IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING

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Abstract:

In the realm of language education, the focus has shifted from traditional, teacher-centered approaches to more student-centered methodologies that prioritize active engagement and practical application of language skills. Unlike traditional methods that focus on grammar drills and vocabulary memorization, TBL emphasizes the completion of authentic tasks as the central vehicle for language learning. Task-based learning (TBL) has emerged as a pedagogical approach that aligns with these principles, particularly in improving students' reading skills in the English classroom. This article explores the implementation of TBL as a strategy to enhance reading proficiency among students and explores the real-world applications of task-based learning across various educational contexts.

Task-based learning is grounded in the belief that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are engaged in meaningful tasks that require them to use language authentically. Unlike conventional methods that emphasize rote memorization or grammar drills, TBL encourages students to develop language skills through activities that simulate real-world situations. These tasks are designed not only to improve language proficiency but also to foster critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and communication skills. Tasks can range from simple activities such as ordering food in a restaurant to complex projects like conducting research and presenting findings. Reading comprehension is essential for language learners as it enhances vocabulary acquisition, grammatical understanding, and overall language proficiency (Grabe, 2009). Proficient readers can interpret and analyze texts, make inferences, and integrate information effectively, skills crucial for academic success and everyday communication. Educators face several challenges when teaching reading skills, including diverse learner needs, varying text complexity, and the need for explicit instruction in comprehension strategies (Rasinski & Padak, 2008). Traditional approaches often focus on isolated skill practice rather than authentic reading tasks that promote holistic language use. In contrast to traditional methods, task-based approaches to reading instruction emphasize the integration of reading

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skills within meaningful contexts (Carrell, 1998). TBL encourages learners to engage with authentic texts to complete tasks such as summarizing, predicting outcomes, or analyzing themes, fostering deeper comprehension and language development (Hedge, 2000). Several studies have investigated the impact of TBL on reading skills across various educational settings and languages. Research findings consistently highlight the positive effects of TBL on reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and motivation (Skehan, 1998; Long, 2015). Studies often compare TBL with traditional methods, demonstrating superior outcomes in terms of language learning and student engagement (Liu & Jackson, 2013).

Implementing TBL for Reading Skills

1.   Task Selection: The success of TBL hinges on the careful selection of tasks that are relevant and meaningful to students' learning objectives and interests. For improving reading skills, tasks could include reading comprehension activities, summarizing texts, extracting key information, analyzing themes, or comparing different texts.

2.   Task Sequencing: Tasks should be sequenced in a progressive manner, starting with simpler activities and gradually increasing in complexity. This scaffolding approach allows students to build upon their reading skills incrementally, from basic comprehension to higher-order thinking tasks such as inference and evaluation.

3.   Language Support: While TBL prioritizes task completion and meaning-focused communication, teachers provide necessary language support such as pre-teaching key vocabulary, clarifying grammar structures, and offering guidance on effective reading strategies.

4.   Authenticity and Engagement: TBL tasks should mirror real-life reading scenarios to enhance authenticity and engagement. By connecting reading activities to students' experiences and interests, educators can increase motivation and the relevance of the learning process.

5.   Monitoring and Feedback: Observe students during task performance, providing timely feedback on language use and strategies.

6.   Reflection and Evaluation: Encourage students to reflect on their performance and evaluate their learning outcomes, adjusting tasks as needed based on feedback.

Benefits of TBL for Reading Skills Development

• Improvement in Comprehension: Through regular engagement with authentic reading tasks, students develop their ability to comprehend and interpret texts more effectively.

• Vocabulary Expansion: Exposure to diverse texts and contexts helps students acquire and apply new vocabulary in meaningful ways.

• Critical Thinking Skills: TBL encourages students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from texts, fostering critical thinking skills essential for academic and real-world contexts.

• Language Fluency: By practicing reading within meaningful tasks, students naturally enhance their fluency and accuracy in English.

Conclusion

Task-based learning represents a paradigm shift in language education, emphasizing active engagement, meaningful communication, and real-world application of language skills. By integrating TBL into teaching practices, educators can empower learners to not only acquire language proficiency but also develop critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities essential for success in today's globalized world. As the field of education continues to evolve, task-based learning stands as a versatile and effective approach to meeting the diverse needs of learners and preparing them for lifelong language competence and proficiency.

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