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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Winter issue of *Taking it to Task*!

This issue’s first article, *Exploring English Self-Efficacy in Japanese Students* by Robert Remmerswaal of Sojo University, details the influence of task-based language learning on self-efficacy in the Japanese university classroom. This is followed by an article by Martin Spivey, *Considerations for Adopting a Task-Based Teaching Approach in a Private English Conversation School*. Finally, Kevin Ballou and Phillip M. Clark both from Kwansei Gakuin University provide a lesson plan: *Investigating a Career*.

We have slightly changed our submission categories and formatting guidelines. Contributors are asked to follow the guidelines set in the seventh edition of the American Psychological Association (APA). The updated categories are listed below:

- Research or theory-based articles should be approximately 5000 words or less (not including references and appendices)
- Discussion/Opinion Articles approximately 3000 words or less (not including references and appendices)
- Lesson/activity plans should be 1000 words or less
- Book Reviews (for unsolicited submissions please contact us first)

In addition, we are planning a couple of special issues over the next two years. The focus of the first special issue, Winter 2021, will be TBLT and CALL. That will be followed one year later with another special issue in Winter 2022.

The submission deadline for the upcoming summer edition is April 1, so if any of you have a TBLT related article, lesson plan, book review or opinion piece that you would like to submit for consideration in a future issue of *Taking it to Task*, please contact us at tbltsigpublications@gmail.com

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue,

Rick Derrah and Martin Spivey
Publication Chairs
Exploring English Self-Efficacy in Japanese Students

Robert Remmerswaal, Sojo University

Abstract

This paper describes a small study conducted with two university English classes in Japan with the goal of changing their perceived self-efficacy in English writing and understanding, both in and outside of the classroom. One class consisted of beginner, and the other of intermediate level English learners. Both received a similar intervention based on Situated Learning and Task-Based Learning. The intervention consisted of several authentic tasks of writing emails and summary reports. At the beginning and end of the course, students completed a Likert scale survey to report perceptions of their English ability. It was found that student perceived self-efficacy increased in English writing and understanding skills inside of the class. However, perceptions did not change for situations outside of the classroom.

Introduction

Perceived self-efficacy (PSE), as defined by Bandura (1995) is the belief that one can take the action required to manage a situation. PSE affects the way people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act more so than their objective ability (Bandura, 1995). For English learners, the PSE of English proficiency should therefore affect their use of English outside of class more so than their actual English ability. The Key to Employability (KtE) model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) ties PSE directly to employability. Under this premise, an increase in student PSE could lead to increased PSE in using English in a potential workplace. This led to the research questions

1. Could an intervention of instruction through authentic activities increase student PSE of their English ability?
2. Could that intervention also increase student PSE of a workplace task?
To explore these questions, authentic tasks were designed using aspects of Situated Learning and Task-Based Learning. The KtE model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) also played a role in course design. The model stipulates that the areas of career, experience, degree subject knowledge, generic skills, and emotional intelligence are the key foundations, that when combined with reflection, lead to an increase in PSE, self-confidence, self-esteem, and employability. While this theory was created in the context of British higher education, it was adapted for Japanese higher education in the context of English learning.

This study involves students from two universities, one public and one private, both located within a small city. The first class (U1) consisted of 14 English majors in their third and fourth year of the private university. Students were likely to seek employment that utilized English, allowing for the course to use activities that were situationally authentic, as defined below. The second class (U2) consisted of 32 science majors required to take English at the public university. These students had lower English proficiency than their U1 counterparts and were unlikely to seek employment requiring English. Activities had less potential to be situationally authentic, but could be interactionally authentic, which led to the application of Task-Based Learning (TBL).

**Literature Review**

While Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) stipulate five areas that lead to increased PSE and employability, classroom limitations led to a focus on experience, degree subject knowledge, and generic skills. These activities were additionally designed using SL and TBL to create realistic work activities. Bandura (1995) found that realistic work environments are an efficient way of increasing PSE. These two theories are explored in more detail below.

**Task Based Learning**

This study incorporates two definitions of TBL. The first from Ellis (2013), where a task is primarily focused on conveying messages, bridging a gap, allowing learners to use their linguistic and non-linguistic resources, and output that goes beyond demonstrating language ability. The second (Nunan, 2004) adds that TBL can be used to mobilize grammatical knowledge to express meaning. Nunan puts focus on the task being able to stand alone and having its own beginning, middle, and end. Ellis (2013) includes interactionally authentic activities as an appropriate task. These are activities with interactions that are likely to be replicated in an authentic situation. In the case of this paper, these include working with groups, deciphering English beyond student level, and creating text that is understandable and appropriate for a given situation.
**Situated Learning**

According to Stein (1998), SL activities should be realistic, centered around a problem, and allow students to learn by completing the activity. Stein goes on to describe the instructor’s role as that of a guide who provides scaffolding and support for beginners, tracks the progress of students, builds collaborative learning spaces, and provides a space for reflection. Oliver et al. (2002) suggest ten points to consider when designing authentic activities for situated learning. The ten points are:

1. Tasks should be related to real world situations.
2. Tasks should be open to multiple interpretations, with students creating their own smaller tasks to complete the large task provided by the instructor.
3. The activity should require a substantial amount of time to complete.
4. Students should be permitted to find a variety of perspectives from multiple sources.
5. Activities should have collaboration.
6. Students should reflect on their contributions and those of the social group.
7. Activities should include multiple subjects or fields.
8. Assessment should be integrated into the tasks and be evaluated on real world merit.
9. Tasks should be for the creation of a final product.
10. Activities should allow for a variety of outcomes and solutions.

These points were directly applied to course design as seen in the methods section below.

**Methods**

In creating the course, a new tool was created to measure students PSE of their English both before and after instruction. Respective school ethical guidelines were followed in the collection of student data and all students provided informed consent.

**Questionnaire**

A two-sample paired t-test was conducted, using Microsoft Excel, comparing survey results of student perceptions both before and after the writing courses. All t-tests were at a significance level of .05. Students were asked their age and gender to allow for demographic analysis. This was followed by 11 statements on a Likert scale with options “strongly disagree” = 1, “disagree” = 2, “neutral” = 3, “agree”
= 4, and “strongly agree” = 5. All t-tests were tested against the null hypothesis that there would be no significant change in responses. The statements were as follows.

1. I am good at English.
2. I can write well in English.
3. I can write an email in English.
4. I believe that in a future job I have the skills needed to write an English email.
5. I believe that at a future job I could reply to a work email in English.
6. I can read information in English and write a short summary that is easy to understand.
7. I can understand written instructions in English.
8. I can work with a team online in English.
9. English is important for my future.
10. I want to use English in my career.
11. My English is strong enough for my future career.

Statements 1 and 2 were included for insight into student beliefs of their general English ability. Statements 3-8 were based on managing a specific task, as PSE is the belief of possessing the ability to take the action required to manage a situation. Statements 3, 6-8 relate to situations in class and research question one, while statements 4 and 5 relate to workplace related tasks and research question two. Statements 9 and 10 do not directly relate to PSE but allow further analysis of the results based on how useful a student perceives English to their future. Finally, statement 11 gave insight into the general PSE students hold of their ability to use English in their desired career.

**Intervention**

There were four main writing tasks given to U1. Due to the lower level of U2, the class was assigned the first three of these tasks and given additional time to complete each task. There were also report writing activities for both classes in which students read native-level newspaper articles, summarized them in groups, and discussed the article through class forums. The main activities were:

1. Write an email(s) promoting your group's new company to your target audience.
2. Write an email to schedule a business meeting in which you are persuading the other person to buy from or work with your company. Alternatively, write a cover letter style email for a job application.
3. Write an email(s) promoting your group's second new company to your target audience.
4. Reply to the response received from activity two (written by the teacher).

These activities were designed to be situationally authentic by considering the 10 points derived from Oliver et al. (2002) described earlier. Task description “1” was derived from recommendation “1” with all descriptions continuing this pattern to “10”.

1. Tasks mimicked authentic emails that a company would write for a marketing campaign or would be used in business-to-business communication.
2. Students targeted their choice of customer, customer type, or company of their choice. Students could change email length, tone, provide discounts, etc. as they desired. Any idea was acceptable with the guiding goal of influencing the recipient to perform an action.
3. Students were given 3 (U1) to 5 (U2) weeks to complete an assignment.
4. Examples of each writing task were provided, but students were encouraged to seek other resources to meet their style, focus, and goals.
5. Activities one and three were completed in a group of 3-4 students. Activities two and four were individual but reviewed by group members before submission.
6. Students evaluated their own contributions and that of members by providing feedback and a mark. To prepare for the exam, students were encouraged to reflect on all feedback received from the teacher and classmates for their final product creation required in the exam.
7. English writing, marketing, and business skills were included.
8. Emails were evaluated on four categories: spelling and grammar, logic of the sentences, the overall email flow, and the chance of receiving a response.
9. Emails were the final product, usable in real-world situations.
10. No group or individual had a similar final product.

These tasks were also interactionally authentic as to make them relevant to students whose careers may not require English, but who may encounter similar situations in Japanese, or be required to utilize English on a one-off basis. To be in line with such situations, students were encouraged to use any online tool, app, dictionary, or other resource they desired to use. In addition, team collaboration led to the production of English, but team discussions were not restricted to English.
Social persuasion was another tool used. Bandura (1995) describes it as the comments of those nearby being used to strengthen one’s belief of being able to succeed. Teacher feedback praised students on the areas in which they did well, and questions led students to find their own mistakes. In addition, during each group or individual brainstorming session, the teacher met with students, praised their ideas, and used questions to expand those ideas further. As suggested by Bandura (1995), these questions were structured in a way to bring the assigned tasks into successful completion, while still allowing the students to be the driving creative force of the assignment.

Results
Responses to statements 1, 2 and those related to a classroom task (3, 6-8) showed a statistically significant increase in student self-efficacy as seen in Figure 1. Responses to statements related to skills needed for the future (4, 5, and 11) showed no statistically significant change as seen in Figure 2. Statements 9 and 10 also had no statistical change (see Appendix for full responses by statement and class).

Figure 1

*Classroom based Tasks and Statements 1 & 2*

![Figure 1](image)

*Note.* Average student responses with .05% error bars included

One area of note is that while all areas did show a statistically significant increase, post-intervention responses were still near 3, a response of neutral.
While there were no statistically significant changes in statements 4 and 5, the post-intervention score is similar to the post-intervention results of statements 6-8. With average responses between neutral and agree.

The following is a breakdown of each statement. The first statement, “I am good at English”, had a statistically significant difference in the scores for pre-intervention (M=2.24, SD=0.64) and post-intervention (M=2.78, SD=0.76) conditions; t (45)=−3.84, p < .01. This result suggests that students’ self-belief in their English scores increased in a positive way. With the average student now much closer to neutral after the course. The second statement, “I can write well in English”, also saw a statistically significant increase. Pre-intervention (M=2.239, SD=0.71) and post-intervention (M=2.70, SD=0.76) conditions; t (45)=−3.31, p < .01. This result suggests that student self-confidence increased in their writing ability. Once again, closer to neutral from disagree. The third statement, “I can write an email in English”, saw a statistically significant increase from disagree to neutral. Pre-intervention (M=2.04, SD=0.76)) and post-intervention (M=3.04, SD=0.82) conditions; t (45)=−11.95, p = 0. This one-point jump was the largest change seen.

The fourth statement, “I believe that in a future job I have the skills needed to write an English email”, saw no significant change pre- and post-intervention. Pre-intervention (M=3.57, SD=1.89) and
post-intervention (M=3.52, SD=1.11) conditions; t (45)= 0.25, p = 0.80). This is similar to the fifth statement, “I believe that at a future job I could reply to a work email in English.”, This saw pre-intervention (M=3.11, SD= 1.10) and post-intervention (M=3.28, SD=1.15) conditions; t (45)= -0.83, p=0.41. In both cases students averaged above neutral, towards agreement both before and after the course. While no change was observed, it is possible the neutral response represents a lack of career knowledge.

The sixth statement, “I can read information in English and write a short summary that is easy to understand”, saw a statistically significant increase. Pre-intervention (M=2.78, SD=0.79) and post-intervention (M=3.20, SD=0.81) conditions; t (45)= -2.40, p=0.02. The seventh, “I can understand written instructions in English”, saw an increase as well. Pre-intervention (M=2.74, SD= 0.77) and post-intervention (M=3.22, SD=0.79) conditions; t (45)= -2.92, p < .01. Statement eight, “I can work with a team online in English”, showed a very large shift in student self-perceptions. Pre-intervention (M=2.43, SD=0.81) and post-intervention (M=3.26, SD=0.93) conditions; t (45)= -5.28, p < .01. Both statements 7 and 8 are generic skills that were not specifically taught. This suggests that students became more confident in their generic skills despite no specific instruction.

Statement nine, “English is important for my future”, saw no significant change; pre-intervention (M=4.15, SD=0.84) and post-intervention (M=4, SD=0.87) conditions; t (45)=0.91, p=0.37. Similarly, statement ten, “I want to use English in my career”, saw no significant change. Pre-intervention (M=3.57, SD=1.00) and post-intervention (M=3.72, SD=1.13) conditions; t (45)= -0.73, p= 0.47. The average student agreed that English is important for their future, but they had slightly less desire to use English in their career.

Finally, the eleventh statement, “My English is strong enough for my future career”, also did not change, with students below neutral on this question. Pre-intervention (M=2.48, SD=1.15) and post-intervention (M=2.67, SD=1.19) conditions; t (45)= -0.73, p=0.47. This may suggest that students are not confident in their ability to work in English, or a lack of reference to judge their ability.

Discussion and Limitations
Students reported an increase in their English PSE when it was connected to specific situations they performed in class. They did not have any change in their perceptions of ability to perform tasks in a future work situation; even when future situations were similar to those done in class. As no qualitative data was gathered, I can only speculate on possible reasons for the results. One cause could be students were given a chance to reflect and evaluate their English ability throughout the course and could connect
their progress to those specific tasks. However, without experience of a work setting, connecting those same tasks to work-preparedness may not have been possible.

To address this, bringing a recent graduate to class may be beneficial in a future study. Bandura (1995) describes this as a vicarious experience. Seeing a person like yourself succeed in a task is likely to increase your belief that you can accomplish the task as well. As statements 4 and 5 related directly to work, Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) also make a good suggestion to include career development learning. This includes students being made more self-aware of their skills, what they enjoy doing, are interested in, what motivates them, and how to present themselves to employers.

Overall, U1 (English majors) reported higher self-efficacy in their English abilities than U2 (science majors), both before and after the intervention. Higher efficacy was also observed in class, showing a positive relationship between reported student self-efficacy and ability. One exception was in statement 6. The averages both pre- and post-intervention were very similar for both classes. Perhaps U1 and U2 had a similar lack of experience in writing summary reports before the course.

Limitations of this study include the additional English classes taken by students in U1, and also the fact that students may have been exposed to English outside the classroom throughout the semester. Students also responded using a five-point Likert-scale, which Matell & Jacoby (1972) found to increase the amount of neutral responses. They found that scales larger than five significantly reduced the use of neutral. A higher scale with seven or nine points should be used in the future so as to reduce the use of neutral while allowing it as an option.

Conclusion

In answering the first research question, student PSE of their English ability was increased using instruction as an intervention. In answering the second question, PSE of a workplace related task was not changed. Further areas of study include determining the most effective means of increasing student PSE, determining if career education can assist in increasing PSE of workplace related tasks, and determining if increased PSE actually influences English use outside of the classroom or readiness to use English in the workplace as assumed.
References


## Appendix

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**U1 Mean** 2.64 3.07 2.5 2.71 2.36 3 4.07 4.14 3.57 4 2.79 3.21 3 3.57 2.71 3.57 4.5 4.5 4.21 4.36 2.64 3.07

**U2 Mean** 2.06 2.66 2.13 2.66 1.91 3.06 3.34 2.95 2.91 2.91 2.78 3.19 2.85 3.06 2.31 3.13 4 3.78 3.28 3.44 2.41 2.5

**Total Mean** 2.25 2.80 2.25 2.73 2.05 3.05 3.52 3.57 3.07 3.32 2.75 3.20 3.20 3.25 2.41 3.23 4.11 4.02 3.57 3.75 2.5 2.64
ARTICLE

Considerations for Adopting a Task-Based Teaching Approach in a Private English Conversation School

Martin Spivey, The University of Birmingham

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the potential impact a move to a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach could have on the communicative skills of students at a small, private conversation school (‘eikaiwa’) in Japan. In an analysis of three different classes, I look at my current teaching approach and the practical implications of adopting a task-based approach for each class. The opening section highlights some of the main arguments in favour of TBLT and criticisms against it. To conclude I explain my own plan of action and offer advice to other small ‘eikaiwa’ owners who may be considering implementing TBLT in their own schools.

Introduction

TBLT has existed as a concept for around forty years now and is a by-product of the Communicative Language Teaching Movement of the 1970s and 1980s, which sought to move away from the traditional ‘synthetic’ ways of teaching a second language and head towards a more communicative approach through which language could be acquired in a more natural process (Ellis et al, 2019).

…a task is taken to be an activity in which meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the real world, task completion has some priority, and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome. (Skehan, 1996. p. 38)

Skehan captures the main goals of the TBLT approach, however there are several definitions of what a ‘task’ entails and proponents of TBLT have differing views of how the approach should be implemented in the second language classroom. For instance, Long (2016) views tasks as “the real-world
communicative uses to which learners will put the L2 beyond the classroom’ and expects learners to work at tasks that practise communication for a variety of purposes; such as academic, occupational, and vocational training” (p. 6). He proposes that a TBLT syllabus requires an extensive analysis of students needs and major institutional support in order for it to be successful.

Ellis (2003, pp. 9-10) advocates that a task is a ‘workplan’ for learner activity with the main focus on meaning, and it should contain a ‘gap’ that requires learners to “use language in order to close it”. A task can also use any of the four language skills and should have a clear outcome to signify completion. Ellis (2017) also believes in using both focused and unfocused tasks, with the former designed to help improve students’ accuracy by focusing on a particular linguistic feature within a task.

One major critique of TBLT is by Swan (2005) who presents a case against ‘task-based instruction’ as a viable pedagogical approach to language learning. He claims that there is little empirical evidence to support the three hypotheses (on-line, noticing, and teachability) that underpin the support for TBLT from a psychological perspective. He also believes that there is a need to pre-teach grammar to learners, especially to beginners with limited knowledge of the language, and that “TBL provides learners with substantially less new language than ‘traditional’ approaches” (p. 392). Many of Swan’s criticisms have been dismissed by Ellis et al (2019) due to what the authors claim are misunderstandings by Swan as a result of his belief that TBLT is a monolithic approach that has “a single set of principles,” when in fact advocates offer a variety of forms (p. 335). Bruton (2002a: 287) questions whether a syllabus based on communicative tasks would cover language accuracy, although he appears to mistakenly view TBLT as limited to pair and group speaking tasks with no focus on other language skills.

It is useful to keep in mind the various arguments that are made in favour of or against TBLT when considering whether this approach is appropriate for one’s own teaching context. Despite some critics, there is strong evidence to suggest that it can significantly improve students’ communicative abilities. This paper focuses on private English conversation schools in Japan (‘eikaiwa’), using my school as a case study.

Private Conversation School (‘Eikaiwa’) Case Study
This school is a small private language school with students ranging from three to seventy years old. Private lessons are offered and group classes have a maximum of five students. Classes are between forty and sixty minutes each. Students usually attend once a week and have an average of forty-eight classes a year. The school is promoted as a four-skills language school and while an attempt is made to
practise all four skills equally, some skills are prioritised over others depending on the needs of the students.

All the students are born in Japan, sharing the same L1 and similar life experiences. As the school is private, students (or their guardians) have to provide extra funding for lesson fees and so are largely from the same socio-economic background. Currently, most students have completed two years of English classes in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school and six years at junior and senior high school. From April 2020, students in the third and fourth grades of elementary school also began compulsory ‘Foreign Language Activities’ of thirty-five hours a year while all fifth and sixth-graders have a minimum of 70 hours of ‘English as a formal assessed subject’ annually (Nemoto, 2018). The key objective in state education is to study for examinations which allow progress to the next educational level and this has had a major effect on the teaching methodology of a typical Japanese classroom. Traditionally, classrooms have been teacher-centred with a focus on grammar-translation and rote learning resulting in little class time to practise communicative language skills. This means that while some seek further English education in ‘eikaiwa’ such as the author’s, they often lack the experience of a communicative classroom which values student output. This conflict can make it challenging to implement a more communicative teaching methodology that focuses on productive skills and this needs to be taken into consideration.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Implementing a Task-Based Approach in ‘Eikaiwa’

In this section I conduct an analysis of three courses that are currently taught at my school. They have been chosen as representative samples of the different age groups and abilities that I teach. I then explain the current teaching approach and evaluate if I believe that adopting a task-based approach would significantly improve the communicative skills of my students.

**Kindergarten Group Class (6 & 7 years old)**

This class consists of five female students; four are in the final year of kindergarten and one is in the first grade of elementary school. The class meets once a week for forty minutes. The students have had varying degrees of exposure to English with most having had less than two years of formal instruction. As a result, there is a focus on language input in the teaching approach and a typical lesson plan can be seen in Figure 1 below:
Greetings: Hello! How are you? How’s the weather? What day is it? etc

Song 1: Hello! song

Song 2: Hokey Pokey – practise body parts and instructions

Game: Drill 6 animal cards and play the Slap! game

Storytime: Teacher reads a story to the students (e.g. Spot the Dog)

Playtime: Play a simple, fun game (e.g. bowling, building blocks)

Song 3: Goodbye! song

Figure 1: An outline of a typical kindergarten lesson plan

The lessons are designed to be fun and lively to increase the students’ motivation to learn. I try to encourage the students to participate as much as possible. Songs play a major role in the curriculum for this age group. They provide a good model of English pronunciation and intonation while simultaneously helping with long-term language retention (Fonseca-Mora 2000). Because of this, I argue that songs in class are an effective activity for developing listening skills as well as introducing grammatical structures, building vocabulary, and providing an opportunity for students to practise producing the language in a fun, stress-free way. A task could be designed where students would change song lyrics such as using different body parts and actions in the Hokey Pokey song. This creates a degree of learner autonomy and allows the students to focus on meaning. It requires a large part of class time to complete though, so the teacher should provide suggestions to move the task along swiftly and avoid the students becoming bored and restless.

Currently, the “present-practise-produce” (PPP) technique is used to introduce vocabulary and simple phrases but in this section, I evaluate the effectiveness of this approach. ‘Eikaiwa’ owners and teachers should refer to relevant research by Shintani (2016), who compared the effects of PPP and TBLT classroom instruction on 6-year-old Japanese beginner learners. In post-class tests, she found that the TBLT group did better than the PPP group on nouns and adjectives because in the TBLT group nouns were presented in context and students sometimes needed adjectives to negotiate meaning in order to identify the correct noun (2016). Her study provides empirical evidence that TBLT can be a more effective method of instruction than PPP when teaching vocabulary to very young learners. Also, cognitive research studies have found that increased emotional engagement can lead to improved long-
term memory of the emotion-inducing objects and this knowledge informs us when putting together our own classroom methodology (for an overview see Tyng, C. M. et al, 2017). From a commercial perspective, a programme that includes fun and challenging classroom tasks that motivate students and help develop their language ability should improve student retention and act as a marketing tool for attracting new students.

Shintani (2012) studied 6-year-old Japanese beginners who repeated the same ‘listen-and-do’ task over several weeks and saw students gradually reduce the use of their L1, increase L2 production via incidental acquisition, and maintain their motivation to communicate with the teacher in the L2. For this task, the teacher gave commands and learners had to select the correct picture card. One point was awarded for each correct card and the student with the most points at the end of the task was the winner. This type of task could work well in my class as it develops comprehension without necessarily restricting output. It also provides a competitive element which motivates students to take part. One potential issue is that the teacher in the study used L1 for giving instructions and occasionally within the task itself. My school policy is to attempt to use only English during class so I try to use gestures and avoid L1 use as much as possible.

Another idea for an input-based task is a colouring task where students are given a picture and they have to listen to the teacher and colour the objects with coloured pencils. This would encourage students to produce language in order to confirm their answers with the teacher. Teachers could also do a more physical task in which the students need to listen to the teacher’s instructions and place different objects around the classroom. These tasks are easy to create and simple to understand. They provide language input in a meaningful context, while allowing for the opportunity for output.

Within my context I don’t recommend a purely task-based approach for this age group but a series of input-based tasks repeated on a regular basis along with songs and story time would keep lessons engaging while encouraging students to produce language at different stages of the class.

**Elementary School Group Class (10 & 11 years old)**

There are two boys and one girl in this class and they have eighteen months to four years of experience of studying at the school. The class meets once a week for fifty minutes and follows a curriculum designed by myself. It is roughly based on the contents of the Cambridge English Young Learners examination although no practice is done for the exam at my school. A textbook, *Fun for Starters*, (Robinson & Saxby, 2016) is occasionally used during lessons and the students are given reading homework every week. A typical lesson plan is represented in Figure 2:
Greetings: Good afternoon! How are you? How’s the weather? What’s the date? What’s the time?

Homework: (Students read a book at home.) Check their book record sheet and exchange books.

Phonics: Practise long ‘i’ sound (kite, lie, my etc) through games – spelling challenge, reading rods etc

Grammar/vocabulary: 1. Drill vocabulary with cue cards
   2. Present, drill question and answer (Q&A)
   3. Practise Q&A in game (e.g. Snakes and Ladders)

Close greetings: Remind students about homework and say goodbye

As shown in Figure 2, the PPP technique is frequently used to present and practise new language points and while this has met with some success, I feel that the use of tasks would allow learners to focus more on communicative skills and not just language forms. Creating an entire task-based curriculum is very burdensome for a small school owner, therefore I recommend gradually introducing tasks into your current curriculum.

Pinter’s (2005) study found that repeating the same ‘spot the difference’ and ‘map route’ tasks with pairs of Hungarian 10-year-olds resulted in a gradual reduction in silent periods and an increase in speech rates between the two students. These are two tasks which would work well in small classes where pairs can be made and the teacher can quietly monitor their progress, offering support where necessary. Long (1989, cited in Beglar and Hunt 2002) states that two-way tasks where each student has different information lead to more negotiation of meaning. There is a need for students to communicate in order to complete the task successfully and I believe that repetition over several classes should result in students producing more English.

Another effective information-gap task has students exchange questions and information in order to complete a picture. For instance, when students are studying vocabulary for furniture and different parts of the home they could perform a task where they draw objects in a house on a sheet of paper. Then they make pairs and exchange questions in order to complete another picture of a house based on
their partner’s answers. From experience, students require a model of the task from the teacher in a pre-task stage in order to complete the task successfully, but during the task the teacher would take a background role and not intervene unless approached or there was a complete communication breakdown.

Introducing tasks into the elementary school-level classroom can provide more opportunities for students to practise natural communication in a fun and motivating manner. The teacher may have to accept an over-reliance on L1 use between students at first (and possibly from the teacher too if he/she can speak Japanese), but task repetition should gradually see this reduced over time and allow the students to communicate more in English.

**Junior and Senior High School Group Class (14 - 16 years old)**

The junior and senior high school class currently consists of three teenage girls in different school grades. They have around two to four years of formal English education at school and have attended the author’s school for six months to eight years. The class meets once a week for one hour and uses a course book, *Interactive 1*, with a structural syllabus (Hadkins & Lewis, 2011) which is set at the Council of Europe A1 and A2 proficiency levels. Their language ability is around the false beginner or elementary level. The course book provides practice of all four language skills and uses the PPP method to introduce grammar and vocabulary.

Many Japanese students study English to prepare for tests such as STEP Eiken (a Japan-administered English proficiency test), and high school and university entrance examinations. These tests focus heavily on reading and listening, requiring little speaking or writing ability in order to pass. Students attend local cram schools to study for these examinations. My language school is promoted as a place to focus on developing communication skills therefore I have to consider how I can best prepare my students for the skills they may need in the future. A rudimentary needs-based analysis suggests that in the near-future students may need English when taking part in a study abroad programme or for English classes at university. They will need conversational skills and the ability to give talks and presentations in their classes, for example.

If a course text has already been assigned, the text could be used for homework exercises while focusing on communicative tasks in the classroom. A problem-solving task can facilitate spoken and written communication practice. The topic should be one that students are familiar with (e.g. global warming, local community issues) in order to promote smooth interaction and an open exchange of opinions. Plenty of ‘scaffolding’ or *collaborative dialogue* is necessary for this type of task, especially
for students of a lower level of proficiency. In a pre-task stage, the teacher can prime the students with a general discussion of the problem and teach useful vocabulary that will be needed for the task. The students then discuss possible solutions amongst themselves and decide on one main proposal. This peer-to-peer interaction allows the more proficient students to assist their weaker classmates, contributing to skill development (Ellis, 2003). The main task requires students to present their case to the class, explaining why it is the best course of action and giving reasons for their views. Each student could write up the proposal for homework and compare their writing with their peers in the next class. A presentation could be made, with the teacher giving feedback and focusing on any language items that caused problems in a post-task stage (adapted from Willis & Willis, 2007). One negative aspect of this task is that it needs three or four class hours to complete successfully, especially with weaker students. However, if the topic is familiar and the teacher provides plenty of support through all the task stages, the task offers good opportunities for communication practice and can be an effective motivational tool for students.

High-speed internet and devices such as computers, tablets and smartphones are easily accessible for most of my students and therefore technology should be better utilised to help develop communicative competence both inside and outside the classroom. In Park’s 2012 study, 13 & 14 year-old boys at a Korean middle school were introduced to e-pal self-introductions, given a task to find an e-pal online, and finally introduce the e-pal to the class in a post-task stage. Student feedback found that students much preferred using the internet over the textbook and that they felt that the task was effective in improving practical communication skills (p. 228). Regular e-pal communication would allow students to practise their communicative skills outside the classroom in an authentic way that provides a genuine need to produce language. Presenting feedback to peers in the classroom would further develop speaking skills and allow the teacher to check that students are satisfactorily performing the task.

Another technology-related task is FutureTech (Anderson & McCutcheon, 2019). It is an opinion gap task that requires students to discuss their thoughts on possible future inventions. The fact file features some advanced vocabulary so in a pre-task stage students consult their dictionaries or the teacher to check meaning. Another option would be for the teacher to create fact files with simpler language. In the main task, students need to be able to have a productive discussion of the technology, any potential issues, and when it may become reality. It is likely that students will find this task quite challenging initially so I recommend repeating the same task type on a regular basis. As students become more familiar and comfortable with the task, they should be able to improve their fluency and develop their discussion and debating skills.
**Conclusion**

In this paper I have looked at three different classes taught at my school and made an assessment as to whether adopting a TBLT approach would result in more of my students being able to improve their communicative skills. There are several empirical studies suggesting that classroom tasks can help students become more fluent in English when students focus on meaning and task completion. I have also found that while output-based tasks are suitable for teenage and adult students, very young learners with limited exposure to English should be given repeated input-based tasks in order to develop all four language skills. I have already started experimenting with tasks in my school and will continue to build up a bank of useful tasks for all my classes.

For other small ‘eikaiwa’ owners that also have a more traditional classroom methodology such as PPP and textbooks, it could be beneficial to avoid a major overhaul of your curriculum to a TBLT approach. The time and financial resources required to make it work successfully may not be at your disposal if there are students of several different ages and levels at your school. Instead, I propose researching suitable tasks for your classes and using trial and error to find out which tasks are most effective at encouraging your students to communicate more in English. I envisage some difficulties at first as both teacher and students learn to take on altered classroom roles. Shy students could struggle with communicative pair/group tasks initially. However, these minor hurdles can be overcome with a supportive teacher, an appropriate level of task difficulty, and frequent repetition of tasks.
Reference List


LESSON PLAN:

Investigating a Career

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This is a semester-long task culminating in a traditional classroom-style presentation and (optional) written report, the topic of which is a possible career path. The task can be done either individually or in pairs or small groups. Depending on time constraints, certain steps of the task can be omitted or developed in more detail.

GOALS

• Familiarizing students with the processes involved in finding employment
• Providing a practice environment for students to interview and be interviewed in the target language
• Promoting a self-starting autonomy whereby students conduct real-world interviews and research
• Providing a forum for students to express themselves in the target language to a group of peers

MATERIALS

• Whiteboard/chalkboard
• Internet access
• Either a computer with presentation software or poster paper and writing materials
• A screen and projector for projecting final presentations
PRE-TASK

(Can be omitted)
Students are asked to prepare a short presentation about their hobbies/interests. These can be as short as 2-3 minutes long (or in a set style, e.g. Pechakucha)\(^1\). The goal in this case is not to present on a detailed topic but to allow students to express their interests and begin thinking about what they personally enjoy (this can be revisited at the end of the project.)

Presentations can take more than one class period, depending on the class size. They can also be limited to small groups, although because the final presentations are to the entire class, this beginning presentation is often important to share with all class members.

TASK

STEP ONE

Students are presented with various career options in a very general sense. Wider categories that may be used include:
Travel/tourism (transportation)
Business (management/sales)
Business (marketing/design/advertising)
Arts & Entertainment
Government/Civil Service
NGO/NPO
Education

STEP TWO

From within this range students narrow their own field of interest to one.

Within the field they choose (e.g. travel/tourism [hospitality]) students brainstorm various companies (e.g. JTB, Hilton Hotels, ANA, etc.).

Note: It is important at this stage to remind students that the topic/job they will investigate does not have to be a job that they intend on pursuing at any point in their lives. The career/job that they will investigate simply needs to be a job that interests them personally, for any reason. (This gives students the chance to investigate careers which may be very different from their own life/cultural trajectory, e.g. pilot or electrical engineer.)

STEP THREE (can be combined with step four)

Students conduct internet research on one of the companies that they have chosen. While this research can be done (and in some cases must be done) in Japanese, it will be later presented in English. Information that students should gather include:

- What is the company’s mission statement? (Note: This is different than the company “motto.”)
- What products and/or services does the company provide? Describe them in detail and provide pictures or examples if possible.
- A brief history of the company/organization (founder(s), dates, development).

STEP FOUR (Can be combined with step three)

Students choose a specific job within the company which they hope to investigate in more detail. For example, a student interested in hotel work, who chooses the Hyatt Regency to present upon, may decide to investigate any job in the hotel that they choose: concierge, bellhop, or even cleaning service. Students should then do internet research to investigate this job generally.

Points to cover:

- What is the purpose of this job?
- What area-specific location can a person do this job?
- Is this job done indoors or outdoors?
- Roughly how many positions are available for this job? (e.g. Prime Minister of Japan: One)
- What are the activities and responsibilities involved in this job?
- What are some skills that might be necessary for this job?
- What are the specific qualifications necessary for this job?
• What is the average salary of this job?
• What are the typical benefits available for this job? (e.g. paid overtime, healthcare, etc.)

Note: Students may find that much of this information is not available online. This is not a problem as it will propel them to the actual investigation in Step 6.

STEP FIVE (optional)

At this point students may present on the information they have found thus far (their field of interest, the company they have chosen to investigate, and the specific job they will consider). Students may do this informally, in small groups, as poster presentations. This activity alone can take more than one class period, depending on class size.

STEP SIX: Interview (can be combined with step 7)

Part 1 - making questions
Students create a set of 10 interview questions to ask a person who holds the job of interest. The creation of these questions can and should be done bilingually as they will be asking the questions in Japanese (but later presenting on the results in English). Content of said questions is also important to be sure that student questions are not simply benign and affective (“Do you like your job?”) but are specific and could apply to anyone (“What is the typical daily routine for this job?”)

Part 2 - interviewing
Students must locate and contact someone either in the job that they have chosen to investigate, or someone who is close enough to the job to give them information that they have not been able to locate in their research (i.e. it is unlikely if students have chosen “Mayor” that they will be able to interview the Mayor of their hometown—though it is possible!) They should then conduct an interview asking these questions (either in person or via email).

STEP SEVEN: Site visit (optional or can be combined with step 6)

If students have been able to conduct a person-to-person interview, they will possibly have had the chance to visit the place of work. The site visit should be the chance for the student to viscerally experience the workplace from the perspective of someone actually present there. Sights, sounds, smells,
décor, lighting, and any other richly descriptive details should be recorded (if not on video, at least in a notebook.)

Note: It is important here to stress that students must receive permission to audio or video-record.

FINAL STEP

Students present all of their data in a final presentation.

Options:
- Students present a chronology of their project, from their first choice to changing choices (if applicable) including any information they were unable to find and why they think this might be.
- Students present the data simply as information, e.g. company name, job, tasks, etc.
- Some combination of the above

In all types of presentation a visual, evocative element should be included (ideally with photos or video captured by the student).

Students can include as an epilogue to their presentation remarks on how they feel personally about the job after having investigated it (including such affective reflections as “Do I think I might fit in this job?”) as well as relating the job to their initial presentation on their hobbies and interests.

POST-TASK

OPTIONAL: Written report on the presentation data. (This provides students who are more comfortable writing than presenting a chance to present their information in a less stressful format.)