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Department of English Language and Literature

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The Effect of Pre-task Activities on Task Performance of Iranian EFL Learners

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<p>چکیده</p> <p>فعالتهای پیش آموزشی در روش تدریس بر مبنای فعالیتهای آموزشی در پیشینه ادبیات چندان مهم تلقی نمی گردد و با وجود تاثیر آن بر انجام فعالیتهای آموزشی این مرحله همچنان به عنوان بخشی اختیاری در نظر گرفته می شود که در بسیاری موارد می تواند حذف شود. اغلب کارشناسان بر این باورند که مرحله پیش فعالیتی تاثیر بر فعالیتهای آموزشی دارد اما این حقیقت بیشتر در قالب نظری بیان می شود و در عمل چندان جدی گرفته نمی شود. در این تحقیق نظر بر این است که تاثیر فعالیتهای پیش آموزشی بر فعالیتهای آموزشی مشخص گردد و چگونگی تاثیر چنین فعالیتهایی بر فعالیتهای آموزشی نشان داده شود.</p> <p>در این تحقیق روش تحقیق نیمه تجربی انتخاب شد. زبان آموزان شرکت کننده در این تحقیق صد نفر بودند که به پنج گروه بیست نفره تقسیم شدند. این صد نفر دارای دانش زبانی در سطح متوسط بودند و از بین صد و بیست زبان آزمون بعد از پاسخگویی به یک آزمون عمومی انتخاب شده بودند. زبان آموزان به طور تصادفی به پنج گروه فوق الذکر تقسیم شدند. این تحقیق دارای چهار گروه آزمایش و یک گروه کنترل بود. به گروههای آزمایشی فعالیتهای مختلف پیش آموزشی قبل از انجام فعالیتهای آموزشی داده شد. به گروه کنترل هیچ فعالیت پیش آموزشی ارائه نشد و فقط فعالیتهای آموزشی به این گروه ارائه شد. بعد از انجام چنین فعالیتهایی به تمام گروهها آزمونی در باره فعالیتهای آموزشی انجام شده داده شد. بعد از تجزیه اطلاعات آماری به این نتیجه رسیدیم که فعالیتهای پیش آموزشی تاثیر مثبتی بر فعالیتهای آموزشی دارند و نتایج تحقیق بیانگر این واقعیت بود که تغییر در نوع فعالیتهای پیش آموزشی بر کیفیت انجام فعالیت پیش آموزشی تاثیر خواهد داشت.</p>	

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We hereby recommend that this thesis by Sima Kazemi

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To:

My Husband

and My Family

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Abstract

This study intends to investigate the effect of different types of pre-task activities on the learners' task performance. However, most scholars have stated that pre-task phase influences the task phase, but it is mainly in the form of speculation and in practice it is still considered as an optional part which can be discarded in most situations. Therefore, this study aimed at shedding some more light on the effect of pre-task activities on task performance of the Iranian EFL learners' and indicate how differences in pre-task activities might influence the learners' task performance in general. In doing so, experimental and control groups were selected. There were four experimental and one control sub-group. Each sub-group had twenty students. The participants had been chosen randomly who have been proved to be at the same level of English proficiency after taking a proficiency test. Then four dictogloss tasks were presented to them. To the experimental sub-groups various types of pre-task activities were offered before the actual performance of the task but to the control sub-group no treatment was given, and then an immediate post-test was given to all sub-groups after the performance of each task. The results indicated that pre-task activities impact task performances of the learners' positively. It also showed that different types of pre-task activities affect learners' task performance differently. It can be concluded that there is a relationship between pre-task and task phase and diversity in pre-task activities will influence learners' task performance differently.

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List of Abbreviations

DF= Degree of Freedom

EFL= English as a Foreign Language

TBI= Task-Based Instruction

CBI= Content-Based Instruction

CLT= Communicative Language Teaching

PPP= Presentation, Practice, Production

Sg. = Significance

Std. Error= Standard Error

Sth = Something

ZPD= Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background

A task-based approach provides learners with a natural context for language use (Freeman, 2003: 137). In general, applied linguists studying second language acquisition have emphasized the value of tasks in the classroom (Brown, 2001). However there are some differences between the tasks carried out in the classroom and those in the real world, but according to some scholars such as Long and Crookes (1992), Skehan (1996), and Willis, J. (1996), giving learners tasks to perform rather than items to learn provides a better environment for the promotion of natural language learning process.

For a task-based methodology, scholars consider different cycles. Ellis (2003: 244) considered this cycle to consist of three phases: pre-task, during task, and post-task. Willis, J. (1996) presented roughly the same model. According to them the pre-task phase is the preparation phase. Ellis (2003) provided four alternatives for teachers in the pre-task phase which involved performing a similar task, providing a model, non-task preparation activities, and strategic planning. But he, similar to most of the other scholars, believed that the most important phase is 'during task' phase. According to Ellis (2003: 246) some of these pre-task types are useful to reduce the cognitive load of the task and some of them are beneficial to decrease the linguistic load of the task to be performed.

In this study, we first attempt to find out whether the presence of the pre-task should be optional or it should be a necessary part of the task-based methodology. Then it is attempted to estimate the effects of different types of pre-task activities on task performance.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

In the Iranian educational context, it seems to be important to use a methodology which adopts communicative tasks in the classroom context to prepare students for the real life. This is because Iranian students do not have a lot of exposure to the language taught out of classroom context. Hence this opportunity can be created for them to practice the language in the classroom. However classroom context is different from real life context, but by using different tasks, teachers can help their students to a higher degree. Brown (2001), Ellis (2003) and Willis, J. (1996) argued that any task interaction contains features of language that are useful in real life so the need for the distinction between real tasks and pedagogic tasks is less obvious. In this study, we tried to use a task-based instruction in the Iranian EFL context. Then the tasks were given to the students by using different types of pre-task phase alternatives (see section 2.8 for further details).

The main purpose of this study is to find out the effects of pre-task phase on task performance and then to estimate how differences in pre-task activities might affect the

learners' task performance. This study hopes to offer influential contributions to the study of task-based methodology in general, and pre-task phase in particular.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The practice of language teaching and learning seems to be directed towards using language meaningfully these days. As Nunan (2001: 15) mentioned "Audiolingual approaches neglected the relationship between language and meaning". The drill practices of some formal properties of the language are not the only focus of most classes any more. In 2004, Willis stated that audiolingual method was replaced by communicative one partly because it failed to have the desired effect of helping students to communicate in the target language (p. 4). However, despite the pedagogical benefits of task-based instruction, it is not largely used in the Iranian EFL context.

In addition to meaning, interaction has been also considered important in second language acquisition. The interaction hypothesis contributes to the acquisition in a number of ways, one of them according to Ellis (2003: 80) is the more opportunities for negotiation of meaning and content, the more likely acquisition is. Therefore, communication and interaction should be considered one of the most important goals in our classes. As a matter of fact with the advent of interactionist perspective in second language acquisition considerable attention has been placed on the role of interaction in general, and meaning in particular (Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). Unfortunately, task-based

instruction which is not so new in the history of language teaching appears to be less known for the teachers in the Iranian EFL context.

The type of the task chosen, in the researcher's opinion, can fit the EFL context in our country, because dictogloss which is sometimes called grammar dictation, can at least serve two purposes. One of them is focusing on form which is very common in our classes and is supported by students and teachers, and the other benefit can be the interaction which takes place while performing the task itself. On one hand, the nature of dictogloss demands discussion and interaction and collaboration, after all it is a communicative task. On the other hand, it deals with form too (for more information see section 2.6.1.).

This study can motivate teachers to use task-based methodology in their classroom context to provide opportunities for students to use language as it is used out of the classroom context, or similar to what is happening in real life. Teachers will also be encouraged to include pre- task phase before task phase because it will lead to a better performance of the tasks.

1.4. Organization of the Study

The present study includes five chapters. Chapter one, in short, introduces the general trend of the study. It also highlights the significance and purpose of the study.

Chapter two provides a background of task-based instruction in general and pre-task activities, in particular.

Chapter three focuses on the research methodology, design of the study, subjects, research question, and hypotheses, and the procedure of conducting this study.

Chapter four deals with the raw data obtained in this study and presents descriptive and inferential statistics. It also presents the analysis of the data.

Conclusions and implications of the study with regard to pre-task phase to facilitate the task performance and the directions for further research are presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. A Brief Review of Task-based Pedagogy

The communicative Language Teaching (CLT) movement can be considered as a reaction against the behaviorist audiolingual method of teaching of 1960s, and it was a response to some limitations of traditional PPP approach represented by the procedure of presentation, practice and performance because that method and approach failed to help learners to communicate in the target language. Teachers usually followed a prescribed lesson plan. However, doubts about this method of language teaching increased by the research of Corder (1967) who got some insights into the learning process by studying errors. He found that errors were systematic rather than random, did not generally stem from learners' first language, and showed evidence of learners improving through specified stages of development.

Hymes (1972) also showed language learning is not only learning the grammar and lexis. He suggested communicative competence. The move to CLT drew on a number of influences, for example the work of Halliday (1973). He viewed language as a system of meaning rather than only wordings. Halliday's (1975) description of his young son's acquisition of his first language also refers to the fact that learners are striving to mean. In 1971, the Council of Europe attempted to identify a common core for communicative functions for all foreign language syllabuses and Van Ek's functionally based

'Threshold Syllabus' was introduced in 1973. Van Ek (1973) was concerned with language functions, what language users are doing with the language, and notions that were defined as the meanings users want to communicate. Therefore, most of the classroom time was spent in learning communicative skills. But the problem of CLT was that it had the primary focus on practice of form rather than the expression of learners' meaning. Pair practices of dialogues, role plays, games using patterns were still common classroom practices in these contexts. However, according to the findings of second language research, teaching can not determine the way learners will learn the language, so it is not surprising that another version of CLT approach, which was called the weak version of CLT, still did not offer a significant improvement on the structural approaches in terms of achievement of communicative skills. Ellis (2003) claimed weak version of CLT dealt with functions and notions of the language (p. 28). The strong version of CLT is seen in 'Natural Approach', which was introduced by Krashen and Terrel (1983). It rested on the belief that language can be acquired naturally through exposure and communication. Howatt (1984: 279) stated that according to the strong version of CLT "language is acquired through communication".

The belief that learning of foreign language is possibly by communication and exposure to a lot of purposeful language led to the use of foreign language immersion programs. Examples are French for English Speakers in Canada (Swain, 1985) and English for Science and Math Teaching in Turkey (Aytan, 1994). It also led to content-based instruction (CBI). It was based on a subject matter with authentic material on different topics. Lightbown and Spada (1999) mentioned, "In content-based instruction, the focus