THE EFFECT OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research study was to find out whether there could be a significant improvement in students taught reading comprehension using Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and those taught using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). In this experimental research, the sample was divided into an experimental group and a control group. The population for this study was 162 second grade students from SMA Negeri 1 Gandapura from which 2 classes were chosen by random sampling. The experimental group had 21 students, while the control group had 23 students. Data was collected through reading comprehension tests. The data was analysed by using an independent t-test assisted by SPSS 22. Based on the t-index from the analysis, it was found that there was a significant difference between the two groups as 0.73 was higher than $\alpha = 0.05$. Moreover, the t-count was 3.12 which was higher that the t-table which was 2.01. These findings showed that there was a significant difference in achievement between the students who were taught reading comprehension by TBLT and those who were taught by GTM. Hence, the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Keywords: *Task-Based Language Teaching, Reading Comprehension.*

INTRODUCTION

In Senior High School, reading is one of the skills that have to be mastered by students learning English. The aim of teaching reading is to develop students to be effective and efficient at reading texts

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(Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2006, p. 125). Therefore, reading is not just for the reading of words, but also for comprehending the meaning of written texts. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002, p. 9), reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and to interpret its information appropriately. Thus, the primary reason for reading anything is to understand it (Berardo, 2006, p. 12).

Furthermore, according to the School Based Curriculum or KTSP for Senior High Schools (Depdiknas, 2006), students are expected to be able to comprehend various types or genre of written texts either in short functional or simple essay form via: recount, narrative, procedural, descriptive, news item, spoof, report, analytical and hortatory expositions in daily life contexts and to be able to access knowledge from them (Depdiknas, 2006, p. 126). Furthermore, the word "comprehend" refers to four aspects of reading competency that students are expected to learn: (1) main ideas from a variety of simple texts, (2) details and explicit information from a variety of simple texts, (3) the meaning of new words based on contextual clues, and (4) the communicative purpose and rhetorical structure of such texts (Depdiknas, ibid, p. 126). Thus it is clear that students are expected to understand and master the reading of various types of texts.

Unfortunately, the teaching of English in Indonesia so far has been unable to achieve its declared goals despite many efforts made to improve its quality (Madya, 2002). Thalal (2010) has stated that there are many cases that show that the proficiency of many students in English is still very low and that their ability in English is insignificant after many years of study. Dardjowidjojo (2000) and Nur (2004) claim that the large class sizes and poorly or unqualified English teachers are two obvious factors that contribute to these on-going problem in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia. Musthafa (2001) also lists other reasons for these problems such as lack opportunity to actually practice English in the classroom due to the focus on grammar and syntax and use of the first language (L1); few authentic materials and lack of opportunity to socialize with English outside the classroom. Nevertheless, Kam and Wong (2004) also claim that the lack of students' motivation and the poor attitude of students to learning English are also factors that contribute to their low ability in English. Such conditions eventually compromise the ability of the students to develop their English.

In order to document the extent of students' problem in reading comprehension, an informal survey was conducted with the second grade

English teachers at SMAN 1 Gandapura. Based on interviews between the researcher and the English teachers at SMAN 1 Gandapura, it was found that comprehending a text is still a serious problem for most students. According to the English teachers at the targeted school, many students found it difficult to comprehend what they had read. For example, the students failed to recall information in the text such as the main idea, stated details, vocabulary in context, word references and failed to make inferences. Thus, the students were not able to comprehend the texts. In addition, the researcher also gathered and analysed the most current standardized test scores from the second grade students for reading comprehension. This review included both daily and unit tests. In reviewing the past classroom records kept by the teachers from previous semesters in the area of comprehension, the researcher found that students performed poorly in reading comprehension test. The students' academic report showed that only 40% of the students scored higher or equal to the minimum standard criteria (KKM; *Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal*), most of them got a score under 70 which was the minimum standard criteria.

In order to overcome these problems, something needed to be done. There are several other potential ways in which the teachers could present reading comprehension materials. Thus, in this study, the researcher tried using the Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) technique as one of the possible solutions to help the students improve their reading comprehension. TBLT refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching (Richard & Rodgers, 2001, p. 233). It views the learning process as a set of communicative tasks that are directly linked to the curricular goals (Brown, 2001). This means that in the implementation of TBLT learners are usually presented with a task or problem to solve.

The way in which the task activities are designed into an instructional plan for use in the classroom can be seen from a model that was outlined by Willis (1996, p. 56) which refers to three stages: the pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus. In the pre-task stage, the topic is defined and essential vocabulary is highlighted by the teacher. In the task cycle, learners perform the task in pairs or small groups; rehearse their reports before presenting findings in front of the audience. The final stage is the language focus, during which specific language features that learners encountered in the task are examined and analysed. Thus, based on the explanation it can be argued that teaching reading comprehension by using TBLT can be influential and particularly useful in improving

reading comprehension. Therefore for this research, the writer was interested to conduct an experimental study using TBLT for teaching reading comprehension to the second grade students of SMAN 1 Gandapura, Bireuen. The writer formulated his study to find out the answer for the following question: "Will there be any significant difference in achievement between students who are taught reading comprehension by using TBLT and those who are taught reading comprehension through GTM?"

This study was intended to find out whether there would be a significant difference in achievement between students who were taught reading comprehension by using TBLT and those who were taught reading comprehension through the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Although TBLT has been investigated in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at the university level, little research has been conducted in EFL reading classroom at the secondary school level. Thus it may provide general information for other teachers in designing more focused tasks for the specific needs of their own students in order to improve the students' reading skills through the implementation of TBLT.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Task-Based Language Teaching

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been a recent expansion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and has become a popular method to use to teach second language communicative acquisition (Dailey, 2009). According to Ellis (2003, p. 65), "TBLT is mostly about the social interaction established between learners as a source of input and means of acquisition, and involves the negotiation of meaning, communication strategies, and communication effectiveness". Richard and Rodgers (2001, p. 223) define TBLT as follows, "TBLT refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching." This means that in the implementation of TBLT learners are mainly presented with a task or problem to solve.

Furthermore, Nunan (2004) describes the difference between the traditional classroom and the TBLT classroom based on the TBLT theories. This distinction between the traditional classroom and the TBLT classroom might be that shown in Table 1 which should provide

teachers with a better understanding of how the use of TBLT is different from the activities in a traditional classroom.

Table 1. Traditional classroom vs. TBLT classroom (Nunan, 2004).

Traditional form-focus of pedagogy	TBLT classroom
Rigid discourse structure.	Loose discourse structure.
Teacher controls topic development.	Students able to control topic development.
The teacher regulates turn-taking.	Turn-taking is regulated by the same rules.
Students' role is responding and performing a limited range of language functions.	Students' initiating and responding roles and performing wide range of language functions.
Little negotiated meaning.	More negotiated meaning.
Scaffolding for enabling students to produce correct sentences.	Scaffolding for enabling students to say what they want to say.
Form-focused feedback	Content-focused feedback.
Echoing.	Repetition.

Developing TBLT in Reading Comprehension

The implementation of TBLT in reading comprehension involves consideration of the stages or components of a lesson that has a task as its principal component. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), sequencing is a major issue in a task-based syllabus. Various designs have been proposed as Ellis (2003, p. 224) notes "there is no single way of doing TBLT". However, they all have in common three principal phases, which provide a framework for designing task-based lessons. The TBLT framework is one favourable way to sequence tasks. However, for this research the model of Willis (1996, p. 38) was adopted as shown in Figure 2.5 which follows overleaf.

Figure 1 shows the framework for the implementation of TBLT for a reading comprehension class proposed by Willis (1996, p. 38). Thus, the first phase is the 'pre-task' and concerns the various activities that teachers and students can undertake before they start the task, such as the introduction to the topic and the type of task that will be performed by the students (Willis, 1996, p. 56). The way in which a task is introduced is quite essential in TBLT. According to Gorp and Bogaert in Branden (2006, p. 98), introduction to tasks usually integrates three functions, the first one is motivating the leaners to perform the task. The second one is preparing the learners to perform the task by discussing pre-supposed or useful knowledge of the words. And the last one is organizing the

performance phase by providing clear instructions about the purpose of the task and how it should or can be performed.

Pre-tasks (including topic and task)		
The teacher • Introduces and defines the topic • Uses activities to help students recall/learn useful words and phrases • Ensures students understand task instructions • May play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task **The students** • Note down useful words and phrases from the pre-task activities and/ or the recording • May spend a few minutes preparing for the task individually		
Task cycle		
Task **The students** • do the task in pairs/ small groups. It may be based on a reading/ listening text **The teacher** • acts as monitor and encourages her students	**Planning** **The students** • prepare to report to the class how they did the task and what they discovered/ decided • rehearse what they will say or draft a written version for the class to read **The teacher** • ensures the purpose of the report is clear • acts as language advisor • helps students rehearse oral reports or organise written ones	**Report** **The students** • prepare their spoken reports to the class, or circulate/ display their written report **The teacher** • acts as chairperson, selecting who will speak next, or ensuring all students read most of the written reports • may give brief feedback on content and form • may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task
Language focus		
Analysis **The students** • do consciousness-raising activities to identify and process specific language • note features from the task text and/ or transcript • may ask about other features they have noticed	**Practice** **The teacher** • conducts practice activities after analysis activities where necessary, to build confidence	

Figure 1 continued…

The teacher	The students
• reviews each analysis activity with the class brings other useful words, phrases and patterns to students' attention • may pick up on language items from the report stage	• practise words, phrases and patterns from the analysis activities • practice other features occurring in the task text or report stage • enter useful language items in their language notebooks

Figure 1. The framework for Task-Based Language Teaching (Willis, 1996, p. 38).

Once the teachers have introduced the topic and the task, toward the end of the introduction of the task, the teacher can begin to ask the students to start reading individually. When they have finished reading, the teacher once again checks whether everyone has understood the instructions and knows what is expected of them.

The second phase, the 'task cycle' phase, centres on the task itself and affords various instructional options, including the task itself, the planning to report the result of the task, and the report (Willis, 1996, p. 36). This phase is specifically designed to generate authentic interaction, discussion, and negotiation between language learners. In line with the basic philosophy underlying TBLT, the teacher interventions during the task-performance phase should not result in a limitation of learner activity and initiative. As elaborately described before, the teacher's role is not, in the first place, to solve the students' problem, but rather should take the form of interactional support in which the teacher mediates between task demands and the learner's current abilities.

The final phase is 'post-task' and involves procedures for following up on the task performance as the task may ask for a specific outcome (Willis, 1996, p. 60). Furthermore, he added that in this case, the teacher and the students should be aware of the fact that the absolute correctness and uniformity of the product is less important in many task-based activities than the mental and interactional energy invested in the process of task performance. Tasks are designed to create an environment in which learners are allowed to experiment with language, use language functionally and to make mistakes in doing so. Finding the correct solution may be a bonus, but learners do not necessarily have to find it in order to learn language. Through constructing joint dialogues, through negotiating meaning, through discussing different options, they may pick up new linguistic forms from each other. The post-task phases also offer

many opportunities for focus on form. But the teacher should not aim to convert the post-task phase to focus only on vocabulary drills, nor to a detailed text analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was an experimental study. Thus, the writer took two classes of students in conducting the research. The first class became the experimental group (EG) and the second became the control group (CG). The students in both groups were each given the pre-test and the post-test. After giving the pre-test, the writer taught the experimental class using the TBLT technique meanwhile the English teacher at the school taught the CG by using the GTM. Both the EG and the CG were taught the same material based on the curriculum for second grade (year 8) students. Then, the post-test were given to both groups after the treatment to compare the results of the learning. Furthermore, to see if there was a significant difference in improvement between the experimental and control groups, the t-test was run that was assisted by statistical software, *Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS)* version 22. In this case, the level of significance degree with $\alpha = 0.05$ was used to determine the t-table with the degree of freedom (df) = n1+n2-2.

The target population of this study was all 162 second grade students in 7 classes at SMAN 1 Gandapura. The sample was selecting by random sampling. The sample classes were selected randomly after normality and homogeneity tests had been done. For the experimental group (EG), the sample selected was class IPA 2 with 21 students, while for the control group (CG) the sample was class IPA 3 with 23 students, so, the total sample was 44 students. The samples in both classes were both female and male students with the same level of competency and from the same socio-economic background.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The independent t-test on the pre-tests from both groups was done to find out if the data obtained before the treatment from the two groups showed any significant differences or not. This test was also used to ensure that the samples in this study had the same level of reading comprehension ability. The criteria of examining the hypothesis was: H_0 would be rejected if sig. <0.05 or $t_{count} > t_{table}$.

Table 2. Summary of independent t-test result on the pre-tests of the EG and CG.

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | T-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.(2tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
									Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.003	.95	2.53	42	0.59	2.18	4.12		-6.13	10.49
Equal variances not assumed			2.53	41.63	0.59	2.18	4.12		-6.13	10.50

The table above shows the summary of the results from the independent t-test on the results from the pre-tests from both the EG and the CG. The data from the table confirmed that the significance value was 0.95. The t count was 2.53 and the t table was 2.01. In this case, the significance value was higher than $\alpha = 0.05$ and the t_{count} were higher than t_{table}. It might be interpreted that null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected or there are no differences between the result of the pre-tests on the EG and the CG. This meant that the EG and the CG had similar ability in reading comprehension before the treatment began.

Independent T-test of Post-test Scores

The summary of results from the independent t-test of the post-test results from both groups was prepared to see whether the data obtained after the treatments were given to the two groups showed significant differences or not. The criteria for testing the hypothesis was: H_0 would be rejected if sig. < 0.05 or t_{count} > t_{table}. The hypotheses were formulated as follows:

$$H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$$

$$H_a : \mu_1 > \mu_2$$

The table below shows the summary of the independent t-test results from the post-test scores. As shown in table, the significance value was 0.73 which is higher than $\alpha = 0.05$. Moreover, the t-count was 3.12 and this was higher than the t-table which was 2.01. As a result, H_0 was accepted which indicates that there were significant differences in the results from the post-tests of the EG and the CG.

Table 3. Summary of the Independent T-Tests on the Post-tests from the EG and CG

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.(2tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.11	0.73	3.12	42	0.003	7.71	2.47	2.72	12.70
Equal variances not assumed			3.10	40.36	0.003	7.71	2.48	2.69	12.73

Discussion

Based on the research findings, there was no significant difference between the results from the post-tests of the EG and the CG. Based on the result of the t-test, it was confirmed that the significance value was 0.73 which was higher than $\alpha = 0.05$. Moreover, the test also revealed that the t-count was higher than the t-table (3.12>2.01). This meant that the EG and the CG had different levels of achievement in reading comprehension. The result of the statistical analysis indicated that the implementation of TBLT to improve reading comprehension was more effective than teaching reading by using the GTM.

Many researchers in previous studies have shown agreement with the findings of this study. Mulyono (2008) claimed that students taught by using TBLT got better results in reading comprehension. This study also supports the findings of Poorahmadi (2012) and Hayati and Jalilifar (2010) who found that TBLT was very effective in improving the reading comprehension ability of EFL students. The results of this study are also in agreement with Iranmehr, Erfani, and Davari (2011) who supported the implementation of tasks and presented the significant advantages of teaching using TBLT.

In addition, the results of this study also revealed that the participants in the EG, who were asked to do tasks, improved their performance. The students' interaction while performing the tasks provided opportunities for them to talk about vocabulary and to monitor the language they used. During the tasks, the students in the EG exchanged ideas and negotiated to find out their peers' ideas or beliefs on certain issues, and to become familiar with many words related to the topic. These findings are in line

with Nunan (2004) who has stated that TBLT focuses on learners using language naturally in pairs or group work, allowing them to share ideas. Willis (1996, p. 56) has also written that the TBLT framework combined with tasks and texts provides learners with rich exposure to language plus opportunities to use it themselves. Thus, these tasks provide learners with opportunities to practice the target language in a realistic setting and encourage them to be actively involved in the learning process.

Besides, TBLT involves several stages in its implementation. So, it makes the students able to follow the lesson step by step. According to Willis (1996, p. 39), TBLT consists of the pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus; in the pre-task, the teacher presents what is expected will be performed by the students in the task phase. During the task phase, the students perform the task, typically in small groups, although this is dependent on the type of activity. Additionally, the teacher's role is typically limited to one of an observer or counsellor. Then the focus returns to the teacher who reviews what happened in doing the tasks regarding language. This may include language forms that the students can use, problems that the students have had and perhaps forms that need to be covered more or were not used enough. In the language focus stage, the teacher may present suggestions and review the students' performances during the task phase regarding use of the language forms. Consequently, the students can get a better understanding of the materials and can get better results in reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the results the students in the EG who were taught reading comprehension through TBLT outperformed the students in the CG who were taught using the GTM. Thus the TBLT was effective for improving the reading comprehension of second grade (year 8) students at SMAN 1 Gandapura Bireuen. Such a conclusion was also justified by considering some previous research findings and theories about the nature of TBLT and its effectiveness for use in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) as previously elaborated in the discussion section.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusion, the result of this study showed that the EG students who were taught English reading comprehension using TBLT

got better results than those who were taught using GTM. Thus the researcher would like to suggest for other teachers who have similar problems as were found by the researcher in terms of teaching reading comprehension to change their reading classes from traditional ones to more dynamic and communicative ones using TBLT which can facilitate and improve the reading comprehension of their students.

Furthermore, the researcher would also like to suggest to other researchers to investigate other skills such as listening, pronunciation, and speaking to examine the possible role of TBLT in them. Since this study was conducted with a limited number of participants, it is suggested to expand the replication of this study with more participants at different levels of proficiency over longer periods of time, and with emphasis on qualitative research could be an interesting area for further research as well.

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