

# Task Based Language Teaching: An Approach to EFL Classrooms in Malaysia

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*Abstract*— One of the many perplexing questions and challenges that await a language teacher is to know which is the correct method to use in teaching language successfully. According to Long and Doughty (2009), historians of language teaching have noted a “considerable fluctuation in the methodological preferences” (p.373) where more than ten basic methods or approaches are available. With the innumerable methods and approaches that exist in the field of language teaching, the variety of selections may have discommoded some aspiring teachers. Hence, this paper aims to share the experience of teaching English to L2 Malay learners, using a task based language teaching (TBLT) or task based instruction. Nunan (2004) proposes that this method is able to strengthen several language teaching principles and practises, as it uses authentic language situations, aside from asking the students to do meaningful tasks in the target language. Moreover, this paper will also discuss the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the implications of task based instruction in a classroom setting. The experiences may be shared by teachers who move from a teacher-centred approach to an approach that encourages learners to play an active and independent role.

*Keywords*- L2 Learner, Task Based Language Teaching, Teaching Method, Lesson Plan, EFL

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the many perplexing questions and challenges that await a language teacher is to know which is the correct method to use in teaching language successfully. According to Long and Doughty (2009), historians of language teaching have noted a “considerable fluctuation in the methodological preferences” (p.373) where more than ten basic methods or approaches are available. With the innumerable methods and approaches that exist in the field of language teaching, the variety of selections may have discommoded some aspiring teachers. Hence, this paper aims to share the experience of teaching English to L2 Malay learners, using a task based language teaching (TBLT) or task based instruction.

## II. TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)

Task-based language teaching or task based instruction focuses on the use of authentic language by asking students to do meaningful tasks in the target language (Brown, 2001). There are several authentic language situations that can be implemented by using this method such as visiting a doctor, conducting an interview, or calling customer service for help. The assessment is primarily based on the outcome rather than on accuracy of language forms. Task based language teaching is popular for developing fluency in target language and also for enhancing students’ confidence (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

The word ‘task’ has a significant element in the syllabus design, classroom teaching and learner assessment. Nunan (2004) proposes that task based language teaching is able to strengthen these following principles and practises:

- A needs-based approach to content selection.
- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
- An enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- The linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Subjects

A group of 25 Malay students, undertaking diploma level at a public university in Malaysia were used as participants in this study. Majority of these students scored band 3 in Malaysian University English Test (MUET) and at this institution, these students are categorised as intermediate level. They undergo an English course in the first semester that central around the 5 language skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as grammar, where the skills are integrated in the syllabus. They meet up 3 days in a week for almost 2 hours in each lesson.

#### B. The Lesson Plan, Activities and Materials

STAGE	DURATION	ACTIVITY
Stage 1	15 minutes	Set Induction (Role Play)
Stage 2	25 minutes	Listening Activity
Stage 3	50 minutes	Group Discussion & Presentation
Stage 4	10 minutes	Evaluation
Stage 5	5 minutes	Closure

There are 5 stages in the lesson plan and these stages are designed to build up the interest of the students with regards to the theme and topic of the lesson; the theme is "People" and the topic is "Hero". By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

1. Listen attentively to the spoken discourse
2. Take note and spell words correctly
3. Participate and contribute in a group discussion
4. Write grammatically correct sentences
5. Listen and give appropriate responses
6. Speak fluently in oral presentation
7. Think and evaluate information critically

The set induction is the crucial stage of a lesson plan as students' interest depends immensely in the activity set at Stage 1. Hence, activity like role playing is befitting to get students' attention and indirectly their interest. In Stage 2, a simple listening activity is introduced, as it is aimed to further boost up and strengthen students' interest. These 2 stages are important as they help to assist students' understanding of the next task, which is the core of the lesson plan. Stage 3 is where the students will spend most of the time preparing and presenting their lengthy discussion and ideas. It is vital that teachers focus more on task completions rather than language accuracy such as grammatical mistakes, spelling, verb tenses and the like. However, during Stage 4, some comments on accuracy can be made aside from praising students' efforts in completing the given tasks. The lesson ends with Stage 5,

which is the closure. Another important element in this lesson plan is the use of materials. Depending on the background of the students and materials use in classroom must foster authentic language situations, where the students can relate with their experience outside the classroom.

### IV. THE GOALS OF THE TEACHER IN TBLT

TBLT encourages learners to learn the target language in a natural context for language use (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This method also promotes learners to work in groups cooperatively where they are advised to interact using the target language with their peers. It is a basic distinction between the real-world (target tasks) and the pedagogical tasks, which refer to the uses of language in the world beyond the classroom, where pedagogical tasks are those that occur in the classroom itself (Nunan, 2004).

The goal of task based language teaching is to transform situation from the real world into a classroom setting, where tasks become pedagogical in nature. Pedagogical task refers to an activity or action, which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language. For instance, listening to an instruction and performing a command may be referred to as tasks. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of a task. The use of variety language teaching promotes more communication among learners.

Based on that, the purpose of task based language teaching is to imply just about anything that the learners do in the classroom qualifies as a task. Activities in classroom that resemble the real world situation are used by learners for communicative purposes, in order to achieve an outcome and all this is done in the target language. Language in a communicative task is seen as bringing about an outcome through the exchange of meanings. Skehan (1998) proposes that task based language teaching to have five characteristics:

1. Meaning is primary
2. Learners are not given other people's meaning to regurgitate
3. There is no some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities
4. Task completion has some priority
5. The assessment of the task is in term of outcome

In task based language teaching, a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilising their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end.

## V. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN TBLT

In the lesson plan, the role of the teacher is to incorporate all the principles of learning in the planning of the lesson plan. As proposed by Stenhouse (1975) as cited in Ellis (2005), coming up with a lesson plan requires more than what is stated in the curriculum syllabus. It includes many considerations, on a different angle and at different stages.

### A. *Planning Stage*

1. Principles for the selection of content – what is to be learned and taught?
2. Principles for the development of a teaching strategy – how it is to be learned and taught?
3. Principles for the making of decisions about sequence.
4. Principles on which to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and differentiate the general principles 1, 2, and 3 above to meet individual case.

### B. *Empirical Study*

1. Principles on which to study and evaluate the progress of students.
2. Principles on which to study and evaluate the progress of teachers.
3. Guidance as to the feasibility of implementing the curriculum in varying school contexts, pupils' contexts, environments and peer-group situations.

The teacher needs to ensure that the lesson is implementing experiential learning throughout the learning process. This approach takes the learners' immediate personal experience as the point of departure for the learning experience. Intellectual growth occurs when learners engage in and reflect on sequence of tasks. The active involvement of the teacher is therefore central to the lesson. In this case, teacher encourages the transformation of knowledge within the learners rather than the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the learners.

Teacher also needs to encourage learners to participate actively in small, collaborative groups – as group and pair work as important, although that there are many contexts where class size makes pair and group work difficult. Teacher then needs to embrace a holistic attitude towards subject matter rather than a static, atomistic and hierarchical attitude (Horwitz, 2008). Teacher needs to emphasise more on the process rather than the product, where in the group discussion, teacher needs to observe whether the learners are practising the use of target language in their group discussion. As to ensure that the lesson is succeeded, teacher should encourage self-directed learning rather than teacher-directed learning.

The teacher has three main roles in the classroom learning of task based. The first is to act as a facilitator of the communicative process, the second is to act as a participant, and the third is to act as an observer and also learner (Horwitz, 2008).

## VI. THE ROLE OF THE LEARNER IN TBLT

In the set induction, teacher shows pictures of several people to kindle learners' prior knowledge about the topic which to be discussed in their lesson. This activity can stimulate the learners' interest of the topic. As proposed by Wilkins (1976), as cited in Paulston (1992), prior analysis of the total language system into a set of discrete pieces of language that is a necessary precondition for the adoption of a synthetic approach is largely superfluous. Furthermore, by having role playing, learners' interest and understanding can further develop, as this activity can aid the learners in the next activities, in terms of language use or might even give them some ideas. Therefore, task based language teaching is organised in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language that are necessary to meet these purposes.

In the task stage activity, learners are encouraged to participate in the process of inference where, learners need to listen attentively to the lyrics of the song and then fill in the blanks of the missing words. Although this activity seems to be an individual activity, but when it comes to knowing the answers, learners are encouraged to discuss among themselves. Some of the learners might have listened to the song before – this shows that they have already possessed the prior knowledge of the particular song, only to implement it in the activity. Learners also learn on how to use mnemonics where they can recall what they have learned, through rhymes, word associations, word classes, particular context occurrences, experiences and personal memories.

In the preparing stage, learners are grouped accordingly. In stage, learners are required to work cooperatively with their group members. Learners are given topics to be discussed in their groups. In this activity, learners are required to collect and share information in order to reach decision. There are several different strategy types they can use in their group discussion, such as cognitive, interpersonal, linguistic, affective and creative.

In the lesson, learners should understand to develop an awareness of themselves as learners. In the process of learning, it shows that good language learners share certain characteristics. Teacher and learners are two sides of a coin. Giving the learners a more active role in the classroom requires the teacher to adopt a different role.

## VII. THE CHARACTERISTICS, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES OF TBLT

In task-based language teaching, all parts of the language used are deemphasised during the activity itself, in order to get learners to focus on the task (Ellis, 2003). In the first stage of the learning, teacher presents what is expected of the learners in the task phase. Additionally, teacher may prime the learners with key vocabulary or grammatical constructs. Learners are encouraged to use what they are comfortable with the order to complete the task. Teacher may also present a model of the task by either doing it himself or herself or by presenting picture, audio or video demonstrating the task.

In the task phase, learners are required to perform the task in groups, and this is also depends on the type of activities. Teacher plays the role of an observer or counsellor, the role of the teacher is typically limited in the group activity. In completing the task, learners are required to prepare a written text and orally present to the class. Teacher may ask questions or just monitoring the learners' presentation.

When the learners have already presented the information to the class, teacher may provide written or oral feedback to each of the group as encouragement or comment and the other groups observing may also do the same. Teacher should analyse the presentation of the learners, in regards to language. This may include language form that the learners were using, any problem that they made, and perhaps language forms that need to be covered more or were not used adequately.

One of the most significant strengths of TBLT is that it encourages learners' participation in the activities done in classroom, aside from enhancing fluency in target languages. Nunan (2004) sees tasks as an enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences which serves as an important contributing element to classroom learning. With the right materials and activities, students' interest can be developed which will lead to a deeper understanding of the next tasks and the topic in general. Once learners' excitement is build up, which can be done by injecting learners' own experiences in the given tasks, interaction in the target language is greater since learners are eager to share their ideas and what they have already known regarding the meaningful tasks or topic.

On the other hand, one of its primary weaknesses is the overemphasis on communication, which increases the risk where learners are overly reliant on the use of communication strategies and lexically based language. Learners will have limited cognitive capacity to attend to accuracy and if this continues, it might later lead to "provoked fossilization", the fossilization of incorrect lexicalized language which is acquired relatively early in the process of acquiring productive skills (Richards and Renandya, 2002)

Due to this fact that TBLT focal focus is on meaning and task completion is given high priority, accuracy is seen as

second grade, even though teachers are encouraged to give comments on grammatical mistakes during evaluation, for instance, but too much of such comments may demotivate students and to an extent, evaluation of task-based learning can be difficult. According to Krahnke (1987), the global nature of task-based learning prevents it from being measurable by some of the more restricted tests. If requires students to demonstrate progress through performance on tests such as on learners' language proficiency, task-based instruction may have to be limited, or it may not be appropriate at all.

## VIII. THE EVALUATION IN TBLT

The evaluation of task based language teaching is based on Candlin (1987) as cited in Nunan (1991 and 2004), that suggests, evaluation should cover three broad areas, these are "problematicity" – refers to an extent to which a given task reveals variations in learners' abilities and knowledge, and also to what extent it is diagnosed and explained. Teacher also needs to provide monitoring and feedback to the learners and whether the findings can be used in the future action. "Implementability" area involves a consideration of the resources require, the organizational and management complexity, and the adaptability of the task. Finally, "combinability" requires teachers to consider the extent to which the task can be sequenced and integrated with other tasks.

## IX. CONCLUSION

All in all, in ensuring that a lesson is a successful one, teacher needs to measure to what extent that the goals of the task, obviously, to the teacher and the learners have been achieved. The task needs to meet the requirements of task based language teaching and encourages learners to apply classroom learning to the real world. Having said that, some alterations can be done to the given lesson plan to suit target students, particularly in the selection of materials and activities.

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# LESSON PLAN

**Course Code:** [REDACTED]  
**Course Name:** [REDACTED]  
**Level:** Diploma (Intermediate)  
**Institution:** [REDACTED]  
**No. of Students:** 25 students (5 groups of 5)  
**Lecturer(s):** 1) [REDACTED]  
2) [REDACTED]

**Date:** [REDACTED]  
**Day:** Monday  
**Time:** 10:00 am – 11:50 am  
**Duration:** 1 hour 50 minutes  
**Venue:** [REDACTED]  
**Theme:** People  
**Topic:** “Hero”

## Course Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Read and analyze passages and articles on general topics
- Write grammatically correct sentences
- Write well-organized and coherent essays
- Listen to and identify main ideas and supporting details
- Communicate accurately, appropriately and fluently in specific academic and social situations.

## Lesson Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- Listen attentively to the spoken discourse
- Take note and spell words correctly
- Participate and contribute to group discussion
- Write grammatically correct sentences
- Listen and give appropriate responses
- Speak fluently in oral presentation
- Think and evaluate information critically

**Stage 1: Set Induction (Role Play)**

**Duration:** 15 minutes

<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Teacher's activities</b>	<b>Students' activities</b>	<b>Teaching Aids</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To ensure students' knowledge about the topic and to stimulate their interest for today's lesson.</li><li>2. To activate students' background knowledge about the topic.</li><li>3. To prepare the students for the next activity.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Teacher shows several pictures on the power point slides to students (Appendix 1).</li><li>2. Teacher asks students about the meanings of the pictures.</li><li>3. Teacher educes responses from students.</li><li>4. Teacher shares and discusses briefly about the pictures with students.</li><li>5. Teacher asks several students to volunteer to be the person in the picture, while teacher and other students will interview the volunteers.</li><li>6. Teacher introduces the next activity to the class.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students look at the pictures presented by the teacher.</li><li>2. Students respond to the pictures presented by providing and sharing their personal knowledge about the pictures.</li><li>3. Some students volunteer to be the person in the pictures and answer questions ask by teacher and other classmates.</li></ol>	Pictures of Heroes, LCD projector and laptop.

**Stage 2: Listening Activity**

**Duration:** 25 minutes

<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Teacher's activities</b>	<b>Students' activities</b>	<b>Teaching Aids</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. As a warm up activity to prepare students for later activity, which shares similar topic.</li><li>2. To establish students' understanding about the topic.</li><li>3. To teach listening and note-taking technique.</li><li>4. To teach spelling</li><li>3. To prepare the students for the next activity.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Teacher gives students a handout, a lyric of <i>Hero</i> with some missing words sung by Mariah Carey (Appendix 2).</li><li>2. Teacher plays the song in class twice.</li><li>3. Teacher asks students to fill in the missing words, with correct spelling, while listening to the song.</li><li>4. Teacher calls students randomly to write the answers on the whiteboard in front.</li><li>5. Teacher asks students to identify words according to groups (Lexical Cluster)</li><li>6. Teacher asks students to write down the answers on the whiteboard.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students attentively listen to the song twice, while writing down the correct answers on the handout.</li><li>2. Students write the answers on the whiteboard and check the answers.</li><li>3. Students identify words according to groups (Lexical Cluster)</li><li>4. Students write down the answers on the whiteboard.</li></ol>	Handout A, <i>Hero</i> MP3 song, Whiteboard, Whiteboard Markers.



	7. Teacher introduces the next activity to the class		
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**Stage 3: Speaking (Group Discussion & Presentation)**

**Duration:** 50 minutes (Group Discussion 20 minutes + Presentation 30 minutes)

Rationale	Teacher's activities	Students' activities	Teaching Aids
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To encourage students to think critically.</li> <li>2. To evaluate communication skill through group work.</li> <li>3. To allow students to use English in class for discussion.</li> <li>4. To let students practice their speaking skill by doing presentation in front of the class</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher asks students to form a group of 5.</li> <li>2. Teacher gives handout (five questions), <i>mahjong</i> papers and marker pens to each group and asks students to discuss. (Appendix 3)</li> <li>3. Teacher asks students to discuss the answers with group member and write down the answer(s) in the provided <i>mahjong</i> paper, within 25 minutes.</li> <li>4. Teacher walks to each group and offers assistance when needed</li> <li>5. Teacher asks each group to present their findings in front of the class, 5 minutes each group.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students get into groups of 5.</li> <li>2. Students listen to teacher's instructions and read the handout distributed by teacher.</li> <li>3. Students discuss in-group and try to answer all the questions.</li> <li>4. Students show their work and ask questions to the teacher.</li> <li>5. Students write down the answers within the time provided.</li> <li>6. Students present their findings in front of the class.</li> <li>7. Students answer questions by classmates.</li> </ol>	<p>Handout B, Marker pens, <i>Mahjong</i>papers.</p>

	<p>6. Teacher elicits responses from students by asking them to ask questions to presenters.</p> <p>7. Teacher aids students throughout presentation.</p>		
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**Stage 4: Evaluation****Duration:** 10 minutes

<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Teacher's activities</b>	<b>Students' activities</b>	<b>Teaching Aids</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To elicits students' background knowledge about the topic.</li><li>2. To stimulate students' critical thinking in answering the questions given.</li><li>3. To enable students to put more thoughts and brainstorm more ideas regarding the topic.</li><li>4. To allow students to decide the best group.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Teacher asks students to remain in their groups.</li><li>2. Teacher praises students for their efforts.</li><li>3. Teacher gives general feedback and points out certain points</li><li>3. Teacher conducts a general discussion with all students regarding this topic.</li><li>4. Teacher asks each group to vote for their favourite group in deciding the winner.</li><li>5. Teacher announces the winner for this activity.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students remain in-group.</li><li>2. Students listen to teacher's feedback.</li><li>3. Students participate in the general discussion with the teacher.</li><li>4. Each group vote for their favourite winner.</li></ol>	Students' work, Marker pens.

**Stage:** Closure

**Duration:** 5 minutes

<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Teacher's activities</b>	<b>Students' activities</b>	<b>Teaching Aids</b>
1. To recollect students' memory about today's lesson.	1. Teacher summarises today's lesson. 2. Teacher reflects the moral values based on today's lesson. (Appreciation, Cooperation) 3. Teacher ends the lesson.	1. Students refresh their memory about the lesson as a whole. 2. Students leave the class. 3. Students refresh their	-

# APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2

**"Hero" by Mariah Carey**

There's a hero  
If you look inside your \_\_\_\_\_  
You don't have to be afraid  
Of what you are  
There's an answer  
If you reach into your \_\_\_\_\_  
And the \_\_\_\_\_ that you know  
Will melt away

*[Chorus:]*

And then a hero comes along  
With the \_\_\_\_\_ to carry on  
And you cast your fears aside  
And you know you can \_\_\_\_\_  
So when you feel like hope is gone  
Look inside you and be strong  
And you'll finally see the \_\_\_\_\_  
That a hero lies in you

It's a long road  
When you face the world alone  
No one \_\_\_\_\_ out a hand  
For you to hold  
You can find love  
If you search within yourself  
And the \_\_\_\_\_ you felt  
Will disappear

*[Chorus]*

Lord knows  
Dreams are \_\_\_\_\_ to follow  
But don't let anyone  
\_\_\_\_\_ them away  
Hold on  
There will be tomorrow  
In time  
You'll find the way

## APPENDIX 3

Answers all questions.

1. Who is the hero mentioned in the song?
2. Who can we regard as hero?
3. List five (5) characteristics a hero should have.
4. What is your definition of a hero?
5. What can “the hero” in the lyric do to us?