

English lecturers' perceptions of task-based reading teaching at ABA Universitas Muslim Indonesia

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Bioprofiles

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Abstract

Teaching reading through task and activity engages learners' immediate personal experience in real language use in the classroom. The aim of this research is to obtain the information on the perceptions of English lecturers towards task-based reading teaching at Akademi Bahasa Asing Universitas Muslim Indonesia, and how these English lecturers understand and respond to task based reading teaching. As this research is a quantitative, the data were collected from a survey of a total of 23 English lecturers. The research showed that in the context of English foreign language learning at ABA UMI, students interact only with their classmates which changed the focus from traditional learning to a

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more active learning. Thus, students learn more easily in the use of the target language. It was also revealed that half of the lecturers were interested in using task-based language teaching as a learning method because they believe that task-based language teaching has a particular benefit to improve the communication and interaction skills of the students.

Key words: Task-Based Reading Teaching, Lecturers' Perceptions of ABA UMI

Introduction

In the global context, reading plays a very important role in the life of mankind. It is a primary requirement which cannot be negotiated because the rapid flow of information demand us to read much. Therefore, if we do not have adequate reading skills, we will easily miss the information. All the information in the internet and other social and printed media, which are published for the public requires active reading. Even in the world of education, the active reading comes into play. Through active reading activities, we can explore the breadth of the world science which is sprawling from around the world and from various scene of the era (Crandal, 1995). Chesla (2009) explained that "active reading is the first essential step to comprehension. The reason is that active reading forces you to really see what you are reading, to look closely what is there" (p.25). McWhorter (1992) added that "active reading is a routine activity in which individual words are combined to produce meaning" (p.23). Anderson and Grabe and Stoller's study (as cited in Erten & Razi, 2009) argued that the active reading is a process which involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning. Harmer (2007) elaborated that to get maximum benefit from students' reading, both extensive and intensive reading are needed to be involved. These enable students to develop their reading skill such as reading for skimming, and for detailed comprehension, and for inference and attitude.

Learning to read English as a Foreign Language in Indonesian largest university context is a part of the four skills curriculum. The majority of the people believe that reading is the ultimate tool for understanding new information and it is the most important skills needed for student success. In the studies of Moreillon (2007); and McIntyre, Hulan, & Layne (2011), they explained that reading practice has wide

acceptance as an excellent tool for developing fluency and comprehension, an active process which requires much practice.

The textbooks that the lecturers still use in teaching English reading are designed for learners of English in countries that have English as the language of instruction. To be able to understand and master all the contents of the textbook, students are required to have the skills and ability to read in English, especially in reading comprehension. Akademi Bahasa Asing UMI (ABA UMI) is one of the private university in east part of Indonesia which is a scientific community group in Sulawesi Selatan Indonesia organizing English language courses. Courses include a variety of English language courses, such as Grammar, Phonetics, Vocabulary, Listening, Speaking, Reading Comprehension, and Writing. Reading Comprehension, for example, is a course taught in three consecutive semesters, that is, Reading Comprehension I is taught in semester 1, Reading Comprehension 2 in semester 2, and Reading Comprehension 3 in semester 3.

Based on the observation from the lecturers who were teaching reading 1 in ABA UMI, the research setting showed that almost all of the students in semester one had difficulties understanding the textbooks used by lecturers (Interview of the lecturer of the course reading 1, 2014). One of the main reasons for this is the fact that the reading material is designed for native speakers of English, and not for the EFL learners. Likewise, the material used does not meet the requirement for the syllabus of ABA UMI.

In the study by Hamra and Syatriana (2012), it was revealed that the student had a weak mastery level of English because of several things including the monotonous teaching strategies employed by lecturers in the classroom, lack of facilities and instructional media, linguistic competence, learning habits, interest, attitude, and ineffective instructional materials. A good way to understand reading is to consider what is required for fluent reading. In the studies of Grabe & Stoller (2001); and Juel (2010), it was noted that fluent readers read rapidly for comprehension, recognize words rapidly and automatically (without seeming to pay any attention to them), draw on a very large vocabulary store, integrate text information with their own knowledge, recognize the purpose for reading, comprehend the text as necessary, shift purpose to read strategically, use strategies to monitor comprehension, recognize and repair miscomprehension, and read critically and evaluate information. All these can be implemented into specific

activities that can be included in a text as prereading, during reading, or post reading activities.

Consequently, a research about the difficulties faced by student in reading comprehension conducted by Asfar (2013) stated that the textbooks were still used in the traditional approach. The lecturers who used the book as a textbook simply asked students to read, then translated it into Indonesian, and asked students to answer questions related to understanding. The approach used by the English lecturers was only Grammar Translation Method approach, which is one of the approaches to teach English. This approach is certainly not sufficient to improve the understanding of learners because it uses only one approach. In fact, the problem that arises with this traditional approach is that they usually do not consider the purpose of learning; and comprehension questions usually lead to all the information in the text undifferentiated as if all ideas or aspects of the text are important. It is therefore apparent that the exercises in the textbook do not give the students a sense of reading skills. The tasks are not designed to engage students in the learning process. Thus, it is the purpose of this study to find out lecturers' understanding on the notion of task-based language teaching and its implementation in teaching reading.

Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-based language teaching, also known as task-based instruction has become one of the important approaches to language teaching and learning. Iranmehr, Erfani, & Davari (2011) wrote that teaching through tasks creates favorable learning conditions for students who study English for specific purposes. Task-based instruction seems to grant meaningful use of language and promote autonomous learning and independent learning. Samuda and Bygate (2008) included teaching reading through tasks as holistic activities which focus on the second language and product or language use that involve the use of all aspects of language. As in the study of Nunan (2004); Finch (2006); and Shehadeh (2005) creating the task such as student-centered and interactive learning materials, teachers can achieve syllabus goals and can help their students to become more motivated and effective learners. Task activities are required because they work to improve our understanding of how to select, adapt and use tasks in the classroom with different learners. It also increases our understanding of how to stimulate classroom language use,

and to increase our understanding of the processes of language learning, and in particular the dynamic relationship between language knowledge and language use. Byrnes and Manchon (2014) argued that the concept of task could be theoretically empowered in two intricately interrelated ways. First, ‘task’ could expand its current horizon of largely cognitive processing-oriented models or, more specifically, problem-solving models toward an understanding and facilitation of writing abilities as a form of considerable linguistic-cognitive engagement— call it deep processing—that enables writers, through the strategic deployment of linguistic resources, to accomplish the remarkable semiotic feat of creating “meaning- ful” worlds with language. Second, such an expanded position of task would enable the educational interests of TBLT work to foreground the potential of writing tasks to offer a well-motivated context for understanding and for fostering literacy development. In sum, recognizing the psycholinguistic and textual nature of writing tasks in terms of a focus on the linguistic resources for meaning-making that are needed and therefore need to be developed for successful acts of textual meaning-making would seem to be a favourable point of departure for the proposal at hand. Willis and Willis (2011) added that task is therefore assumed to refer to arrange of work-plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning.

Methodology

The research on English lecturers’ perceptions of task-based reading teaching at ABA-UMI investigated two fields associated with task-based reading teaching: the first is lecturers' understanding of the notion of task-based reading teaching and the second is the teacher's viewpoint on the implementation of task-based reading teaching. Based on the two aspects mentioned above, the proposed research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent do lecturers understand the notion of task-based language teaching for reading skill ?
2. How do the lecturers implement task-based language teaching for reading skill?

To find out the above two aspects of research questions, the research instrument used consists of questions designed to measure English lecturers' perceptions of task-based language teaching for reading skill in the classroom. The questionnaire consists of 15 questions based on a Likert’s scale model. The first part contains the structure of population questions to obtain information about the level of lecturers’ understanding about TBLT. The second part is related to lecturers' views on implementing TBLT as the

basic concepts of duty and teaching principles based on task-based language teaching in order to review lecturers' understanding of task-based reading teaching. These questions were partially adapted and modified from studies of Samuda and Bygate (2008); Nunan (2004); and Jeon & Hahn (2005) checklist to evaluate communicative tasks.

The population of this research is all the English lecturers of Department of English ABA UMI. There are two groups of lecturers. The first group consists of foundation lecturers who work for Foundation of YW-UMI and earn salaries from both the foundation and the government, and the second group is the government lecturers who worked for ABA UMI and earn a salary from central government, in this case the Ministry of Education and Culture. A total of 23 lecturers (16 Foundation lecturers, 7 government lecturers); consisting of 13 female lecturers and 10 male lecturers served as the participants for the study. As for their teaching experience, 9 lecturers have taught for fewer than 10 years; seven lecturers have taught between 10 to 20 years; and 7 people have taught for over 20 years.

Data collection in this study was done by visiting the lecturers who taught English at the Department of English ABA UMI for six consecutive weeks from March to April 2014. Because the lecturers were not gathered in one place and they had class at different hours, the researcher arranged a convenient time to meet all the research participants. The questionnaires were also given to the lecturers. Before the lecturers filled out the questionnaires, the researcher first explained the purpose of the study and asked them to answer the questionnaires in accordance to the content asked for in the questionnaires. Within six weeks, the questionnaires were then retrieved.

The process of data analysis used was Likert scale (Burns, 2010; Stillwell, 2008). Likert type items, which are designed to identify lecturers' understanding of the concept of TBLT and the lecturers' views on the implementation of TBLT, are given a numerical score (eg, disagree = 1, neutral = 2, and agree = 3).

Results and Discussion

Results

The Level of Lecturers' Understanding about TBLT

Table 1 presents a comparison of the percentage of teacher responses to each of the seven items on TBLT concepts. To facilitate responses, a five-point scale is simplified

to three points (disagree, neutral, and agree).

Table 1

No	Questionnaire Items	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
1	Tasks are invaluable in achieving communicative purpose	0 %	52%	48%
2	Tasks require learners to decide on potential relevant meanings.	5%	43%	52%
3	Tasks are the need to achieve one or more meaningful outcomes	5%	39%	56%
4	Tasks work towards the task outcome.	5%	43%	52%
5	Task process refers to any language process(es) used in working towards an outcome.	0%	47%	53%
6	Tasks are based on the student centered learning.	0%	35%	65%
7	Tasks involve three phases: pre-tasks, tasks in process, and post tasks.	0%	39%	61%

Lecturers' Understanding against the Concept of TBLT (n = 23)

For the first three items on the key concepts of TBLT, 48.1% of respondents understood that the main focus of TBLT is communicative purposes, 52% of respondents understood that TBLT focuses on the meaning, and 56% of respondents understood that TBLT focuses on results. On the fourth item, 52% of respondents considered the task is a type of activity in which the target language is used by the students. This means that half of the lecturers agree with the definition of tasks as discussed in the theoretical background. In response to the fifth item, 53% of respondents reported that they believe in the relevance of task-based teaching and communicative language teaching. For the sixth and seventh items, 65% of respondents suggested that the activities centered on students, and 61% of respondents admitted three different stages including pre-task, task execution, and post-task. Lecturers have few negative views on the second, third, and fourth items in the implementation of TBLT in the classroom.

Table 2. *Lecturers' Views on Implementing TBLT (n = 23)*

Table 2 presents lecturers' views on implementing TBLT. To facilitate responses, a five-point scale is simplified to three points (disagree, neutral, and agree). This questionnaire items was adopted from Jeon and Hahn (2005).

No	Questionnaire Items	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree(%)
8	I have interest in implementing TBLT in the classroom.	0%	47%	53%
9	TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.	0%	56%	44%
10	TBLT activates learners' needs and interests.	0%	43%	57%
11	TBLT pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom.	0%	61%	39%
12	TBLT gives much psychological burden to teacher as a facilitator.	13%	43%	43%
13	TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.	9%	43%	48%
14	TBLT is proper for controlling classroom arrangements.	0%	56%	54%
15	TBLT materials in textbooks are meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context.	0%	39%	61%

Aspects of the Teacher's Position on the Implementation of TBLT in the Classroom.

First, for item eight, 53% of respondents responded positively when asked about the implementation of TBLT in the classroom. Respondents argued that the concept of TBLT was necessarily used in the classroom. Items 9 through 11 explored the teacher's views on TBLT as a teaching method. 44% of respondents replied that TBLT provided a relaxed atmosphere to promote the use of the target language, 57% of respondents activated the needs and interests of learners, and 39% of respondents indicated teaching TBLT on the development of integrated skills in the classroom. This suggests that the EFL lecturers who want to implement task-based teaching successfully need to have knowledge of the four language skills that are integrated based on the principles of social interaction. In items 12, 43% of respondents agreed that TBLT will provide psychological burden to the teacher as a facilitator and item 13, 48% of respondents believed that TBLT will provide more preparation time. Item 14 indicated that the respondents, 54%, believed that TBLT is appropriate to control the classroom setting. For item 61 % of respondents answered that the teaching materials reflect the activities in the real world.

Discussion

Items 1 up to 7 are the concept of task based language teaching. These concepts are clearly understood by the lecturers about the nature of linguistic tasks, so they approved the pedagogical benefits of tasks in the classroom teaching of a second language. Even more important is that most of the lecturers understood the key concepts of TBLT. This may be a result of the implementation of the national English curriculum which is characterized by the application of student-centered learning that is intended to improve the communicative competence of learners.

Items 8 to 15 show that despite relatively moderate understanding of the concept of TBLT, there are still a half of the lecturers neutral to adopt TBLT as a method of learning in classroom practice. This is because most English Foreign Language lecturers still use traditional teaching methods, which they usually do. In addition, they have a psychological demand in the face of some new problems in using TBLT. In addition, English Foreign Language lecturers are used to work in the teacher-centered classroom, so they chose to adopt teaching methods in one route rather than dialogue. After all, a teacher needs to be flexible and dynamic in controlling language learning environments

because of the nature of language learning, which substantially demands that learners actively participate in the activities of language use.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusions

In English Foreign Language learning at ABA UMI, learners only communicated to their colleagues, so the focus has changed from traditional learning to a more active learning. Through this model, the students can learn more easily in the use of the target language. Thus, half of the lecturers are interested in using task based language teaching as a learning method, mainly because they believe that task-based learning has particular benefit to improve communication skills and interaction of learners.

The whole findings of this research indicate that although there was a quite high level of understanding of the concept of task-based language teaching, only few English lecturers avoid practicing it as a learning method for discipline issues related to classroom practice. Based on the findings, The significant results for the lecturers are: Because the views of lecturers on learning approaches have a major shock on classroom practice, it is important for the lecturers, as a classroom activity controller for the students, to possess an outright view towards task based language teaching for the success of the implementation. Lecturers who lack knowledge of the practical application of the method or technique of task-based learning must be given the opportunity to gain knowledge of task based language teaching associated with the planning, practicing, and evaluating of the lessons.

Suggestion

It is suggested that the lecturers of the education program, who aim to deepen the training of language teaching methodology, be trained on the implementation of task based language teaching as a way of teaching. It is also suggested that lecturers consider alternative solutions for classroom management such as the level of difficulty of the task and a variety of tasks including activities that allow learners to work in groups, in pairs, or independently practice the skills, concepts, and information presented.

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