



Integrating Task-Based (TBLT) and Collaborative Teaching (CT) Methods to Foster English Communicative Competence of the Learners

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Abstract

In the modern paradigm of language education the development of learners' communicative competence, which allows them to use the language as a tool in social interaction, becomes central. So, it requires to move from traditional forms of learning to active, meaning-based models. In this context, Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and Collaborative methods are in high demand today, fostering a learner-centred environment in class. Current paper touches upon the problem of the effectiveness of the combined use of Task-based learning (TBLT) and Collaborative methods in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. We consider how group works and pair works are the basis for the successful implementation of the TBLT model. Practical examples and strategies are presented that allow students to integrate in meaningful communication, by completing tasks close to real life.

The paper also analyzes the teaching mechanisms through which a collaborative environment completes the stages of task performance, promoting mutual assistance, a sense of responsibility and critical/creative thinking. Actually such a combination not only increases learning motivation, but also ensures a more natural language acquisition, a favourable instructional and psychological atmosphere, where students' mistakes are viewed as a natural phenomenon of learning, and the development of their communicative competence becomes the result of joint meaningful activity.

Key-words: *meaningful tasks, face to face interaction, learner-centred instruction, motivation, collaboration, critical and creative thinking, social responsibility.*

Introduction

Traditional language teaching methods often focus on grammatical forms, ignoring the use of language in natural and meaningful communication. But the modern labour market and international communication require not only knowledge of language rules, but also the ability to apply them in real social situations.

National Standards of Language Education in the Republic of Armenia based on the development of the learners' life competencies, accentuate the elaboration and implementation of methodological systems that promote learners' autonomy, independence, interculturality and critical/creative thinking. For this account Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach to language learning where the learning process is not built around grammatical rules or word lists, but around meaningful tasks that students must complete using the target language.

For learners at the B1-B2 levels, language communicative competence implies solving complex problems and effective cooperation, which is possible only through the harmonization of goal-oriented tasks and collaborative group work. So, the combination of Task-based learning and Collaborative methods contributes to overcoming language barriers among learners, as well as the development of their autonomy, critical/creative thinking, and teamwork skills.

TBLT in English Language Teaching

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), also known as task-based instruction (TBI), focuses on the use of authentic language to complete meaningful tasks in the target language. Such tasks can include visiting a doctor, conducting an interview, calling customer service for help, etc. Assessment is primarily based on task outcomes (the appropriate completion of real-world tasks) rather than on accuracy of prescribed language forms. This makes TBLT especially popular for developing target language fluency and student confidence. As such, TBLT can be considered a branch of Communicative language teaching (CLT).



According to R. Ellis, a task has four main characteristics:

- A task involves a primary focus on (pragmatic) meaning.
- A task has some kind of 'gap'. (Prabhu identified the three main types, as information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap.)
- The participants choose the linguistic resources needed to complete the task.
- A task has a clearly defined, non-linguistic outcome [1, 76-79]

The core of the lesson or project is, as the name suggests, the **task**. Teachers and curriculum developers should bear in mind that any attention to form, grammar or vocabulary, increases the likelihood that learners may be distracted from the task itself and become preoccupied with detecting and correcting errors and/or looking up language in dictionaries and grammar references. Although there may be several effective frameworks for creating a task-based learning lesson, here is a basic outline:

Pre-task Stage

In the pre-task, the teacher presents what is expected from the students in the task phase. Additionally, in the "weak" form of TBLT, the teacher may prime the students with key vocabulary or grammatical constructs, although this can mean that the activity is, in effect, more similar to the more traditional present-practice-produce (PPP) paradigm. In "strong" task-based learning lessons, learners are responsible for selecting the appropriate language for any given context themselves. The instructors may also present a model of the task by either doing it themselves or by presenting picture, audio, or video demonstrating the task.

Task Stage

During the Task phase, the students perform the task, typically in small groups, although this depends on the type of activity. According to N. Prabhu, there are three main categories of task: Information-gap, Reasoning-gap, and Opinion-gap [4, p.46-47].

Information-gap activity - Involves a transfer of given information from one person to another - or from one form to another, or from one place to another - generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. One example is pair work in which each member of the pair has a part of the total information (for example an incomplete picture) and attempts to convey it verbally to the other. The activity often involves selection of relevant information as well, and learners may have to meet criteria of completeness and correctness in making the transfer.

Reasoning-gap activity - Involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction and practical reasoning. One example is working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables. Another is deciding what course of action is best for a given purpose and within given constraints. The activity necessarily involves comprehending and conveying information, as in an information-gap activity, but the information to be conveyed is not identical with that initially comprehended. There is a piece of reasoning which connects the two.

Opinion - gap activity - Involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling or attitude in response to a given situation. One example is story completion, another is taking part in the discussion of a social issue. The activity may involve using factual information and formulating arguments to justify one's opinion, but there is no objective procedure for demonstrating outcomes as right or wrong, and no reason to expect the same outcome from different individuals or on different occasions.

Post-task Stage (Language focus) - When implemented from a critical perspective, the teacher also acts as a mediator of "critical dialogue." If learners have created tangible linguistic products, e.g. text, montage, presentation, audio or video recording, learners can review each other's work and offer constructive feedback. If a task is set to extend over longer periods of time, TBLT can be seen as analogous to Project-based learning.

Collaboration in English Language Teaching

Among the most effective frameworks fostering the transition from teacher-centered model to a dynamic, student-centered approach is **Collaborative learning (CL)**. Rather than acquiring language forms in isolation, learners work together in pairs or small groups to solve problems, complete tasks, and construct meaning. This methodology aligns seamlessly with Vygotsky's Socio-cultural theory, emphasizing that language acquisition is inherently social and optimally occurs within the zone of proximal development [5, p.89].



Five Core Pillars of Cooperative Learning

- **Positive interdependence:** Group members must perceive that the success of the individual is inextricably linked to the success of the team.
- **Individual and group accountability:** Working collaboratively, every single student remains responsible for mastering the linguistic material or contributing a specific segment to the final outcome.
- **Promotive interaction:** They share resources, offer constructive feedback and scaffold during the task
- **Social skills:** CL implicitly and explicitly teaches essential 21st-century soft skills, including active listening, negotiation of meaning, conflict resolution and leadership [3].

Pedagogical Benefits in the ELT Context

Benefit Category	Description and Impact on Learners
Reduction of affective filter	Working in small groups lowers language anxiety, providing a safe environment for communicative practice.
Increased student talking time(STT)	Minimizes teacher talking time (TTT) and exponentially increases opportunities for student talking time (STT)
Enhanced Communicative competence	Besides grammatical competence, learners develop strategic, discourse and sociolinguistic competences through authentic interaction.
Autonomy and self learning	Shifts the responsibility of learning onto the students, nurturing self-regulation, peer-assessment and independent research skills.

Combining Task-Based Learning with Collaborative Methods

Collaborative learning achieves its highest potential when integrated with structured pedagogical frameworks like Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). When tasks are designed with a clear, real-world outcome, collaboration becomes purposeful rather than superficial. When implementing collaborative learning, task design must ensure that the cognitive load is balanced and that tasks cannot be easily completed by a single dominant student. Group composition should ideally be heterogeneous (mixing different proficiency levels) to encourage peer scaffolding and mutual support.

Combining task-based learning with collaborative methods in high school is an excellent approach. It not only develops students' language communication skills but also targets key skills of 21st century: critical and creative thinking, teamwork, and independent research abilities.

Presented below are integrated lesson models based on Synergy of TBLT and Cooperative learning.

LESSON 1

(Target audience: High school learners, Level: B1)

Topic:

PLANNING AN ONE-DAY ECO-FRIENDLY CULTURAL TOUR FOR FOREIGN TEENAGERS

Framework

- Duration: 45 minutes
- Pedagogical integration: Task-based language teaching combined with Collaborative Learning (Positive Interdependence and Role Interlocking)
- Core competencies: Negotiation of meaning, oral fluency, cooperative decision-making and functional language for suggestions and consensus.

Phase 1: Pre-Task and Role Allocation

- Schema activation: Show two contrasting visuals on the board - one depicting overcrowded mass tourism and another showing a small group engaging in community-based eco-tourism. Elicit quick impressions using guided prompts ("What makes an itinerary eco-friendly and culturally authentic?").
- Target language priming: Introduce a short scaffolded list of functional phrases without formal grammar drills:



- *Proposing ideas*: "Why don't we include...?", "How about visiting..."
- *Negotiating/Evaluating*: "That might be too far because...", "It aligns well with our budget/time."
- *Reaching consensus*: "Are we all agreed on...?", "Let's settle on..."
- **Collaborative grouping**: Divide students into home groups of 4. Assign specific, interlocking roles to guarantee individual accountability:
 - **Facilitator**: Keeps the team focused and ensures all members speak in English [2, p.233-234]
 - **Route specialist**: Selects locations, transport (public/green options), and timing.
 - **Cultural/eco coordinator**: Selects authentic local activities, food, and eco-friendly practices.
 - **Reporter**: Synthesizes notes and prepares the final spoken pitch.

Phase 2: Collaborative Task Cycle

- **Task execution**
 - Groups receive an authentic briefing card: A group of international exchange students is visiting your town/region for one day. Design an engaging 3-stop itinerary (morning, afternoon, evening) with zero single-use plastic, support for local artisans/food, and a total budget limit.
 - Students collaborate using a structured Graphic Organizer to finalize stops, activities and eco-guidelines.
- **Planning the pitch**
 - Teams rehearse a 2-minute oral presentation. Group members support the Reporter by refining vocabulary, checking timing, and preparing visual notes on a mini-poster or board space.
- **Report and Cross-group interaction**
 - **Numbered heads/Gallery walk**: Reporters deliver the itinerary to adjacent groups or the whole class.

Phase 3: Language Focus and Reflective Assessment

- **Form-focused feedback**
 - The teacher highlights authentic language observed during monitoring.
 - Write 3-4 anonymized sentences on the board containing common communicative slips (e.g., preposition errors, modal misuse in suggestions) and invite the whole class to correct them collaboratively.
- **Collaborative and metacognitive reflection**

Groups complete an exit slip assessing both product and teamwork:

 - Did every team member contribute their assigned part?
 - Which functional phrases did we use most effectively to solve disagreements?
 - One linguistic structure we want to improve next time.

Key Advantages of the Framework

- **Authentic and meaningful communication**: By using TBLT centered on a real-world scenario, it naturally promotes oral fluency, negotiation of meaning, and practical functional language over passive grammar drills.
- **High engagement and individual accountability**: Assigning specific, interlocking roles (Facilitator, Route specialist, Cultural/eco coordinator, Reporter) ensures positive interdependence, keeping every student actively involved and accountable within their group.
- **Integrated 21st-century skills**: The lesson effectively combines language acquisition with critical thinking, environmental awareness, cultural appreciation, and cooperative decision-making.
- **Balanced and reflective assessment**: The structured final phase offers anonymous, form-focused feedback derived from real monitoring, paired with metacognitive reflection on both language use and teamwork.

LESSON 2

(Target audience: Linguistics undergraduates, Level: B2)

Topic:

CURATING THE "LANGUAGE AND CULTURE INSTRUCTIONS" (UNIVERSITY EXCHANGE WELCOME GUIDE)



Framework

Duration: 80 minutes

Pedagogical objective: Foster socio-pragmatic communicative competence, collaborative negotiation, and persuasive speaking through a real-world curation task.

Stage 1: Pre-Task - Cultural Pragmatics and Framing

- Schema activation: The instructor displays a short, humorous scenario: "An international exchange student arrives at your university and gets confused by local social norms (e.g., how to greet a professor, canteen etiquette, or idioms used in group chats)." Plenary question: "What is one unspoken cultural/academic rule newcomers always struggle with?"
- Collaborative ranking: In pairs, students list 3 essential cultural "survival tips" for foreign students at their university and rank them by importance.
- Target language priming: The instructor boards functional chunks for justification, consensus-building, and advice:
 - Giving Nuanced Advice: "It is customary to...", "You might want to avoid...", "A common pitfall is..."
 - Negotiating Inclusion: "I see your point, but is that really essential?", "If we have to cut one, I'd suggest...", "This is crucial because..."

Stage 2: Task Cycle - Curation Task

1. The Task: Assembling the 4-Item guide

Students work in groups of 3 - 4. Each member takes on a role to ensure true collaboration:

- Moderator: Directs turns and keeps the exchange strictly in English.
- Pragmatic editor: Checks that the explanations sound natural, polite, and culturally accurate.
- Presenter: Drafts the final mini-guide entry and delivers the summary.

Task Goal: From a broad list of cultural categories (Communication etiquette, Local slang/idioms, academic norms, leisure and socializing), the team must select and describe exactly 4 must-know tips or concepts for an international student guide, justifying why each made the cut.

2. Planning and drafting

Groups produce an one-page visual layout (or board sketch) summarizing their 4 curated items with brief explanations and examples of usage. The instructor monitors passively to record recurring linguistic gaps and natural discourse markers.

3. Report and Inter-group comparison

- Jigsaw exchange/Gallery walk: One representative from each team stays to present their guide, while the other members rotate to examine other groups' guides.
- Visitors take notes on: 1. The most practical tip, 2. The most creative linguistic advice.
- Stage 3: Post-task - Form-focus and metacognitive analysis
- Task outcome analysis: The class reconvenes to discuss:
 - "Which shared advice across teams was the most communicatively effective?"
 - "What communicative breakdowns happened during your group negotiations, and how did you resolve them?"
- **Delayed error correction and language upgrade:**
 - The instructor presents 5–6 anonymized utterances collected during the Task-cycle.
 - Students work collaboratively in pairs to reformulate awkward phrasing, refine modal verbs of advice, and correct register/tone mismatches.

Key Advantages of the Framework

Integrating **Task-based language teaching (TBLT)** and **Collaborative teaching (CT)** creates a dynamic, student-centered learning environment. Combining both approaches offers several key advantages for fostering learners' English communicative competence:

- **Authentic language application:** Instead of memorizing isolated grammar rules, students use target language structures as practical tools to complete meaningful, goal-oriented tasks.
- **Accelerated fluency and spontaneous production:** Engaging in pair and group work forces learners to negotiate meaning, ask for clarification, and adapt their speech in real time.



- **Peer scaffolding and lowered affective filter:** Working cooperatively with peers reduces performance anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Stronger learners reinforce their knowledge by helping others, while less confident learners receive supportive peer scaffolding.
- **Holistic 21st-century skill development:** The integration fosters critical thinking, teamwork, negotiation, time management, and active listening alongside core linguistic skills.
- **Higher engagement and autonomy:** Active participation shifts the teacher from an authoritative lecturer to a facilitator, encouraging students to take ownership of their own communicative progress.
- **Balanced focus on form and function:** TBLT provides purposeful task phases (pre-task, task cycle, language focus), ensuring that communicative fluency is achieved without neglecting grammatical accuracy.

Conclusion

In the modern paradigm of language education, shifting from traditional, teacher-centered, and grammar-focused models to interactive, learner-centered frameworks is vital for cultivating authentic communicative competence. This study has demonstrated that the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Collaborative Learning (CL) creates an optimal pedagogical environment, where language functions not as an abstract subject of study, but as an indispensable tool for real-world social interaction and problem-solving. This paper has explored the pedagogical synergy of integrating Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with Collaborative Learning (CL) in English as a foreign language classrooms. The findings and practical frameworks presented substantiate several key pedagogical implications:

- **Authentic language application:** Grounding classroom instruction in meaningful, real-world tasks transforms learners from passive receivers of grammar rules into active participants who use the target language to achieve tangible communicative outcomes.
- **Empowering cooperative environment:** Structured group interaction lowers the affective filter and encourages positive interdependence, ensuring that diverse learners scaffold one another's progress while maximizing Student Talking Time (STT).
- **Integration of 21st-century skills:** Beyond linguistic competence, the hybrid model nurtures essential soft skills such as negotiation, collaborative decision-making, critical and creative thinking, and learners' autonomy.

Ultimately, combining TBLT and Collaborative Teaching represents a dynamic, student-centered pathway that aligns seamlessly with modern educational standards and effectively prepares learners for real-life communicative challenges.

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