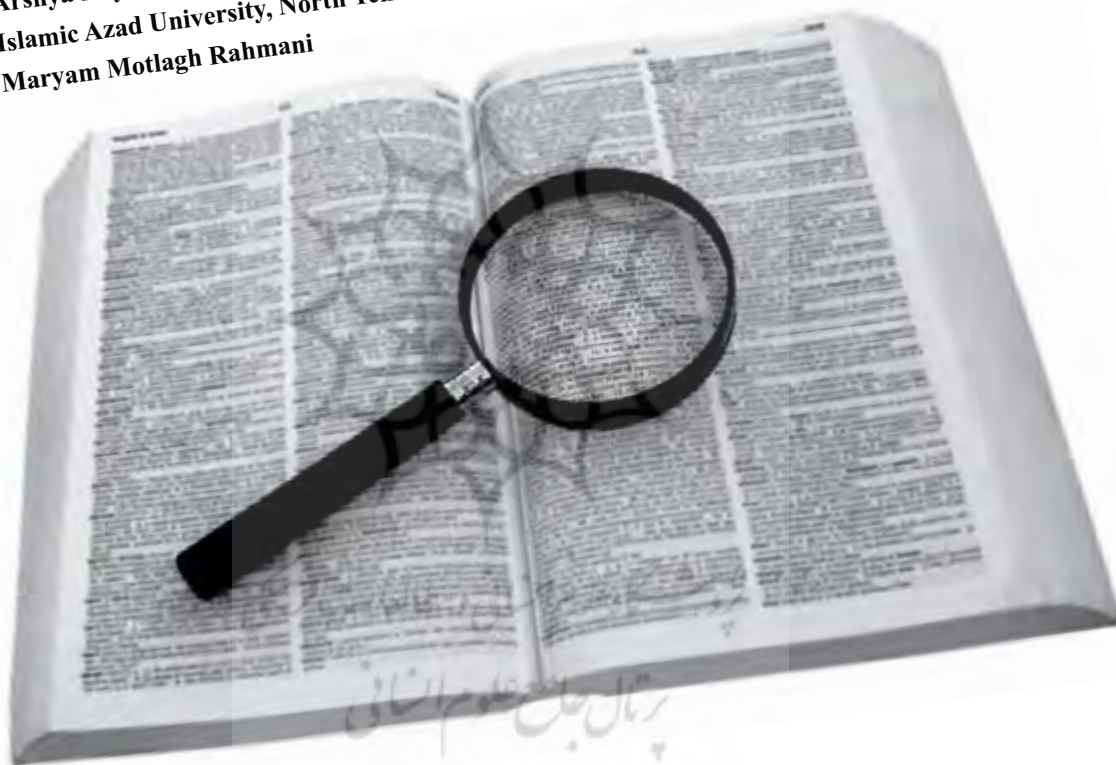


Classroom
Techniques

Pre-university Reading Activities Under Close Inspection

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چکیده

در روند یادگیری زبان دوم / خارجی، نظریه‌ها و الگوها، رهنمودهایی برای معلمان و محققان زبان فراهم می‌آورند تا به کمک آن‌ها، روش‌های مناسبی اتخاذ کنند و آموزش و یادگیری زبان دوم / خارجی را میسر سازند. چگونگی و علت آن‌چه که مردم در زندگی واقعی می‌خوانند، ممکن است به‌طور کامل در کلاس درس بازتاب نیابد. از طرف دیگر، تمامی زبان‌آموزان از دنیای واقعی وارد کلاس درس می‌شوند که در آن، متون متنوع با دلایل واقعی مطالعه می‌شوند. در نتیجه، آگاهی از «چه‌ها» و «چرا»ها در زمینه‌ی خواندن، به معلمان زبان کمک می‌کند تا متون و فعالیت‌های معتبری را برای رسیدن به اهداف حقیقی انتخاب کنند.

به‌عنوان مدرسان زبان انگلیسی می‌توانیم چندین علت برای مشکلات دانش‌آموزان خود بیابیم، اما عوامل بازدارنده‌ی اصلی آن‌هایی هستند که در کلاس درس می‌بینیم. برای دانش‌آموزان، رسیدن به جواب صحیح سؤالات درک مطلب اهمیت بیشتری دارد تا این‌که چگونه و از چه طریقی

به جواب صحیح دست یابند. آن‌ها بسیار به فرهنگ لغت وابسته‌اند و در خواندن متون طولانی دچار مشکل می‌شوند. مهم‌تر از تمام موارد ذکر شده، همیشه مشکل تضاد فرهنگ‌ها نیز وجود دارد. به طوری که فرهنگ زبان‌آموزان با فرهنگ زبانی که متن به آن نوشته شده، کاملاً متفاوت است. یکی از مشکلات کلاس‌های آموزش زبان این است که دانش‌آموزان قادر نیستند آن‌چه را که در کلاس درس آموخته‌اند، به محیط بیرون و در ارتباط با دیگران منتقل کنند. بنابراین، شاید یکی از راه‌حل‌ها می‌تواند قرار دادن آن‌ها در موقعیت متفاوت طبیعی باشد. به نظر می‌رسد که مانند دیگر مهارت‌های زبانی، مهارت خواندن و درک متون با استفاده از به‌کارگیری فعالیت‌های معتبر داخل کلاس آسان می‌شود. آموزش زبان انگلیسی، به‌عنوان زبان خارجی، با مسئله استفاده از «فعالیت‌های معتبر» روبه‌روست، چرا که آن‌ها تنها ابزار استفاده‌ی زبان در دنیای واقعی هستند. بنابراین، به زبان‌آموزان باید تعلیم داده شود که چگونه این متون را درک کنند و در این فرآیند از فعالیت‌های واقعی بیرونی بهره ببرند. این مقاله پس از شرح اصول و مبانی آموزش زبان به روش فعالیت‌محور، فعالیت‌های خواندن کتاب زبان دوره‌ی پیش‌دانشگاهی را مورد بررسی قرار می‌دهد و در ضمن، استفاده از چند نمونه فعالیت تکمیلی را در راستای به‌کارگیری آموزش زبان به روش فعالیت‌محور در زمینه‌ی تدریس زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی در ایران پیشنهاد می‌کند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: مهارت خواندن، آموزش زبان به روش فعالیت‌محور، کتاب زبان انگلیسی دوره‌ی پیش‌دانشگاهی، فعالیت‌های خواندن

Abstract

In the process of second language acquisition, theories and models provide guidelines for language teachers and researchers to find out suitable paths through which teaching and learning a second language could be realized. What people read in the real life and its reasons may not be completely replicable in language classrooms. On the other hand, all language students come to class from the real world in which they read different kinds of texts for real purposes. As a result, having information about the whats and whys of reading helps language teachers to select authentic texts and tasks for authentic purposes. Having elaborated on the basics of task-based language teaching, the present paper examines the reading activities of the pre-university language course book and suggests the use of some supplementary tasks as a step forward in the implementation of TBLT in the Iranian EFL setting of Iran.

Key Words: reading skill, task-based language teaching, pre-university English course book, reading tasks.

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Richards and Rodgers (2001) define Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as “an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching” (p.223). It is based on the same principles that formed part of the CLT movement in the 1980s. It was argued that

activities that involve real communication promote learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Therefore, researchers started using tasks as SLA research tools with the emphasis that engaging learners in task work provides a good context for improving the learning processes. Tasks expose learners to comprehensible input while providing them the opportunity “to negotiate meaning

and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication” (Rashtchi & Keyvanfar, 2007, p. 107). Nunan (1991) defines TBLT as a facilitating factor in foreign/second language learning. In TBLT, syllabus content and instruction processes are selected with reference to communicative tasks which learners will (either actually or potentially) need to engage in outside the classroom and also with reference to theoretical and empirical insights into those social and psycholinguistic processes which facilitate language acquisition.

Skehan (1996) notes that in a strong version of TBLT, tasks should be the units of language teaching, while in a weak version tasks are embedded in a more pedagogic context. Oxford (2006), on the other hand, argues that, “In L2 teaching and learning, task is viewed as an outcome-oriented instructional segment or as a behavioral framework for research or classroom learning” (p. 97).

Task-based learning has become a central issue in second language acquisition (SLA) and its importance has grown rapidly during the past decades. It is, in fact, an attempt to confront the need to engage in naturalistic learning processes. Skehan (1996) states that a task-based approach ensures that the participants are actively involved in the learning process, and they are taking decisions that they need to take in the classroom. According to Mennim (2003), a classroom task encourages learners to

attend to the language forms that they are either using themselves or are exposed to. Next, learners notice ways in which their own interlanguage differs from the target language. This leads to rethinking their hypotheses about the target language, and to modification of their output. In other words, as Nunan (2006) states, a task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammar knowledge to express meaning, and in which the aim is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate the form. As he notes, the task should have a sense of completeness and be able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, middle, and an end.

Based on the above definitions, it can be claimed that grammatical activities with a direct emphasis on form are not the major concern of TBLT. Some scholars have recommended the term *form-focused* versus *meaning-focused language use* to distinguish between the two types of activity. Others have preferred the use of the term *exercise* to refer to form-focused activities. According to Ellis (2003) a ‘task’ differs from other devices used to elicit learner language such as an ‘activity’, or ‘exercise’, or a ‘drill’. He explains that during a *task*, the participants function as *language users* because they undergo the same kinds of communicative processes as they would

in real-life interactions and hence any kind of learning would be *incidental* or *implicit*. *Exercise*, however, requires the participants to act as *language learners*, engaging them in *intentional/explicit learning* (p.3). He pinpoints the final distinction between these two by arguing that a task has a *nonlinguistic outcome* which is in fact the goal of the activity while the outcome of an exercise cannot be separated from the language which is produced (Ellis, 2003).

Reading Tasks in Action

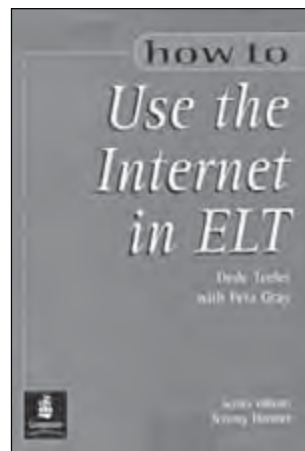
Guariento and Morley (2001) argue that with the development of the communicative movement, the need to develop students' skills for the real world has led teachers to make an attempt to stimulate this world in the classroom. One way of doing this has been to use authentic materials based on the fact that exposing students to the language of the real world will help them acquire an effective receptive competence in the target language. Busch (2003) believes that first language acquisition normally occurs naturally, while second or foreign language acquisition, in most cases, occurs under artificial conditions. Basically, what we should be doing as foreign language teaches is to make these conditions as natural as possible and similar to language acquisition in a natural setting.

By the same token, in the foreign language setting of Iran, under the influence of the communicative movement, the use of TBLT

and reading tasks in teaching started to attract enough attention in the last few years. Shafizadeh (2004) conducted a research to explore the impact of reading tasks on the reading comprehension performance of Iranian high school students. He suggested that reading tasks can improve the reading skill of Iranina EFL learners, particularly through the interest that they invoke in learners. Tavakoli (2004) investigated the impact of task-based reading materials on Iranian EFL learners' attention span. She tried to understand if using different types of reading tasks could lead to higher recalling and remembering of the reading materials and increased learners' attention span. She concluded that the use of reading tasks was significantly effective with EFL students showing the effectiveness of using reading tasks on the students' attention span. Another researcher (Alinegad, 2004) attempted to investigate the effect of task-based reading activities and text-based reading activities on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. The selected reading comprehension tasks were reading a passage and completing a table, completing charts or diagrams, and making classified lists from unclassified ones. The findings of this study verified the importance of using TBLT as an effective way to achieve a good command of the reading skill.

Communicative testing has also benefited a lot from the use of tasks. Authentic test tasks are those which correspond closely

how to Use the Internet in ELT



How to Use the Internet in ELT is a practical guide to the use of the Internet for teachers of English. This book is appropriate for teachers who have little or no experience of the Internet as well as for those looking to extend their understanding of the resources available on the "Net"

How to Use the Internet in ELT offers:

- a practical introduction to the main features of the internet, including e-mail and the World Wide Web
- a review of the resources and information available on the internet for teacher development
- a guide to searching for classroom materials on the World Wide Web
- ideas on creating an "Internet classroom"
- a variety of classroom and study activities exploiting the Internet
- guidance on how to develop an Internet-based language course
- a Take File of photocopiable review exercises for each chapter
- detailed appendices listing newsgroup and mailing list addresses, and Web sites of relevance to teachers of English, as well as suggested further reading

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to tasks which a language user is likely to encounter in the target situation (Bachman and Palmer, 1996, as cited in Taylor & Falvery, 2007). The target situation mainly refers to non-test situations; nevertheless, testing context itself is one of the situations where most language learners find themselves in (Brown & Hudson, 2002). Walters and Oded (2001) investigated the assignment of different tasks on creating different types of processing. In their study they focused on two completion tasks, writing a summary of a text and listing the examples in a text. The findings revealed that extra processing required in the writing of a summary of main points helped learners to have a better encoding of the text which in turn helped learners to perform better on subsequent comprehension tasks. It was concluded that tasks involving production should be viewed as an instrument of learning rather than one of testing and they can help less skilled learners to better extract meaning elements from the text. Keyvanfar and Rahmani (2009) also investigated the impact of two reading task types of completion and selection on reading ability of low intermediate Iranian EFL learners. The results of the research indicated that completion and selection of the reading tasks both had positive effects on reading comprehension ability of language learners but in comparison, completion tasks yielded better results.

The present paper through examining

the reading activities of the pre-university English textbook demonstrates that they mainly involve completion with different degrees of production. It further introduces a number of reading tasks that can be used by teachers as supplementary materials.

Pre-University Reading Activities

Examination of the type of activities in the Pre-University textbook shows that the students are mainly involved in finding paragraph headings, understanding references, using punctuation marks, discussing text structure, recognizing the main point of a text, summarizing, outlining, and guessing unknown vocabulary items. Each will be discussed below:

Paragraph Headings in *Lesson One* informs the students that the heading of a paragraph has the most important information. They are taught to read the paragraph and choose the heading that best summarizes it.

For example: In paragraph 3, the writer explains how aerobic exercise helps the human body work better and keep healthy. The students are required to choose the phrase that best summarizes the paragraph.

Aerobic exercise.....

- a) helps you feel no tiredness
- b) helps the heart to send more oxygen to the muscles
- c) makes your muscles use less oxygen
- d) increases your blood

In **Understanding References**, readers

learn not to repeat the same nouns in connected sentences. They are told that they can use pronouns instead. Sometimes when the sentences are too long finding references is not very easy. Here the readers should divide the sentence into smaller parts, find out the connection between them, and finally determine the references. The following example is taken from *Lesson*

Pronoun/ Adjective	Paragraph & Line Number	Check if it refers to something		Copy down what it refers to
		before	after	
Itself	P1, L3			
Another	P1, L4			
Its	P3, L3			
They	P4,L5			
This	P5, L8			

Three:

In *Lesson Four*, learners learn about **Punctuation Marks** such as comma, colon, semicolon and dash. They are required to find some examples in the lessons and also write down about the function of each.

Punctuation Mark	Examples in this lesson	More examples from other lessons	Functions
,	Comma		
:	Colon		
;	Semicolon		
-	Dash		

Recognizing Text Structure in each paragraph helps readers to better comprehend the text. In this part readers get to know the main topic of each paragraph and match the ideas with the correct paragraph in the text. *Lesson Five* uses this type of task asking students to write the number of the paragraph in the text for each of the main ideas mentioned. For example:

1. Examples of child labor
2. Introducing child labor

In another task called **Recognizing the Main Point of a Text** students learn to get the main points of the text and transfer them to a table. In this way they organize the information and events and make a summary of the whole text. *Lesson Six* employs this type of task in which happenings are arranged according to year,

When?	Who?/What?	The event
1659		
1957		
1958		
1967-1972		

person and the exact event.

Summarizing is another task in which learners find main points in the text and re-organize them in a summary. An example of this task type can be found in *Lesson Seven*:

One of the most interesting things about information is that we are able to get and

use it on many new and different kinds of information such as computers, radios, TVs, telephones, fax machines, etc. Among all these, computers have attracted the most attention since they have made it possible to store and a large amount of information in a very short time....

Outlining is another reading activity requiring learners to put all the main points of the text in a short space with the objective of making reading and understanding faster and easier.

Students can use outlining while reading short stories, too. In this way they will not forget the main points while narrating the story. Outlining is suitable in reading different texts especially biographies. It involves extracting information and organizing them in a timetable. The

Mother Teresa	
1910	born in
1922	.....
1928	.....
1929	.....
1946	left the convent and
1950	.....
1979	.....
1997	.....

following example is from *Lesson Eight*:

Learners should be aware of the fact that in the process of reading a text there are always some new words. **Guessing Unknown Vocabulary** is an important task in teaching reading comprehension which is presented in all units of the book. Students should

learn how to move from known to unknown information. This task teaches students that it is not necessary to know a large amount of vocabulary. It is important to guess the meaning of the unknown words based on the given information in the context. One way to guess the unknown words is having information about word formation and affixation processes. The following example

Word	Part of Speech	Formed from	Meaning
silence	Noun	silent (adj)	
confident	Adjective	confidence (n)	
facial	Adjective	face (n)	
react	Verb	act (v)	

is taken from *Lesson Two*:

It can be seen that the above activities are mainly form-focused, more of a *consciousness-raising* type in which as Ellis (2003) explains, the content of the activity is language itself rather than some everyday-life topics or situations. That is a language point becomes the subject of the interaction learners are supposed to engage in. As learners talk about the linguistic item in order to complete the task, they develop some kind of awareness of how that particular linguistic item works (Rashtchi & Keyvanfar, 2007).

Suggested Reading Tasks

High school as well as pre-university teachers can supplement their work on reading skill using the following alternative

tasks. They are particularly devised to increase the students' motivation to read, familiarize them with real-life tasks, promote interaction, and finally enhance implicit language learning. The tasks are taken from a book titled "Focus on Skills for IELTS Foundation" by Matthews and Salisbury (2007).

Classification tasks involve classifying names, objects, events, etc. Classifying means putting things into groups or classes. Classification tasks are similar in some ways to doing T/F/NG tasks. Both tasks involve matching words in the question with words in the text. Therefore learners need to scan the text to find the place of the related information and then consider what to do next. Sometimes the classes refer to different periods of time and learners are to identify the period when a certain event happened. The following task can be employed when working on *Lesson Six (Space Exploration)*:

Classify the following events as occurring during the mentioned time, and write the correct letter next to each sentence.

- A 1609
- B 1957
- C 1976
- D 1977
- E 1988

The *Voyager I* and *Voyager II* space probes were launched.-----

The launch of the first units of the International Space Station began a new era in space exploration.-----

The Italian scientist, Galileo, used telescope to observe the sky.-----

The former Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, an artificial satellite.-----

Viking I and *Viking II* landed on Mars.-----

Matching is a kind of task in which students match sentences to items in a box. The statements are usually numbered 1,2,3 etc. and the items in the box are usually labeled A, B, C, etc. There may not be a matching sentence for every item in the box. It means students may need to use some items in the box more than once. The items in the box are usually in passage order but the sentences are in a random order. School students are used to match just two parts in two different columns referring to one grammatical point such as conjunctions of time, reason and condition. The course book introduces this task in *Lesson One (Why Exercise Is Important)*:

Match a line in Column A with a line in Column B.

A	B
As we had no food at home, Since we didn't need the car	we looked into the shop Mary was cutting the birthday cake
As we walked along the street, When we arrived at the party,	we decided to go to the restaurant we felt too tired
Since we had done a lot of exercise,	we decided to sell it

This matching task has a shortcoming. It does not have any additional choices;

therefore, it increases the chance of guessing. An example of this task type is made according to *Lesson Eight (Thomas Edison)*:

Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list of headings below:

List of Headings

- His most interesting subjects
- His personal life
- The most important scientist in the last 200 years
- His hobbies
- Different projects
- Edison's early life
- His famous invention
- Edison's social life

Paragraph

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Heading

-
-
-
-
-

In **Tick from a List** task students pick the correct answers from a list of options. The options are labeled A, B, C, etc. The answers may not be in passage order. This type of task is different from multiple choice items in which students just pick up the correct answer. The answers are all in one small area of the passage. On the other hand in **Pick from a List** students pick a number of answers (usually two or three) from a list

of five or six options and they may need to read a large area of the passage. Consider the following example from *Lesson One (Why Exercise Is Important)*:

Choose three letters A-F.

Which three factors about the importance of exercise are mentioned by the writer?

- A. Exercise makes muscles stronger
- B. Exercise causes you feel younger
- C. Exercise keeps you low
- D. Exercise makes heart happy
- E. Exercise keeps you fit
- F. Exercise takes your flexibility

Sentence Completion with a Box is another task that can be suggested in reading comprehension settings. After reading the text quickly, readers are to use a scanning strategy to find the exact parts that they want to look at more carefully and fill in the blanks. In this task type, the words learners have to use to complete the sentences must be taken exactly from the text. This type of task exists in the course book but there students are to complete sentences which are not related to the topic of the lesson but just the main words of the lesson are extracted.

An example of the task is given in *Lesson (Five (Child Labor: A Global Issue*

education	discipline	specific	poverty
common	handle	prevent	willing
educational			

1. A leg injury may John from playing in tomorrow's game.
2. Are you to help me wash the car tomorrow morning?
3. He lost all his money and died in
4. Be careful when you the bottles of acid.
5. It's very for people to get colds in winter.
6. The movie made her very and she started to cry.
7. My parents spent a lot of money on my
8. The teacher gave the class instructions on how to do the exercise.

In the following example new sentences are given but they are related to the new lesson. Consider the following example from *Lesson Two (How to give a Good Speech)*:

<p>mood concentrate confidence variety gestures</p>

1. During a speech, it is important to the speaker to on the audience.
2. When a speaker addresses the audience, he/she shows his/her by expressions on the face.
3. Practicing in front of a mirror is a helpful way for speakers to find an acceptable to use in front of an audience.
4. To make your speaking more effective add to your speech by raising

and lowering your voice.

5. Knowing communication power tools will help a speaker to speak with

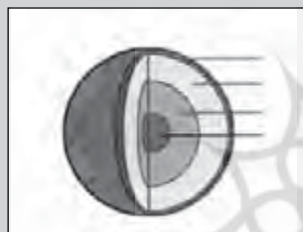
Another task is **Summary Completion without a Box**. In this task learners are asked to complete a text with appropriate words that are usually (but not always) nouns. In this task it is suggested to language learners to read the whole summary quickly and then follow the steps to complete the sentences. The course book has an example in *Lesson Seven* that was introduced before. The task could not be an effective one because lots of explanations and information are given to the students and the number of blanks is very limited. Therefore the chance of guessing would be high. The following suggested task is taken from *Lesson Five (Child Labor: A Global Issue)*:

Child labor means when young people are forced to do unusual work that is not for their health. This is more common in countries, but it also exists in nations. It is the result of Working children in rural areas are more in Urban children work in, with fewer in, and

Labeling a Diagram. In this task students name parts of a diagram by using words and/or a number from the passage. The parts to be labeled are marked with arrows and the questions with number. The

answers may not be in passage order, but they are usually grouped together in one part of the passage, where the diagram is described. Students should use words from the passage. The words and numbers should be written exactly as they are in the reading passage. The following example is taken from *Lesson Four (Earthquakes and How to Survive Them)*:

Label the diagram below:



In **Flow Chart Completion** task, students complete the gaps in the flow chart by using words and/or a number from the passage. Some information may already be given to help readers to get the missing information. The answers may not be in passage order. Consider the following example from *Lesson Three (Global Warming, Global Concern)*:

Complete the flow chart below:

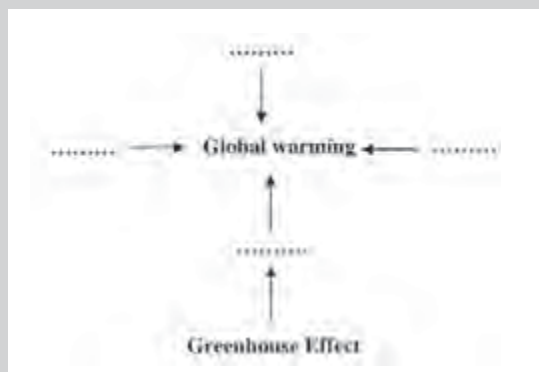


Table Completion task is similar to flow chart completion task in which the gaps in tables are filled by words and/or a number from the text. Sometimes one or two parts of the table are completed to help learners to find the missing parts. The answers are not usually in passage order. The tables in the course book are more like summary completion and do not follow the rules and shape of a table. The following example is from *Lesson Seven (IT and its Services)*:

IT and Its Services		
The main two parts	Computer Technolog	.....
Examples of IT	.....	Internet
Purpose	..... and save time, money, and energy	..... over long distances

Conclusion and Implications

As it was demonstrated, completion tasks are more common than selection tasks in the pre-university English course book. This may be due to the view confirmed by a few researches that production is more effective in the enhancement of language skills (e.g. Walters & Oded, 2001, Keyvanfar & Rahmani, 2009). Nevertheless, we suggest that pre-university course book activities can be mainly regarded as exercises, or at best form-focused consciousness-raising tasks. Language teachers are recommended to take action and flavor their teaching especially in the area of reading skill with the help of some supplementary pedagogic tasks. Through these tasks learners get the

opportunity to interact with their peers and experience first-hand language use.

The present paper can have some practical applications for different parties involved in the business of ELT. Teachers should have a new evaluation of what reading tasks are and what they can do. They should regard reading tasks as activities which aim at giving learners first-hand experience of how reading is used in everyday life interaction. Teachers are also suggested to use other types of reading tasks as teaching devices in their classes. Other tasks would also be beneficial in teaching reading because they make reading more pleasant, interesting, and motivating. Tasks also teach learners that in order to be successful in reading, it is not enough to have a good knowledge of vocabulary. It is important to know how to use the known words and guess the unknown ones to accomplish the task. Teachers of test preparation courses can make benefit of different types of reading tasks depending on the type of test they are preparing their students for, their level, and the duration of their course.

Test Makers similarly can employ different reading tasks for different testing purposes based on the type of processing that each task may entail. A reading task which superficially only assesses the reading skill of testees can also measure their production, reasoning, problem solving, and social skills. In fact, tasks can be seen as the best means of evaluating communicative

competence in an integrated fashion.

Material developers can employ tasks of different types in the construction of learning materials. They are specifically recommended to use rich and rigorous real-life tasks in different content areas. Academic content learning need not be delayed or weakened while limited English proficient students acquire English since language acquisition is enhanced when integrated into academic instruction and activities.

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