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DEVELOPING READING COMPETENCE FOR B2-LEVEL LEARNERS THROUGH TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract. Reading competence is central to foreign language learning because it helps learners access information, develop vocabulary, recognize discourse patterns and participate in academic and professional life. B2-level learners usually understand the main ideas of many complex texts but may still have difficulty interpreting implied meaning, separating an author’s main argument from supporting details, evaluating evidence or dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary (e.g., unfamiliar subject matter). This article explores whether TBLT can be used to develop reading competence among B2-level English learners: it is organised around three methodological questions: whom to teach, what to teach and how to teach. It draws on existing literature in reading and language pedagogy to discuss the needs of target learners, relevant subskills of reading and a task-based lesson sequence; the teacher’s role, differentiation, assessment, technology use and limitations are considered as well. Since it is based on literature there is no claim that it presents original experimental findings but rather makes recommendations for further research. Instead it gives a reasoned methodological discussion and a practical lesson proposal that can be adapted to university-level English classes.

Keywords: reading competence, B2-level learners, reading comprehension, reading strategies, English language teaching.

Strategies and becoming an independent reader

Reading strategies should be chosen according to the purpose of the task. Learners may preview headings, skim for general idea, scan details, annotate important points, reread

difficult paragraph, or summarise text in their own words. They also need to monitor comprehension and notice when an initial interpretation does not fit evidence.

Reflection after a task can also encourage learner autonomy. Students might say what strategy worked best for them, which part of the text was hard and what they would do differently next time; over time reflection like this can help learners become more aware of their own reading processes.

Applying TBLT to reading lessons

A task-based reading lesson should connect learning objective, text, outcome of the task and assessment. Teacher first identifies what learners should be able to do; then selects texts that provide information needed to complete a task. Activities are planned so that learners prepare for reading, process texts, use information to reach an outcome and reflect on performance.

The following lesson proposal is for a 45-minute B2 class. Its purpose is to show how TBLT principles can be put into practice. It is not an experiment report but a suggested plan. Choosing a sustainable university event; target learners: B2 level university students Duration: 40 min

Facts and length: 45 minutes. Materials: three short texts describing possible event venues or plans, a comparison chart and a task sheet. By the end of the lesson learners should be able to identify the main idea of each text; find at least two relevant details for comparison; and make a group recommendation based on textual evidence. These outcomes are measurable because the teacher can check the completed comparison chart, listen to group report and check each learner’s exit ticket.

The texts should have different options and information (cost, accessibility, environmental impact suitability for participants) The options shouldn’t be so obviously different that learners can choose one without reading. Each text has useful evidence and task criteria require learners to consider more than one factor.

The teacher tells the situation: a university committee has to choose a plan for an event. Learners discuss briefly what makes an event successful and suggest criteria (e.g.

affordability, accessibility, environmental responsibility, comfort of participants). The teacher says what will happen next: each group has to choose one option and justify its decision using information from texts.

Learners preview the titles, headings and opening sentences of texts. They predict what information they will need and criteria they should look for. Teacher checks that instructions are clear and clarifies only vocabulary that would otherwise prevent learners from understanding the task.

The pre-task stage activates background knowledge and prepares learners for a clear reading purpose. It shouldn’t be a lecture (long) or provide all the answers in advance (otherwise learners don’t take responsibility for finding and interpreting relevant information).

The teacher watches the groups and their reading strategies. If a group selects a detail that does not support its conclusion (e.g., “Which part of the text helped you decide that?” or “Does this information fit with the criterion?”), then she can ask: “Why did you pick that detail?”. Learners have to return to the text rather than just accepting the teacher’s judgment. Learners discuss the alternatives and reach one recommendation. They must record at least two pieces of evidence and explain why those details matter (this forces them to read selectively and critically). It also means that task outcome depends on comprehension not just personal preference. Reporting and collaborative discussion Time: about 7 minutes Each group gives its recommendation in a short report. The speaker identifies the option chosen, explains the main reasons for it and refers to evidence from texts other learners ask questions or explain why their group made a different choice

Reporting stage gives learners a reason to organize the information they read and express it clearly. It also lets the teacher check whether the group’s conclusion is connected with the source material. Different groups may come to different decisions but this can be productive if their reasoning is supported by relevant evidence. To ensure fair participation the teacher can assign roles (evidence finder, comparison-chart writer, discussion leader, reporter etc). Roles should be rotated in later lessons so all students have opportunities to

practise different responsibilities. A short individual reading stage before group work helps the teacher see if each learner has engaged with the text.

Language focus and feedback

Time: about 10 minutes. After the reports teacher focuses on language for comparing options, degree of certainty, referring to evidence and disagreeing respectfully. Examples are “According to the text…”, “The strongest reason is…”, “Compared with the first.

Feedback should be about the lesson outcomes. If learners found the main idea successfully but chose irrelevant details the teacher can model how to connect a detail to criterion; if they understood texts but struggled to justify their decision the teacher can show how to use a short quotation or paraphrase as evidence. Language correction is most useful when it helps learners communicate their reasoning more accurately.

Learners complete an individual exit ticket (write one text’s main idea; one supporting detail; a reading strategy they used). The teacher checks responses to see who can find the information on their own and who may need more practice. A practical assessment checklist might have four criteria: (1) identifies the main idea correctly; (2). selects relevant supporting details; (3) justifies recommendation with evidence; and (4) communicates the conclusion clearly. Each criterion can be rated as “needs support”, “developing” or “secure”. The checklist is to be used as formative information not as sole measure of a learner’s overall reading competence. Group work with an individual check is important because the quality of a group product does not necessarily show what every member has understood. The exit ticket gives a small amount of . individual evidence and can guide next lesson (e.g., if many learners cannot tell claim from example the teacher plans a short follow-up activity on that skill).

Learners may need different levels of support even if they have the same CEFR level; support can be numbered paragraphs, a comparison chart with prompts, a short list of key terms or time. More advanced learners could be asked to point out weaknesses in an argument; compare the reliability of two sources; or explain what further evidence would be needed before making a decision.

Digital tools can be used if they support the learning objective directly. A shared document may help groups record evidence and compare it; an online quiz or exit ticket can give quick feedback; a digital annotation tool may allow learners to highlight claims and supporting details but these are not requirements: printed texts and paper charts will work just as well when devices or internet access are limited. The teacher should also be aware of accessibility – texts should be readable, instructions clear, learners should have an opportunity to ask for clarification;. where possible digital materials use legible fonts and simple layout;. choice of technology should be based on usefulness (for reading, collaboration and feedback) not novelty.

Discussion

Benefits and Limitations of TBLT for Reading

The proposed lesson shows how TBLT can give reading a purpose – learners need to understand the texts in order to compare alternatives and make a recommendation so that relationship between comprehension and outcome can make task more meaningful than an activity where learners answer isolated questions without using information for any further purpose.

A second advantage is that several subskills are integrated. Learners skim to find main ideas, scan for details, reread passages to check evidence and decide which information best supports their decision (strategic reading rather than repeated use of one technique). B2 learners need to move between general understanding and more detailed interpretation so integration is important.

Third, collaborative work gives learners the chance to compare interpretations and explain their reasoning. When learners ask each other to show where an answer is in the text they are practising referring to evidence. Group discussion might also expose them to alternative interpretations and encourage them to reconsider an initial conclusion. But all this depends on careful classroom management and quality of interaction. There are also limitations. Designing a meaningful task and choosing suitable texts require preparation.

The teacher has to make sure the texts contain all the information needed for the task

and that the task cannot be solved easily without reading. Too complex a task may overwhelm learners; too simple one may not develop the skills intended. Teachers have to strike a balance between cognitive challenge, language difficulty and time available.

Mixed ability group work is another problem. More confident learners will dominate discussion while others have little practice. Individual preparation, clearly defined roles and individual assessment can help. Teachers should also check whether learners are reading and discussing textual evidence (not just one group member’s summary).

Assessment should be varied and aligned to objectives. Group recommendation can show collaboration and use of information but it cannot establish each learner’s reading competence alone – individual summaries, comprehension checks, annotations or exit tickets provide other evidence; because reading develops over time teachers shouldn’t draw broad conclusions from one lesson using only one task/text type. TBLT should not be viewed as a replacement for every other teaching technique. Explicit instruction in reading strategies, vocabulary support, modelling and focused language practice may all be needed. Balance allows teachers to meet learners’ needs but also maintains the central principle that learners use written language to achieve meaningful goals.

Several recommendations follow from this discussion. First, teachers should start with a learning outcome in mind rather than pick an activity just because it looks interesting. If the aim is to develop inference then the task needs learners to interpret information implied by what is said; if the aim is to find supporting details then the task needs learners to find and use those details 9. Second, texts need to be appropriate to the learners’ proficiency level interests and purpose. Authentic texts can be useful exposure to real language but may need shortening or limited support (adaptation must preserve important ideas not remove every challenge that makes the task worthwhile). Third the task outcome has to make reading necessary: learners have to compare, classify, rank, evaluate or use information from text; instructions should say what learners have to produce and how success will be judged; textual evidence is one practical way to connect final answer with actual comprehension. Fourth teachers should combine collaborative work with individual work. Group tasks

facilitate discussion and negotiation; individual reading and reflection ensure that every learner participates and develops independent strategies Roles can be used to structure collaboration but they should change from lesson to lesson. And finally teachers should use feedback to guide future instruction. If learners have trouble identifying the main idea next lesson work on paragraph summaries could be done; if they select details without explaining relevance teacher models how evidence supports a claim etc. Assessment is not final judgment but part of learning process.

Conclusion

This article has looked at the use of Task-Based Language Teaching for developing reading competence in B2 level English learners and discussed the three central methodological questions: who to teach, what to teach and how to teach. TBLT can be supplemented with explicit strategy instruction and vocabulary support when these are needed to enable learners to complete tasks successfully. Since this article is based on methodological literature and a proposed lesson plan it does not claim to show experimentally that TBLT improves reading performance (future classroom-based work could). How learners respond to different types of task and how their individual reading performance develops over time would be examples of future classroom work. The practical conclusion for teachers is then: give learners a reason to read, require them to use evidence from the text and provide feedback so they become more independent and thoughtful readers.

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