Implementing task-based language teaching in a Japanese EFL context

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...although PPP lessons are often supplemented with skills lessons, most students taught mainly through conventional approaches such as PPP leave school unable to communicate effectively in English (Stern, 1983). This situation has prompted many ELT professionals to take note of... second language acquisition (SLA) studies... and turn towards holistic approaches where meaning is central and where opportunities for language use abound. Task-based learning is one such approach...

(Willis, 2005: 4–5)

Do you think that Task-Based Language Teaching, if adopted in your own teaching context, would result in more students being able "to communicate effectively in English"? Why (not)? What would be the advantages and/or problems of implementing a task-based approach in this context?

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1. Introduction

> ... the most effective way to teach a language is by engaging learners in real language use in the classroom. This is done by designing tasks – discussions, problems, games, and so on – which require learners to use the language for themselves.
>
> (Willis & Willis, 2007: 1)
>
> Careful examination of the meaning of English in the Japanese context indicates that CLT and TBL are not yet as suitable as we would expect in encouraging Japanese EFL learners to produce output in the classroom ... these Western approaches, which do not take sufficient account of the unique learning environment in Japan, are not yet as practical in application as the PPP approach.
>
> (Sato, 2009: 12–13)

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become a dominant approach to language teaching worldwide. However, despite being used around the world for more than two decades, task-based approaches have been unable to displace more traditional pedagogies in many EFL contexts. This is especially true in Japan, where conventional form-focused approaches, such as grammar translation and presentation-practice-production (PPP), have long held sway. While TBLT has made some inroads, doubts remain over the effectiveness of the approach generally (Bruton, 2002; Sheen, 1994; Swan, 2005) and its suitability for Japanese EFL contexts in particular (Burrows, 2008; Sato, 2009). However, proponents of task-based teaching argue that such doubts are based on misconceptions of the approach (Ellis, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007). They claim that approaches such as PPP have failed to develop learners' communicative abilities (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2009) and cite second language acquisition (SLA) and classroom-based research in advocating the wider implementation of task-based teaching.

That this debate over the merits of TBLT and its suitability for Japanese EFL contexts remains unresolved indicates a need for further examination of the arguments which have been made on both sides. This paper will consider these arguments in assessing whether adopting a task-based approach in my own teaching context – a private language school – would result in more learners being able to communicate effectively in English.

This paper is organised as follows. First, I will provide the background to TBLT and define key terms. I will then review the relevant literature before discussing the advantages and problems of implementing TBLT in my context. The implications for English language teaching in Japan will be discussed near the end of this essay.

2. What is Task-Based Language Teaching?

In this section I will present the background to TBLT before providing definitions of language learning tasks and task-based language teaching.

2.1 Background to TBLT

TBLT can be seen as both a refinement of communicative language teaching (CLT) as well as a reaction to the use of form-focused models such as PPP. Critics of PPP claim that it fails to meet an essential requirement of CLT, which is to treat language 'primarily as a tool for communicating rather than as an object for study or manipulation' (Ellis, 2003: ix). For example, Willis & Willis claim that in 'a PPP methodology learners are so dominated by the presentation and practice that at the production stage they are preoccupied with grammatical form rather than with meaning' (2009: 3–4).

Samuda & Bygate (2008: 56) observe how despite the syllabus content of many CLT materials being framed in terms of communicative functions the use of models such as PPP to engage learners with that content had 'continued to reflect a view of learning as a gradual accretion of individual, pre-selected items, mediated through orchestrated pedagogic sequences.' Therefore the possibility of an approach

> driven by engagement with meaningful and relevant *tasks* offered a promising way through the communicative content/communicative procedure impasse that CLT seemed to have arrived at, and thus [was] seen by many as an opportunity to return to the conceptual foundations of CLT.
> (Samuda & Bygate, 2008: 57)

From the mid-1980s onwards, the term 'task-based' was increasingly used to describe this development in language teaching methodology.

2.2 Defining language learning tasks

Before assessing the benefits of adopting a task-based approach it is first necessary to know what a 'task' is exactly. However, as Samuda & Bygate (2008: 62) point out,

> while a widely agreed definition of the term is both desirable and necessary ... arriving at such a definition is not straightforward – a considerable part of the second language task literature has been concerned with the search for a precise, yet comprehensive definition of a "task".

Ellis (2003) attempted to synthesise many of the definitions resulting from this search. He gathered together their various strands and, rather than providing another definition, created the following set of essential criteria for language learning tasks:

> 1. A task is a workplan.
> 2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.
> 3. A task involves real-world processes of language use.
> 4. A task can involve any of the four language skills.
> 5. A task engages cognitive processes.
> 6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome.
> (Ellis, 2003: 9–10)

In a similar vein, Willis & Willis (2007, 2009) do not provide a '*watertight* definition' (2007: 13) of a task, but a set of criteria for determining how 'task-like' a given activity is:

> A task has a number of defining characteristics, among them: does it engage the learners' interest; is there a primary focus on meaning; is success measured in terms of non-linguistic outcome rather than accurate use of language forms; and does it relate to real world activities? The more confidently we can answer *yes* to each of these questions the more task-like the activity.
> (Willis & Willis, 2009: 4)

However, not everyone has found the Willis & Willis criteria particularly useful. For example, Harmer (2009: 173) considers these criteria 'less than helpful' and finds in this approach to defining tasks 'a lack of willingness to pin down exactly what is on offer' that is 'less than totally persuasive' (2009: 174). Many teachers can probably relate to Harmer's point. At least one study (Littlewood, 2007) has found that conceptual uncertainty about tasks and TBLT has affected its implementation in many East Asian EFL contexts.

The following provides teachers with a more precise definition of a language learning task. Samuda & Bygate (2008: 69) carefully consider the task definition literature before defining a second language pedagogic task as:

> ... a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both.

By being neither too restrictive nor too broad in terms of its processes and overall aim this definition provides the solid foundation needed to begin developing an understanding of task-based teaching.

2.3 Defining TBLT

TBLT is not a monolithic teaching method, but an adaptable approach to language teaching. As Ellis notes, 'there is no single way of doing TBLT' (2009: 224). A useful definition of TBLT and the one that will be used in this essay is provided by Samuda & Bygate, who write that task-based language teaching refers to 'contexts where tasks are the central unit of instruction: they "drive" classroom activity, they define curriculum and syllabuses and they determine modes of assessment' (2008: 58). Some more well-known examples of this conceptualisation of TBLT include Long and Crookes (1992), Skehan (1998) and Willis (1996). An example of a task-based learning framework, from Willis (1996), is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 A framework for task-based learning (Willis, 1996)

• **Pre-task**
- Teacher introduces topic and task
Task cycle
• **Task**
- Students carry out the task
• **Planning**
- Students plan how to report on task outcome
• **Report**
- Students report back to class
• **Language focus**
- Analysis
- Practice

3. Perspectives on TBLT

In assessing the benefits of using task-based teaching in my context it is necessary to consider existing perspectives on the approach, especially those relevant to Japanese EFL learners. This section will review such perspectives from the literature,

first considering arguments in favour of TBLT, before discussing critiques of the approach.

3.1 Arguments for TBLT

Some of the main arguments put forward in support of TBLT include:

- It is consistent with what is known about second language acquisition from the findings of SLA research (Ellis, 2003; Long & Crookes, 1992; Willis & Willis, 2007).
- It is designed to develop learners' abilities to engage in meaningful and fluent communication (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2009).
- It meets the need of learners to engage with meaning in order to develop a language system (Beglar & Hunt, 2002; Willis & Willis, 2009).
- It is intrinsically motivating as it provides many opportunities for learners to use the language that they know without penalising them for inevitable failures in accuracy (Willis & Willis, 2007).
- Learning through form-focused approaches, such as PPP, is likely to end in failure (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2007, 2009).

However, not everyone accepts these claims for the superiority of TBLT and it remains a controversial approach. I will now summarise some of the more prominent critiques of TBLT, first looking at general criticisms before presenting concerns more specifically relevant to Japanese EFL contexts.

3.2 General criticisms of TBLT

Some of the more well-known general criticisms of TBLT include:

- It is unsuitable for low-level learners (Bruton, 2002; Swan, 2005).

- It results in impoverished language use that is of little acquisitional value (Seedhouse, 1999).
- It lacks both theoretical and empirical support (Bruton, 2002; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005).
- It lacks sufficient focus on form (Burrows, 2008; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005).

3.3 Japan-relevant criticisms and concerns

While TBLT is used in Japan, doubts remain about its suitability for Japanese EFL contexts. Some Japan-relevant criticisms of TBLT include:

- It is unsuitable for EFL contexts where learners have no immediate need to use English outside the classroom (Sato, 2009; Sheen, 1994).
- It is unsuitable for the learning styles and expectations of Japanese learners (Burrows, 2008).
- It is demotivating for those Japanese learners focused on preparing for exams (Sato, 2009) or accustomed to viewing progress in terms of the gradual item-by-item approach exemplified by models such as PPP (Burrows, 2008).
- It can conflict with a Confucian-heritage culture where teachers are supposed to have authority over students (Hu, 2005; Sato, 2009).

Having summarised some key perspectives on task-based teaching, I will now discuss responses to criticisms of TBLT that are most relevant to my context.

3.4 Responses to criticisms of TBLT

A common theme in the literature defending TBLT is that much of the criticism is based on misconceptions of the approach. An example of this, from a pro-TBLT perspective at least, is the claim that task-based learning does not provide a sufficient

focus on form. For example, Burrows (2008: 19) criticises TBLT for its 'omission of a focus on form', while Swan (2005) claims that it 'outlaws' the grammar syllabus. However, examination of just a few task-based teaching frameworks (e.g. Samuda, 2001; Skehan, 1996; and Willis, 1996) reveals that they do have a focus on form, but unlike in the PPP model, it is sometimes placed in the middle (Samuda) or at the end (Willis) of the learning sequence rather than from the beginning. An example of this is the 'Language focus' stage of the Willis (1996) framework which was presented in Table 1.

Another criticism which defenders of TBLT argue is based on misunderstandings is the claim that using a task-based approach could result in language fossilisation rather than acquisition (Seedhouse, 1999). Seedhouse contends that the impoverished interaction often produced while performing tasks does not provide learners with a sufficient challenge to extend their linguistic abilities. However, Ellis (2009) rejects Seedhouse's criticism on two counts. Firstly, he argues that such interaction may be beneficial for beginners, as it encourages them to improve their capacity to make the most of their resources which, in turn, helps them develop their strategic competence. Secondly, Ellis claims that the nature of interactions during task performance depends on three factors: the proficiency level of the students, the design features of the task, and the method of implementation. He argues that there is 'plenty of evidence ... to show that tasks can result in highly complex language use' (Ellis, 2009: 229).

Claims that task-based teaching is unsuitable for low-level learners (Bruton, 2002; Swan, 2005) have also been rejected by TBLT advocates. Ellis (2009) and Willis & Willis (2007) argue that people with a limited grammar can often operate effectively enough in a second language and that TBLT can help them develop their grammar

system by providing opportunities to use the language resources that they have. Ellis also reminds readers that 'TBLT can be input-providing as well as output-prompting' and claims that there is substantial evidence showing that 'input-based approaches enable learners to develop not only the ability to comprehend input but also the grammatical resources they will need to speak and write' (Ellis, 2009: 237). Many examples of task-based approaches being used successfully with lower-level learners have also been described in books reporting case studies of TBLT (e.g. Edwards & Willis, 2005; Leaver & Willis, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). A recent Japanese example is a study by Little & Fieldsend (2009), where the use of tasks with low-level Japanese EFL learners appeared beneficial to their language development.

TBLT has been widely criticised for lacking both theoretical and empirical support (Bruton, 2002; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005). However, while the need for more empirical research into using tasks in the classroom has been acknowledged (Ellis, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008), several studies have addressed this issue. Examples of research demonstrating that tasks can be linked to language acquisition issues include Mackey (1999), Takimoto (2009) and various studies by Ellis and co-researchers (e.g. Ellis, Tanaka & Yamazaki, 1994; Ellis & Heimbach, 1997; Ellis & He, 1999). In a study of Japanese EFL learners, Takimoto (2009) found that English polite request forms could be effectively targeted by different input-based tasks and that completing these tasks resulted in learners improving their pragmatic proficiency as measured in pre-, post- and follow-up tests. Mackey (1999) reported similar success using tasks to target various question forms with learners in an ESL classroom setting.

The claim that TBLT is intrinsically motivating has been disputed by some Japan-based critics, who argue that the approach could demotivate those Japanese learners preparing for exams (Sato, 2009) or accustomed to viewing their progress in terms of the sequential acquisition of discrete language items (Burrows, 2008). However, a recent survey study of Japanese learners' demotivation to study English (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009) found the use of noncommunicative methods with an emphasis on grammar learning and examinations to be a significantly demotivating factor. Furthermore, Willis & Willis (2007) address the concerns of Sato and Burrows by showing how to adapt TBLT for learners preparing for form-focused exams and by explaining how their framework allows learners to see what they have learned, thus potentially increasing their motivation:

> Learners want to know why they have been studying, and this usually means they want to know what they have learned ... [We] need to show learners what learning opportunities they have been offered in a given lesson. By putting grammar at the end of the cycle there is every chance that we can increase motivation.
> (Willis & Willis, 2007: 25)

Another common criticism of TBLT is that it is unsuitable for input-deficient EFL environments (Sato, 2009; Sheen, 1994; Swan, 2005). For example, Sato (2009: 13) claims that activities such as imitation, pattern practice, drills and memorisation are 'essential for English learning in the input-scarce Japanese EFL environment' and considers PPP the most suitable approach for this context. However, Ellis (2009: 238) argues that TBLT is 'ideally suited' for what he terms 'acquisition-poor' environments. He states that in contexts where communication opportunities cannot be found in the wider community they need to be provided in the classroom and TBLT is a means of achieving this (Ellis, 2009: 238).

The opposing positions on this issue, as with several others in this debate, have their roots in the differing beliefs held on the role of explicit grammar instruction. Defenders of form-focused approaches believe that knowledge of grammatical structures is an essential prerequisite for communication. However, TBLT proponents maintain that this position is 'clearly wrong' (Ellis, 2009: 237), believing instead, like Vygotsky (1986), that people first try to communicate and, in the attempt, learn language. The merits of such differing views will now be considered further in assessing the benefits of implementing TBLT in my own context.

4. Implementing TBLT in a Japanese EFL context

In this section I will establish my context, before discussing the possible advantages and problems of implementing a task-based approach.

4.1 Context

My teaching context is a private language school located in a regional city in a rural area of Japan. The majority of adult learners are in the false beginner to low-intermediate range. Most adult learners attend one or two 75-minute lessons per week. Apart from one-to-one classes, most classes have between 4–6 learners. While coursebooks are prescribed for many classes, teachers generally have a great deal of autonomy in choosing teaching materials and methodology. However, general and business English lessons are expected to be communication-based and to foster learners' abilities to use English in 'real-world' situations. While such a context appears ideally suited to task-based learning, several factors, related to the individual learners, the specific learning environment, as well as the broader socio-cultural context, need to be considered in assessing the possible benefits of adopting TBLT.

4.2 Advantages

In this section I will discuss some of the potential advantages of implementing a task-based approach in my context. Interestingly, something which some critics have identified as a weakness of TBLT could in fact prove to be one of its greatest strengths in my context. As discussed, some writers (e.g. Sato, 2009; Sheen, 1994) argue that TBLT is unsuitable for input-deficient EFL environments. My own context is definitely such an environment. For most learners, their only interaction with English occurs in the classroom. Although some more motivated students actively seek input from other sources, naturally-occurring opportunities to encounter English in their daily lives are extremely rare.

It has been argued that a PPP-driven approach incorporating activities such as imitation and drills is 'essential' in the input-deficient Japanese environment (Sato, 2009; Yamaoka, 2006). However, despite having had six years of English instruction utilising such approaches most Japanese learners leave school with very limited communicative abilities. My own experience using such activities has also convinced me of their limited effectiveness. For example, there have been many instances of learners being able to accurately imitate my pronunciation of a problematic word only to regress to their previous pronunciation as soon as they used the word again in conversation.

Task-based learning, however, offers an alternative approach to the input problem of the Japanese EFL environment. As discussed, language learning tasks can be input-providing as well as output-prompting (Ellis, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007). The reported research (e.g. Mackey, 1999; Little & Fieldsend, 2009; Takimoto, 2009) indicates that the use of input-based tasks can also help learners improve their

performance of particular language functions. In addition, a task-based framework can provide further opportunities to address the input problem as learners could be asked to do input-based work outside of class, for example, reading or listening to a text in preparation for a writing task or an activity such as a discussion in a following lesson. If such tasks can be tailored to the needs and interests of learners this could also be more motivating than a wholly teacher-directed approach to providing input.

Another possible advantage of TBLT in my context is that it provides learners with opportunities for meaningful language use. Defenders of PPP argue that it also provides such opportunities. However, something which some TBLT proponents have pointed out (e.g. Willis & Willis, 2009) and I have observed in PPP-based classes myself is a tendency of both learners and teachers to be overly concerned with grammatical form, even during the 'production' stage when the focus should be on meaningful language use. A commonly observed example involves learners stopping mid-conversation to reformulate perfectly acceptable utterances in order to accurately produce a target item.

In some instances learners become so obsessed with accurately producing the target language that no meaningful communication takes place at all. An example of this from one of my classes concerned an activity which involved learners leaving and taking telephone messages. One learner was so engrossed in monitoring her own language use that she 'forgot' to listen to and take down her partner's message, meaning that from a communication perspective their interaction was a complete failure. I realised that this was not a fault of the task itself, but of how I had used it as a 'production' activity after presenting and practising examples of useful telephone expressions.

The adaptability of TBLT is another potential advantage in my context. If a flexible approach is utilised TBLT is very adaptable to learners' needs. As my context is as much a client-oriented business as it is a school, meeting learners' needs is extremely important. While it has been argued that approaches such as PPP are more suitable for Japanese EFL learners (Burrows, 2008; Sato, 2009) a methodology based on a fixed teaching sequence presenting a limited number of pre-selected language items appears less capable of taking learners' needs into account. For example, the presentation-practice-production cycle does not allow learners to demonstrate their communicative abilities until the final stage of the sequence. It is very possible that, unknown to the teacher, many learners were already very capable of using the language that valuable class time had been spent presenting and practising.

On the other hand, with a task-based learning sequence, such as that of Willis (1996) for example, learners get to use the language that they know early in the lesson. This allows the teacher to assess their needs and to adapt the following stages of the lesson accordingly. This would be especially advantageous in my context as class time is very limited, with many learners attending only one 75-minute lesson per week. Thus a flexible task-based approach allows not only for lessons to be adapted to meet individual learner's needs, but also for class time to be used more effectively for all learners.

The ability to increase motivation is one of the most commonly cited advantages of TBLT. However, as discussed, some critics have expressed concerns that task-based approaches may be demotivating for many Japanese learners (Burrows, 2008; Sato, 2009). As reported, these claims were contradicted by a recent study on demotivation (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009) which found the use of noncommunicative methods

emphasising grammar learning and exams to be significantly demotivating for Japanese EFL learners. In my own context, the main goal of learners is to be able to communicate effectively and I have very rarely encountered a student who felt that this was best achieved through form-focused methods. In fact, in line with the findings of Kikuchi & Sakai (2009), many learners have reported that the use of such methods in secondary school English classes had been highly demotivating. I have also observed that learners appear much more engaged when doing meaning-based tasks – an observation corroborated by feedback from the learners themselves. This has potential language acquisition benefits if, as Laufer & Hulstijn (2001) suggest, retention of previously unknown language is conditional on the level of involvement while processing the new words.

Having considered some of the possible advantages of adopting TBLT in my context, I will now discuss some potential problems with the approach.

4.3 Problems

While there appear to be several advantages in adopting TBLT in my context, there are also some potential problems which need to be taken into account. One such problem is related to learners' expectations and learning styles. Japanese learners are accustomed to learning in a teacher-centred education system which tends not to encourage learner autonomy or a high level of active participation (Burrows, 2008). However, most approaches to task-based learning require high levels of learner involvement. This can conflict with some learners' expectations and, as Burrows (2008) points out, dissatisfaction is likely when teaching is inconsistent with learner beliefs.

I have experienced this kind of student dissatisfaction on several occasions. One example involved a colleague who had a learner complain to her about being asked to do a task without first having been presented with the *exact* language the learners 'had to' use. An example from my own teaching concerned a student insisting that I write an entire model dialogue on the whiteboard, so that she would know what to say in a role play activity. Even after explaining the purpose of the activity and the reasons why it was important for the learner to use her own language she remained unconvinced. It was apparent in both of these cases that not only had the learners come to expect a PPP approach, they had become completely dependent on it and were therefore extremely resistant to alternative approaches. Although relatively rare in my experience, such cases suggest that there will always be some learners who, due to their expectations and learning styles, will find strongly learner-centred approaches to language learning problematic.

Another related potential problem with TBLT in my context concerns affective dimensions. Burrows (2008) argues that in Japan such 'is the strength of these dimensions that they often determine the level of participation among students, and even render opportunities to communicate and express feelings unproductive' (2008: 17). He claims that the consequence of this is that a more teacher-centred approach which may not be compatible with some forms of TBLT is necessary.

While Burrows offers no specific evidence for these claims, a study comparing the affective dimensions of two groups of Japanese EFL learners in urban and rural environments, Tani-Fukuchi & Sakamoto (2005), provides evidence which seems applicable to my context. This study found that more learners in the rural area (which shares many geographical, demographic and socio-cultural similarities with my own

location) claimed that they hid their English speaking ability; that they did not enjoy interacting with others in English class; that they tended to rehearse their answers before responding in class; and that they preferred to have other students practise something new before they did in classroom situations. The study suggests that these findings may be related to the relative lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom and learners in the rural area having slightly higher anxiety or reluctance to use English (Tani-Fukuchi & Sakamoto, 2005: 342).

The implications of such findings are that some learners may find approaches to TBLT requiring high levels of active participation and interaction quite stressful. However, this would be true of any communicative approach. And perhaps task-based learning, with its emphasis on meaningful language use rather than formal accuracy, provides a more encouraging environment for learners to use English in the classroom as it does not penalise them for any inevitable errors in accuracy (Willis & Willis, 2007), something which cannot be said of form-focused approaches such as PPP.

In fact, discussions with learners who felt anxious about speaking English in class has almost always uncovered that their anxiety resulted from previous negative learning experiences in strongly teacher-centred classes employing form-focused methods. I have found that this anxiety can usually be overcome once learners realise that they are not going to be punished for making mistakes, not understanding something or asking questions about the language.

5. Discussion and Implications for ELT in Japan

Careful consideration of the literature, knowledge of my context and my experiences using and observing various teaching approaches in the classroom has led me to conclude that TBLT can help more learners in my context to communicate

effectively in English. However, it is important to acknowledge that most of these learners are already highly motivated to use English for communication, which may not be true of learners in other contexts. For example, a high school student who has no desire to communicate in English and who is focused solely on passing exams will obviously not be motivated in the same way. The difficulties of using a task-based approach, or indeed any communicative approach, with this type of learner need to be acknowledged.

However, arguments that task-based approaches are not suitable for all Japanese EFL contexts due to such difficulties appear not only to be an overgeneralisation, but also based on making things easier for teachers rather than doing what is best for learners. While this is understandable to a degree, the reluctance of teachers to try new approaches is potentially depriving learners of opportunities to improve their English abilities. Innovation can be difficult and, as discussed, some approaches to task-based learning may not be suitable for all learners. However, it is equally apparent that existing practices, especially those employed in Japanese secondary schools, are failing to develop learners' abilities to communicate effectively in English.

A common defence of existing practices has been that it is more important to prepare learners for passing English exams than to develop their communicative abilities (Sato, 2009). However, as Japanese education policy now requires teachers to develop these abilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2003) and more exams are becoming communication-focused, such arguments can no longer be justified and the need to at least explore or revisit the possibilities of task-based learning is perhaps greater than ever.

6. Conclusion

The evidence provided by the published literature and my own experience suggests that adopting task-based learning in my context would result in more learners being able to communicate effectively in English. While some valid concerns have been raised about TBLT, especially regarding the affective dimensions, learning styles and expectations of Japanese EFL learners, many criticisms of the approach appear based on misunderstandings of what it actually entails. Much of the criticism of TBLT also focuses on its perceived difficulties for teachers, rather than its potential benefits for learners. However, given that most Japanese learners leave secondary school unable to express themselves well in English, there is clearly a need for change. And with a growing body of evidence of the successful use of TBLT in Japanese contexts, claims that it is a 'Western approach' unsuited to the Japanese learning environment can no longer be sustained. It is hoped that more teachers will explore task-based approaches in their classes and that more classroom-based research will be done to further assess the extent to which tasks can be instrumental in developing Japanese learners' abilities to communicate effectively in English.

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