

The Impact of Task-based Activities on the Reading Skill of Iranian EFL Young Learners at the Beginner Level

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Task-based learning and teaching in the realm of teaching young learners is still considered an adventure since very few experimental studies to date have tackled its applicability in that age group. The present research was an attempt to find out whether using task-based reading activities has any impact on the development of text comprehension in Iranian young learners studying English as a foreign language at the beginner level. Two groups of 25 students, aged 11 to 13, were the participants of the study. Through a reading pretest, it was ensured that the two groups were at the same level and belonged to the same population in terms of the reading skill. Having instructed the experimental group with four task types and the control group with classical reading activities, the researcher compared the reading performance of the two groups through a t-test which, not surprisingly, manifested the better performance of the experimental group. A follow-up reading test also showed that the experimental group still enjoyed a higher level of reading skill after one month. Furthermore, the scores gained from the four task types were compared and it was concluded that the students performed better in tasks which involved creativity and gave them the experience of playing.

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There has been a great deal of research and theorizing in the last approximately fifteen years on the use of tasks in language teaching, particularly tasks which involve interaction between learners (e.g., Breen, 1987; Nunan, 1989; and Prabhu, 1987). In SLA research, tasks have been widely used as vehicles to elicit language production, interaction, negotiation of meaning, processing of input and focus on form, all of which are believed to foster second language acquisition. Far less empirical research has been carried out where tasks have been used as the basic units for the organization of educational activities in language classrooms.

Prabhu (1987) deserves credit for originating task-based teaching and learning, based on the concept that effective learning occurs when students are fully engaged in a language task, rather than just learning about language. Willis (1996) sees a task as a goal-oriented activity which has a clear purpose and which involves achieving an outcome through creating a final product that can be appreciated by others. Breen (1987) suggests that language tasks can be viewed as a range of work plans, from simple to complex, with the overall purpose of facilitating language learning. He sees all materials for language teaching as compendia of tasks. Such Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is believed to promote language acquisition by providing learners with opportunities to make the language input they receive more comprehensible, furnishing contexts in which learners need to produce output which others can understand, and finally making the classroom closer to real-life language situations.

According to Nunan (1989), in Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL), learning is fostered through performing a series of activities as steps towards successful task realization. The focus is away from learning language items in a non-contextualized vacuum to using language as a vehicle for authentic, real-world needs. By working towards task realization, the learner uses language immediately in the real-world context, making learning

authentic. In a TBLL framework, the language needed is not pre-selected and given to learners to practice it, rather it is drawn from learners with the help of the facilitator, to meet the demands of the activities and task. It can be said that TBLL relies heavily on learners, who are actively experimenting with their store of knowledge, and using skills of deduction and independent language analysis to fully exploit the situation (Willis, 1996).

In this approach, motivation for communication plays the major role, which in turn is fueled by the growing fluency that learners surprisingly witness in their language. The other important factor in this approach is the emphasis on target language use (TLU) which is available only in naturally occurring contexts. This means that in TBLT materials are not prepared especially for the language classroom, instead they are selected and adapted from authentic sources.

TBLT in Action

Within the varying interpretations of TBLT related to classroom practice, recent studies exhibit three recurrent features: TBLT is compatible with a learner-centered educational philosophy (Ellis, 2003; Richards & Rodgers, 2001); it consists of particular components such as goal, procedure, specific outcome (Skehan, 1998), and it advocates content-oriented meaningful activities rather than linguistic forms (Breen, 1987). Given the fact that language acquisition is influenced by the complex interactions of a number of variables including materials, activities, and evaluative feedback, TBLT has a dramatic, positive impact on these variables (Ellis, 2003). This means that TBLT can provide learners with natural sources of meaningful materials which in turn create ideal situations for real-life communicative activities. Specifically, in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) environments, where learners are limited in their accessibility to use the target language on a daily basis, it is necessary for language learners to be provided with real opportunities to be exposed to language use in the classroom (Rashtchi & Keyvanfar, 2007).

TBLT can compensate for the weaknesses of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and is seen as an alternative to it by researchers (Klapper, 2003). Conventional L2 curricula, including CLT, divide the language into lexis, structures, notions or functions, which are then selected and sequenced for students to learn in a uniform and incremental way. In this so-called 'synthetic' syllabus (Wilkins, 1976), exposures to the target language is deliberately restricted and rationed, and the discrete parts of the syllabus are gradually built on each other in the belief that this can lead the learner towards mastery of L2. TBLT rejects this type of syllabus, and makes use of process-oriented syllabi, in which communicative tasks are designed to promote learners' actual language use.

Skehan (1996) criticizes the belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization. He insists that the long-accepted idea that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology. Indeed, some SLA studies have shown that naturalistic and classroom L2 learners rarely acquire new and discrete linguistic forms instantaneously, one at a time or in a preordained order (Ellis, 2000). Instead, learners seem to pass through clear developmental stages in their acquisition of grammatical forms (Meisel, et al., 1981).

As a result, an area relevant to TBLT has been work on 'focus on form' in language instruction. Long (1991, cited in Ellis, 2003) distinguished 'focus-on-forms' from 'focus-on-form': while the former involves taking individual linguistic items out of context and isolating them for separate study as part of an a priori synthetic syllabus, in a focus-on-form approach to instruction, learners are involved first and foremost in meaning-based activities before any attention is paid to specific linguistic features. Long (ibid.) explains that the aim of form-focused tuition is thus to make linguistic forms salient so that learners can notice the gap which results from the mismatch between input (the target language ideal) and their own output (their current interlanguage). In other words, in focus-on-forms approach, this noticing of formal linguistic features occurs incidentally, or arises out of primarily

meaning-focused instruction, while in focus-on-forms it becomes the principal concern of classroom activity (Ellis, 2003).

Besides, in recent years an increasing number of teachers in all subjects have been looking for ways to change the traditional forms of instruction, in which knowledge is transmitted, in a one-way process, from a dominant teacher to a class of silent, obedient, “passive” learners. They have sought ways to make the classroom more “student-centred” and have investigated the different ways in which students can play more active roles in discovering and processing knowledge. This desire to make learning more student-centered is reflected in widespread attempts, in different areas of the curriculum, to introduce approaches like experimental learning or co-operative learning, which engage students actively in the learning process (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Underlying all of these approaches is a desire to involve students in some kind of purposeful interaction with information, objects and/or ideas, often in groups, in order to develop their skills and knowledge.

Skehan (1998) has investigated the possibility that tasks may be chosen and implemented so that particular pedagogic outcomes are achieved. It can be said that any pre-designed task will be changed by the way the learner interacts with it. As a result, the outcome may not be consistent with the objectives intended by the task designer, who may be the course book writer or the teacher. Similarly, Breen (1987) distinguishes between ‘task-as-work plan’ and the actual ‘task in process’ and suggests that the two may diverge. Kumaravadivelu (1991) is another researcher who argues that in the context of task-based pedagogy, learning outcome is the result of a fairly unpredictable interaction between the learner, the task, and the task situation. Thus, achieving success in task-based pedagogy depends largely on the degree to which teacher intention and learner interpretations of a given task converge.

Building on these insights from SLA and form-focused approaches, TBLT aims to ensure that learners are given plentiful opportunities for two things: (1) receiving meaningful input, or exposure to L2, and (2) having output or experiencing language use. The former is elaborated on by Krashen (1987) under *comprehensible input* while the latter is called by Swain (1985,

cited in Ellis, 2003) as ‘pushed output’, which enables learners to pick up or acquire those skills and elements of language they are developmentally ready for.

TBLT and Young Learners of English

Over the last decade, one can notice a growing interest in the application of TBLT in different realms of second and foreign language teaching. The enthusiasm is mixed with some confusion particularly regarding the design and construction of tasks based on learner variables such as age and level of language proficiency (Ellis, 2003). One can assume that, similar to the case of adults, TBLT can require children to engage in interaction when fulfilling a task which would in turn develop their underlying language system. Among different tasks, reading tasks seem to be more promising since they can involve children in perhaps the most basic yet essential activity of their academic life.

Researchers have defined reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Doff, 1998). They use the terms extracting and constructing meaning to emphasize both the importance and the insufficiency of the text as a determinant of reading comprehension. Nevertheless, most people learn to read in their native language without difficulty, and hence many, but not all, learn to read as children. Some children and adults need additional help. Yet, others learn to read a second, third or additional language, with or without having learned to read in their first language. Reading instruction needs to take into account different types of learners and their needs. Research has shown that there is a great deal of transfer from learning to read in one language to learning to read in a second language (Grabe, 2004). Child EFL learners are not an exception to this transfer. Since tasks are designed to engage learners in meaning more than anything else, they are expected to minimize the impact of first language.

In order to acquire the target language effectively, especially in children, learners need to engage actively in processing the

meanings of whatever they hear and read. A variety of tasks can be designed to motivate and give learners a purpose for processing the meaning and accomplishing a desired end or product (Willis, 1996). Unlike grammar exercises that are focused directly on the structure and comprehension questions that may become boring and senseless, TBL provides students with both a framework of structures, forms and/or words to be used and a good reason/purpose for doing the activities. That is why task-based reading activities may prove to be a good means of integrating the four skills and fostering effective language learning because such activities are done with the purpose of comprehending something, reaching a conclusion and/or creating a whole picture of something within a pre-set frame (Nunan, 1989). Although such activities are done in order to improve the learners reading skill, they are expected to help improve the other skills as well. Of course, these ideas are just theoretical assumptions that wait to be confirmed.

The present research was conducted to particularly target one of these theoretical assumptions. For this purpose the following questions were raised:

- 1- Does task-based teaching have any impact on the reading skill of Iranian young learners at the beginning level?
- 2- Does task type have any impact on the reading performance of young Iranian learners at the beginning level?

Method

Design

The research was conducted using the pretest-posttest nonequivalent-groups design, which is one of the designs of quasi-experimental research (Best, 2006). Through non-probability sampling, two intact classes were chosen and randomly assigned as the experimental and the control group. The dependent variable was the reading skill of the participants and the independent variable was the method of teaching reading with two varieties of “task-based activities” versus “classical reading activities”. Observation or evaluation of the two groups was carried out at four

stages of pretest, posttest, follow-up test, as well as the formative evaluation of each of the four task types.

Subjects

Based on non-probability sampling, two intact classes with a total number of 50 students were selected as the samples of the study. The subjects were all female students aged 10-13 who had enrolled in English language classes at Sohrevardi Institute in summer and fall 2006. The subjects in this research were all beginners in terms of reading skill. However, based on the institute's categorization, they were studying at Level 3. It means that in their two previous semesters, they had learned English, mainly vocabulary, only through songs, chants, drawings and playing. The third semester, during which the present research was conducted, was the first level in which students were going to try reading texts.

In addition to the institute's placement of the students at Level 3 of Beginner Stage, a general proficiency test originally designed for placement purposes by the institute, based on ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, was run. The purpose behind this pretest was to assure that the two intact classes of students chosen for this study were at the same level and belonged to the same population.

Materials

To start the project, it was very important for the researchers to have some texts that not only worked on the reading skill of subjects but also were attractive and easy for them to do. According to Brown (1991), in addition to text characteristics, there are a number of other factors that affect reading to locate information. Ellis (2003) points out that the search task itself varies in difficulty. He asserts that information is easier to find if readers are given the search terms, rather than being required to develop them. Brown (2001) reported that single-word search terms are easier than complex or multi-word search terms to use in locating information.

Therefore, the researchers tried to design the tasks based on the students' book in a way that motivated them to follow the text eagerly and enabled them to guess the answers from the text easily. In other words, the texts were available in the students' books and the researchers just had to design the tasks based on the text that was going to be taught during the term. It should be mentioned that the texts were the same for both groups, and just the kind of activities that were based on the texts differed. On the whole, there were 20 tasks in four types:

Task Type One. The first group of tasks was Map Reading Tasks. The subjects had to read a text about a road or a street. There was a map at the bottom of the page. The students had to follow the map and draw a line while they were reading the text, and pass different places. Finally, the student had to be able to find the destination correctly.

Task Type Two. The second group of tasks was Creative Product Tasks. The students had to read a text and make something. Therefore, the subjects had already been told to bring the necessary tools. In order to make a good and correct handicraft, the subjects had to read the text carefully and make something step by step as the text instructed. On other forms of these tasks, the students had more freedom to use their creativity. The subjects were given a sample, for example a postcard, and had to make something similar with the same topic but in an innovative way.

Task Type Three. The third group of tasks was called Mystery Tasks. The students had to give one-word answers to some mini-questions, based on what they had learned before, or they had to draw something or color something to finally find a keyword. In this group of tasks, again it was very important for the students to do exactly according to what the text said and progress in a step by step fashion.

Task Type Four. The fourth group of tasks, which were called Journalist Tasks, included a text with a collection of unscrambled pictures at the bottom of it. The subjects had to read the text, cut the pictures and stick them on their special places.

The control group was instructed through the classical method of teaching reading, focusing on their textbook, "Let's Go"

(1994). The book contained ten lessons each starting with a text for reading, followed by some descriptive questions to answer and some new vocabularies to learn.

Instrumentation

Four major instruments were used during this research.

1. A general proficiency test for placement purposes by the institute based on ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines was administered to the students of two intact groups to make sure the two samples belonged to the same population. The results of the item analysis approved all the items and the reliability index came to be satisfactory.
2. A reading post-test (as a final test) was administered to both groups. The test was chosen from Cambridge English for Schools (2000). It contained a series of short texts which were based on students' pre-learned vocabularies during the semester. At the end, there were some meaning-based questions. In other words, the students were not able to answer the questions unless they understood the meaning of the texts. The questions were in different forms including solving puzzles, coloring to make pictures, filling gaps, matching, and making some sentences based on the meaning of the texts.
3. After one month, at the beginning of the new semester, another reading test, as a follow-up assessment, was selected from the same source (as that of the posttest), and administered to both groups to see if the experimental group still outperformed the control group or not.
4. A fourth form of instrument was used in the experimental group to evaluate how they performed in the four task types. In so doing, the researcher scored and recorded the performance of each individual in each task of each task type, and thus was able to come up with an average performance on each task type for each and every individual in the experimental group.

Procedure

At the first step, two intact classes of female beginners were selected, and through a standardized general proficiency test, it was ascertained that the differences between the two groups at the onset of the study was based on chance, and could be attributed to sampling error.

After randomly assigning the two groups to the experimental and control groups, the treatment started and lasted for forty two-hour sessions. If the whole period of instruction, i.e. 40 sessions, is divided into 20 two-session parts, then it can be said that in the control group, in the first sessions of each part, the students worked on some short conversations, a grammar lesson, and some new vocabularies. In the second sessions, they read a text and answered some comprehension questions of open-ended, true/false, and/or matching types.

In the experimental group, in the first sessions, the students learned the new words by playing, for example playing with cards or guessing the word on the board. Then, a simple grammar was taught and different examples were written on the board. In making sentences, they were asked to use the new vocabularies. In this session, the subjects were told to bring the needed tools for doing the task of the next session if there were any. In the second sessions, the task papers were brought to the class. The first half hour was used for reviewing the new words of the previous session and answering the questions. Then, the researcher introduced the topic and gave students clear instructions on what they had to do to perform the task. In addition, the teacher helped the students recall some language that could be useful for the task. Also, the pre-task stage often included performing a similar task to give students a clear model of what was expected of them. The rest of the time was used for doing the task. The students completed the task individually or in pairs using the language resources that they had as the researcher was monitoring and offering encouragement.

As it was mentioned earlier, in all the stages of performing

the research, the researcher tried to keep the time in both classes the same. After doing the tasks and at the planning stage, the students were asked to prepare a short oral or written report (even in their simple primary words) to tell the class what had happened during their task, in other words, what they had done. They, then, practiced what they were going to say in the class. Meanwhile, the researcher was available for the students to ask questions to clear up any language problem they might have had. After the students accomplished each task, the teacher/researcher evaluated their work based on a general guideline that she had prepared before and scored their performance. The scores obtained on each task type were to be used in the second phase of the study to investigate the possible impact of task type on the participants' reading skill. It is worth mentioning that the students in the experimental group were unaware of this implicit evaluation, and were given only some general feedback and guidelines for the betterment of their work.

After the final session of the instruction, a reading post-test was run and the scores of both groups were compared to see if the two groups performed differently. After a one-month break, a follow-up reading test was administered to both groups to see if any change had occurred. In other words, the researcher was interested to see if task-based teaching had prolonged effect on the reading skill of the experimental group.

Results

Since the present research mainly focused on the reading performance of the experimental and the control groups before and after the treatment, the main statistical procedure involved was a series of t-test which compared the averages of the two groups in the reading pretest, post-test, and follow-up test.

The second part of the research, which was concerned with the performance of the experimental group in four task types, required the calculation of an ANOVA to investigate possible differences among the four reading sets of scores obtained on four task types. A follow up TUKEY test was also conducted to locate the exact areas of difference.

The following is a summary of results in four phases:

Phase I. In this phase, a general proficiency test (GP pretest) was run to see if the fifty students in two intact classes chosen as samples of the study belonged to the same population. Item analysis measures showed that all items were functioning satisfactorily. The reliability of the test estimated through Cronbach's Alpha turned out to be .859. Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of the two groups in the GP pretest.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the two groups in the general proficiency pretest

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	SD	Variance
Control	25	16.00	20.00	454.25	18.1700	1.41554	2.004
Exp	25	16.00	20.00	453.50	18.1400	1.48268	2.198

Table 2 demonstrates the t-test which was run to compare the two groups to make sure that they belonged to the same population, and could act as the participants of this study.

Table 2

T-test of the two groups in the general proficiency pretest

	Leven's test for equality of variances	t-test for equality of means								
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean dif.	Std. Error of Differences	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.223	.639	.073	48	.942	.03000	.40998	-.794	.85432	
Equal variances not assumed			.073	48	.942	.03000	.40998	-.794	.85432	

In the above table, assuming that the variances of the two groups are equal, one has to refer to the first row of data in which the significance level of .942, being far greater than 0.05, shows

that there wasn't any significant difference between the proficiency averages of the two groups at the beginning of the study. In other words, the students were at the same level and the researcher could run the research which could lead to the comparison of the reading performance of the experimental and the control group at the end of the instruction.

Phase II. Being assured that the students belonged to the same population, they were randomly assigned as the experimental and control groups. The control group was instructed through the traditional method and the experimental group was under task based teaching, both for forty sessions. At the end of the term, a reading post-test was conducted, the results of which were compared to see if different methods of instruction had made any significant difference in the performance of the students in two groups. The estimated reliability index for the posttest test was .756. Tables 3 and 4 show the descriptive statistics and the t-test results of the two groups' reading posttest respectively.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of the two groups in the reading posttest

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	SD	Variance
Control	25	17.0	29.5	583.0	23.320	3.4728	12.060
Exp	25	23.0	30.0	700.5	28.020	1.8956	3.593
Valid N (listwise)	25						

Table 4

T-test for the two groups in the reading posttest

	Leven's test for equality of variances	t-test for equality of means								
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2- tailed)	Mean dif.	Std. Error of Differences	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	13.793	.001	5.9	48	.000	4.7000	.7913	3.11	6.2910	
Equal variances not assumed			5.9	37	.000	4.7000	.7913	3.11	6.2910	

Once again, using the first row of the data which is based on the assumption of the equality of the variances, the reader can clearly see that the significance level of .000 allows the researcher to conclude that after the two types of instruction, the experimental group has outperformed the control group in reading. In other words, the experimental group which underwent task-based instruction did better in the post-test than the control group, which received the traditional instruction. Figure 1 shows that the mean scores of the experimental group are higher than the control group.

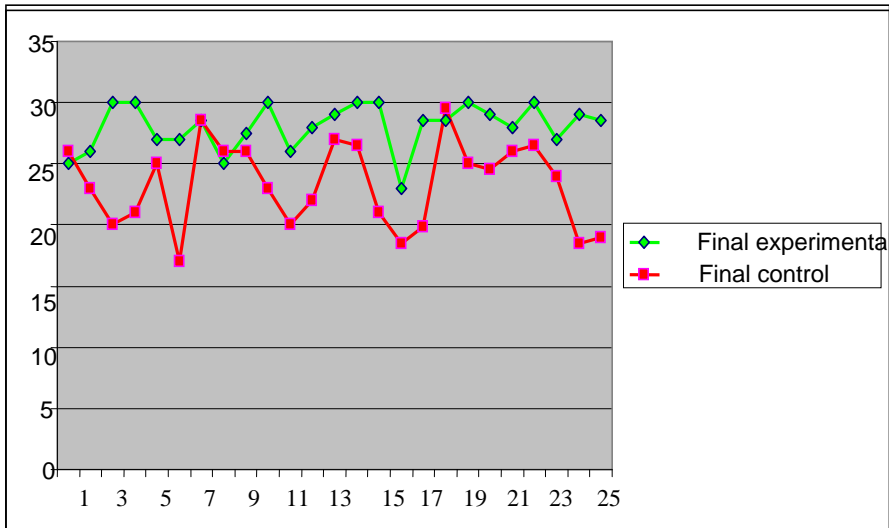


Figure 1. Linear chart of one to one comparison between the scores of two groups

In addition to comparing the means of the two groups, a schematic one to one comparison of the subjects in both groups can display the outperforming of the experimental group in the reading posttest. As Diagram 1 clearly shows, in most of the parts, the scores of the experimental group are located at a higher point compared to the scores of the control group.

Phase III. About one month after the posttest was

administered, the students of both groups took a follow-up reading achievement test. The purpose was to see if the experimental group still outperformed the control group. The results were compared through a second t-test. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of both groups. The reliability index for this test was calculated to be .844.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of experimental and control group in the follow-up reading test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	SD	Variance
Control	25	13.00	19.00	399.00	15.9600	1.49944	2.248
Exp	25	16.50	20.00	461.00	18.4400	1.08321	1.173
Valid N (listwise)	25						

Table 6 below shows that the two means of 15.96 and 18.44 are significantly different with more than 99% confidence, indicating that task-based instruction had prolonged effect on the reading skill of the experimental group.

Table 6

T-test for the two groups in the follow-up reading test

	Leven's test for equality of variances	t-test for equality of means							
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2- tailed)	Mean dif.	Std. Error of Differences	95% Confidence Interval of Difference
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.530	.222	6.70	48	.000	2.48000	.36995	1.736	3.2238
Equal variances not assumed			6.70	44	.000	2.48000	.36995	1.734	3.2257

Phase IV. As it was mentioned earlier, in this project four types of tasks were used in the treatment of the experimental group. They included Map Reading Tasks (Task 1), Creative Product Tasks (Task 2), Mystery Tasks (Task 3), and Journalist Tasks (Task 4). Each session, after doing the tasks, the students' performances were scored. The scores were going to be used for a later comparison of task types. In other words, the researcher aimed to use these scores to see in which task the students had done better. It was mentioned earlier that there were twenty tasks in four types, which were given to the students in forty sessions (every two session, one task was given). The average score in each task type was estimated for each student. To investigate in which type they showed a better reading skill, the students' scores on four types of tasks were compared through an ANOVA. Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of the four sets of scores.

Table 7

Descriptive statistics of the final scores on four task types in the experimental group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	SD	Variance
Task 1	25	7.0	10.0	211.0	8.440	1.1187	1.252
Task 2	25	9.0	10.0	241.8	9.670	.4128	.170
Task 3	25	5.0	9.0	179.5	7.180	1.1715	1.373
Task 4	25	7.0	10.0	220.0	8.800	1.0408	1.083
Valid N	25						

Table 8

ANOVA of the final scores on four task types in the experimental group

	Sum of Sqaures	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	80.072	3	26.691	27.532	.000
Within Groups	93.065	96	.969		
Total	173.137	99			

In Table 8, the significance level of .000 and the F obtained of 27.52 (being higher than the critical value of 2.76) both indicate that there was a significant difference among the four sets of scores obtained for each task type in the experimental group. A follow up Tukey test located the areas of difference (Table 9).

Table 9
Tukey tests among the four task types

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: VAR00006

TukeyHSD

(I) VAR00007	(J) VAR00007	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-1.23000*	.27849	.000	-1.9581	-.5019
	3	1.26000*	.27849	.000	.5319	1.9881
	4	-.36000	.27849	.570	-1.0881	.3681
2	1	1.23000*	.27849	.000	.5019	1.9581
	3	2.49000*	.27849	.000	1.7619	3.2181
	4	.87000*	.27849	.012	.1419	1.5981
3	1	-1.26000*	.27849	.000	-1.9881	-.5319
	2	-2.49000*	.27849	.000	-3.2181	-1.7619
	4	-1.62000*	.27849	.000	-2.3481	-.8919
4	1	.36000	.27849	.570	-.3681	1.0881
	2	-.87000*	.27849	.012	-1.5981	-.1419
	3	1.62000*	.27849	.000	.8919	2.3481

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Based on the results of the Tukey test, the four task types can be ranked as the following:

Task 2 (Creative Product Tasks)

Task 3 (Mystery Tasks)

Task 1 (Map Reading Tasks) = Task 4 (Journalist Tasks)

This means that task type 2 had the highest impact on the reading performance of the experimental group, and then task type 3 and task types 1 and 4 had equal impacts on the improvement of their reading skill.

To recap, it can be said that, the researcher found a

statistically significant difference between the reading performances of the experimental and control groups when comparing their mean scores both on the reading posttest and the follow-up test. That is, the treatment (the application of task-based reading activities) affected the dependent variable (L2 reading comprehension) in Iranian child beginners. Thus, regarding the first question, one can confidently claim that task-based instruction did have positive effect on the reading skill of Iranian children as EFL learners at the beginner level. As for the second question, the results of the ANOVA and the follow-up Tukey tests indicated that the students were more successful in Creative Product type of task.

Discussion

TBLT has always aimed to ensure that learners are given plentiful opportunities both for exposure to L2 and for language use. It was something that the researchers think the participants easily gained in this research. The subjects under TBLT instruction not only were exposed to language, but also acquired those elements of language that they were developmentally ready for. In applying the TBLT instruction method, learning is more likely to take place when individual learners, through engaging with naturalistic language material, notice things that are new, and then try to “fill in the gap” or “make something” from what they have noticed. Getting learners to notice language forms in context and encouraging them to form hypotheses about language use are attempts to imitate the (long term) L1 learning process and adapt them to the L2 classroom. TBLT sees tasks as a necessary and sufficient drive (or impetus) for language development and is close enough to some aspects of the first language acquisition to be appropriate for the foreign or second language learning context (Ellis, 2003).

The results of this research proved TBLT as an effective, practical and innovative teaching method, at least in teaching reading to EFL young learners at the beginner level. This research was comprised of stages such as ‘ready to go’ (warming-up), reading, and doing some real life tasks. In the application of

TBLT, students liked the task-based texts; their involvement in class activities dramatically increased because they loved the topics; their communicative abilities and skills improved, and finally their willingness to talk in English increased. In this research, Task-based reading activities had the advantage of enabling the learners to see their progress since their own hands shaped the 'end-product'.

The findings and analyses above demonstrate that task-based learning is quite applicable and fruitful with even beginners. The research findings may also lead to the idea that TBLT may easily prevail in countries where the evaluation system is quite traditional, and the exams are knowledge-oriented.

Furthermore, TBLT can have a particularly high value in ELT for children since it can offer play activities. The twentieth century is undoubtedly the century in which there is a particularly high regard for play activities and their important role in children's education. Although there were authors in past centuries who stressed the significance of play, this stress was for the sake of entertainment and not as an indispensable tool for more effective teaching. That our century should have a better grasp of the potential role of play activities is due to the fact that, with the progress in psychology, people have now realized that education can no longer be based on methods designed to produce walking encyclopedias, but that it should promote learning in the broader sense, by starting out from various forms of contact with the concrete and proceeding to its abstract and intellectual representation. The aim of modern teaching is consequently to make teaching adapted to the child, instead of adapting the child to its own ends.

All play activities and materials should be utilized with the proviso that they are a source of inspiration for teachers seeking to devise methods and a language of learning that, after all, will come most naturally to the children. From the teacher's point of view, the only criterion affecting their choice of play activities and equipment should be their educational potential and their capacity to convey an accessible image of the multiple and complex reality to be taught to young children. Teachers must not

lose sight of the fact that it is partly or entirely through play, coupled with a child's particular perception of the world around them and their behavior towards it, that a developing personality emerges and asserts itself, and that world is made up of both their experience and their hopes.

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