USING THE TASK-BASED METHOD IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

The task-based method (TBM) has gained considerable attention in language and general primary education as a learner-centred pedagogical approach that places meaningful tasks at the core of instruction. This article examines the application of the task-based method in primary school settings, drawing on documented case studies from diverse educational contexts. The analysis explores how TBM is implemented across different subject areas, the challenges encountered by teachers and learners, and the outcomes observed in classroom practice. The findings suggest that when properly scaffolded, task-based instruction fosters communicative competence, critical thinking, and intrinsic motivation among young learners. Implications for teacher training and curriculum design in primary education are discussed.

Keywords: task-based method, primary education, learner-centred instruction, case study, language teaching, communicative competence.

1. Introduction

Primary education represents a critical developmental stage in which pedagogical approaches profoundly shape learners' attitudes toward knowledge, language, and collaborative interaction. Over recent decades, the task-based method — grounded in the theoretical work of Prabhu, Long, Willis, and Nunan — has emerged as one of the most influential frameworks for organising meaningful instruction around purposeful tasks rather than

discrete grammar or vocabulary drills [1]. In a task-based classroom, learners engage in activities that require genuine communication, problem-solving, and the deployment of linguistic and cognitive resources to achieve a concrete outcome [2].

Despite a wealth of theoretical literature on TBM, its implementation in primary school contexts presents unique challenges and affordances. Young learners differ substantially from adult language users in their cognitive development, attention spans, metalinguistic awareness, and social interaction patterns [3]. Understanding how TBM functions in actual primary classrooms requires attention to specific contextual variables, including teacher experience, curriculum demands, classroom resources, and institutional support.

This article reviews documented case studies of TBM implementation in primary schools across several countries, synthesising key themes relating to task design, teacher roles, learner engagement, and observable outcomes. The aim is to provide practitioners and curriculum designers with an evidence-informed perspective on how TBM can be effectively adapted for young learners.

3.2 Case Study 2: TBM in Primary Literacy Instruction in South Africa

Hardman and colleagues investigated the use of task-based approaches in Grade 3 literacy classrooms in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, as part of a broader project examining effective literacy pedagogy in under-resourced settings [4]. The case study focused on four classrooms in township schools where many learners were acquiring literacy in a second language. Teachers were supported to design genre-based literacy tasks that required learners to produce written and oral texts for authentic communicative purposes, such as writing instructions for a game or narrating a community story.

Classroom observations and learner writing samples collected before and after the intervention indicated substantial improvements in text organisation, vocabulary use, and narrative coherence in classrooms where teachers implemented task cycles with structured pre-writing activities and peer feedback phases. Hardman et al. attributed these gains to the purposeful nature of the tasks, which provided learners with a genuine reason to attend to both meaning and form [5]. The study also highlighted the importance of oral task rehearsal before written production, a scaffold particularly beneficial for multilingual learners in early primary grades.

The study documented how teachers presented learners with real-world mathematical problems — such as planning a class event within a budget or comparing prices in a simulated market — and required small groups to negotiate solutions and justify their reasoning to peers. Analysis of classroom dialogue revealed a significant increase in pupil-initiated questions and explanatory talk compared with traditional textbook-based lessons. The researchers observed that task-based mathematics lessons fostered a qualitatively richer form of mathematical discourse, and that lower-attaining pupils in particular benefited from the scaffolded peer collaboration that task cycles afforded [6].

4. Key Themes Emerging from Case Study Evidence

Across all reviewed case studies, the quality of task design emerges as the single most influential factor in TBM effectiveness at primary level. Tasks that were developmentally appropriate — with clear goals, familiar topics, and manageable linguistic demands — generated high levels of engagement, whereas tasks that were too abstract or insufficiently scaffolded resulted in confusion and off-task behaviour. Nunan emphasises that tasks for young learners must be immediately meaningful, closely connected to the learner's world, and achievable within a short time frame [7]. The case

studies reviewed here consistently support this principle: the most successful tasks were those that tapped into children's immediate social realities, such as school events, family activities, or local community contexts.

A recurring theme across the case studies is the centrality of teacher competence and confidence in TBM implementation. TBM demands a fundamentally different teacher role from transmission-based pedagogy: rather than directing and correcting, the TBM teacher must facilitate, monitor, and scaffold [8]. The case studies from Hong Kong and Iran both documented the challenges that teachers face in relinquishing direct control of classroom discourse, particularly in educational cultures where teacher authority is strongly normative.

6. Conclusion

This review of case study evidence demonstrates that the task-based method, when appropriately adapted for the developmental stage and contextual realities of primary education, can make a substantial positive contribution to learner engagement, language development, and higher-order thinking. The five case studies examined here, drawn from China, South Africa, Spain, Belgium, and Iran, reveal convergent themes around the importance of task design quality, teacher facilitation skills, institutional support, and sensitivity to contextual constraints.

For primary school educators and policymakers, the central implication is clear: TBM offers genuine pedagogical value, but its successful implementation requires investment in teacher professional development, ongoing classroom support, and thoughtful curriculum integration. Superficial or mandated adoption without these conditions risks producing the alienation and frustration that some critics have observed in poorly implemented TBM classrooms. When these conditions are met, however, the case study record is encouraging, suggesting that task-based

approaches can transform primary classrooms into dynamic, communicative learning communities in which young learners thrive.

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