of Prabhu is not considered here as it is not directly influencing current thinking (Prabhu 1987).

Common features

The following could be seen as characteristic features of some, if not all, approaches to TBL:

- Task as a reflection of real world activity

- Task as the syllabus unit
- Task as part of a negotiated syllabus / learner centredness
- Task as a creator of optimal SLA conditions
- Task as a tool to identify areas to address in subsequent work

The first feature, Task as a reflection of real world activity, can certainly be seen as common to all models of TBL. Within the approach outlined by Breen, Candlin and Murphy tasks are seen as social and problem solving interaction (Breen & Candlin: *ibid*; Candlin & Murphy: *ibid*). These 'problem posing activities' are undertaken as part of a process of 'exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu' (Candlin & Murphy 1987: 10). This emphasis on the social aspect highlights their real world connection.

Within his model, Long highlights the relationship between 'target tasks' and 'pedagogic tasks'(Long: *ibid*; Long & Crookes: *ibid*), the former being what the learner will eventually do in the target language, and the latter being activities which are worked on in the classroom, and approximate the target tasks (Long: *ibid*). Again the firm footing of tasks within real world activity is emphasised.

In their attempt to support the application of task-based learning in the classroom, the Willis' have also emphasised the importance of a real world basis for tasks. In her influential 1996 work, *A Framework for Task-based Learning*, Jane Willis states:

The aim of the task is to create a real purpose for language use and provide a natural context for language study. (J. Willis 1996: 1)

&

In this book tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. (J. Willis 1996: 23)

The second feature is more problematic to identify than the first, as modern syllabuses do not contain a single strand identifying the content of any course but usually comprise several strands dealing with different aspects of a course. Within the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001) tasks might be seen as part of the *Can do* specifications, these being statements concerning what a learner can do with the

language in given contexts. The key question appears to be whether sufficient weight is given to the task strand of the syllabus in relation to the other strands. The Willis' have stated that:

The first principle of TBL is that units of syllabus organisation should be tasks which define what outcomes can be achieved through language, rather than linguistic items as such. (D. Willis & Willis 2001: 176)

Nunan presumably agrees that tasks are the unit of language teaching as he has called them the 'central curriculum planning tool' (Nunan 2004: 113). This seems the key point when considering the position of a task strand within a syllabus: that it should be considered more central than any strand concerned with specific linguistic items. Skehan sees a divide existing between 'strong' and 'weak' models of TBL based on whether tasks are '...the unit of language teaching..' or '...embedded in a more complex pedagogical context' (Skehan 1996: 39), which suggests a cline running from 'strong' TBL through 'weak' TBL to non-TBL.

Breen and Candlin argued for a negotiated syllabus with both teachers and learners selecting the content of a course built upon social and problem-solving interaction (Breen & Candlin: op.cit.; Candlin & Murphy: op.cit.). Within such a model, the tasks themselves would clearly be the dominant strand.

While Long doesn't address the question directly, it can be inferred from his broader comments on syllabus types that his model also sees task as the central unit of the syllabus. He makes the case against structural synthetic syllabuses and in favour of analytical syllabuses, which include those with tasks at their core (Long & Crookes: op.cit.).

The third point, concerning a negotiated syllabus and/or a focus on learner centredness, can be seen as common to the model of TBL advanced by Breen, Candlin and Murphy (Breen & Candlin: op.cit.; Candlin & Murphy: op.cit.), as well as that proposed by Nunan, but it is not something addressed by Long. Indeed, a negotiated syllabus is something that Long and Crookes warn against for fear it may restrict range and coverage (Long & Crookes: op.cit.). Other writers, such as the Willis', can be said to be 'neutral' on the issue,

neither directly advocating it, nor necessarily precluding it from their model.

Nunan originally advocated increased learner-centredness within the then dominant CLT tradition. His subsequent work suggests that the position he took then is something he feels is still relevant for TBL today as he continues to argue that 'teacher-focused work should not dominate class time' (Nunan 2004: 37).

The fourth feature, task as a creator of optimal SLA conditions, is the cornerstone of Long's model of TBL and those that contributed to it. Long and Crookes argue that this model is soundly based on SLA research, on classroom-centred research, and on principles of syllabus and course design (Long & Crookes 1992: 41). Reference is made to TBL's basis in linguistics research by Nunan (Nunan 2004: 10), while Jane Willis states that TBL:

...takes into account what we know about how people learn languages. (J. Willis 1996: 1)

Much of the work of Skehan and Ellis is also closely related to this approach and attempts to address the key questions raised if an SLA-based model is to be realised in practice. Skehan states that for TBL:

Contriving activities which are at once meaningful and provide scope for a focus on form and specific forms is an important challenge for the future. (Skehan 1998: 65)

Breen and Candlin's approach doesn't build its case upon SLA theory. It should, however, be noted that all TBL approaches embrace the findings of SLA research when that research suggests that the learning of discrete linguistic items is unlikely to be a successful approach to language acquisition; it is concerning the degree to which they draw on SLA research to develop alternatives that they differ.

Our final feature, tasks as an identifier of areas of language learning that might need addressing in subsequent work, is a direct reference to one role for tasks within the Willis' task-cycle. A similar, but less explicitly described cycle, forms part of Nunan's approach. It is not something either explicitly or implicitly addressed in either the approaches of Long or Breen and Candlin.

Contentious areas

Having focussed on areas that unite different approaches, it is now necessary to consider those areas which have proved controversial and can therefore help differentiate between the various approaches to TBL, namely:

- Inclusion of attention to form in pre-task activities and instructions
- Inclusion of consciousness raising / metacognitive tasks

The issue of students extracting exemplifiers of language form to use during task completion from pre-task input highlights differences in approach to TBL. This is potentially problematic from the Willis' perspective as they argue that:

The initial aim of TBL is to encourage learners to engage in meaning with the language resources they already have. This makes learners acutely aware of what they need to learn. (D. Willis & Willis 2007: 2)

Nunan, however, regards this process as something that can be exploited by the teacher (Nunan 2001). This issue of attention to form in pre-task activities and instructions clearly divides Nunan and the Willis'. Skehan outlines pre-task activities which fit with both the Willis and Nunan models when he addresses the issue (Skehan 1996: 52), which suggests that he at least does not regard some attention to language form in pre-task activities as outside the remit of TBL.

This is not an issue specifically commented upon by other TBL advocates, but it can be inferred that this is not a significant issue for Breen and Candlin as it concerns an SLA perspective that they do not use to support their position. One would expect this to be a significant issue for Long though, as it relates to the SLA arguments he uses to support his own model of TBL. Although Long hasn't explicitly addressed this question, it seems reasonable to conclude that he would side with the Willis' in seeing no merit in paying attention to form prior to a task.

Another contentious issue is the use of tasks which themselves study language and draw attention to linguistic form. Skehan

outlines the psycho-linguistic rationale for such tasks when he observes that:

... a syntactic orientation to processing, which may not occur so naturally in communicative and immersion approaches, can be induced by giving learners tasks (such as dictogloss). Such tasks have to encourage hypothesizing, under conditions (collaboration, peer-support) which enable restructuring to occur.' (Skehan 1998: 59)

Ellis has described such tasks as 'consciousness raising' and sees a role for them within a TBL framework (Ellis 2003). He defends them as tasks because they 'require learners to talk about the data together' (Ellis 2003: 17). Others do not however agree that such activities can be seen as tasks, for example the Willis' state that:

The use of the word 'task' is sometimes extended to include 'metacognitive tasks', or exercises with a focus on language form.....But a definition of tasks which includes an explicit focus on form seems to be so all-embracing as to cover almost anything that might happen in a classroom. (D. Willis & Willis 2001: 173-174)

Nunan appears to be taking a 'middle-ground' position when he states that:

...I have embraced a 'weak' interpretation of TBLT, arguing that while focus on form activities do not constitute tasks in their own right, they do have a place in any task-based instructional cycle. (Nunan 2004: 111)

As with the previous issue, this issue is not directly addressed by Breen and Candlin as it is outside their conceptualisation of task, but again it could be considered likely that Long would agree with the Willis' although he has not commented directly on the issue either.

Analysis of situation

The information presented so far in this paper has been summarised in Table 1: Summary of Approaches to TBL.

Figure 1: Summary of Approaches to TBL

	Breen & Candlin	Long	D & J Willis	Nunan	Skehan	Ellis
Task as a reflection of real world activity	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>
Task as a key syllabus component	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>
Task as part of a negotiated syllabus/learner-centredness	<u>Y</u>	<u>N</u>	X	Y	X	X
Task as a creator of optimal SLA conditions	X	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>
Task as a tool to identify areas to address in subsequent work	X	X	<u>Y</u>	Y	X	X
Can include consciousness raising / metacognitive tasks	X	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>
Allows attention to form in pre-task activities and instructions	X	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	X

Y Yes and commented upon directly

Y Yes but not commented upon directly

N No and commented upon directly

N No but not commented upon directly

X Not commented upon directly

This table suggests that the model of TBL proposed by Breen and Candlin stands outside the current TBL mainstream as it has not drawn explicitly upon SLA to support its suggestions for classroom practice. Its influence can, however, be seen in Nunan's model, which does sit within the current mainstream.

The representation of Long's work in the table highlights that it has been focussed on specific issues related to tasks and SLA and has not been directly concerned with the emerging discussions regarding the actual application of task-based approaches. The influence of Long's work on others is clearly represented though.

As noted earlier, Skehan and Ellis have also not proposed fully developed models of TBL in the way that the Willis' and Nunan have. This is illustrated by the number of issues where there is no direct comment from them. Not surprisingly, it is the Willis' and Nunan who have taken positions, either directly or implicitly, on the most issues, as it is they who have had to address them most directly when attempting to formulate concrete prescriptions for actual classroom practice.

The most notable thing when comparing the Nunan and Willis models is the high degree of similarity. On the issue of tasks as part of a negotiated syllabus/learner centredness, it should be noted that the Willis' do not appear to be against the principles of learner-centredness. They appear to have taken a 'weak' version of these principles to heart in the sense that they are clearly coming from a CLT tradition that also adopted a weak version of these principles. They do not, however, specifically promote or allude to them in the way Nunan has.

Where Nunan and the Willis' appear to differ most is in their attitudes to the inclusion of tasks and instructions that contain a more explicit focus on language forms. In light of the previous comment concerning learner-centredness, it seems reasonable to say that Nunan's conceptualisation of TBL is broader than that of the Willis'. It draws more on work dealing with negotiated syllabuses and learner-centredness, in one direction, as well as allowing tasks that focus on language forms in another. This could be seen as placing it more within the tradition of what came before, namely CLT, than an attempt to establish a significantly different teaching paradigm. While the Willis' also acknowledge their CLT

roots, their work can perhaps be seen as a more deliberate attempt to transcend what has gone before rather than a broader development of it. It is essential to understand though that however much the work of Nunan or the Willis' can be seen as drawing on CLT, one thing unites their work and separates it from what went before: the central place given to tasks in any syllabus.

Conclusion

The question this paper has sought to answer is whether it is possible to actually talk of a single methodology called TBL, or whether the label has been applied too widely. The analysis conducted here suggests that a broad methodology does exist that sees tasks based on real world activities as central to any syllabus, but within that broad methodology two distinct trends exist. The first of these has developed around principles of a negotiated syllabus and learner-centredness, while the second is that developed around principles derived from SLA research. These two distinct trends have largely come together, though, when attempts to put TBL into practice have occurred, with Nunan's realisation representing a possibly more balanced development of both trends, and the Willis' representing a greater emphasis of the SLA side. On balance, however, the great similarity of the Nunan and the Willis models makes it reasonable to conclude that in terms of attempts to actually put TBL into practice, it is valid to talk of TBL as a recognisable and distinct entity, despite some distinct differences at a deeper theoretical level.

The subsequent chapters in this collection show that TBL can be seen as compatible other educational models, for example it can combine with a product-based approach to teaching writing (Zacharias, and Molinari in this collection). Such an approach sits easily within both Nunan's and the Willis' model of TBL, while also having roots in constructivist models of learning. By advocating such combined approaches, these authors are drawing upon both the SLA basis of TBL and its roots in ideas of learner-centredness; they are both considering the internal, psycholinguistic processes involved, and the external socio-cultural ones. It does not seem unreasonable to conclude that the future will see further exploration of how TBL can be realised in ways that exploit the common ground it has with other models of learning.

The EAP Writing Process: Exploring Ontology, Methodology and Assessment

Julia Molinari

Introduction

An expeditious perusal of any HE educational programme shows that writing is the main skill through which students' academic and research competencies are measured. It is not surprising, therefore, that EAP programmes should focus significantly on the writing skill by setting students the challenge of transliterating their ideas into the written pragmatics of describing, explaining, classifying and narrating in order to persuade their readers of their viewpoint. Writing ability is, in this sense (and in the absence of recognised learning impairments), equated with academic ability.

Given the high-stake nature of the written word for university students and the responsibility we as educators have to support them, this paper aims to draw attention to the very nature of writing in order to better understand and define it within an EAP teaching and learning context. This will be explored in the first section. With some definitions in place, the second section will consider the adeptness of task-based learning (TBL) as an approach for developing academic writing competence. This will lead to a reflection in the third section on how best to assess student writing.

Academic writing

Much of the academic writing ability of international students (undergraduates and postgraduates) on a general EAP course is assessed on their ability to write discussion-type essays which follow a standard pattern: introduction, a body of three to five paragraphs aimed at supporting a thesis or aim, and a conclusion (Warschauer 2002). However, providing a definition of 'essay' in this general EAP context is problematic because "it is rare in academic coursework or exams" and it rarely reflects "real-life writing contexts" (Alexander, Argent and Spencer 2008:182). Gimenez (2008:152) argues that in addition to students finding essay writing demanding and frustrating, engaging in this type of writing may not actually facilitate their entry into the discourse community of their future academic disciplines because fluency in other genres may be more appropriate. For example, the genre of reflective essays is required on nursing, midwifery and education courses whereas business and engineering courses expect students to write reports (ibid). Different genres, it is

argued, require different linguistic choices and the traditional discussion-type essay does not facilitate the acquisition of these genres.

It could however be argued that the skills developed in learning to write these standard essays will be of help to students in their future academic disciplines whether they are scientists or historians (Hyland 2006: 11). Such skills include choosing academic rather than colloquial vocabulary; skimming, scanning, summarising, paraphrasing and synthesising information from readings (Jordan 1997); adopting an academic/objective style rather than a personal style (Hyland 2002) and using language that facilitates the expression of specific rhetorical functions, or 'moves' (Swales 1990 cited in Flowerdew: *ibid*), such as comparisons and causal relations (Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham: 22 and 66). Coherence, cohesion and paragraph control are equally essential (*ibid*: 68; Hyland: 178).

An example of such an essay can be found in Warschauer (2002: 47) who describes the product or formalist approach to essay writing adopted by a teacher called Mary. A product approach provides students with a model essay which they have to reproduce using vocabulary, grammar and ideas that they have previously learnt on a given topic. Students are not necessarily required to bring their own experience into the essay, but to replicate the model text. However, Warschauer observes that although students were able to produce essays of this type, they were not necessarily prepared for the writing demands of their future academic disciplines. In contrast to the product approach, the process or constructivist approach emphasises the need to brainstorm, plan, discuss and organise ideas and then draft, proofread and edit the writing (Badger and White 2000: 154; Warschauer: 48). The process approach reflects academic practice more authentically in the sense that writing takes time to produce because it requires thinking and drafting before it can be presented as a final, public product.

However, time constraints and level of language proficiency at the start of an EAP course may prevent students from mastering such product and process skills. With regard to this, Warschauer quotes another teacher he observed in his study:

I don't think that this class should teach [the students] language or grammar because I think that's beyond our possibilities for one semester. Some of the students have

such a low level of language ability that they wouldn't benefit from just a focus on that for a semester. I think the problem is bigger than that. What they really need is just to learn all the skills involved in studying, writing, reading, relating to their professors and other students in their departments. And they need to realise what graduate life is about, how to become more academic in this system. (2002: 50)

Warschauer argues that in order to become competent writers, students must go through a "lengthy process of discovering what university life is about" (2002: 53). In other words, students will not become expert writers over-night and will not achieve the "high degree of precision" in writing that Gimenez says is expected of students before they even begin their courses (2008: 151). Moreover, in response to those who argue that students acquire language step-by-step (such as the proponents of the product approach), there appears to be no evidence in the literature to suggest that weaker students need to learn the basics of language (such as sentence structure or word order, for example) before they can learn more complex forms (e.g. specialised jargon or rhetorical moves to express causality) and that, in any case, there are "serious doubts over [what constitutes] a 'common core' of language items" (Hyland 2006: 11 and 12). This raises concerns about which language forms to prioritise in an EAP class, who should be responsible for this choice and to what extent such forms will be of use to the learner.

Flowerdew (2000) also argues against adopting a product approach to writing on the grounds that even if it were useful for students to have a model to replicate, the reality is that no such models actually exist, even in a very specific field such as engineering. Her study of 15 engineering reports showed that there was considerable variation in the rhetorical moves of introductions. To avoid the difficulty of finding the 'model' text, she suggests using more realistic models such as reports written by actual undergraduate engineering students.

Moreover, Alexander, Argent and Spencer (2008: 190) show that even when a student has successfully replicated the language of a rhetorical function such as 'classification' from a 'model' essay, this does not lead to a coherent argument in the student's own writing because, in the case study they present, the writer has no specific audience in mind and no motivation to write about the topic (sport).

The tension that arises from whether to adopt a 'product' or 'process' approach to writing in the EAP classroom can, to a certain extent, be resolved by adopting a 'genre-approach' to writing. Badger and White support an integrated approach which combines the positive features of the product approach (e.g. having a model), the process approach (e.g. students brainstorm ideas and experience) and the genre approach which emphasises the need to tap into the learner's potential by having a purpose for writing and a reader in mind (Swales cited in Flowerdew). They call this the process genre approach.

In line with the process genre approach to writing, Moore and Morton argue that in real university contexts, essays rely on an 'information source' (2005: 5), such as a reading text and prompt, they are epistemic rather than deontic (i.e. they require topic knowledge rather than personal judgements) and that their rhetorical features include summaries as well as comparisons, descriptions and evaluations. This draws attention to the fact that writing is part of a process which includes reading. It is by reading other people's writing that novice writers notice rhetoric and form. Given that EAP teachers should know "what the expectations of academic departments are" (Alexander, Argent and Spencer: 180) and that students should learn to write with these expectations in mind, learners should be exposed to more authentic genres. This view is also supported by Weigle (2002: 96) and Plakans (2008; 2009 a and b).

The process genre approach, which requires a focus on the writer's purpose and audience, would seem to support the following claims that writing, in addition to needing relevant content (Moore 2000), is:

- always situated within a genre because it needs a communicative purpose, an audience and a context¹ (Devitt 1996);
- a dialogic activity in which "proficient writers attempt to second-guess the kind of information that readers might want or expect to find at each point in the unfolding text" (Thomson 2001: 58). Thomson shows clearly how writers respond to the actual or imagined utterances of others, just as speakers do. He claims that good writing is inherently interactional because it involves the reader in an argument during which objections, making connections and re-iterating central ideas form part of the 'dialogue' between the reader and the writer, for example, evaluating content through the use of modality and overt

¹ The role of 'context' for writing will be mentioned later.

interaction with the reader. This is achieved through the use of imperatives, direct questions and statements which lend themselves to being contradicted, such as "It might be argued that [...]; but" (2001: 68). This means that writing is not merely interactive, as the use of signalling words and textual features might suggest. These include discourse markers such as 'however' and 'so' which signal to the reader that a contrast or consequence is being expressed, but do not address the reader directly. His claims are supported by Matsuda and Tardy (2007) and Zhao and Losa (2008) who argue that authorial voice in the form of re-iteration of key points and reader awareness can determine the quality of a written text. Similarly, Thomson's views are in line with Grice's (1975) 'cooperation principle' which refers to the responsibility writers have to their readers in keeping information relevant and concise;

- an identity-building activity in which writers position themselves in terms of stance in order to become part of academic discourses and communities where there are shared practices, for example, constructing arguments to ensure they are persuasive (Hyland 2002; Uzuner 2008; Ivanič 1998);
- a social practice (Gimenez; Weigle 2002) which is communicative and purposeful (Swales 1990) whereby norms and conventions relate to a specific discipline (for example, reflective journals in nursing).

When academic writing is seen as an activity which is genre-embedded, dialogic, identity-building, social, communicative and purposeful, then *quality* writing is "the degree to which a work comes together as a whole to achieve its intended purpose" (Sadler 2010: 544)

This notion of 'purpose' – which is central to the genre approach of Swales and Martin (1984) – can be understood dialogically in terms of the degree to which a piece of writing reaches out to its audience, as Moore indicates:

Watson and Crick's work was remarkable, as was the style in which it was reported. Unlike virtually all other research reports of its time, the paper² by Watson and Crick was an accessible and entertaining paper that [...] could be read and understood by educated laypeople. (2000:23)

² This refers to the paper published in 1953 by James Watson and Francis Crick entitled "Molecular structure of nucleic acids: a structure for deoxyribose nucleic acid". In this paper, which won its authors a Nobel Prize, the writers made public their description of the double-helix structure of DNA.

Similarly, when Uzuner states that:

...it is the stylistic differences, not so much the linguistic barriers, that lead to rhetorical weaknesses in multilingual scholars' writings. (2010:250)

he is referring to the interactional (stylistic) rather than interactive (linguistic) features discussed by Thomson. Typically, it is in the discussion section of an academic paper that dialogue occurs; it is here that the writer is required to persuade the reader by drawing together all the strands of an argument. In other words, this is where the writer explicitly addresses the reader. It is in the discussion section that the writer's stance (identity) is most manifest because this is where a scholar needs to position themselves within their research community. However, as Uzuner shows, this is also the section that multilingual scholars have most difficulty writing.

Swales exemplifies this clearly in the following example. He asks the reader to consider the meaning of the word 'interestingly'. He reminds us that it is a fairly common disjunct in academic discourse, occurring most often in sentence initial position but rarely used as an adverb of manner as most dictionaries would define it. He quotes the following extract from a writer of an academic paper:

This increasing population of international students, especially from Asia, in the United States faces special challenges in terms of adaptation to a new living and learning environment [...] **Interestingly**, several studies suggest that students from Asia have more difficulty adjusting to life in the United States than international students from non-Asian countries (2011: 84-85)

and then draws our attention to the dialogic illocutionary force of 'interestingly' in the context:

The **interestingly** disjunct thus conjures up in the reader a sense of the author saying to herself, "how clever of me to have noticed this and you bet I am going to exploit this further in my paper" (ibid: 85)

In fact, another notion which is central to the genre approach is that of context. Halliday (1994) provides a systemic functional account of what context is in relation to language. He advocates an ethnographic definition of context which takes into account the field (what is being

talked or written about), the tenor (who is involved in this interaction) and the mode (whether the interaction is spoken or written) of any given situation. By changing any one of these three variables in an interaction, a good writer will necessarily amend the language they use to ensure the text achieves its communicative purpose (Devitt 1996). In the example referred to above, 'interestingly' takes on a meaning that cannot be found in a dictionary because its locutionary and pragmatic force is bound by the context of that particular piece of writing. Feez (1998), Hyland, Christie (1999), Flowerdew (1993) and Hyland (2002) have argued in a similar vein to draw attention to the importance of providing a context for writing.

This section has argued that the ontological nature of writing cannot be reduced to either a product or a process because it is a complex social dialogical activity which requires a writer to have a purpose, an audience, a context and an identity to communicate. This dynamic nature of writing can therefore be best understood in terms of 'genre'.

Teaching academic writing

We now consider the affordances of task-based learning (TBL) for the production of a text that displays the qualities of good writing as outlined in the previous section.

There are many definitions of 'task' in the literature which aim to ascribe specificity to the term within the language learning context. The following definitions draw attention to the similarities between the nature of 'task' and the nature of 'writing'. Skehan (2003: 3) refers to a task as an activity in which meaning is primary: there is a goal and an outcome; Feez (1998) calls it a goal-oriented activity which reflects a social purpose; Swales (1990) refers to it as a goal-oriented activity which can be sequenced and is undertaken for a foreseen or emerging socio-rhetorical situation; Samuda and Bygate (2008) call it a holistic activity which has a pragmatic outcome and promotes language learning through a product and process approach. They also provide references to the underlying educational philosophies of TBL such as those developed by Dewey and Kohonen on managing experience (for example, learners' academic identities) as a source of learning; Freinet and Freire on the importance of having a social purpose for learning in order to transform knowledge from description to evaluation and Van Lier and Leung on the need for tasks to deal with meaningful content that leads to action. The role of context, which was mentioned earlier with reference to Halliday's systemic functional analysis of language, is

also important in TBL pedagogies: "... it is the context that provides the primary grounds for the participants' interpretations of what they are doing and why [...]. This is bound to affect the kinds and qualities of action they engage in" (Samuda and Bygate: 258).

TBL has also been referred to in terms of being 'strong' (Prabhu's version: 1987; Skehan), where the negotiation of meaning takes precedence over the focus on form, and 'weak', where a focus on language form is built into the task cycle (Willis 1996). Although both forms are compatible with the view of writing outlined above, the need to address language in the EAP context would seem to favour a weaker version of TBL, depending on what stage students are at in the writing process. For example, during the brainstorming and research stage, a focus on linguistic form may be less relevant than during the proof-reading and final drafting stages.

The following definition of 'task' seems to summarise the above:

a goal-oriented communicative activity with a specific outcome, where the emphasis is on exchanging meanings not producing specific language forms (Willis 1996: 36)

When we analyse Willis' pre-task and task cycle (which includes the four stages of task, planning, reporting and language focus), several opportunities arise for writers to establish the purpose, audience, context and identity of their text, thus ensuring that the final product is dialogic and socially situated. In the first section, we argued that there is little evidence to suggest that language is acquired step by step. We also claimed that becoming fluent in the practices of an academic community does not necessarily require the acquisition of a prescribed core of language. Similarly, Willis claims that "students will not necessarily notice the same things as you but will pick out things that [...] they can fit into their own picture of the target language" (Willis: 103) or of the task purpose (Samuda and Bygate: 11-13).

In a general EAP class, Willis' pre-task might be to establish the purpose and audience of a piece of writing by exploring model texts from a range of disciplines and topics in order to provide students with an opportunity to think and choose what kind of genre they wish or need to produce. This creates the necessary motivation which is central to TBL (Willis: 11).

During the planning stage of Willis' task cycle – which might include the process involved in preparing to write – there are many dialogic opportunities for learners to explain what they mean, correct themselves, experiment, listen to each other and help each other draft their work (1996: 57-58). Building on Flowerdew's suggestion (2000: 372-373), the process genre approach could be embedded into the planning stage by identifying the rhetorical moves to reconstruct a section of a reading text, perhaps using a jumbled paragraph activity and comparing examples to show differences in the genres; activities could be designed to show how information relates to previous sections and flowcharts could be used to show the Problem – Solution pattern (i.e. focus on language). All of these opportunities foster the integration of communicative language skills such as reading, listening and speaking in order to write. These skills do not become the focus of the lesson, but rather the means through which learners first notice how other writers create meaning and then negotiate the meanings they themselves wish to communicate in their own writing. This integration of skills is also endorsed by Willis (1996: 25)

By allowing students time to discover the patterns that occur naturally in other people's texts and to integrate these into the new context of their chosen written topic, they would be replicating the authentic process of learning and of becoming more expert members of their discourse communities (Warschauer). This view is echoed by Willis who claims that:

with constant exposure and opportunities to use language, [learners] will be more likely to notice further examples, and discover how and when to use them for themselves (1996: 103)

Because of the focus on social, collaborative and purposeful talk during which learners "find out what meanings they wish to convey" (ibid: 34), thus developing their communicative confidence without fearing inaccuracy, TBL sits within the humanistic tradition of language teaching where students are encouraged to observe and respond to each other collaboratively by exploring how the meanings they create during both process and product contribute to their sense of identity (Moskowitz: 195-201). Similarly, proponents of TBL argue that language learning is holistic (Samuda and Bygate: 7), has uncertain outcomes (2008:10 and 13) and should involve students' real life experiences. This view is supported throughout Willis' work which seems to echo Vygotsky's (1986) collaborative pedagogy:

[Doing a task in pairs or groups] engages learners in using language purposefully and cooperatively, concentrating on building meaning, not just using language for display purposes (Willis: 35)

Building meaning, purpose, identity and confidence are essential to the academic writer. Without these, others cannot be persuaded or dissuaded and knowledge cannot be transformed.

Assessing academic writing

Samuda and Bygate make scant reference to how assessment can reflect what is covered on a task-based syllabus, suggesting that testing the language of holistic tasks is hard because it is complex and unpredictable (2008: 17). Future research, they claim, would need to investigate this area because "It would help to inform pedagogy to understand the roles tasks play in preparing students for end of course assessment (2008: 260).

However, elsewhere, they refer to the Australian Adult Migration Education Programme which uses 'competencies' and 'attainment' targets to allow progress through the programme. In line with the principles of TBL, where the emphasis is on processes and emergent language to negotiate meanings, EAP assessment could also focus on academic competencies rather than prescribed forms of language. This view is supported by Prabhu who believes assessment should be carried out on content, not language, in order to evaluate the success with which a student has performed a task, or solved a problem posed by the task. This would be compatible with Willis' understanding of task "where the emphasis is on exchanging meanings not producing specific language forms" (1996: 36).

The integration of skills which TBL seems to foster (Willis: 25) could also be validly tested in integrated forms of assessment. There is extensive literature on the need to reflect the authenticity of the academic process involved in teaching EAP through integrated tests such as 'reading for writing' (Paltridge 1992; Plakans, Cho 2003, Moore and Morton (2004). The writing descriptors would need to be criterion-referenced (Hyland 2006: 102; Paltridge: 244; Alderson, Clapham and Wall: 180-181) meaning that assessment would be measured against a set of external criteria (what the student can actually do) and not a set

of norms (such as the relative performance of other students). This would also ensure that the test maintained content validity (Alderson, Clapham and Wall: 173). The need for criterion-referenced tests is also supported by Long and Crookes 1992 and 1993 (cited in Samuda and Bygate: 201)

Finally, in the context of academic discourse, the dynamic process-oriented nature of portfolios as an assessment tool, which encourage dialogue and self-evaluation, would support the social nature of the writing process which involves discussing purpose, audience, stance, drafting, revising, editing. Portfolios can build a sense of community and caring because they can be shared, looked back upon, discussed (Callahan 1995). In this sense, portfolios would complement the need to develop learner's confidence and encourage them to express the meanings they wish to convey (Willis: 34-35; Moskowitz).

Conclusions

This paper has argued that becoming a good academic writer requires an understanding of the genre-embedded, dialogic, identity-building, social, communicative and purposeful nature of the writing process and product. Writers need a purpose for writing before they can learn the language needed to enact this purpose. Language thus becomes a conduit for achieving this purpose, rather than the purpose itself.

We have also argued for a process genre approach to writing because of the socially- situated nature of the planning and drafting stage, but also because a proficient writer needs to show reader awareness in the final product (Thomson 2001). Academic texts, in particular, require writers to synthesise discourse as argued by Plakans (2008, 2009 a and b), which further highlights the need to view writing as a process which involves reading other genres and synthesising them to create a new text.

In terms of pedagogic approaches to the teaching of writing, the humanistic affordances of TBL have been listed. Namely, TBL provides dialogic opportunities for the writing process to be fully explored, for example in the planning stage of Willis' task cycle. Reference was also made to Flowerdew who describes a genre awareness-raising activity. Moreover, TBL encourages learners to notice language rather than copy it which further encourages reflection on the appropriateness of a particular language form for a given purpose.

We concluded with an overview of forms of writing assessment which are compatible with a TBL writing syllabus. We suggested that outcomes-based assessment, which tests competencies rather than language skills, would be a valid assessment tool. We also argued in favour of integrated forms of assessment which reflect the discourse synthesising process advocated by Plakans. Portfolios would also seem to support the TBL approach because they reflect the social and dialogic nature of the writing process.

Towards a Task-Based Methodology for Reading-to-Write Using Academic Sources

Sally Zacharias

Introduction

Many university pre-sessional courses offer writing classes which require their students to submit a project that they have written using academic sources. The aim of these components is often to guide students through the different stages of writing of that project. The course frequently adopts a task-based syllabus, in that the students are expected to produce a project, as they will be required to do on their future university course. One key set of skills that students need to have to be able to complete this task, and more importantly to be able to study on a university course, is the ability to read different academic sources and to present arguments from these sources in their own writing. As they are such an important set of skills, there has developed a number of different approaches, or theories of language teaching and learning to teach them (Richards & Rogers 1996).

This paper seeks to determine and exemplify the most appropriate methodological approach for teaching these skills to achieve the task of writing a project on a particular pre-sessional course at a British University. It was found that the course materials at the language centre support mainly a product and to a lesser extent a genre-based approach. However, drawing from recent English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Task-Based Learning (TBL) literature and reflecting on the teaching and learning that took place during the five week course in summer 2010, it was soon concluded that an overly dominant product-genre-based approach does not always meet the needs of the students. Although the target task (see Knight in this collection) had been specified in the syllabus, the pedagogical approach did not always help the students achieve the desired outcome. More consideration is needed when selecting pedagogical tasks for students in the classroom. Rather than simply giving students 'items to learn [students need] real life tasks to transact' (Foster 1990: 69 cited in Knight see in this collection). In other words, it became soon apparent that a TBL methodological approach would be more appropriate in this context.

Developing a methodology encompasses more, however, than deciding on which approach is best suited to teaching a set of skills. As Nunan (1995) points out the development of a methodology needs to take into account the classroom and institutional context and 'it will emerge over

time as a result of the interaction among the teacher, the students, and the materials and activities' (Bell 2003: 329). This paper will begin with a brief description of the background of the students, institutional context and the needs of the students. An analysis of the relationship between a teaching methodology and a task will be made to orientate the reader some of the terminology used throughout this paper. A literature review will be then presented on the process and genre-based approaches, briefly highlighting some of the principles, beliefs and procedures behind each approach in relation to the teaching of reading to write using academic sources. Finally, to evaluate the methodology used, the learning objective, learning activities, in other words the tasks assigned and assessment of these skills on the course will be analysed. Some recommendations will be made for implementing changes in my teaching and in the syllabus in the future.

Background

The project component class that I taught had sixteen students coming mainly from China but also from Thailand and South America. The students arrive on the course with varying degrees of subject knowledge, language proficiency and study skills. The majority of the students aim to be accepted on a university postgraduate course. However, a small minority are undergraduate students, who have had little experience at studying at a university. Students will need to be ready to cope with the reading and writing demands of their future courses and may in the future receive little support with developing these skills.

By reviewing a random sample of ten projects written by members of the group on the 'turnitin³' database and the feedback comments written by the tutors marking the projects, it became apparent that many of the students still experienced great difficulty in writing from sources by the end of the course. Six out of ten projects contained comments suggesting that the writer was paraphrasing too closely to the original text, suggesting that many students need to develop their reading-to-write skills further, in order to be able to cope with the demands of a postgraduate course. It, therefore, seems appropriate to examine the methodology adopted during the course in order to

³ Software that the language centre currently use to assist with the detection of plagiarism.

determine whether the difficulties students were having, were a result of the methodology used.

Methodology

According to the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics a methodology is defined as: 'the study of the practices and procedures used in teaching, and the principles and beliefs that underlie them.

Methodology includes:

- a) study of the nature of language skills (eg. reading, writing, speaking and listening) and procedures for teaching them
- b) study of the preparation of lesson plans, materials and textbooks for teaching language skills'

(Richards & Schmitt 2010: 363)

Any investigation of a methodological approach involves, therefore, the study of the learning activities, or tasks⁴ set in order to achieve the learning goal, which in this case is the reading of different academic sources in order to write a project.

As the study of the practices and procedures involves taking into consideration many of the variables of the classroom, for example the students' backgrounds or the time constraint of the course, this paper will, in addition to the above notion of a methodology, incorporate how reflecting on my own practice has constructed my own idea of a methodology. This is in line with approaches adopted by Schön (1983) which propose the notion of a cycle of teaching practice, reflection in light of the theory and subsequently a re-construction of the practice and theory (Dovey 2010). The study of a methodology, which according to Nunan (1995) is more associated with how a language is taught, cannot be studied, however, without analysing the purpose of study and assessment of the learning process. This paper will refer, therefore, to the overall purpose of the project component as well as the lesson objectives, which as stated by Nunan (ibid.) are an essential part any task-based syllabus. In order to determine how well the

⁴ A task is taken here to be 'an activity which is designed to help achieve a particular learning goal' source: Richards & Schmitt (2010: 584)

learning objectives were met, a brief evaluation of the assessment process will be made.

There is much debate in the literature on which approach is most appropriate to the teaching of reading to write using academic sources. The following will briefly outline the main principles behind each approach (see Molinari in this collection for a more detailed discussion). It will also discuss the suitability of each approach for the teaching of reading and writing on the project component and propose some classroom practices to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

The Product and the Process Approach

The product approach to teaching writing views a text as an object, which conform to a set of rules and the meaning is encoded in the text itself (Grabe & Stoller 2002). The assumption made by this approach is that everyone understands the text and the language of the text in the same way (Hyland 2009). It is possibly suitable once ideas have been negotiated and people have agreed on a common meaning. However, as many students still have to make sense of the texts they are reading, alternative approaches which encourage the students to analyse and negotiate meaning, need to be adopted.

An alternative approach to teaching writing from sources is the process approach, which focuses on what the writer does when writing rather than the final product. The focus is on how the student makes sense of what is read and communicates this to a readership: it places an emphasis on the 'operations required of the learner' (Long & Crookes 1992:28). Its strong problem-solving and social dimension appears ideally suited to international students, who will need to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the topic they have chosen and be able to communicate these ideas effectively to their audience in their final assessment.

The Reading-to-Write Construct

When students communicate their ideas, which they have constructed from their reading, effectively in their writing there seems to exist an amalgam of the two sets of skills. This has been referred to as the reading-to-write construct in the literature and can according to Dovey (2010) be examined from both a skills and a theory of learning perspective. One theory of learning, which supports the reading-to-

write construct, will be referred to next. This will be followed by an analysis of the skills and metacognitive skills involved. The reading-to-write construct has been viewed by many constructivists as a suitable pedagogical approach to support the learning process. According to the constructivist perspective, knowledge is created through the learning activities undertaken by the student (Biggs 2003). The student creates meaning through both reading comprehension and writing the ideas down, which they have understood from their reading (Delaney 2008).

Reading and Writing Skills in the Reading-to-Write Construct

The process of reading to comprehend in the reading-to-write construct involves both the selecting and connecting of ideas and information (Spivey 1990). Good language specific skills such as word-recognition skills are according to Delaney (2008) a prerequisite to good reading comprehension. However, there is evidence that some students (see McNamara et al. 2007: 233), who do have good word-recognition skills are still unable to infer meaning and learn effectively from texts and conversely how occasionally students with relatively poor L2 linguistic capabilities show the ability to construct the meaning from a text (Swaffar et al. 1991); other factors must be at work. A number of behavioural studies which have been carried out in the past twenty years have shed some light on this phenomenon (ibid.). These studies show that a person, who is able to successfully comprehend a text demonstrates the following abilities; a good working memory of the text as they are reading it, the ability to exclude irrelevant information and focus on pertinent information and lastly, the ability to use prior knowledge both actively and effectively to infer meaning from a text (Rosen & Engle 1998). Furthermore, these skills are metacognitive, which according to Cohen allow students to 'control their own cognition by coordinating the planning, organizing, and evaluating of the learning process' (1998 cited in Grabe & Stoller 2002:45). There is some evidence to show that L2 readers perform better if they receive metacognitive strategy training (O'Reilly et al. 2004: McNamara & Scott 2001). Kirkland & Saunders (1991) provide some practical guidance to teachers on how best to teach these strategies. They claim that students benefit from teachers modelling their own thought processes aloud when summarizing a text together in class, providing sample summaries and practice at planning the summaries, which involves students assessing the text in relation to the writing task.

Possibly the most important factor according to research, which might determine whether a student is able to infer meaning from a text, is

whether the student is familiar with the topic and whether connections can be made between what the student reads and their own background knowledge. Research has demonstrated that students who have a low-level background knowledge benefit the most from using active reading techniques (O'Reilly et al. 2004). These techniques, although not described explicitly in their paper, include 'comprehension monitoring, logic and common sense, elaboration, paraphrasing and prediction' (O'Reilly et al. 2004:3) and appear to work most effectively when the student is able to verbalise their understanding of the text. Kirkland & Saunders (1991) hold a similar position and mention that by orally summarizing a text that was read on the previous day, students are encouraged to link their understanding of the text with their background knowledge. This active approach to reading and relating it to the reader's own knowledge of the topic links in well to some research by Aslanian (1985, cited in Nunan 1995:69) carried out back in the eighties on the effect of background knowledge on a student's understanding of a text. Her conclusion was that although background knowledge is beneficial, if the reader ignores the textual features of the text the reader will be unable to utilise his/her background knowledge appropriately and will, therefore, have trouble understanding the writer's purpose.

When students are reading to integrate information in their writing using several sources, they will need to decide how the information from these sources relates to each other, and on the relative importance of the information given from each source. The students' original rhetorical frame will need to be readjusted as they assimilate new information. This requires the reader to critically engage with the material in order to be able to select the relevant material which serves their own purpose (Grabe & Stoller 2002). Critical thinking involves the ability to think in a judgemental and reasoned way (Cottrell 2005). This approach to questioning and casting doubt over claims made by others, especially to those in authority, may be to some students unfamiliar. Cottrell claims this is mainly due to cultural differences, however, students who are also unfamiliar with the subject matter itself and lack the background knowledge may feel they are not in a position to criticise a text on subject they have never thought about before. Further barriers to critical thought, as pointed out by Cottrell, might include mistaking learning as simply a process of memorizing information and facts rather than gaining skills and methods to develop understanding in a discipline. Moreover, students might lack the

methods, strategies and practice to think critically. Kirkland & Saunders (1991) claim that students can develop their critical thinking by mapping key ideas from the sources out on a diagram to show their relative importance and how they relate to each other. This is an area that needs further exploration but lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The process of writing in the reading-to-write construct involves transforming the meaning of several sources into a new text. There appears some variation in the literature as to what these processes are, but there seems to be an agreement that that 'recursive reading, thinking and planning' (Dovey 2010) are three essential features. Moreover, feedback, either from a peer or from the teacher, plays a decisive role in this process.

The process approach develops students' ability to construct meaning from a text. However, students will need to be made aware of the various forms and conventions of their own disciplinary discourse. As Reppen (2002) points out this ability to use the expected forms and conventions can be empowering to students as they are more likely to be judged favourably by other members of their academic community. The main principles of the genre approach will be now discussed.

The Genre Approach

The genre approach to teaching writing has evolved from the observation that members of a discourse community frequently use language in a specific way to fulfil a specific purpose (Hyland 2006). By analysing specific genres, such as dissertation acknowledgements or introductions of MA assignments in the social sciences for example, students are able to analyse what the writer is trying to achieve and how they are able to do this. In turn, students can employ the same features in their own writing. One distinct characteristic of this approach is that it encourages students to focus on the form of the language and how the form relates to its meaning. Furthermore, drawing students' attention to the language code has been shown to help SLA (Long & Crookes 1992).

One important area of interest in genre research is citation practice. Hyland (1999) and Becher & Trower (2001) argue that there exist different citation practices between disciplines and that this reflects a variation in how knowledge is constructed and negotiated between

disciplines in academia. Tutors need to be aware of these differences and how they relate to the students they are teaching. For example, students studying the soft disciplines, for example, sociology and philosophy will have a greater need to know how to write a direct quote than science students, as direct quotes are used far more frequently in the sciences than they are in the soft disciplines.

As pointed out by Dovey (2010), the genre-based approach does not directly support the student with the read-to write process and with the planning stage, which allows the student to construct their own meaning from a text. It appears then, that a combination of these two approaches is required and that the optimal TBL methodology consists primarily of a process TBL approach together with opportunities for students to focus on the form of the language. A similar conclusion is drawn by Molinari (see this collection). Interestingly, this is also confirmed by Long & Crookes, who advance this combination of approaches, especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts (1992). To develop students' ability to write academic texts from several sources the tutor can develop the students' reading-to-write skills by using techniques outlined in the following section.

Towards a TBL methodology

There appears to be a difference in the way academics and competent students cite, which might as suggested by Petrić (2007) be, in part, an indication of the fact that students and academics write for different audiences. It seems, therefore, logical that students should be reading authentic academic texts in class, to develop their awareness and critical thinking of how academics operate. Furthermore, from comments made by students throughout the course, students find certain text types such as journal articles, particularly difficult. It would, therefore, be appropriate to support students with their reading of these texts in class. To make this distinction clear, two learning goals are, therefore, necessary:

- . to understand when you read academic texts how academics use other academics' work to further their own argument

- . to understand how you can use academics' work to further your own argument in your own writing.

The following is a suggested task-based approach, based on the preceding discussion that could be adopted when aiming to achieve the latter learning objective. The tutor models the reading-to-write process in front of the students by bringing two or three authentic sources into the classroom (students could read these at home before the lesson) and then complete the task of summarizing together with the students a feature which is common to all disciplines, such as a key concept or a comparison of two definitions together. The tutor by careful questioning monitors the students' understanding of the text and steers the students' attention towards the key information, by relating it to their own background knowledge and by focusing their attention on the textual features, procedures proposed by both Kirkland and Saunders (1991) and Aslanian (1985). The tutor, together with the help of the students, then writes a model text of a comparison of two definitions of a key concept, for example. At this point the tutor and students switch their attention from the meaning of the text to its form by adopting a genre approach and compare what they have written with a student model, an approach proposed by Petrić (2007). The tutor and students could then rewrite their first draft after receiving feedback, incorporating some of the features found in the student model.

Following from this, the students write their own definitions using their own sources. The role of the teacher would be to facilitate this process, dealing with linguistic and conceptual problems as they arise. One further advantage of this approach is that students are then encouraged to explain their own work to other members of the group, which as already mentioned, helps the student relate what they have read to their own background knowledge (O'Reilly et al. 2004). Furthermore, by explaining their subject to another person, they are required to take their audience into consideration, which encourages them to adapt their explanation to the understanding of their audience.

Assessment

The students' reading-to-write skills on the project component are assessed by submitting a 2000 word project. Thus, the students have a very clear goal and this appears to be for many students a strong motivating factor. However, it is often difficult to judge how well the student understands the topic, as the tutors themselves are often not subject specialists and find it difficult to decide whether a breakdown in the text is due to either poor linguistic or content knowledge. Furthermore, due to time constraints tutors have little time to refer to original sources to ascertain how well the student has used their

sources. Their appears therefore to be a need to alter, at least in part, the way students are assessed on their reading-to write skills.

The assessment needs, therefore, to be more transparent, in other words, the students should be able to display the skills that they have acquired during their course, in a way that tutors can judge as accurately as possible how well students use their sources to write and thus, how well the objectives were achieved. Furthermore, the assessment should give the tutor an indication of the suitability of the tasks employed in class and therefore a means to evaluate the TBL methodology used. Students, in turn, would benefit from such an approach as they would receive a more accurate feedback.

One possible approach would be to require students to submit with their project a section from two sources which are referred to in a section of their project. This would enable the tutor to see more clearly how the student was able to use the original texts to synthesize their own argument. This approach would reflect the approach adopted in class, where tutors are better able to see the process students took to reach their final product. Interestingly, in order for effective learning to take place the approach of the assessment should according to Biggs be the approach of the instruction (2003).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to determine and exemplify the most appropriate methodological approach for teaching read-to-write skills in an EAP context. Drawing from EAP and TBL literature and by reviewing aspects of the course component, it was concluded that a combination of both the process and genre approaches would become part of a TBL methodology for teaching these skills a pre-sessional writing course.

By then focusing on the learning objectives, pedagogical tasks and assessment and their relationship to each other, on the project component, it was possible to evaluate the methodology and make recommendations for change. To maintain the overall effectiveness of the learning, changing the methodology implies that the objectives and assessment need to change too (Biggs, 2003).

The proposal made in this paper is only the first step towards developing an effective TBL methodology for teaching writing using academic sources on a pre-sessional component. To determine whether the students would benefit from the recommendations, it would be necessary to repeat the process. Student-tutor and student-student interactions that take place during classes could be noted, so that a more detailed picture of how the students respond to the different tasks could be drawn. Students could be interviewed during their postgraduate courses, which would give insight to how well course prepares them for their studies. To extend the 'my' methodology to an 'our' methodology that could be developed between tutors, collaboration between tutors would need to be encouraged. The process is continuous and will always change as students' needs and institutions change.

An investigation into the impact of task-based writing instruction upon the reading skills of PET candidates

Mehran Esfandiari

Introduction

The change of focus from grammar to communication within linguistic theories led to the development of communicative language testing and, in particular, task-based assessment where the authenticity of tasks is a crucial feature (Bachman and Palmer 1996). Therefore, most Cambridge ESOL exams, for example PET, contain a significant number of authentic task-based items.

Where language skills are concerned, a bi-directional relationship has been acknowledged between reading and writing (Stotsky, 1983; Shanahan, 1984; Belanger, 1987; Carson and Leki, 1993). However, there is not much empirical evidence about its nature. This study investigates the impact of task-based writing instruction on the reading skills of PET candidates to see whether or not it can have a positive effect on their reading comprehension.

Literature review

Following the shift from teacher-directed towards more learner-centered approaches, TBL came into widespread use to help learners develop their actual language use. Based on the assumption that languages are learned best through authentic acts of communication and negotiation of meaning, TBL focuses mainly on fluency rather than accuracy with the main emphasis on the central role of meaning in language use. Willis (1996) defines tasks as goal-oriented activities with clear purposes that involve not only achieving an outcome, but also creating a final product that can be appreciated by others. To encourage the use of challenging tasks, a framework was established by Willis (1996) for TBL, though similar frameworks have subsequently been proposed by other proponents particularly Nunan (2004).

Following the shift towards communication, there began a trend towards communicative language testing and, in particular, task-based assessment where language proficiency is looked upon as the ability to achieve communicative purposes in a range of situations that bear a striking resemblance to real-life contexts.

Where language learning is concerned, particular attention has been paid to writing as an important skill. A significant number of studies have been conducted to explore an effective approach to teaching writing (Raimes 1991). However, little research has been carried out on

the role it can play in second language acquisition. "Writing, as a means of developing the students' general ability in English, is greatly undervalued in most language courses" (Littlejohn 1991 p. 78).

Authorities have acknowledged a relationship between reading and writing. A number of studies indicate that some kind of reciprocal interrelationship does exist between these two skills. Stotsky (1983) believes that good readers are good writers. Shanahan (1984), Belanger (1987), and Carson and Leki (1993) assert that these two skills are not only interactive, but also interdependent. In addition, Collins (1979) points out that in comparison with what reading instruction has to offer by itself, if writing practice is combined with reading instruction, significant improvements can be made in reading comprehension. Furthermore, where meta-cognitive awareness is concerned, Guterman (2003) points out that conscious-raising writing tasks not only facilitate language learning, but also make a big difference to reading skills of students.

Task-based writing activities should be interactive. Littlejohn (1991 p. 80) argues that "they require students to write to, for, and with other students. The aim in doing this is to encourage the students to talk about writing and, thereby, learn from each other". When it comes to task-based writing, audience interaction is of crucial importance because it enables students to produce not only syntactically, but also lexically more complex texts in writing tasks (Li 2000).

Context setting

The study was conducted in Nottingham College International. The college runs a wide variety of English courses for a growing population of international learners who come to the UK with the intention of doing postgraduate studies. As part of entry requirements for admission to UK universities, they need to present a particular IELTS overall band score. Therefore, many of them sit the PET exam to not only familiarize themselves with Cambridge ESOL exams, but also to check their own progress to ensure that they can satisfy entry requirements before the final deadline. However, from my experience with these candidates, they find the reading paper quite difficult. Having found reading a problematic area for these students, I decided to conduct this study to see whether or not task-based writing instruction can make any difference.

These PET candidates take a 12-week preparation course in the college on a full-time basis. During the week, they have three consecutive classes from 9.00AM to 3.30PM with the exception of Fridays when

they finish classes at 11.00AM. Every morning, they have course book lessons. There are two of them which are used in parallel with each other in a topic-based order. One of them is *New Headway Pre-Intermediate Third Edition* by John Soars, Liz Soars, and Sylvia Wheeldon (2007), and the other one is *New English File Pre-Intermediate* by Clive Oxenden, Christina Latham-Koenig, and Paul Seligson (2005). The other two sessions are allocated to the PET test itself using two other books specifically designed to prepare students for this exam. One of them is *PET Practice Tests Plus 1* by Louise Hashemi and Barbara Thomas (2003), and the other one is *PET Gold Exam Maximiser* by Jacky Newbrook and Judith Wilson (2004).

Materials

For the purpose of this study, I selected two books. Most of the task-based activities were adapted from *Cambridge skills for fluency: Writing 2* by Andrew Littlejohn (1991), and some others were taken from *Writing Extra: A Resource Book of Multi-Level Skills Activities (Cambridge Copy Collection)* by Graham Palmer (2004). Since both of the above-mentioned books are topic-based, I could easily opt for those topics that perfectly matched the topics of course books in morning classes for which students had some ideas and were already aware of some particular vocabulary items. Another thing to point out is that since *Writing Extra* is a resource book of multi-level skills activities, it offers tasks that deal with the same topic but at three different levels in each unit. As a consequence, it made it possible for me at some stages to make tasks quite challenging for the learners by giving them an activity designed for a higher proficiency level.

Research Design

A quasi-experimental study was conducted across a 12-week period with a control group and an experimental group, and a pre-test and a post-test were conducted. By careful random sampling, allocating the same timetable to both groups, considering the same teacher for both groups, and using a carefully designed pre-test and post-test, particular attention was paid to ensure that the control group and the experimental group were benefiting from equivalent conditions. Furthermore, the T-test was used not only at the end of the study to draw a comparison between the results of the post-test, but also at the

beginning to ensure careful sampling and make sure that the participants had been drawn from the same population.

Data Collection Instrument

The reading paper of real past papers of PET was selected for this study for the following reasons. First of all, the study was expected to be conducted on pre-intermediate learners who were making preparations to sit the PET exam. Moreover, real PET exams are rigorously validated by University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) to ensure that they meet assessment standards before being professionally used in Cambridge ESOL examinations centers around the world. In order for PET reading tests to reflect the use of language in real-life contexts, hard and professional work is done to ensure that authentic materials are carefully selected and perfectly match this proficiency level. Accordingly, they help to achieve more reliable results and make sure that in terms of assessment almost everything is on the right track.

The 'PET Handbook for Teachers' is regularly published by UCLES. In the 2005 Handbook, there are two real samples of PET reading tests numbered as paper 1 and paper 2. For this study, paper 1 was used as the pre-test and paper 2 as the post test for both the control group and the experimental group. I chose these two tests because these are not readily available to students. Thus, more reliable results can be achieved. Furthermore, they date back to the year 2005 when these learners were not possibly involved in the process of thinking about PET and making preparations for that. Furthermore, instead of using paper 1 once again for the post-test after 12 weeks, I decided to use paper 2 to make sure that students had no idea about it because it can be argued that if we use the same test for the post-test, some intelligent students may remember some of the tasks and it can have a direct impact on the results.

Participants and Sampling

The subjects of this study were 24 learners who had registered for the PET preparation course. All of them were from the Middle East and spoke Arabic as their first language. They had taken the same internal placement test in order for their proficiency level to be carefully identified.

Although they seemed to be a homogenous group ready to move on to the pre-intermediate level, I decided to use my own experience as an

ESOL examiner to confirm this. Thus, I interviewed them in groups of two using a previous PET pack for oral examiners. As the result of interviewing them, I realized that with the exception of two ladies from Saudi Arabia who were significantly better than the others, the rest of the candidates were at the same level. Thus, I divided them into half – that is, into two groups of 12, but one of those two Saudi Arabian ladies was assigned to the control group, and the other one to the experimental group to ensure the highest possibility of having two comparable groups at the first stage. Student details are summarized below in Table I.

Group B1	Kurdistan	Saudi Arabia	Iraq	Kuwait
Male Students	8	2	—	1
Female Students	—	1	—	—

Group B2	Kurdistan	Saudi Arabia	Iraq	Kuwait
Male Students	9	1	1	—
Female Students	—	1	—	—

Table I. Student details

Having divided them into half, both of the groups took paper 1 as the pre-test. Table II summarizes the results.

	Questions 1-5	Questions 6-10	Questions 11-20	Questions 21-25	Questions 26-35	Total
Mean (Control Group)	2.16	1.75	3.00	1.91	3.00	11.83
Mean (Experimental Group)	2.25	1.83	3.08	1.83	3.08	12.08

Table II. The results of the pre-test

Figure 1 depicts the results shown in table II in the form of a bar chart to facilitate comparison between the means of the two groups.

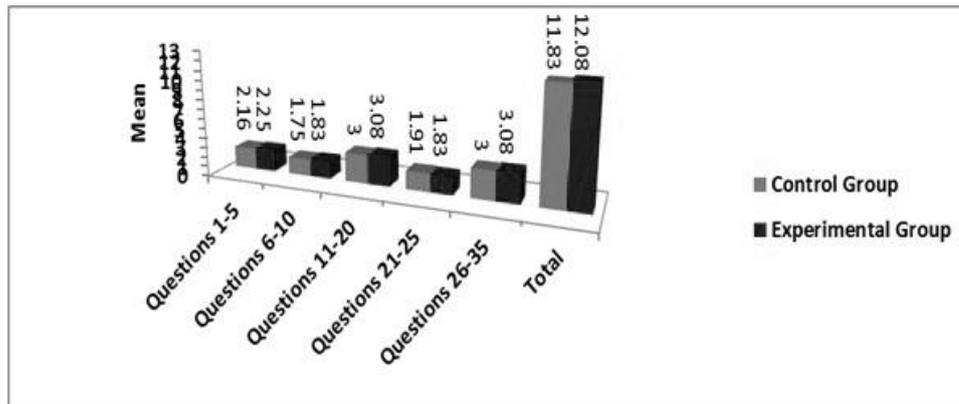


Figure 1. The results of the pre-test

On completion of the pre-test, the results were immediately analyzed through the T-Test to ensure that the subjects were from the same population. Table III summarizes the factors needed to be calculated for that.

	Mean	Variance	SD	SE	Population mean (95% of confidence)
Control Group	11.83	8.33	2.88	0.8313	10.16 – 13.49
Experimental Group	12.08	9.53	3.08	0.8891	10.30 – 13.49

Table III. Calculations for the T-Test

Having calculated essential factors and put them on the graph, Figure 2 shows differences between the means.

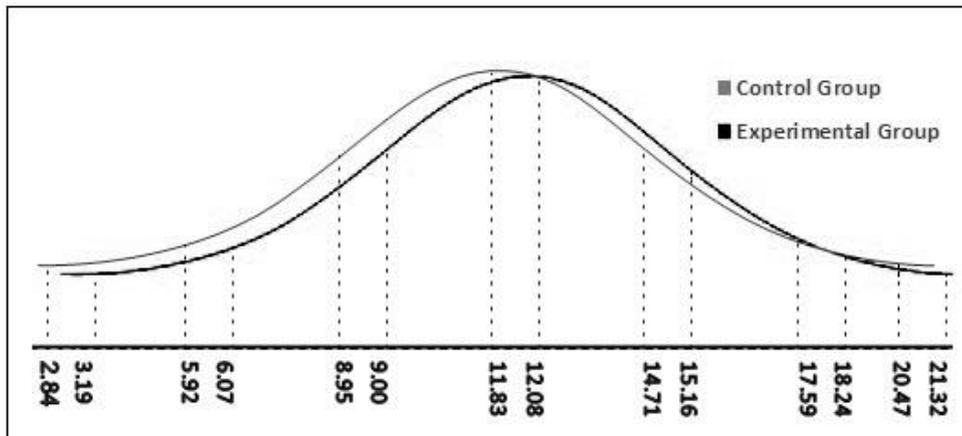


Figure 2. Differences between the means

The graph shows a case with high variability of scores within each group. Clearly, it can be concluded that the group difference appears least striking because the two bell-shaped curves overlap to a significantly large extent. Furthermore, having calculated the t-value to be 0.2, set the alpha level (the risk level) at 0.05, and determined the degree of freedom (df), 22, the t-value can be looked up in a standard table of significance in order to determine whether it is large enough to be significant. Having done so, it can be easily seen that the t-value is small. Thus, from the statistical point of view, the T-Test confirms that there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups. Simply stated, the samples had been drawn from the same population because the group difference appeared minimal. Thus, it was time to go through the procedure. Group B1 became the control group, and group B2 the experimental group.

Procedure

Every Friday, I arranged one 90-minute session for the control group from 11.30AM-1.00PM, and another 90-minute session for the experimental group between 1.00 and 2.30PM. I taught both groups myself. However, what I did in these two sessions was almost entirely different. In the first session, organized for the control group, we referred to the syllabus document and revised the work that had been done in their classes during the week. The first half of each lesson was spent reviewing the particular unit of their course book for that week,

and the second half was spent having a review of their PET preparation materials from afternoon classes. In contrast, in the second class that had been organized for the experimental group, there was task-based instruction which was mainly comprised of task-based writing activities. It should be mentioned that the definition of task proposed by Willis (1996) has been taken into consideration for this study, and the range of task-based activities is mainly restricted to the ones that consist of written work. Also, it needs to be emphasized that the framework established by Willis (1996) has been used as the main basis of instruction. However, at some stages I made some slight changes to that.

For every session with the experimental group, first I referred to the syllabus document to check the course book and its particular unit for that week. Then, I matched the title of that unit with a similar topic in the book "WRITING 2" or "Writing Extra". Here I concentrated my efforts on opting for topics of general interest to encourage higher levels of interaction and language use in the classroom (Lightbrown and Spada 1999). In order to have the three phases of the framework in my TBL lesson, pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus, I prepared three separate handouts out of that unit and numbered them from 1 to 3. I made enough copies out of each handout and took them to my class with the experimental group.

Structure of each lesson

One crucial thing about this group was that for all of them, Arabic was the mother tongue. Littlejohn (1991 p. 81) argues that "an 'English only' rule, may make communication difficult and thus defeat one of the purposes of group work." However, it can be argued that if they share the first language, they may translate from that into English and as a result of that, the outcome does not seem natural enough. Thus, I asked them not to share the mother tongue. However, in order to avoid a breakdown in communication, I took a few bilingual dictionaries to the class so that they could refer to them when they had a problem. In fact, I wanted them to use English to write in English.

Pre-task

Typically, at the first stage, I decided to set the task and then give out the text. Therefore, I first used the silent approach and body language to introduce my students to the topic of the lesson through eliciting. I

wrote it in the form of a gap-fill topic on the board and encouraged the whole class to complete it by shouting out the words or even just the missing letters. Then, I gave my students the first handout normally containing few examples and a couple of consecutive activities to be done in writing in order to help them not only recall some useful words and phrases, but also learn some new words and broaden their knowledge of vocabulary items related to the topic of the lesson. However, utterances were mostly in the form of short sentences. I gave them time to do these activities in pairs. Thus, they had to negotiate with each other and reach an agreement before finally putting pen to paper. Sometimes I played a recording of people doing a similar task to give my learners a better idea.

The Task Cycle

In this stage, I used the second handout to give them the main task. In fact, I was looking for longer utterances in real-life contexts, at least three sentences or four sentences at the most, but same as the previous stage again in writing. This stage was also performed in pairs and groups. However, I used some kind of pyramid discussion but with the final product in the form of written work. Normally, in a pyramid discussion, a task is conducted in small groups where students have to reach an agreement on some certain items. After that, they join another group and again have to come to an agreement but this time as a larger group. The same thing keeps taking place and learners form progressively larger groups by reaching an agreement until the whole class is involved in one discussion. As an organizational technique, pyramid discussions enable learners to rehearse and repeat arguments that they have already tested on others (Scrivener 2005). It should be mentioned that at every single stage they had to reach an agreement and produce one single piece of written work as the outcome. Thus, I set a time limit for every stage, but the larger the group size, the longer the time.

When each group of six had only one last finished product in writing, I asked three members of both groups to exchange places and sit next to a partner from the other group to share in pairs what they had produced separately in their own groups at the previous stage and put them together to produce a piece of written work as long as a paragraph. As the result of that, there was a great deal of interaction, negotiation, collaboration, and communication in the class. In fact, a lot of language was being shared in the class. However, I think the

most significant thing was that because the students had to repeat arguments that they had tested on others, the cycle was being repeated several times in a row. Therefore, they were all rehearsing reports and drafting written versions to prepare themselves for the next stage where they had to present their reports to each other in a larger group and reach an agreement. As the teacher, I was in charge of sequencing and monitoring to make sure that everyone was involved. Sometimes I gave brief feedback on content and form and wherever possible, I played a recording of fluent speakers doing a similar task for learners to compare.

The Language Focus

Finally, it was time for analysis, practice, and error correction to help my students to reflect on the language they had experienced and also build up self-confidence. Thus, we went through in-depth analysis of the forms as well as the use and meaning of lexical items in the previous stage and studied them more closely. I made use of the third handout to not only provide my students with a practice activity, but also to present some new vocabulary items to make the practice activity more challenging. In terms of error correction, I first went for self-correction, then, peer correction through eliciting, and finally, I tried teacher correction but only as a last resort.

Almost the same procedure, but sometimes with some slight changes, was taken into consideration for the experimental group over this 12-week period. At the end of the period, both the control group and the experimental group took paper 2 as the post-test.

Results and Discussion

Table IV summarizes the results of the post-test for both of the groups.

	Questions 1-5	Questions 6-10	Questions 11-20	Questions 21-25	Questions 26-35	Total
Mean (Control Group)	2.83	2.66	7.33	2.75	7.83	23.41
Mean (Experimental Group)	4.08	3.91	7.41	4.00	7.58	27.00

Table IV. The results of the post-test

Figure 3 shows the results shown in table IV in the form of a bar graph to make it easier to draw a comparison between the mean of the control group and that of the experimental group.

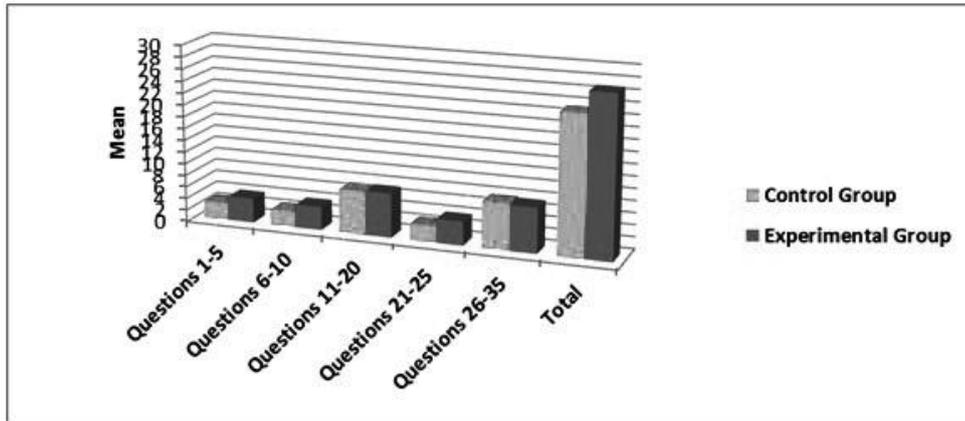


Figure 3. The results of the post-test

On completion of the post-test, the results were carefully analyzed through the T-Test. Table V summarizes the factors are needed for that.

	Mean	Variance	SD	SE	Population mean (95% of confidence)
Control Group	23.41	7.53	2.74	0.7919	21.82 – 24.99
Experimental Group	27	6.72	2.59	0.7485	25.50 – 28.49

Table V. Calculations for the T-Test

Figure 4 depicts differences between the two means.

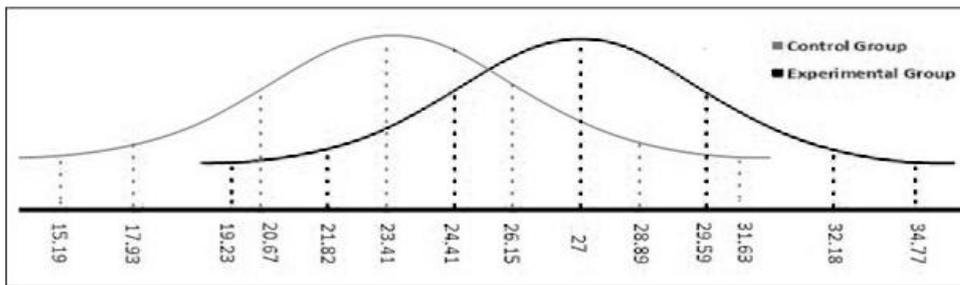


Figure 4. Differences between the means

The graph shows a case with low variability of scores within each group. Therefore, it can be clearly concluded that the group difference appears most striking because there is significantly less overlap between the two bell-shaped distributions. In addition, having calculated the t-value to be 3.30, set the alpha level (the risk level) at 0.05, and determined the degree of freedom (df), 22, the t-value can be looked up in a standard table of significance in order to determine whether it is large enough to be significant. Having done that, it is obvious that the t-value is noticeably large. Therefore, from the statistical point of view, the T-Test confirms that there is substantial difference between the means of the control group and the experimental group. Simply stated, I am confident that the samples have been drawn from different populations.

Discussion of the results

The T-Test confirms that at the starting point of this study, both of the groups had been drawn from the same population and the group difference appeared to be minimal. However, it confirms that at the end point of the study, the group difference appeared to be significantly distinct. Having compared the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the two groups, it can be easily seen that although both of the groups showed an improvement in their reading skills, the experimental group did remarkably better than the control group. As a consequence, task-based writing instruction appears to have had a positive impact on the reading skills of PET candidates. However, when it comes to the reading sub-skills, by taking a deeper look at Figure 3, we can see that there is an exception. According to this figure, the experimental group did substantially better than the control group in parts 1,2, and 4 of the PET reading test – that is, dealing with real-world notices, reading for specific information, and reading for detailed comprehension, respectively. It should also be mentioned that the experimental group did only slightly better than the control group in

part 3 of the PET reading test – that is, True/False questions. However, contrary to parts 1 to 4 where the experimental group was much better, it was in the last part, part 5, that the control group did slightly better. In this part, there is a cloze test which acts as a multi-purpose task to examine knowledge of grammar in parallel with the reading skills. In my opinion, it can be argued that one 90-minute session a week had been allocated to the control group the same as the experimental group to just review what they had learned during the week. Therefore, they may have improved their knowledge of grammar to a larger extent than the experimental group, and as a result of that, they have done slightly better in this part because there was a deeper focus on grammar in their sessions.

Conclusion

As a branch of communicative language testing, task-based assessment is becoming increasingly popular around the world. The PET exam, which makes the second level of the Cambridge Main Suite, is gaining in popularity all over the world for a variety of reasons ranging from immigration to academic purposes. However, for many candidates the reading test can be quite difficult. A bi-directional connection has been long acknowledged between reading and writing as two language skills. Thus, writing may help to make improvements in reading skills. Having conducted a quasi-experimental study with a control group and an experimental group and carefully analyzed the results of the pre-test and the post-test, it can be seen that task-based writing instruction has a positive impact on the reading skills and sub-skills, particularly reading for specific information and reading for detailed comprehension, of PET candidates. The results of the study suggest that task-based writing instruction possibly has a positive impact on the reading skills of not only candidates of other exams, for example FCE and CAE, but also non-exam students. However, there is clearly a need for further research on this topic area.

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