Research Article

The Effects of Online Task-Based Learning on the Acquisition of Second Conditional

Los Efectos de Task-Based Learning Online en la Adquisición de Temas Gramaticales del Idioma Inglés

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Abstract

The present study shows the effects of online Task-Based Learning on the acquisition of grammar topics in EFL context. It discusses the Willis' (1996, 2012) TBL methodology focus on using tasks which are developed in three stages: pre-task, task cycle and language focus. The experiment was carried out in a private school in one of the biggest cities of Ecuador with 61 participants. The experimental group was taught using tasks. Meanwhile, the control group was taught using activities different from tasks. The findings are based on the result of pre and post-test between two groups through SPSS program. This study proves that Willis' TBL framework has a positive effect for teaching online and helps to develop and engage a communicative language teaching. Although, it requires long-term planning and serious organizational considerations. Further researches might be in online TBL methodology for children and its effect in affective filter in virtual environments.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching, online Task-Based Learning, TBL methodology, virtual environments.*

Resumen

El presente estudio informa sobre los efectos del Task-Based Learning en forma online en la adquisición de temas gramaticales del idioma inglés. Este tema fue propuesto por el autor Willis (1996, 2012), la cual está enfocada en usar tareas y estas se desarrollan en tres etapas, pre tarea, ciclo de tareas y enfoque del uso del idioma. Este experimento se dio lugar en un colegio particular, en una de las principales ciudades de Ecuador con 61 participantes. El grupo experimental utilizó tareas. Mientras que el grupo control utilizó otras actividades diferentes a las tareas. Los resultados se basaron en el pre y post- test de los dos grupos, a través del programa SPSS. Este estudio demostró que la teoría del autor Willis tiene un efecto positivo en la enseñanza online y que ayuda a desarrollar e incentivar la enseñanza del idioma inglés en forma oral. Sin embargo, esta teoría requiere de una planificación profunda y una seria consideración de organización. Se podría realizar otras investigaciones sobre la metodología del aprendizaje basado en tareas en niños y el efecto del mismo en la parte afectiva dentro de un entorno virtual.

Palabras Clave: *Enseñanza idioma inglés forma oral, aprendizaje basado tareas online, metodología aprendizaje basado tareas, entornos virtuales.*

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1. INTRODUCCION

This pandemic situation has created new alternatives but it has also opened the door for a dramatic innovation in education. Today, language classrooms are being changed, through training on how to set up teachers to solve questions online. Furstenberg[1] in her study "Teaching with Technology: What is at Stake?" suggests that technology lets "the learners to make choices and thus provide autonomy, a sense of empowerment, and the opportunity to become an active participant in language learning" [1]. In addition, she says that technology is not the cure for learning language and teaching but it is a tool that allows developing new pedagogical practices. At the same time, the author thinks that tasks foster students' creativity and the main role of teachers is to design tasks appropriately. The interest in tasks for the teaching environment plays an important role in the process of acquiring a foreign language in online mode. This study was based on Willis' TBL framework: "goal-oriented activities in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome" [2]. The studies made by Ellis, Tanaka & Yamazaki, [3] showed that tasks are effective in developing linguistic competence and provide rich input to the students in grammar topics. Additionally, Ellis [4] claims that tasks seem useful to work with pupils, who are adapted to a more traditional environment. Furthermore, they are well suited to large classes. Some authors like Ellis, 2003, 2004; Li, 2019; Long, 1985, 2003, 2015; Meskil, 1999; Nunan1989, 2004;Vigostky, 1978 say that task is based on practice which requires to analyze and identify pupils' authentic needs for their learning process of the language. In addition, there is an article based on TBL and online environments. Baralt and Morcillo [5] article is about Task Based Language Teaching Online: a guide for teachers. This research demonstrates how to adapt the Willis task-based methodology framework for synchronous, online video-based interaction. The authors describe the framework and show examples of how to apply it while fostering socialization and community building. On the other hand, there are several studies related to TBL such as Edwards & Willis [6], teachers exploring tasks in English language teaching; Reinders, H. [7], The Effects of Task Type and Instructions on Second Language Acquisition; Ellis, R. [8], Task-based Language Teaching; Crookes & Gass [9], Tasks and Language Learning. Integrating Theory and Practice; Baralt and Morcillo [10], Task-Based language teaching online: a guide for teachers) who believe that tasks engage meaningful communication as well as the cooperation between students and teachers. They promote activities with real context, which are stimulating and motivating to the pupils. In line with the necessity to consider peers' language acquisition through tasks and the important role of tasks in the online setting, the present research aims to explore how beneficial is the use of tasks in synchronous environments. Therefore, the

present paper would further show the elaboration of lesson plans based on Willis' TBL framework in teaching grammar topics and the necessity for teachers to know and adapt their framework in order to design tasks correctly in the online mode because there are not any previous studies found in Ecuador about the current topic. As a result, the current investigation was conducted to describe the effects of online Task- Based Learning on the acquisition of Second Conditional. Additionally, this study proposed to answer the research questions such as: What do learners know about Second Conditional before and after undergoing TBL approach activities? What is the effectiveness on the students using tasks when learning Second Conditional in virtual classes? Should tasks be recommended for teaching the Second Conditional in an asynchronous environment? Is Willis' framework appropriate for developing communicative skills in online mode? Consequently, the present study could find the solution to improve the understanding of Second Conditional in foreign language classrooms in online mode. Further, the findings of this study may become a source of encouragement for teachers, students, syllabus designers, text designers, researchers, and others, to consider the use of tasks as a cornerstone of their professional practice in online classes.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research will be conducted through a quasi-experimental, contrastive, and quali-quantitative method. The study took place in one of the biggest cities of Ecuador. The participants of the current study were 61 learners from the third year of Bachillerato General Unificado (BGU), which means students from the last year of high school 3 BGU (B-C). They were divided into two groups of students, and their parents were informed that they would be participating in this investigation and their consent letters were signed. The learners were aged approximately 17 years old. The school works on a five- day timetable and students from the third year of BGU have 4 English lessons (each lasting 40 minutes) a week in online mode. The 61 teenagers were randomly divided. The control group is 3 BGU "B" with 35 (21 men, 14 women) and the experiment group is 3 BGU "C" 26 (16 men, 10 women) in total 61 participants. For one month (December), the experimental group (3 BGU C) was taught using tasks. Meanwhile, the control group (3 BGU B) was taught using activities different from tasks. The researcher ran pre and post-tests, lesson plans based on Willis' TBL methodology, and the use of technological tools for collecting the data between control and experimental groups. To analyze the data, SPSS software was used to reveal the effects of Task-Based Learning on the acquisition of second Conditional.

3. RESULTS

In order to answer the Research Question 1, the investigation used pre and post-tests between control and experimental group. The pre-test was designed to know what learners' knowledge about Second Conditional is before using the tasks. As Table 1 shows, the control and experimental groups demonstrated a medium level of understanding of Second Conditional. Meanwhile, the reading section showed that control group has high level (60.3%) than experimental group (39.7%). The same pattern is repeated in Listening section in control group, it has high understanding (60.3%) than experimental group (39.7 %). The findings of the study show that the experimental group had a better performance as compared with the control group in their listening and reading comprehension, and this better performance in the listening and reading test seems to be the result of the background of these skills. It happens when students make connections to their previous knowledge in order to build a mental framework with which to link the new information might facilitate comprehension.

Grammar structure

		Correct		Incorrect		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Test	Pre-test experimental	29	58,0%	7	63,6%	36	59,0%
	Pre-test control	21	42,0%	4	36,4%	25	41,0%
Total		50	100,0%	11	100,0%	61	100,0%

Reading comprehension

		Correct		Incorrect			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
3 BGU	B	35	60,3%	0	0,0%	35	57,4%
	C	23	39,7%	3	100,0%	26	42,6%
Total		58	100,0%	3	100,0%	61	100,0%

Listening section

		Correct		Incorrect			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
3 BGU	B	32	60,4%	3	37,5%	35	57,4%
	C	21	39,6%	5	62,5%	26	42,6%
Total		53	100,0%	8	100,0%	61	100,0%

Figure 1

Pre-test for control and experimental groups.

Moreover, the contrast between pre and posttests in control and experimental groups showed that learners had gained a little and a lot of experience in the use and structure of the 2nd conditional. As Table 2 shows, the control group demonstrates a minimum decrease of certainty of 3,4% in the grammar section. The reading section shows the 100% of the answers are correct both pre-test and post-test in the control group. The listening section has a slight reduction of 6,6% between pre and post-tests. It shows that output production is not significant enough. Teaching techniques are the means that

reflect the success of the learning process and the competencies of the teacher. For this reason, this slight difference in the grammar section could be due to a traditional method (TM) that always focuses on mechanical grammar exercises such as drills and drudgery, learning rules, grammar, and word formation. Al- Rawi [11] supports this idea because he believes that "traditional teaching methods become not effective as it used to be due to the current advancement in technology" (p.110).

Grammar section

		Correct		Incorrect			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Test	Pre-test control	30	51,7%	6	50,0%	36	51,4%
	Post-test control	28	48,3%	6	50,0%	34	48,6%
Total		58	100,0%	12	100,0%	70	100,0%

Reading section

			Pre-test control		Post-test control			
			N	%	N	%	N	%
Correct	3 BGU	B	35	100,0%	35	100,0%	70	100,0%
	Total		35	100,0%	35	100,0%	70	100,0%
Total	3 BGU	B	35	100,0%	35	100,0%	70	100,0%
	Total		35	100,0%	35	100,0%	70	100,0%

Listening section

		Correct		Incorrect			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Test	Pre-test control	32	53,3%	3	30,0%	35	50,0%
	Post-test control	28	46,7%	7	70,0%	35	50,0%
Total		60	100,0%	10	100,0%	70	100,0%

Figure 2

Pre and post-tests for control group.

On the other hand, the comparison between pre and posttests for the experimental group demonstrates that learners gained some experience in the use and structure of 2nd conditional. As table 3 reflects, the learners increase the level of certainty (6,6%) in the grammar section. The reading section displays an increase of 4,2% between the tests. Finally, the listening section shows an increase of 8, 6% between pretest and posttest. Therefore, the comparison tables show that there is an increased level of understanding of Second Conditional structure and output production and, it is more than confident that pretest in the experimental group. It means that the task-based approach (TBA) guides learners to engage in certain types of information processing that are believed to be relevant for effective language use and for language acquisition. Ellis [12] defends this idea because he said that "tasks will predispose, even induce, learners to engage in certain types of language use and mental processing that are beneficial to acquisition" (p.197). So Research Question 2 cannot be rejected.

To examine Research Questions 3, this study designed lesson plans and tasks for virtual classes. The control group received virtual sessions based on activities different from tasks such as fill in gaps through the Liveworksheets platform and speaking activity through the Flipgrid platform. Meanwhile, the experimental group worked with TBL online methodology. The lesson plans were designed based on Willis' framework, which

Grammar section

		Correct		Incorrect			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Test	Pre-test experimental	21	46,7%	5	71,4%	26	50,0%
	Post-test experimental	24	53,3%	2	28,6%	26	50,0%
Total		45	100,0%	7	100,0%	52	100,0%

Reading section

		Correct		Incorrect			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Test	Pre-test experimental	23	47,9%	3	75,0%	26	50,0%
	Post-test experimental	25	52,1%	1	25,0%	26	50,0%
Total		48	100,0%	4	100,0%	52	100,0%

Listening section

		Correct		Incorrect			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Test	Pre-test experimental	21	45,7%	5	83,3%	26	50,0%
	Post-test experimental	25	54,3%	1	16,7%	26	50,0%
Total		46	100,0%	6	100,0%	52	100,0%

Figure 3

Pre and posttests for experimental group.

contained three phases pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. The learners' output production had different activities in each session and they were registered in some technological tools. Teams board and Padlet tools were used to registered the ideas about Christmas celebration in specific countries and they put in practice the use of Second Conditional, then they recorded a video where they explained the contrast between the real situation and imaginary situation about Christmas celebration, see Figure ??. Finally, they posted an anonymous opinion in the Mentimeter tool in order to know how they feel about tasks and TBL online. In conclusion, the positive comments and results were registered by students in the different platforms showed that tasks are recommended for teaching Second Conditional in virtual mode. It means the present study does not reject Research Question Three. In order to answer Research Question Four, this investigation demonstrates that designing lesson plans based on Willis' framewrok and online TBL approach create a positive setting for learner's interaction in the virtual environment because students could express their ideas, comments, or opinions without feeling afraid of making mistakes. As a result, students can perform communicative tasks correctly. To give an example, the experiment and control groups had to record a video on the Flipgrid platform where participants explained the Christmas celebration in a specific country using the Second Conditional structure. Student A (control group): I have ticket to Russia in Christmas, I will travel to Red Square in Moscow Student B (experimental group): I am in Ecuador and I eat "Pristiños" with honey in Christmas but if I were in Venezuela, I would eat "Jayacas" in Christmas. The videos showed three relevant aspects such as grammar structure, information used,

and body language. First, students "A" and "B" used different structures of the Second Conditional. Those examples showed that the experimental group used this grammar topic in a better way than the control group. Second, learners provided important information about the Christmas celebration but the experimental group recognized the use of Second Conditional to contrast with something real and something hypothetical. It means that the experimental group could manage different tenses and accurately use the Second Conditional. As well as, the body language demonstrated that students felt more confident to speak in English in the experimental group because there was a movement of hands, arms, eyes, and even expressions of surprise like "Wow" during the explanation of the Christmas celebration than the control group. In addition, the assessment of the videos was made through speaking rubrics, see Figure ??. Therefore, the current study considers that TBL lesson plans are appropriate for developing communicative skills in online environments.

4. DISCUSION

Based on Baralt, Weiss & Kim [13] believe that the Task-Based language teaching approach is a positive alternative for teaching linguistic features in online classes. Furthermore, in the context of Task-Based Learning, a variety of studies have been carried out and the present study was evoked by many research studies on the field of teaching in online mode and the importance of using TBL in synchronous environments. Additionally, the technology carries out new tasks in the learning and teaching process which has created new language education needs and demanded suitable curricular and instructional changes. Tasks and technology are certainly and excellently integrated, this fusion reflects how the TBL approach and digital era fit into the new language education. (Chapelle, 2014; Chapelle & Hegelheimer, 2004; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). Regarding the importance of tasks inside lesson plans, some authors design tasks in various ways and follow different stages in order to achieve the objective of tasks *pedagogic and communicative work*. For instance, Paul Seedhouse [14] described what Task-based interaction is and it was supported in Warren's framework [15]. The study consisted to show what the characteristics of task- based interaction are such as: clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and self- repetitions. The findings said that the learners were concentrated on completing the task rather than on language use. Another illustration is the study made by Regine Hampel [16] which discussed a framework for the development of tasks in a synchronous online environment. This study showed how a theoretical approach based on second language acquisition principles, sociocultural

and constructivist theories can influence the design and implementation of the tasks. The results demonstrated that the design of tasks is focused on some issues such as student- students and student- tutor interaction, feedback, use of multimodal tools, and the differences between teaching face- to-face and online. Baralt and Morcillo's [5] study evidenced that "having a real task to do, based on learners' authentic needs and lives, gives them the capacity to feel a sense of community" (p, 40). They applied task-based language teaching online study in young learners to teach the use of the verb *to be* and the use of possessive adjectives in Spanish. Their study also demonstrated that tasks can raise learners' awareness of the functional or semantic meanings of linguistic accuracy. Finally, Willis [2] designed tasks based on three stages: pre-task, task cycle, and language use. These steps require the target language must be used by the learners for a communicative intent. The findings of this study indicated that utilizing online TBL is effective in teaching grammar topics. Additionally, the implementation of tasks in the online classes fostered interaction among students and promote the negotiation of meaning in language acquisition. Also, the present research indicated that using Willis' framework for virtual classes should be recommended for teaching the Second Conditional in a synchronous environment. She suggested designing tasks to get "goal- oriented activities in which learners use language to achieve a realistic outcome" [2].

5. CONCLUSION

Learning a foreign language compromises the development of four skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing but Ecuador context does not develop enough. It could happen due to a set of factors such as the methodology does not work in the same way virtual classes that traditional classrooms, lack of use of tasks, and the exaggerated use of grammar drills which could cause some learners to lose interest in learning English. Therefore, this paper concentrates on the practical aspect of using Task-Based Learning ideas in online classrooms including a description of tasks and task-based methodology. However, Bygate [17] pointed out that different tasks seem to activate different linguistic muscles, some tasks may be more lexical, syntactic, and others. He describes tasks like dietary balance. Learners could be fed with narrative tasks and they will perform some aspects of language in one way, improving certain linguistic features and mapping certain communicative skills. In other words, teachers may feed different tasks to the learners, and different linguistic features may learners develop and improve. Willis' [2] TBL framework was used to design tasks for teaching online. Each step has a specific objective, for instance, the pre- task stage introduces

the topic and activates the prior knowledge through questions, videos, and pictures. Input is an essential aspect during this phase. Then the task cycle works on the base of three components: task, planning, and report where learners have to follow the instructions, interact with their peers in order to complete the instructions given, and share the information with the class. The last stage is language focus where students can analyze the grammar structure of Second Conditional, receive feedback and practice the grammar topic in group work. However, this online adaptation helped to develop and engage a positive learning environment where communicative skills are used during the class to complete the tasks. Nonetheless, the TBL approach requires long-term planning and serious organizational consideration in virtual classes because its methodology involves all of the psycholinguistically- supported activities that the teacher designs around the task in order to increase learners' performance. Lastly, the process of understanding, performing, and reflecting on the tasks produces real use of the target language and a meaningful outcome. Further researches could be related to online TBL methodology materials for children and the effect of TBL in the affective filter during virtual classes.

AcknowledgEMENTS

6. CONFLICT OFINTEREST

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[1] Erika Tenezaca declares that she has no conflict of interest. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the researcher.

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