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THE POTENTIAL OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING (TBL) IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONTEXT

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Abstract. This research explores the implementation of Task-Based Language Learning (TBL) within an interdisciplinary framework to enhance linguistic proficiency and subject-specific knowledge. Emphasizing the value of interdisciplinarity in promoting interaction and motivation, the study advocates for collaboration across diverse disciplines. Task-based learning is examined for its goal-oriented nature and authenticity in replicating real-life scenarios. The research highlights the potential benefits of TBL in fostering linguistic competence, critical thinking, and a holistic understanding of real-world problems. It includes a sample interdisciplinary lesson plan integrating English Language, Mathematics, and Art.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Learning, task-based lesson plan, interdisciplinary.

POTENȚIALUL ÎNVĂȚĂRII BAZATE PE SARCINI ÎN CONTEXT INTERDISCIPLINAR

Rezumat. Această cercetare explorează implementarea învățării limbilor bazate pe sarcini (TBL) într-un cadru interdisciplinar pentru a îmbunătăți competența lingvistică și cunoștințele specifice subiectului. Subliniind valoarea interdisciplinarității în promovarea interacțiunii și a motivației, studiul pledează pentru colaborarea în diverse discipline. Învățarea bazată pe sarcini este examinată pentru natura sa orientată spre obiective și autenticitatea în replicarea scenariilor din viața reală. Cercetarea evidențiază beneficiile potențiale ale TBL în stimularea competenței lingvistice, gândirii critice și înțelegerea holistică a problemelor din lumea reală. Include un exemplu de plan de lecție interdisciplinar care integrează limba engleză, matematică și artă.

Cuvinte cheie: învățarea bazată pe sarcini a limbilor, plan de lecție bazat pe sarcini, interdisciplinar.

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the integration of diverse pedagogical approaches holds the key to fostering dynamic and comprehensive learning experiences. Among these approaches, Task-Based Language Learning (TBL) has gained prominence for its emphasis on real-world language use and practical application. This research seeks to delve into the potential of TBL within an interdisciplinary context, where the convergence of language acquisition and diverse academic disciplines promises to unlock new synergies and enrich the educational landscape. As global communication becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, the intersection of language learning and other fields presents a unique opportunity to enhance both linguistic proficiency and subject-specific knowledge. This study aims to explore the benefits, challenges, and optimal strategies for implementing TBL in interdisciplinary settings, shedding light on its capacity to cultivate not only linguistic competence but also a holistic understanding of complex, real-world problems.

In the field of education, employing teaching methods customized for specific disciplines is crucial for cultivating a profound and meaningful comprehension of diverse subjects. In Geography, students engage in immersive experiences through Fieldwork Learning, Interactive Mapping, and the utilization of Geospatial Technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This hands-on and technology-driven approach enables them to grasp the intricacies of spatial relationships and geographical phenomena. Physics education thrives on Hands-on Experiments, Demonstrations, and Interactive Simulations, promoting experiential learning and the integration of technology to enhance conceptual understanding. In Biology, students delve into the intricacies of life through activities like Dissection and Specimen Observation, Outdoor Exploration, and Ethical Discussions, fostering both scientific inquiry and ethical awareness. Meanwhile, History education employs Primary Source Analysis, Timeline Construction, Local History Exploration, and Biographical Studies to instill critical thinking skills, a sense of historical context, and an appreciation for the diverse narratives that have shaped our world. These tailored teaching approaches exemplify the nuanced and discipline-specific strategies that educators employ to cultivate a comprehensive and insightful learning experience for their students.

While these approaches are crucial, there are also overarching methods that prove effective across disciplines. Strategies like Project-Based Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Integration of Technology can be applied universally, fostering a dynamic and holistic learning environment that transcends the boundaries of specific subjects. This dual approach ensures a well-rounded educational experience that addresses both the unique needs of individual disciplines and the broader goals of interdisciplinary understanding.

A new feature for school classes is the introduction of interdisciplinary activities, which are based on flexible approaches that encourage positive interaction, motivation, and involvement of students in their educational process, and elements of learning in contexts beyond the classroom (outdoor education).

Interdisciplinarity is a dynamic and transformative approach that involves the integration of concepts and methods from diverse disciplines to address complex and multifaceted research problems. It breaks down the barriers between academic specialties, fostering collaboration among experts from various fields to effectively harness collective intelligence. By transferring knowledge and methodologies across disciplinary boundaries, interdisciplinary collaboration enables a fusion of diverse perspectives and expertise. The interdisciplinary approach encourages a synthesis of ideas, methodologies, and insights, fostering a creative and holistic problem-solving process. This collaborative exchange catalyzes addressing challenges in a more nuanced and effective manner, as it capitalizes on the complementary strengths of various disciplines.

Task-based learning (TBL) serves as a widespread pedagogical approach not only within language education but also in interdisciplinary contexts. This method places a central emphasis on tasks, making them the focal point of both curriculum planning and instructional strategies. Rather than traditional rote memorization or isolated language drills, TBL engages learners in meaningful activities that mirror real-world situations. By integrating tasks into the curriculum, educators create a dynamic learning environment that encourages active participation, problem-solving, and collaboration. This approach not only enhances language proficiency but also cultivates critical thinking skills and promotes a deeper understanding of subject matter across various disciplines.

TBL experts who have significantly contributed to the field of language education, with their works, include Mike Long's "Second Language Acquisition: Task-based Language Teaching," David Nunan's "Designing Tasks for a Communicative Classroom," and Dave and Jane Willis' "Doing Task-Based Teaching."

The task is defined as a "goal-oriented activity with a clear purpose," according to J. Willis. In language education, the task is conceptualized as "an activity in which students use language to achieve a specific goal," as articulated by M. Long. These definitions underscore the practical and purposeful nature of tasks in the learning process, emphasizing the role of language as a tool for communication and accomplishment.

In the 2020 language curriculum, a task is characterized as the action of one or more individuals strategically employing all available skills to achieve a specific result. This definition underscores the dynamic and skill-driven nature of tasks within the educational framework. Tasks are not merely exercises; rather, they represent purposeful actions that require the application of a range of abilities, encouraging learners to engage in strategic thinking and problem-solving.

The primary objective in solving a task is to generate a product. For instance, a task may involve the creation of various products. Particularly in the field of Geography, traditional products might take the form of on-paper formats such as physical maps, atlases, and travel brochures. On the other hand, digital products could manifest on computer software, interactive online maps, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), or satellite imagery. The diversity in potential products reflects the adaptability of tasks to different mediums and technologies, catering to both conventional and contemporary approaches to geographic learning and representation.

In the educational process, digital products play a crucial role, representing the creative outputs of both students and teachers facilitated by modern information technologies. In language education, these products span various formats, including documents in Word or PowerPoint format, audio recordings in MP3 format, videos in MP4 format recorded with a mobile phone, blog pages, wiki pages, and digital portfolios created with Google Sites. Mathematics education sees the production of solved problems,

exercises, posters, graphic representations, tables, PowerPoint presentations, and elaborated conceptual maps. Art education, on the other hand, encourages the creation of diverse plastic works such as drawings, paintings, and sculptures, thematic portfolios capturing nature through visual-artistic images, personal or group exhibitions, plastic and decorative compositions, lapbooks, albums showcasing the human face in music, literature, and visual art, as well as three-dimensional works and sculptures, possibly in digital form. The breadth of these examples underscores the variability of digital and traditional products in showcasing students' comprehension and creativity across various subjects.

A fundamental characteristic of effective tasks is their real-life and authentic nature, a principle that holds across various educational domains. In language education, authentic tasks mimic real-world scenarios, such as visiting a doctor, buying a pair of shoes, calling customer service for assistance, or borrowing a library book. Similarly, in Geometry, tasks like determining flat surfaces, such as finding out the area of your flat or room, align with real-world applications. Physics offers authentic tasks like exploring the inertia and usefulness of seat belts, urging students to explain the essential role of seat belts in driving safety. Geography introduces real-life tasks through travel planning, where students select vacation destinations considering geographical preferences, climate, and time zones. In Biology (Zoology), tasks like pet care require students to provide appropriate nutrition, exercise, and medical attention tailored to the specific needs of individual pets. Arts education incorporates authenticity with tasks like interior design, prompting students to decorate living spaces with art, furniture arrangements, color schemes, and textiles to create aesthetically pleasing environments. These examples underscore the integration of practical, real-life applications across diverse subjects, fostering a more meaningful and engaging educational experience.

Task-based learning is essential because it equips students with the practical skills needed to successfully navigate and accomplish a variety of real-world tasks.

It is recommended that teachers alternate classic, traditional subjects and practical-applied themes related to real life, providing students with a well-rounded and relevant educational experience.

Ideally, the teacher's role in task-based learning involves monitoring without direct participation, intervening only to provide guidance or hints when students encounter challenges.

While task-based learning shares similarities with traditional teaching methods, the key distinction lies in the arrangement and emphasis placed on activities, with a greater focus on student engagement and reduced direct instruction. In task-based learning, the teaching techniques employed closely resemble those used in conventional teaching, but the unique aspect lies in how activities are organized and prioritized, shifting towards a higher volume of student-driven tasks and a reduced emphasis on direct teaching.

The task-based lesson plan for a language course has three principal stages: the pre-task stage, the task cycle, and the post-task stage. (Burdujan, Prague)

Pre-task activity: This stage aims to prepare learners for the main task by providing clear instructions and presenting the topic. Mini-tasks are used to enhance lexical, grammar, or digital skills, making the process engaging. For lower-level proficiency, the teacher reviews key lexical or grammatical patterns and may present a task model. Students take notes and prepare for the task.

Task Cycle (task - planning - report): During the task stage, students perform the task in pairs or small groups, promoting a student-centered approach. The teacher observes or counsels. Learners enhance both digital and language skills with teacher guidance. After completing the task, students prepare and present a report to the class, receiving feedback from both peers and the teacher, serving as a form of assessment.

Post-task activity (language focus and feedback): The teacher selects language areas based on student needs, proposing consolidation exercises. Learners, having experienced language in use, engage in practice activities to boost confidence. Homework is assigned for time efficiency in working on exercises.

The Stages of an Interdisciplinary Task-Based Approach

As an example, the stages of the task-based lesson plan, designed to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach and encompassing three disciplines: English Language, Mathematics, and Art courses, will be taken (Figure 1).

The basic task is to design a child's room with a primary focus on crafting a space that authentically mirrors the student's personality while optimizing functionality and comfort. Students are challenged to meticulously assess the room's overall area, striking a harmonious balance between open play zones and designated areas for study or rest. Attention to detail is crucial, strategically arranging furniture items to make the most of the available space, ensuring seamless movement, and easy accessibility. Deliberate consideration should be given to the dimensions and placements of key elements such as the bed, study desk, and storage units. Moreover, students are encouraged to infuse their creative flair into the selection and arrangement of decorations, creating an atmosphere that would stimulate imagination and creativity. Additionally, as part of this design process, students should embrace the opportunity to learn and incorporate new necessary words in English to eloquently describe their room, further enhancing their language skills and ability to articulate design concepts.

In the first stage of our activities, we engage in pre-task exercises to build a foundation for the accomplishment of the basic task.

In Mini-task 1, we focus on grammar, specifically the syntactical structure of multiplication sentences. An example, such as $3 \times 5 = 15$, illustrates the structure, where

two numbers are placed next to the multiplication sign, and one follows the equals sign. The sentence "3 times 5 is fifteen" helps reinforce the understanding.

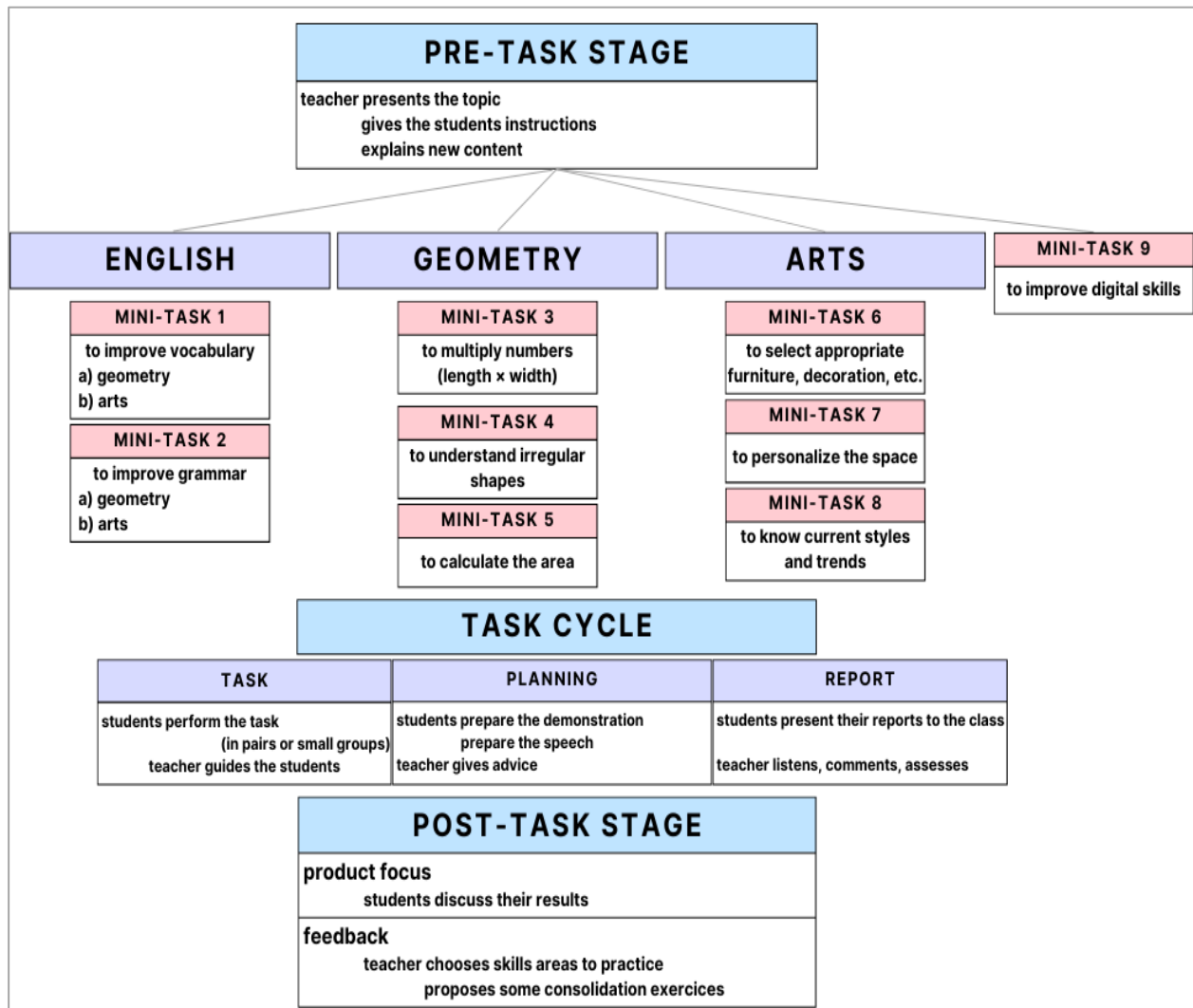


Figure 1. Interdisciplinary Approach: The Stages of a Task-Based Unit

Moving to Mini-task 2, we delve into mathematics, exploring the concept of multiplication.

Exercise: Calculate 4×6 , 3×9 , 2×4 , 8×5 , etc.

In Mini-task 3, our attention turns to vocabulary, specifically decimal numerals, ensuring a solid grasp of this numerical representation.

Name the following decimals: 0.25, 1.75, 3.42, 6.89, 5.00, 9.13, 2.50, 4.67, 7.88, 0.99, etc.

In Mini-task 4, we introduce vocabulary related to geometrical shapes, expanding our understanding of geometric forms. Some examples include a circle, triangle, square, rectangle, and pentagon.

Mini-task 5 combines grammar and geometry, emphasizing the calculation of areas. For instance, " $2 \text{ m} \times 3 \text{ m} = 6 \text{ sq.m.}$ " illustrates the process, highlighting the multiplication of dimensions to determine square meters.

Tell the following math sentences in English: $5\text{ m} \times 2\text{ m} = 10\text{ sq.m.}$, $4\text{ m} \times 7\text{ m} = 28\text{ sq.m.}$, $6\text{ m} \times 5\text{ m} = 30\text{ sq.m.}$, $8\text{ m} \times 4\text{ m} = 32\text{ sq.m.}$, $3\text{ m} \times 9\text{ m} = 27\text{ sq.m.}$, etc.

Mini-task 6 extends the exploration of calculating areas, reinforcing the concept further.

Exercise on calculating areas: Find the area of a rectangle with dimensions 4 m by 7 m.; Determine the area of a square with each side measuring 5 m.; Calculate the area of a rectangular garden with dimensions 10 m by 6 m.; Find the area of a triangular field with a base of 8 m and a height of 12 m (use the formula: $\text{Area} = 0.5 \times \text{base} \times \text{height}$); Determine the area of a circle with a radius of 3 m (use the formula: $\text{Area} = \pi \times \text{radius}^2$).

Shifting to vocabulary, Mini-task 7 introduces terms related to furniture, enhancing our ability to describe elements within a room. Common nouns related to furniture include a chair, an armchair, a table, a desk, a bed, a dresser, a bookshelf, etc.

In Mini-task 8, we delve into grammar, exploring prepositions of place.

Exercise: Complete each sentence by choosing the correct preposition of place: The cat is _____ the table. The keys are _____ the drawer. The book is _____ the shelf. The shoes are _____ the bed. The lamp is _____ the ceiling. The backpack is _____ the chair. The dog is _____ the sofa. The painting is _____ the wall. The plant is _____ the window. The clock is _____ the door.

The Mini-task 9a or 9b, offers the choice between digital and traditional forms. These tasks involve practicing room design, either on roomsketcher.com (digital) or on paper (traditional), providing a hands-on application of the concepts learned. This structured progression ensures a comprehensive approach, integrating grammar, mathematics, vocabulary, geometry, and practical design skills, all in preparation for the main task of designing a child's room.

The second stage is called a task cycle. Students engage in a structured sequence comprising task execution, planning, and reporting.

Engaging in group work in the classroom during task execution fosters collaborative learning, cultivates diverse perspectives, enhances communication skills, promotes problem-solving abilities, allows for the division of labor, encourages peer learning, facilitates conflict resolution, and ultimately leads to increased engagement among students.

When reporting a presentation in front of the class, students gain valuable advantages, including the development of public speaking skills, confidence building, honing communication skills, fostering preparation and organization abilities, mastering time management, achieving subject proficiency, acquiring persuasion and influence techniques, and experiencing enhanced memory retention.

The third stage includes post-task activities and is composed of discussing the results and feedback.

During the third stage, students are engaged in round table discussions, actively participate in open dialogue, foster collaboration, improve listening skills, demonstrate flexibility and adaptability, resolve conflicts, build relationships, make informed decisions, and learn from peers—all while maintaining a focused approach on the content under consideration.

In conclusion, the exploration of Task-Based Learning (TBL) within an interdisciplinary context demonstrates its potential to enrich the educational landscape by fostering dynamic and comprehensive learning experiences. The integration of TBL in diverse academic disciplines aligns with the ever-evolving nature of education and the need for customized pedagogical approaches. Through the examination of discipline-specific strategies and overarching methods, such as Project-Based Learning and Collaborative Learning, the study highlights the importance of tailoring teaching methods to individual subjects while promoting interdisciplinary understanding. The introduction of interdisciplinary activities further contributes to positive student interaction, motivation, and real-world learning beyond the classroom. Interdisciplinarity, as a dynamic and transformative approach, encourages collaboration, the synthesis of ideas, and a holistic problem-solving process. Within the realm of TBL, the emphasis on authentic tasks reflects a commitment to real-life applications across various subjects, equipping students with practical skills essential for navigating real-world challenges. Overall, the study underscores the significance of task-based learning as a versatile and effective pedagogical approach, contributing to a well-rounded and relevant educational experience for students across diverse disciplines.

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