

A Framework for Task-Based Flipped Classroom in EFL Education in Vietnam

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Abstract

When it comes to language teaching in general education in Vietnam, there are many challenges for teachers to overcome. Such as time constraints, examination wash-back effects, students' demotivation and students' individualization causes of learning. Various innovative teaching methods and approaches have been applied to address these concerns, such as task-based language learning and flipped classrooms (FCs). However, each mode of teaching has its advantages and disadvantages. Due to this, it is essential to carefully examine the combination of TBLT and the flipped classroom (FC). This paper reviews the effects of the implementation of task-based language learning in the flipped classroom, discusses the integration of both teaching approaches, and suggests the applied model for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Vietnam.

Keywords: flipped classroom, task-based language learning

Introduction

Teachers face many challenges when it comes to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Vietnamese high schools to overcome, such as time constraints in applying the communicative teaching approach, crowded classrooms, heavy emphasis on rote learning, product-based instruction, and strictly teacher-centered instruction (Petraki & Nguyen, 2016). To overcome this problem, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which is viewed as a learner-centered approach, has recently been implemented in many schools (Dao & Newton, 2021). As Song (2020) noted, TBLT may enhance a learner's cognitive abilities and help to mobilize existing resources of the target language. However, this teaching approach also has some disadvantages. For example, in-state school contexts, where student numbers, time and resources are significant constraints, students may have limited language learning goals and teachers may possess more or less language learning ability. A further consideration is that task-based interaction is typically narrow, with learners focusing primarily on communicating meanings rather than necessarily focusing on the precise form of communication (Buyukkarci, 2009). Moreover, due to time constraints, teachers do not have enough time to work with individual students, and students are not given adequate time to achieve learning objectives. Additionally, each student can learn at his or her own pace, yet teachers apply the same teaching rate for all students. This leads to boredom for the fast learners and overwhelms the weaker ones, which results in their demotivation. Despite teachers' efforts to solve these problems by varying activities based on student's interests and abilities, they still face difficulties in meeting individual learning

styles (Muldrow, 2013, as cited in Afrilyasanti et al., 2016). Therefore, exploring an appropriate teaching model that can solve the aforementioned issues is necessary.

During the past few years, the FC teaching approach started attracting the attention of educators in Vietnam (Kieu, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2018). According to Song (2020), FC is the practice of adjusting the time inside and outside the classroom and transferring the decision-making power from the teacher to the student, and this teaching mode can be applied in conjunction with TBLT to help teachers free their time for lessons, help students study at their own pace, and improve classroom teaching flexibility and teaching quality. Therefore, in this paper, we describe a framework for Task-Based ELF FC in general education in Vietnam.

Task-Based Language Learning

TBLT refers to "an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 223). Chen (2017) describes TBLT as a further development of communicative language teaching in which students should construct their communicative competence by completing tasks given by their teacher in various situations. In terms of definitions of tasks, the term has been defined in various ways. From a non-linguistic perspective, Long (1985) defines a task as "a piece of work undertaken for oneself or others, freely or for some reward," and it means "the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, or in between" (p. 89). Richards et al. (1986), from the point of view of pedagogy, regard a task as an action or activity carried out due to understanding or processing language. According to

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Nunan (1989), a communicative task requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, produce, or interact with the target language. It has been suggested by Ellis (2009, p. 223) that a task should fulfill certain criteria: (1) it should focus on meaning; (2) it may have some gaps to convey information, express an opinion or infer meaning; (3) it should allow learners to use their resources (linguistic and non-linguistic); and (4) it should have a clearly defined communicative aim.

In conclusion, TBLT provides students with many opportunities to acquire the language by accomplishing tasks given. As mentioned above, TBLT has been implemented in language classrooms. However, like any other teaching methodology, implementing TBLT has several pros and cons. In the next part of this paper, TBLT and the challenges when implementing TBLT are discussed in the next section.

TBLT Framework and the Challenges of Implementation TBLT in Classroom

According to Zhang (2018), TBLT has been designed in various ways, but they all follow the same three basic phases. Moreover, Zhang noted that only the 'during-task' phase is mandatory in these phases, while the optional other phases contribute to highly effective language development during task performance. All three stages may have different activities that require students to carry out. Here is a TBLT framework formulated based on what this researcher describes.

Although TBLT has been used in many classrooms, certain factors influence its adoption. According to Adams and Newton (2009) several factors can influence the success of TBLT, including "factors related to institutional culture, factors related to classroom teaching, and factors related to teacher development" (p. 5). Accordingly, Dao and Newton (2021) concluded that summative, knowledge-based high-stakes examinations, inadequate support and training for teachers, and a lack of adequate resources all hinder teachers from applying TBLT. According to Song (2020), low classroom efficiency, difficulties ensuring large-scale teaching, and difficulties monitoring and controlling effectively are some of the main obstacles teachers encounter when implementing TBLT in the classroom.

Flipped Classroom

Definition of FC. There have been a variety of definitions of FC by educational researchers. However, there are some similarities in the previous definitions, which focus on the student-based approach and inverting the teaching procedure. For example, according to Lage et al. (2000, p. 32), the term "flipped classroom" refers to an environment in which events that were previously held in classrooms are now conducted outside of them and vice versa." In this sense, FC is simply reorganizing classroom activities and at-home activities. Similarly, FC is a model for instruction in which activities traditionally conducted in the classroom are transformed into activities that are performed at home and tasks that are normally assigned as homework are transformed into classroom activities (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018). As well as emphasizing the inversion of the teaching process, many scholars emphasize the student-centered approach. For example, Deng (2019) states that FC is a pedagogical method that involves students acquiring new knowledge outside of class via short videos, podcasts, e-books, and the Internet and consolidating it through classroom activities with the assistance of classmates and teachers.

The effects of FC on EFL students. Numerous studies have explored the effects of FC on English language learners. The papers were conducted in various educational contexts, ranging from high school to tertiary education. Most researchers compare the effectiveness of FC to traditional classroom instruction. In comparing experimental and control groups' pre-test and post-test scores, Khanahmadi and Nasiri (2022) found that incorporating online FC into EFL educational context improves students' learning performance. Similarly, Kintan (2022) concluded that students' English achievement in the experimental class was higher than in the control class. Likewise, Thai et al.

(2017) claimed that students in FC settings performed better than those in traditional settings.

For enhancing writing skills, many researchers concluded that students in the FC experimental group performed better on writing tests (Abedi et al., 2019; Afrilyasanti et al., 2016; Mubarak et al., 2019; Sahragard et al., 2020; Wang & Lui, 2018). Similar findings have been made by Abaeian and Samadi (2016) and Abusaalek (2020) regarding the enhancement of students' reading skills. Besides that, Alibeigloo et al. (2021) concluded that the use of speech acts by EFL learners was significantly improved through flipped instruction. Furthermore, FC received supportive recommendations regarding other linguistic aspects, including improving English pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition (Salal & Ali, 2019; Soltanabadi et al., 2021).

In terms of motivation, Thai et al. (2017) found that studying in an FC setting improved self-efficacy beliefs and intrinsic motivation. In their study, Zarrinabadi et al. (2021) found that FC strategies significantly influenced learners by making language learning enjoyable, increasing motivation, and decreasing language anxiety. In addition, Hsieh et al. (2017) and Wang and Liu (2018) reported that theory-based flipped instruction improved the motivation of their participants.

Based on the above results, adopting the FC strategy in teaching seems to enhance students' positive motivation. It is an efficient means of improving students' learning skills to make them more capable of learning. However, some reports have shown neutral results in their studies comparing FC and traditional classrooms (Lo & Hew, 2017; Smallhorn, 2017). Accordingly, this paper aims to explore a framework for integrating TBLT into FC to improve the effectiveness and applicability of these methods of instruction.

Task-Based Flipped Classroom (TBFC) in EFL Education

It has been indicated above that both TBLT and FC teaching models are effective methods for realizing the learner-centered approach. However, the TBLT teaching model regards the student as the center of language learning through tasks. In contrast, the FC teaching model places the class initiative in the hands of the students before class and digestion during class (Duan, 2020). Moreover, Wu et al. (2020) state that FC can undermine teaching effectiveness due to its defects of fragmentation of the teaching process and polarization of the learning effect. In contrast, TBLT offers clear tasks and systematic knowledge that can compensate for the shortcomings of online teaching in FCs. Due to this, building an FC teaching model through TBLT (from now on, it will be referred to as TBFC) can be an effective means of stressing a student-centered approach instead of employing TBLT or FC separately. The next part of the article discusses the theoretical framework for TB-FC and reviews some related research.

Theoretical background for TBFC. According to Bishop and Verleger (2013) and Akçayır and Akçayır (2018), the theoretical foundations used for justifying the FC typically draw upon the literature on student-centered learning theories, which encompasses a variety of learning theories that include learning styles, peer-assisted, collaborative, and cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and active learning. Duan (2020) proposes that constructivist learning theory can support the framework for TB-FC. Constructivists believe that learners acquire knowledge by themselves under certain conditions by constructing meaning with the assistance of teachers, co-learners and relevant learning materials. The learner constructs the knowledge, not the teacher (Duan, 2020). Consequently, it is concluded that a TB-FC model can effectively facilitate learners in achieving their learning goals.

Previous Studies on the Application of Task-Based Classroom Learning (TBCL) on EFL Learners

Five papers are examined to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts of TBCL in EFL contexts. These studies were conducted in a variety of educational settings, including high school and tertiary education. Except for a paper that was published in 2018, other research was published in 2020.

Wang and Liu (2018) developed a TBLT model for college EFL students and applied it to the teaching practice of Chinese college oral English classes. In order to conduct this study, contrastive experiments, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews were used. The results suggest that the task-based flipped classroom teaching model significantly enhances students' communicative competence in English.

Duan (2020) presented a detailed reform plan combining TBLT and FC to improve students' learning effectiveness. Students learning impacts of Hotel English could be evaluated from three perspectives: their course assessment results, their working English ability in hotels, and their course satisfaction levels. A research study was conducted in 2016 with 100 undergraduate students from Yinxing Hospitality Management College. As a result, implementing this plan was effective in teaching practice and could enhance the student's language abilities for the hotel industry.

Song (2020) claimed that FC is perfectly integrated with TBLT. The participants in this study were selected from seven to ninth-grade classes at a middle school. According to the findings, traditional TBLT can be perceived as boring. As a result of innovative TBLT, the teacher could pay more attention to the student's learning situation. A final benefit of the innovative teaching mode is that students' learning efficiency has generally been enhanced.

Wu et al. (2020) carried out a task-driven online FC teaching model and explored its practice. By applying this model, the researchers claimed that they generated and motivated students' interest. It has been found that the transition from "teacher-centered" to "student-centered" and from "knowledge transfer" to "ability training" has increased the effectiveness of students' learning.

For his dissertation, Zhou (2020) integrated TBLT into FC to investigate the impact of an FC approach on students' learning experiences in university EFL classes in the first semester. It was found that through the use of a variety of tasks not commonly used or observed in traditional classrooms, as well as better class time usage and improved instructional practices, the students were allowed to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge of the subject matter.

In general, although the researchers built their model of TB-CL, all of them have some common points. First, learners' autonomy is emphasized through effective support from teachers with high feedback efficiency. Second, the teacher has more time to spend with each student due to the teacher's guidance before class. Third, these models highlight the mutual relationship between classroom instruction and self-directed learning. Finally, these models follow the three phases of TBLT, with the first phase usually taking place prior to class, thus allowing students to discuss and present their tasks during class. To sum up, the researchers agreed that their models have the potential to

improve classroom teaching flexibility and quality, as well as promote learners' motivation.

The Applied Model of Task-Based Flipped Classroom (TBFC) in EFL Education

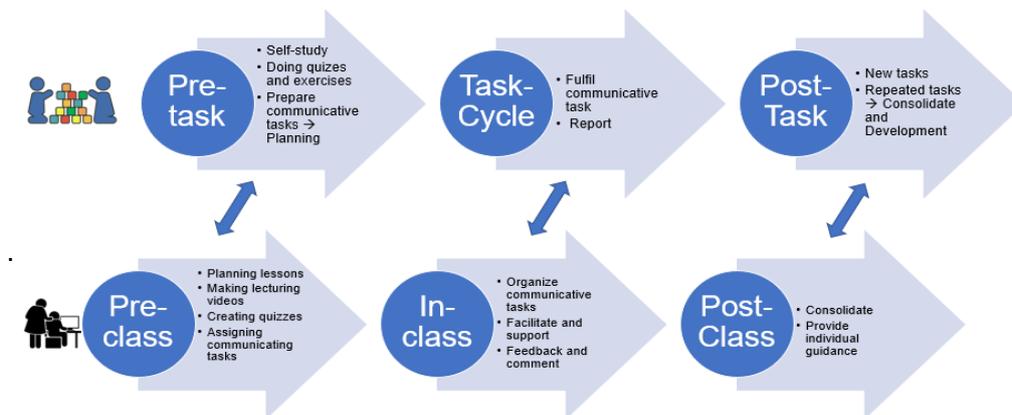
Theoretically, TBLT and FC emphasize the learner-centered approach and constructivist learning theory. According to Duan (2020), TBLT is characterized by rich learning situations, collaborative practice, and scaffolding by the teacher, while FC uses constructivist learning theory at its most advanced, as follows: students construct knowledge on their own through teaching videos and materials online prior to class, after which they do practices, participate in discussions, and ask questions in class under the guidance of the teacher to achieve knowledge consolidation. Therefore, the TB-FC model can be an effective way to emphasize students' autonomy and collaboration. With this TB-FC model, learners are highly motivated to complete various communicative tasks and solve various problems, which results in a considerable improvement in their communicative competence (Wang & Liu, 2018).

Teachers in general education in Vietnam usually face a wide range of challenges when it comes to teaching. Generally, the obstacles mentioned when discussing difficulties in teaching general education in Vietnam are the fact that state schools usually use outdated course books, teachers' lack of communication skills or limited expertise in developing communicative activities, classroom and teaching material constraints, teacher-centered methods that are familiar to teachers, and a mismatch between testing and teaching (Hoang, 2018; Pham, 2007). Among all the problems, teaching and learning styles are the most problematic. Influencing our Vietnamese culture, English teachers play a central role in classes in order to assist students in passing exams with high grades. As a result, students learn passively, so they do not have an immediate need to use English inside or outside the classroom (Pham, 2007). Additionally, most of the learning time is spent in the classroom, so teachers may not spend enough time with each student to help them to work effectively due to crowded classrooms. Therefore, an efficient model that helps solve these problems is a must.

Implementing TBLT and FC is not a new phenomenon in the classroom. However, teachers usually employ these approaches separately. As discussed above, TBLT and FC have their own merits and demerits, so a combination of the two methods promotes the effectiveness of the TBLT in the application of the FC practices.

Wang and Liu (2018) point out, three factors are considered when creating this model: aligning teaching content with learners' needs, intensifying classroom interactions to enhance communication, and encouraging a connection between the classroom and autonomous learning. Based on Wang and Liu's (2018) model, this paper attempts to adopt it into teaching practice.

Figure 1
The Model of Task-based Flipped Classroom



Note. The image adopted from "Task-based flipped classroom in Chinese college EFL teaching: An empirical study in oral English course," By S. Wang & C. Liu (2018). *International Journal of Contemporary Education*, 1(1), 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijce.v1i1.3086>

In the pre-class stage, teachers plan lessons to help students learn autonomously. The teacher's preparation includes making lecture videos, creating quizzes for checking to understand and assigning communication tasks. This stage emphasizes learners' self-directed learning by asking them to view the video recording, do quizzes before class and prepare for discussion in the next phase. Taking a letter of request lesson as an example, students watch video clips presented by their teachers to learn the letter format; they also learn some lexical related to the topic, some useful structures in writing one, etc. Then, a quiz is conducted to check if the learners fully understand the lecture. Finally, the students prepare for their answers to the follow-up discussion in class. This stage facilitates learners' autonomous learning, according to Wang and Lui (2018), but also requires teachers to be aware of the learners' difficulties in order for the teacher to be aware and find the most effective solution to help the learners overcome these difficulties.

Wang and Liu (2018) note that teachers organize communicative tasks in the in-class stage. However, the focus is on constant communication and interaction between learners to accomplish the tasks. The teacher is responsible for facilitating learning, providing support, and motivating students to achieve learning objectives. In the example of the letter of request lesson, students review their knowledge from the pre-class phase before writing a formal letter of request. Then they discuss how to apply the knowledge they have acquired beforehand to real-life situations under the teacher's guidance. After that, teachers must receive students' letters with peer review to provide immediate feedback and suggest solutions to any common issues emerging in class.

The after-class stage requires students to consolidate their knowledge through quizzes or real-life applications of what they have learned. For example, students can be assigned to write a letter to a university to request some information about admission requirements. Wang and Liu (2018) also point out that students may encounter some difficulties at this stage, so individual guided communication between teachers and students, which may involve an online platform, should be maintained.

To conclude, through this teaching mode, teachers may be able to facilitate their students to focus more on active task-based learning by adjusting the time inside and outside the classroom and transferring the decision-making power from the teacher to the students (Song, 2020). Hence, in order to successfully implement this model of teaching, teachers must analyze student needs, communicate with them, and guide them to do self-study; at the same time, students should also strive to study independently, without over-depending on their teacher and achieve meaningful learning (Feng, 2006, cited in Duan, 2020).

Conclusion

Applying the adopted TB-FC model, teachers may be able to improve classroom teaching flexibility and teaching quality to achieve better educational results. Thanks to this model, teachers no longer occupy class time to teach but promote communication and interaction between students and students as well as students and teachers more effectively. Further, this mode of teaching could enhance the individualization of learning, which has been described as a demotivating factor in the introduction. This TB-FC model needs to be applied to general education in Vietnam, however, in order to ensure its effectiveness.

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