The role of task-supported language teaching in EFL learner's writing performance and grammar gains

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ABSTRACT

Recent research in SLA advocates the use of task as a useful class activity claiming that task approximates language use in the context of classroom to the way language is used in the real world. Framed under a cognitive framework to task-based language teaching, this study was set out to investigate whether task-based oriented activities bear any superiority to that of more traditional ones evident in PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) model. Twenty eight female pre-intermediate participants studying English in one language school in Urmia, Iran, took part in the study. They participated in ten half-an-hour long sessions of instruction during which they were instructed four structural points: simple past, simple present, present continuous, and 'There is/There are/How much/How many' structures. PPP group received their treatment through conventional approach and task-based group, through task-oriented activities. The quantitative analysis performed on the post-test (consisting of a grammar recognition test and a writing activity) suggested that participants in the PPP group did significantly better in the grammar recognition section of the post-test. However, their counterparts in the task group gained better scores in the writing section of the test. Further findings and implications are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching; PPP model; focus on form; focus on meaning

BACKGROUND

Since the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 1960's, language teaching profession has been concerned with developing learners' communicative competence along with linguistic competence, and as Ellis (2003) notes, there has been a concern with both use and usage. Considering the fact that teaching principles in each era have almost always been the reflection of the thinking paradigm of the same era, this rather elusive goal has been perused differently, and sometimes in sharp contrast with their preceding ones. In the heyday of Audiolingualism, where structuralism in linguistic and behavior conditioning in psychology was highly espoused, communicative competency was assumed to evolve out of repeated drills some of which were not even meaningful to learners (Richards & Rodgers 1986). Chomsky's cognitive approach (1959) cast doubt on the validity of Audiolingual's underlying assumption about the nature of language and learning. According to this newly perceived approach, language learning was not viewed as the result of new habit formation; rather language learning was solely ascribed to internal mental processes (Ellis 2003). Despite their

radical difference in their views toward language learning, they seemed to share not dissimilar belief in their views toward the vitality of treating forms in the course of language instruction.

Willis and Willis (2007) call such approaches with their emphasis on formal properties of language as form-based approaches as opposed to meaning-based approaches, where the primary focus is on meaning, and form receives a peripheral attention. A good example of form-based approach is PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) model. During the Presentation phase, the teacher highlights one or two specific forms and illustrates their meaning; during the second phase that is Practice, learners practise the presented instructional forms under teacher's careful supervision; and finally during the last phase (i.e. Production), learners produce those structures in more such free communicative activities as simulation and role play.

Our first hand experience in teaching language learners reveals that in spite of prolonged language learning experience, engaging in simple communicative activities has been a challenging task for most EFL learners. It should be acknowledged that the dominant approach followed in these contexts has leaned heavily toward form; that is, syllabus designers, teachers, and even learners perceive enhancing formal properties of language as the primary goal of language learning. According to a number of researchers (Krashen 1981; Skehan 1996; N. Ellis 1998; Nunan 2004; Willis & Willis 2007) language learning should be meaning-driven rather than form-driven. By this, they mean that language learning happens when learners' attention is directed to meaning focally and to form peripherally, when learners are primarily concerned with either encoding or decoding the exposing language. Therefore, any learning that takes place would be incidental. This group of scholars, in their attempt to bring down the general principles of CLT and in order to design an activity that primarily calls for meaning processing, proposed *'task'* as a desired meaningful activity which caters to both form and meaning. Despite their general consensus on what a 'task' is, disagreement is observed between task proponents when it comes to the provision of a monolithic definition on task. As Nunan (2004) suggests, there are as many different task definitions as there are writers who have written on task. Skehan (1998, p. 95) highlights the main features of a task, which seem to lie at the heart of most conceptualizations of task. A task is an activity in which,

- Meaning is primary
- There is some communicative problem to solve
- There is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities
- Task completion has some priority
- The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome

Clarifying the concept of task, Ellis (2003) points out that a task requires learners to process language pragmatically to achieve an outcome that can be judged non-linguistically. In doing so, he further comments, learners are required to use all their linguistic and nonlinguistic resources to achieve their goals. Vilches (2003 points out how a change of syllabus from orthodox to task-based approach produced a profound positive effect on the graduates' language proficiency. Framed under a psycholinguistic framework, and Robinson's Cognition Hypothesis, Kim (2009) investigated the impact of task complexity on the occurrence of language related episodes (LRE) with thirty four ESL learners in two different tasks. His findings partially confirmed Robinson's Hypothesis in that more cognitively demanding task leads to more negotiation of meaning and LREs.

In Mayo's (2002) study, the participants were asked to complete five form-focused activities: cloze, multiple choice, dictogloss, text reconstruction, and text editing. The study revealed that all activities were successful in generating a high percentage of LREs. The editing task produced the greatest and the dictogloss task produced the lowest percentage of LREs. In an interesting study, de la Fuente (2006) investigated the effectiveness of vocabulary retrieval in three different conditions:

PPP, task-based with an inherent focus-on-form, and task-based without focus-on-form. Although the immediate post-test did not reveal any significant difference among the three groups, the delayed post-test showed a greater vocabulary gain in the task groups particularly in the focused task condition group. While de la Fuente (2006) investigated the efficacy of TBLT (task-based language teaching) to that of PPP in terms of vocabulary retrieval, the current study aims to put a step forward and compare the efficiency of these two approaches in two broader areas (grammar and writing). The study reported here will answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between PPP and task-supported teaching/learning model in terms of EFL learners' performance in a grammatically judgment test?
2. Is there any significant difference between PPP and task-supported teaching/learning model in terms of EFL learners' performance in a writing activity in terms of the accuracy of the pre-specified grammatical points, their frequency, and content?

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

Twenty eight pre-intermediate female learners studying English in one of Urmia's (Iran) language schools participated in this research. Their mean age was 15.15 years (range: 11-19) and the mean duration of exposure to the English language in a classroom setting was 8.32 months. It was not possible for the researchers to choose the sample from the population of pre-intermediate female learners in the language school, so two classes of pre-intermediate level of proficiency based on the in-house placement tests of the institute were used for this research. The participants in both classes attended three long sessions of instruction every week. The groups were asked to stay for an extra thirty minutes during which they received the treatment. The two classes were semi-randomly (Mackey and Gass, 2005) assigned as the task group who received instruction through task-based activities and the PPP group who received instruction through PPP procedures. (In a semi-random sampling procedure which is used in applied linguistics research for its convenience, while the selection of participants does not follow a random procedure, the assignment of one group as control and the other as experimental is decided on a random basis.) The candidates participated in ten sessions of instruction, two of which (sessions one and ten) were devoted to the pre- and post-tests, and the remaining sessions, (two to nine) to treatment.

MATERIALS

The following four structural points were the focus of the treatment: Simple Past, Simple Present, Present Continuous, and 'There is/ There are/ How much/ How many' structural point. The textbook used for treatment was *Top Notch* Series *Fundamental B* (Saslow & Ascher, 2005). Tasks were also made and added to the treatment in the task group as explained below. A pre and a post-test consisting of a grammar recognition section and a writing task were used to elicit the relevant data. The grammar section consisted of thirty multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank items which had the above mentioned structural points as its focus. The scoring for this section was objective; participants received one score for each correct answer.

For the writing section, two writing tasks were assigned. The criterion for scoring the participants' writings was defined as the frequency and accuracy of target structures as well as overall content in each writing task. For example, for the first writing task , "*Write an e-mail to your friend and tell him/*

her what you did last weekend", if learners were able to produce at least four specified target structures (i.e. Simple Past), they received the full score (two) for frequency and accuracy. Accordingly, for the occurrence of each intended form, they received 0.5 points. Accuracy was also a determining factor in participants' scores: If they produced the erroneous form of the intended structure, no score was given. For example, the following sentence in one of participants' writing did not receive any score because she failed to produce the intended structure correctly: **With my mother I buy bag.*

The same scoring procedure was followed for the second writing task with the following prompt as well: "*What do you and your brother do in your free time?"*. Here, the full score (two) for frequency criteria was given to those writings that had both verbs with first person singular "I" and the third person singular "He" as the subject. For each writing task, only the related pre-specified structural point was taken into account for scoring as it was the focal structural point for that task: simple past for the first writing and simple present for the second one.

Overall content (quality) was the third criterion for scoring candidates' writing. Two points were allocated to the overall content of the writings which took into account such criteria as pertinence of the sentences to the topic, cohesion and coherence. Coherence was determined as the extent to which the writing utterances formed a unified text. If a participant, for example, produced a target structure accurately with little or no relevance to the prompt no score was given to it (as far as the overall quality was concerned) because they were required to stick to the topic. Learners felt free to take as much time as they wished for writing tasks. The majority of them finished their writings in less than twenty minutes and all writings were completed in no longer than thirty minutes. Learners were asked to do the grammar test in not more than thirty minutes.

PROCEDURE

A pre-test aimed at measuring the ability of learners in recognizing and producing pre-selected linguistic features was administered during the first session of the course. Since almost all activities implemented in the task group called for joint collaboration among participants seven dyads of 14 participants constituting the task group were formed. Each participant in each dyad was randomly labeled Student A and Student B. If one of the participants failed to attend the class, one of the researchers played the participant's partner role, and if two of participants were absent, those participants whose partners had not attended formed a new dyad. During the same session (i.e. session two), one of the researchers showed the class some pictures which he had brought with him, of the last vacation he had taken to the South of Iran and gave a short description about each picture, some information about the places he went, the people he met, and the place where he stayed at. The aim of this activity was to prepare learners for the main task which was to be implemented during the following session. Then, participants were asked to talk about their last vacation to their partners.

In the third session the main task - Simple Past Tense- was introduced. It was an information gap task in which each pair of participants received two texts which were Rita and Kevin's description about their vacations to Hong Kong and Paris, respectively. Both texts were taken from *Top Notch* Series *Fundamental B* (Saslow & Ascher 2005). Student A in each group received Kevin's description (a 247-word passage) and their partners (i.e. Student B) that of Rita's (a 205-word passage). Before reading their texts, learners were provided with a list of the new words used in the texts with their equivalent L1 meaning. The theoretical rationale behind this stems from information processing hypothesis which posits that due to learners' limited processing ability, paying attention to one area of language would be at the expense of lack of attention to other areas (Skehan 1998). In other words, if learners' attention is not drawn to lexical items, they more efficiently can focus on the content. Accordingly, learners

were provided with the new words perceived to be problematic for them by the instructor, who spent some time practicing them to make sure that their meanings were clear to learners.

The dyads were asked to read their texts carefully and they were not allowed to see their partners'. In order to help them remember as many details of the text as possible, the dyads were allowed to jot down a limited number of content words (at most ten). By so doing, the participants were hoped to draw their attention to the formal aspects of the text rather than memorizing inconsecutive details that could have led to extra cognitive load. For example, Student A who held Kevin's description could jot down such content words as Louvre and the Eiffel Tower on their notes to jog their memory for later recall about the places where Kevin had gone. They were not allowed to write the whole sentence, however. Having finished reading their text, they were asked to retell their descriptions to their partners. After that, they were asked, based on the studied texts, to decide jointly who (Kevin or Rita) enjoyed the vacation more, by providing their justifications. The outcome of the activity was evaluated non-linguistically (i.e. learners' success was not based on whether e.g. they were able to make use of Simple Past structure accurately in their production), rather they should have come to a joint decision: which individual Kevin or Rita enjoyed their vacations more, albeit the use of Simple Past structure made the task execution more convenient. Similar procedures were followed during other sessions and with other structural points.

The PPP group received the same linguistic structures in the same number of sessions and also in the same order as in the task group. Like their counterparts in the task group, they took pre- and post-test in the first and the last sessions. In order to avoid the difference of input between the task group and the PPP group, attempt was made to make the provided input for both groups as much similar as possible. The rationale behind this attempt was the fact that the researchers wished to make sure that the results of the research were mainly attributed to the method of application rather than the nature of presented input and the difference between them. Accordingly, the same input used for the task group which had Simple Past Tense and Simple Present Tense as the focus of instruction was used also for the PPP group.

The presentation of treatment in the PPP group followed the same procedures evident in form-oriented approaches, that is, a teacher's explanation about a grammatical point was followed by several practices taken from *Top Notch* textbooks and workbooks. Although the PPP participants received input which had Simple Present and Simple Past Tense as the focus of attention identical to that of task participants, they did not get engaged in the same activities as the members of the other group did: the PPP group was subjected to traditional activities such as comprehension questions and multiple choice tests.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After the homogeneity of the participants in PPP and task groups was ascertained using independent t-tests (which were insignificant for both test of grammar and writing), the pre- and post-test scores of both groups were compared to understand whether first of all the type of treatment resulted in any improvement in grammar and writing within each groups and whether different treatments (i.e., PPP versus task-supported) worked differently.

PPP DATA

As Table 1 indicates, the mean pre-test writing score of the PPP group is 3.45 and the post-test mean is 4.5 This means that the participants did better in the post-test than in the pre-test as far as the writing

task was concerned. To understand whether this difference was significant or not, a matched T-test was used.

TABLE 1: Paired samples statistics in the PPP group for writing test

Pair1	Mean	N	SD	S. Error Mean
Pre-Writing	3.458	12	1.6714	0.4825
Post-Writing	4.500	12	1.1871	0.3427

Table 2 shows the effect of instruction, presented PPP. In order to investigate the effect of instruction in this group, a matched T-test was used. As the Table illustrates, the low enough significance level (0.03) indicates that there is a meaningful difference between the pre- and post-test writing task scores in the PPP group.

TABLE 2: Paired samples test in the PPP group for writing test

	Paired Differences							
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Pre-Writing Post-Writing	-1.0417	1.4841	0.4284	-1.9846	-0.0987	-2.431	11	0.033

As Table 3 shows, the PPP participants' pre-test mean score in grammar test is 13.5 while their mean score in the post-test is 20.17. To understand whether this difference is statistically significant or not, another matched T-test was run. The result of the analysis, displayed in Table 4, indicates that the difference was indeed significant.

TABLE 3: Paired samples statistics in the PPP group for grammar test

Pair1	Mean	N	SD.	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Grammar	13.50	12	6.113	1.765
Post-Grammar	20.17	12	3.186	0.920

TABLE 4: Paired samples test in the PPP group for grammar test

	Paired Differences							
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Pre-Grammar Post-Grammar	-6.667	4.658	1.345	-9.626	-3.707	-4.958	11	0.000

TASK DATA

As Table 5 shows, the pre-test mean score of the task group in the writing task is 4 and that of the post-test is 5.54, which means that participants in the task group gained higher scores in the post-test than in the pre-writing task.

TABLE 5: PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS IN THE TASK GROUP FOR WRITING TEST

Pair 1	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Writing	4.000	12	1.5811	0.4564
Post-Writing	5.542	12	1.1172	0.3225

In order to determine the existence of a meaningful difference between the pre- and post-tests (writing task) of the task group, a paired T-test was employed. As Table 6 indicates, there is a meaningful difference between the pre-and post-writing tasks of the task group at 0.05 significance level.

TABLE 6: Paired samples test in the task group for writing test

	Paired Differences							
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair1 Pre-Writing Post-Writing	-1.5417	1.7117	0.4941	-2.6292	-0.4541	-3.120	11	0.010

Table 7 shows the mean scores in the pre- and post-test grammar section in the task group. As the Table indicates, the post-test mean score of the task group (18.25) in the grammar test is slightly greater than that of the pre-test (17.58). In order to find out whether this difference was statistically significant, another matched T-test was used.

TABLE 7: Paired samples statistics in the task group for grammar test

Pair 1	Mean	N	SD.	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Grammar	17.58	12	4.441	1.282
Post-Grammar	18.25	12	3.279	0.946

According to Table 8, the amount of significance is 0.69 which is more than 0.05. Therefore, it can reasonably be concluded that although participants in the task group did better in the grammar section of the post-test compared to their pre-test performance, this difference is not significant.

TABLE 8: Paired samples test in the task group for grammar test

	Paired Differences							
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair1 Pre-Grammar Post-Grammar	-0.667	5.821	1.680	-4.365	3.032	-0.397	11	0.699

In order to determine which group did better in the post-tests (writing task and grammar test), separate ANOVA was employed. It was observed that while the groups' differential performance was significant at 0.03 level in the case of writing task with task-group performing better, it did not reach statistical significance (sig = 0.29) in the case of grammar test although PPP group did better.

The results of the study show that both groups demonstrated development in their written scores (PPP G pre-test mean writing=3.45, PPP G post-test writing= 4.50). Eight out of twelve participants in the PPP group (67%) gained better scores in the post-writing task compared to that of their pre-test; only two (16%) deteriorated in the post-test. The participants' mean score in the post-writing task in the task group, too, showed improvement compared to that of pre-writing task, and their mean score grew from 4 to 5.42. In this group too, eight out of twelve improved and two failed to demonstrate any improvement in the post-test. The comparison made between the PPP group and the task group revealed that the latter group demonstrated more gain in the writing task of the post-test (i.e. they were able to make use of more specified structural items in a longer context in the post-test).

The results of the grammar section of the test is somewhat ironic in the task group, though. The participants in this group did not show any significant improvement in the post-test: while their mean score in the grammar section of the pre-test was 17.58, it was 18.25 in the post-test. This implies that participants' performance in the post-test was slightly better than that of the pre-test, and although they showed improvement in the post-test compared to pre-test, this amelioration is marginal and does not fully correspond with researchers' initial presupposition that grammar instruction through task-based activities can help learners internalize structural points more efficiently. A possible explanation that can be put forward for this performance in the post-test of the task group in the grammar section may be attributed to the nature of the post-test questions: while the instructional activities during the eight sessions of instruction in the task group were meant to tackle implicit learning (this is the nature of task-oriented activities), the test called for the explicit knowledge of the learners in the PPP group.

The obtained data from the PPP group may partially support the above hypothesis. The participants in this group did significantly better in the grammar post-test compared to the pre-test: while their mean score in the pre-test was 13.50, their post-test score was 20.17. This difference becomes more meaningful when compared to the performance of the task group whose mean score in the post-test was only marginally greater than their mean score in the pre-test. As it was mentioned before, this difference may mainly be attributed to the kind of knowledge, which the post-test called for. Another important factor not impertinent to the first one (i.e. the kind of knowledge involved) is the temperament of instruction and activities presented to each group. Most of the activities and teacher explanations in the PPP group were explicit in nature and targeted participants' explicit rather than implicit learning. Table 9 exemplifies some of the employed explanations, typical activities, and feedback given in the PPP group, followed by two examples.

TABLE 9: Examples of activities used in the PPP class

Typical activities and explanations	Examples
Reading and simulating a conversation embedded with a pre-specific structure Filling in the gaps Reading a text and answering comprehension questions Conscious explicit focus on form	Read the following conversation and act it out with your partner How…bananas are there on the table? How often does Jane go out with her friend? Read the text carefully and highlight Present Continuous structure

Example 1
Researcher: What did Rita eat in Hong Kong?
Participant: *She eat fresh fish.
Researcher: She eat or ate?
Participant: ate
Researcher: She ate fresh milk
Example 2
Researcher: Sevda, what are the people in the picture doing?
Sevda: *They talking.
Researcher (addressing the class): Is it correct? They talking?
Participants: They are talking
Researcher: Yes, they are talking.

Table 9 shows, both instructional activities and feedback in the PPP group targeted explicit grammar instruction. Such exercises equipped learners very well to form a general understanding of the instructed features and accordingly to do strikingly better in the grammar post-test, whose questions were very similar to the kind of exercises they performed in the classroom during the instruction. In other words, the questions in the grammar recognition test were biased toward the PPP group. On the other hand, the activities of task group were of a different nature. The constant existing gap between communicative pairs required learners to fill it by negotiating with other pair to get their intended meanings across and to comprehend their pairs by both linguistic *and* nonlinguistic resources. For example, in the first task, learners faced the gap of the need to know the other pair's text, which was either *Kevin* or *Rita's* vacation, for filling which they had to negotiate with their partners and to transfer the propositional meaning of their texts and also to receive that of their partners.

All these activities made learners involved in a different way of processing and using language from the way the PPP participants were involved. In most sessions of the instruction, participants in the task group were involved in meaning-oriented activities; retelling their texts to their partners and jointly coming to a decision, listening to a text and collaboratively trying to reconstruct it, negotiating with their fellow peers to identify differences between their pictures, etc. In all such activities, the learners' primary attention was drawn to meaning; and explicit formal focus on formal structure took place during a very short proportion of class time by the researchers in the form of a general description of the features of the specified structure rather than an elaborate presentation.

The writing score of the task group may be a piece of evidence in support of the claim that task-supported learning and teaching has the potential to better improve language skills of the learners. The writing task, unlike the structure-based section of the test, which called for a primary focus on form and explicit knowledge, drew learners' attention to meaning and implicit knowledge. The writing task, compared to the grammar test, seems to simulate the way language is used in real operating conditions better than does the grammar test, which bears little, if any, similarity to the way language is used among communicators. It is much more probable to get involved in a writing activity in real life than

in reading a number of multiple-choice grammatical questions with blanks and selecting the correct choice. For example, everyone may face a situation in which they wish to write about the vacation they recently had or in the course of chatting with an e-pal on the Internet; and when the topic revolves around the leisure activity, they would like to give an account of their favorite activities.

Another plausible explanation that can be proposed for the outperformance of the task group in the writing section of the post-test is that the proportion of meaningful and communicative activities in which the participants in the task group were involved was greater than that of the PPP group. For example, they listened to the instructor and their pairs' account about their last vacations; they attempted to describe their own vacations; and finally they tried to communicate the propositional content of their texts to their pairs. In all of these activities, the participants in the task group encountered a good deal of target forms in meaningful contexts either in the form of input or forced output (see Swain & Lapkin 1995), which they had internalized unconsciously enabling them to perform satisfactorily in the writing section of the post-test. Therefore, it can be concluded that while the grammar section of the test favored the PPP group, the writing section, was more biased toward the task group. It can be concluded that each form of instruction had something to offer the learners: the PPP participants formed a good deal of explicit knowledge which equipped them to perform satisfactorily in the test which called for this type of knowledge (i.e. grammar recognition test), while their counterparts in the task group, were more equipped with implicit knowledge which enabled them to perform better in the writing task. What this study implies is the fact that based on the learners' perceived needs, instructors can make use of either approach to produce the most desirable results: where developing explicit knowledge is of paramount concern for learners, the reliance can be on the PPP model, and the typical activities apparent in this approach; and when learners need to form a good command of implicit knowledge, which enables them to function efficiently in communicative and meaning-driven contexts which calls for fluent L2 speakers, TBLT can be of immense help.

CONCLUSION

Few scholars would dispute the significance of input and output in developing L2: 'In general, the more exposure [to language] they receive, the more and the faster they will learn' (Ellis 2005 p. 9). Such deeply felt need to input and the opportunity to put into practice the acquired formal aspects of language in the context of classroom is naturally met in ESL contexts where learners have abundant opportunities to engage in genuine communicate activities with native speakers and through feedback, and altercations made accordingly enhance their interlanguage and make it more target-like. However, their counterparts in EFL contexts are not that fortunate: attending two or three an-hour-and-a-half long sessions of instruction, learners in such contexts have to mostly rely on the teacher, fellow students and materials to enhance their interlanguage. It is expected that due to the inherent limitations of EFL contexts, while a good deal of classroom time is spent on communicative oriented activities and meaning negotiation, ironically this is not the case.

Learners are treated more as language learners rather than language users, and language is viewed as an object rather than a tool; class hour is mostly devoted to elaboration of structural properties and semantic meaning rather than negotiating meaning and an awareness of pragmatic meaning. Learners are mostly cast into the responding positions and the nature of teacher's questions are of display rather than bearing a genuine interest in eliciting transformational information; and the observed turn-taking follows the rigid IRF (initiation-response-follow-up) discourse in which learners have little if any chance to initiate a conversation, choose their own topic of interest, treat topics of little interest briefly or interject and express an opposing opinion. By provision of 'task' as a communicative activity,

teachers can ensure that learners, at least to some extent, compensate for such disadvantages, engage in activities that resemble real life situations and hence are equipped better to deal with communicative activities which call for spontaneous, rapid and fluent language processing.

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