Korean College Students’ and a Teacher-Participant’s Reactions to TBLT

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This study investigates two things: (a) students’ and a teacher-participant’s reactions to the task-based lesson and (b) ways to localize TBLT in a Korean context based on their responses. Given the fact that not many studies have tested the feasibility of TBLT in Asian EFL contexts, the findings of this study will contribute to the knowledge base of TBLT. A module of task-based summary writing, grounded in needs analysis, was created and implemented among Korean university students. To achieve a follow-up perspective, students’ reactions were collected through open-ended questionnaires which covered the new approach after implementation. A teacher-participant’s (an observer) observations were added for a more comprehensive view. Three prominent advantages of TBLT were found: (a) it offers an opportunity to work/learn with other students; (b) it helps students learn easily and effectively through step-by-step procedures; and (c) it promotes two-way learning between teachers and students. The two greatest concerns about this approach were students’ lack of participation and students’ doubts regarding student-generated knowledge. Ways to fit the new approach into the Korean context were discussed based on the findings.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rationale for task-based language teaching (TBLT) was to compensate for the limitations of “focus on forms” and “focus on meaning” approaches in L2 language teaching. The shortcomings of the focus on forms approach are that it ignores a learner’s internal syllabus so that a learner is forced to learn forms regardless of his/her readiness. This approach assumed that learners will synthesize the parts they have learned when they need them in communication (Long, 1985; Wilkins, 1976). The focus on meaning approach provides holistic samples of the target language with meaningful content, hoping
that the input is comprehensible to a learner. Examples of this approach are immersion education, the natural approach, and content-based instruction (Krashen, 1981a, 1981b). The shortcomings of this approach are that learners are lacking in accuracy in the target language. Accordingly, the focus on form approach was devised in order to compensate for the limitations of these two earlier approaches. TBLT is based on this alternative approach and is designed to increase a learner’s accuracy while dealing with meaningful content relevant to his/her needs (Long, 1985; Long & Norris, 2000; Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1998).

Along with balance between meaning and form, another rationale of TBLT is that it provides a connection between what a learner does in the class and how s/he would perform in the real world. Long (1985) defines a task as “the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between” (p. 89). Skehan (1998) lays out the four requirements for a task as: (a) meaning is primary; (b) there is a goal to be accomplished; (c) the task is outcome evaluated; (d) there is a real-world relationship. The Council of Europe (2001) stated that “tasks are a feature of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domains” (p. 157). Finally, Ellis (2003) synthesized various definitions as follows:

A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes. (p. 16)

Overall, a task, the basic unit of TBLT, is an activity closely related to the real world, designed to direct learners’ attention to meaning, and the outcome is evaluated in terms of how/whether a task is completed appropriately. Therefore, TBLT is an approach designed to teach a target language while engaging learners in a task with meaningful purposes, giving a learner motivation to perform.

Although the rationale of the TBLT approach seems to be logical and workable, the feasibility of this new approach needs to be tested in various Asian contexts where different cultural and educational backgrounds exist (Carless, 1997, 2004; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007). The importance of local context is confirmed by many cases because it appears that teaching methods or approaches evolved in the west are not always
appropriate in Asian contexts. Many studies have shown that a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach does not work well in most Asian countries. Samimy and Kobayashi (2004) explained why CLT was not working in Japan, while Degen and Absalom (1998) indicated why CLT did not fit a Chinese context, and Li (1998) demonstrated Korean secondary English teachers' difficulties in implementing CLT in a Korean context. After studying their situations carefully, Nunan (2003) and Li (1998) suggested that Korea and other similar EFL Asian-Pacific countries needed to adapt the CLT approach to their local teaching circumstances. Accordingly, knowing a local context is the most important step before implementing any new teaching methods or approaches.

Some studies have shown that there are cases where western-based teaching approaches have been successfully adapted into learners' local contexts. Ouyang (2000) presented the story of an innovative teacher in mainland China. She experienced difficulties implementing a CLT approach in rural schools and finally adapted the CLT approach to her local context by using both L1 and L2 and mixing traditional grammar translation and CLT methods. Sullivan (2000) also discussed an example of a localized CLT approach in a university in Vietnam: instead of trying to fit into an Anglo-Saxon ideological system and after considering classroom physical constraints and a heritage of play with language, the teacher and students adapted the approach into teacher-fronted CLT, that is, a teacher-led playful oral narrative style instruction. Canagarajah (1999) described how local teachers and students in Sri Lankan classrooms adapted CLT and task-based approaches in order to suit their longstanding teacher-fronted instruction style. These examples show that people in the English language teaching profession need to be more sensitive to local exigencies and needs and to be reflective of local needs and constraints in order to meet realistic educational goals.

To date, a few studies have investigated TBLT-related areas in a Korean EFL context. Seung-Min Lee (2005) discussed pros and cons of TBLT in elementary schools, based on lesson extracts. He argued that a strong task-based approach may not be appropriate for elementary learners of English. He suggested that, based on the learners' proficiency, form-focused instruction needs to be inserted in the task cycle and students should be trained in meaning negotiation skills to achieve effective task-based learning. In-Jae Jeon (2005) analyzed task-based materials in first year high school English textbooks. Besides, using a questionnaire, he also investigated, according to five categories, participants' satisfaction with tasks using the materials (goals and rationale; input data; classroom settings; activity types; and activity themes). The findings suggested that (a) goals and rationale should be made more explicit to encourage learners' motivation; (b) authenticity of input should reflect real world situations; (c) group work oriented to problem-solving rather than individual or pair work needs to be included; and (d) types of tasks and themes need to be proportionally distributed based on learners' needs and interests. AeJin Kang
(2007) compared Content-Based Instruction (CBI) with Task-Based Instruction (TBI), using a questionnaire, speaking and writing abilities, and students’ course evaluation. Twenty English majors in a TBI course and 12 students from mixed majors in a CBI course participated in the present study. The findings showed that students in the CBI course seemed to be more motivated to use the language, as well as attaining content knowledge. For suggestions for CBI, teachers’ feedback was recommended both on content and in the linguistic area. For improving TBI, a customized syllabus based on students’ needs was suggested in order to motivate them better.

It seems that, in addition to these previous studies, more research is needed to test the new teaching approach before being implemented on a large scale in order to find ways to fit it into specific contexts. The present paper has two purposes. The first objective is to investigate students’ and a teacher-participant’s reactions to the task-based approach. It is important to evaluate this new approach for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness in both teaching and learning since teachers can obtain valuable information from students. The second objective is, based on participants’ reactions, to find ways to localize a TBLT approach in a Korean context. Given the fact that there are still only limited studies that have tested the feasibility of TBLT in a Korean EFL context, the findings of this study will provide a good data base for the feasibility of a classroom-level and program-level TBLT approach in tertiary institutions in Korea. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the following two research goals: (a) learners’ and a teacher-participant’s reactions towards a task-based lesson; and (b) a search for ways to localize a TBLT approach in Korean tertiary institutions.

This paper is organized into three sections. Instructional context and needs analysis is explained in order to show the basis of the summary writing materials. Based on the needs analysis, a module of tasks is produced and presented. Then, reactions of students and an observer (a teacher-participant) towards a TBLT approach are discussed. Finally, ground upon their reactions, ways to localize a TBLT approach was suggested.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXT AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

The instructional context of the present study was an English Reading 1 course at a university in Korea during winter session. The curriculum of the current English reading program was a mixture of grammar-translation and a CLT approach. In total, 26 students were enrolled in this English reading course and they were from all grade levels and various majors. Ms. Kim was teaching this course, one that I also used to teach. She and I agreed about problems that students in this level may have. One of their challenges was summary writing. She mentioned that she often assigns her students to write a summary of
an article or story that students had read in class, but that they do not know how to summarize effectively. When I suggested that she use the task-based module I had created for summary writing, she proposed that I teach this part of her class instead since I know more about the materials. I asked her to observe and provide feedback on my teaching. She was willing to participate as an observer (a teacher-participant).

One of the goals of this study was to improve Korean college students’ summary writing skills. Summary writing was one of the academic literacy skills they needed for academic success. It was a necessary skill for college students to succeed in other subject areas, not to mention in English reading courses. Students were involved in a lot of summary writing in the course to improve their comprehension and their general writing skills. Previous studies on summary writing indicated that Korean college students need to learn how to write a summary through explicit instruction. Prochaska and Young-In Moon (2004) investigated Korean college students’ summary writing experiences and revealed that most of the participants had not received any type of writing instruction throughout their primary and secondary school years in their L1, not to mention their L2. Sung-Ae Kim (1998a) and Sung-Ae Kim (1998b) further supported Prochaska and Young-In Moon’s (2004) claim that Korean college students are lacking formal education in summary writing. They all pointed out that summarization skills have to be explicitly instructed since these skills develop through practicing summary writing, not through anything else.

A summary writing task was chosen based on the students’ real-world needs. A student needs analysis was conducted while observing Ms. Kim’s class in order to get familiar with her students before testing the materials. A written survey was produced in order to check students’ current and future needs and previous education in summary writing. They were asked two questions: (a) why do you need summary writing skills other than this course; and (b) have you ever learned how to write a summary? Twenty-two students participated in the survey since four students were absent on that day. Table 1 presents my summary statements of their data. Frequency refers to row occurrence of each type of remark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current/Future Needs</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Besides English reading courses, other content subjects sometimes request summarizing assignments.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a useful and valuable study skill in my daily life (eg., I summarize a lot for the sake of efficiency when studying or preparing reports. Summarizing helps me understand my readings).</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is good to know this skill because I may need it when preparing presentations and reports at work after graduation.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It may be helpful in my graduate study later.</td>
<td>4</td>
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**TABLE 1**

Results of Students’ Survey on Summary Writing

Students’ Responses                                           Frequency
Previous Formal Education

- It seems I learned in middle or high school but I do not know how now because I was not taught how to do it through hands-on practice (lecture type instruction).
- I do not remember well but it seems that I was taught in the elementary years.
- I learned about picking out main ideas in high school in preparation for the college entrance exam (lecture type instruction).
- I do not have any formal instruction on this.

As shown in Table 1, students indicated four types of needs in summary writing. Most of them reported that they need summary writing skills in other content subjects although the frequency may be different depending on subject areas. They expressed that knowing summary writing skills is a useful study skill since they need it widely in their everyday lives for tasks such as writing reports, preparing for exams, and comprehending reading materials. In addition, this skill will also be useful when they get a job since they may need to summarize documents, reports, and articles either in Korean or English. Furthermore, some students who think of going to graduate school indicated that summary writing would be important in pursuing graduate studies, although the amount of summary writing they will do may depend on their majors.

In the case of students' previous formal education in summary writing, most of them had not been taught how to write a summary in a formal manner. Five students reported that they never had any formal instruction on this and six students said that they hardly remember whether they were taught but it was probably during elementary school, if ever. The rest appear to have learned how to find the main ideas in preparation for a college entrance exam or they were taught the skills through lectures without hands-on practice. Overall, the results of the student survey indicate that they need to be taught summary writing through hands-on experience, not by lecture alone.

III. A TASK-BASED LESSON MODULE

Based on the findings of the needs analysis, a module of task-based materials was produced in preparation for a task-based lesson of two days duration. The framework of the task-based lesson is based on Ellis (2003). It consists of three phases: pre-task, during task, and post-task. Ellis mentioned that only the during-task phase is obligatory, and pre-task and post-task phases are non-obligatory. However, the latter two have an important role in maximizing learners' performances for the sake of language development. According to Norris, Brown, Hudson, and Yoshioka (1998), a task may involve a great number of steps or embedded sub-tasks. A target task can be further divided into a target
type task and a pedagogic (sub-) task for the sake of efficiency. A pedagogic task is “simple approximations of gradually increasing task” on the way to completing the target task type, and is indirectly related to real-life tasks according to learner needs. For example, “serving breakfast, serving lunch, serving dinner and serving snacks and refreshments” are a series of sub-tasks or pedagogic tasks which may be classified into a type task, serving food and beverages (Long & Crookes, 1993, p. 40).

The role of the teacher in TBLT is either to monitor or facilitate learners from a distance and to provide assistance when learners need help. The role of students is to learn in an independent setting by experimenting with the language through various tasks (Willis, 1996). The module of tasks that follow is presented with information on how the tasks are sequenced, how long they take, and how they are implemented in the class. The instruction took two days, with two hours in each class.

1. Pre-Task Phase

A pre-task phase exists to ready students for the during-task phase. The purpose of this pre-task phase is to provide inputs and skills needed for a smooth transition to an actual task. The pre-task for the current model consists of four tasks: input task, schematization task, genre analysis task, and selecting a best summary task.

1) Input Task (15 min.)

Two example summaries were chosen to provide inputs to students. Summaries of *A Christmas Carol* and *Forrest Gump* were selected from the books and polished a little. Then, the texts were glossed in Korean for difficult words in order to assist comprehension. This sub-task is to make students observe a model by presenting them with an example of the ideal performance of the task (Ellis, 2003).

**Instruction:** A teacher distributed the summaries of *A Christmas Carol* and *Forrest Gump* and let students read them. Then, the teacher and students discussed the contents of the stories. They talked about general things briefly, such as do you remember the stories; when did you read them; and to what extent do the summaries remind you of the stories?

2) Schematization Task (10 min.)

This sub-task is to recall students’ content schema or background knowledge about a summary if they have any. According to Ellis (2003), giving non-task activities is one among four alternatives available as pre-task activities. The idea, in this case, is to prepare them to perform a task by activating learners’ content schemata, to facilitate the next step.
Besides, when learners know what they are going to do, they have more processing space available for the language they need.

**Instruction:** Students were asked to pair up and share their thoughts about the following two questions: what is a good summary; what is the purpose of writing a summary? Then the whole class shared their thoughts and the teacher listed their ideas one by one on the chalkboard.

3) A Genre Analysis Task (30 min.)

Students had already received inputs through two sample summaries. However, they also needed to study a summary of a book chapter because they often are asked to write a chapter summary in class. A genre analysis task is inserted in order to model how to analyze a piece of text. Students need to internalize the particular genre (summary) in order to reproduce it appropriately. In this respect, a genre analysis helps learners understand different features of discourse about a summary.

**Instruction:** Students were asked to read the first two chapters of a book (graded readers), *Gone With the Wind*, and were given a summary of them. Then, students, in small groups of three, were asked to compare the ideas they came up with in the schema building task with what they saw in the actual examples, in terms of text structure, language style, and functional aspects of genre (text content, author’s purpose). After that, as they shared their thoughts as a whole class, the teacher revised the key features of a good summary on the chalkboard. Students also discussed differences between the two former summaries and the summary of the book chapter from *Gone With the Wind*.

4) Selecting a Best Summary Task (25 min.)

This sub-task seeks to check whether students know how to apply what they have learned from previous sub-tasks (1, 2, 3) and also to get ready for the next phase, the during-task. The story was chosen from a well-known Korean folk tale in order not to disturb students with an unfamiliar topic. So far, students had received inputs, thought about features of a good summary, and analyzed the genre. They needed to check, in a less challenging situation, whether they knew how to apply these tasks. Accordingly, they were instructed to choose a good summary instead of writing one. In other words, they completed a similar but easier task than the forthcoming main task.

**Instruction:** In small groups of three, students were asked to carry out the ensuing sub-tasks one by one. Then, the teacher went over the answers with them in order to confirm whether and what they had learned of summary writing and to review some of the points so far.
Sub-Task A) Read *The Queen Swallow's Gift* and choose the best summary among three examples given and discuss why.
Sub-Task B) Discuss with your partners how the other summaries are written.

2. During-Task Phase (25 min.)

During-task is the phase in which learners will attempt this kind of task on their own out in the real world. A type task (summary writing) is broken down into three sub-tasks in order to reduce the learners' cognitive load and to help them manage their work more efficiently. A type task is a representative task made up of several common linguistic and non-linguistic features that share among sub-tasks (Avermaet & Gysen, 2006). In other words, the task leads them to write a summary step by step. Through the three stages, students are led to focus on meaning (content). Steps 1 and 2 help students gather material and organize it in the hopes of making the drafting stage (step 3) easier. After finishing the task, students submitted their summaries to the teacher for feedback.

1) Type Task: Writing a chapter summary

**Instruction:** Read chapter 3 of the book and complete the following sub-tasks alone.
Step 1. What is the main idea of the chapter? Write it down.
Step 2. Read the story again quickly, underline the important ideas of the story, and then list the main points below.
Step 3. Write a first draft of your summary in your own words based on your notes.

2) Providing Feedback (20 min.)

On the second day, each student received his/her summary back with the teacher's written feedback. Overall, the feedback was concerned with organization and how to present material in a condensed form without missing any important ideas in the chapter. The purpose of giving feedback was twofold: (a) to make sure students were on the right track; (b) to find out the most prominent learner-generated errors (including grammatical and mechanical mistakes) to prepare for further instruction. The individual feedback would help them think again about their problems and give them an opportunity to improve their performances when revising. Regarding conspicuous errors made by many students, the teacher addressed them explicitly before the whole class.
3. Post-Task Phase

After the feedback, a post-task was given to the students. This stage was designed to help students focus on complexity and accuracy by repeating the task from the during-task phase. According to Ellis (2003), a post-task may have three pedagogic goals: (a) to provide an opportunity to repeat performance of the task; (b) to encourage reflection on how the task was performed; and (c) to encourage attention to forms. This task was also broken down into two sub-tasks for the sake of efficiency. Sub-task A was to make students reflect and learn actively about their performance by sharing feedback one to another. In other words, this process was to teach them to be aware of their errors in a salient way by talking out problems and listening to one another. Sub-task B was designed to increase accuracy and complexity by revising and elaborating based on the previous stage. In this stage, students may be able to: organize the summary clearly, try to find new wordings to express meaning more exactly, and try to avoid any mistakes, since they submit their summaries to the teacher for a grade. Thus, sub-task B encourages students to focus on accuracy and probably on complexity (Willis, 1996).

Type Task: Revising a summary
Sub-Task A. Sharing feedback with others (20 min.)
Instruction: Students were asked to form a small group of three and to share the written feedback they had received from the teacher with one another.

Sub-Task B. Revising a summary individually (35 min.)
Instruction: Students were asked to revise their summaries. Based on what they had learned through written feedback and sharing with their peers, they had to revise them by themselves and to submit them to the teacher for assessment.

For assessment, students were asked to email their revised summary to her and also to the substitute teacher for her own reference.

IV. REACTIONS TO THE TASK-BASED LESSON

After the instruction on the second day of the lesson, a retrospective written survey was conducted in order to get reactions towards this task-based lesson. I wanted to know students’ and a teacher-participant’s impressions of a task-based lesson in general. I was curious to investigate whether my materials were properly constructed and appropriate to the students.
1. Students' Reactions

The students were asked to provide written feedback of their general opinions of the TBLT lesson. Twenty-three of the students participated in this evaluation. Most students provided paragraph-long comments in Korean on the new approach after completing the lesson on summary writing. Their feedback was categorized into advantages, concerns, and suggestions, and was presented with frequency of response. Table 2 presents my summary statements of their data. Frequency refers to row occurrence of each type of remark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
<th>Students’ Overall Evaluation of a Task-Based Approach</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students’ Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• It offers an opportunity to learn/work with other students.</td>
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<td>• Students can be taught easily and effectively due to the step-by-step procedure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Instruction is two-way between teachers and students whereas the traditional method was a one-way instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It makes students responsible for their learning since they have to express their thoughts in many ways through group work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It makes students actively think/reflect on their work.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Difficulties/Concerns</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It takes more class time to learn compared to the traditional method.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• If students are reluctant to participate in the tasks, this approach may not be effective.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It may take time to get used to a task-based approach for those who have been used to traditional one-way instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Suggestions</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• It may be more effective if task-based instruction is combined with the traditional method.</td>
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Students provided a positive view of a task-based approach in the form of a long list of advantages. The three prominent advantages of task-based learning were found to be: (a) encouragement of student participation; (b) effective learning through several guided steps; (c) and two-way instruction between teachers and learners. The following are examples of students’ typical responses.

I like this approach because it requires students’ participation, compared to the traditional method. It makes me reflect while performing each task. I also learn a
lot from others through pair/small group work.

I liked it because it was interactive in many aspects; I had to participate in small group/pair work. This is not one-way instruction where students receive something from a teacher in the way I have been used to. I could learn how to write a summary easily through step-by-step procedures.

Students’ two main concerns were that they were not used to such interactive learning and that the process was more time consuming. Their first concern was that the new approach may not be effective if students are not used to group work since most of the activities emphasized student-centered learning.

Considering the Korean educational/cultural background, I can see that student participation is not as active as it is supposed to be. Since we are not used to learning by discussing or sharing our thoughts, it may take a while to get used to this type of learning. I myself had a little difficulty adjusting to the new approach. I think a teacher needs to find ways to motivate us to participate actively in small group work.

Another concern was that learning summary writing seemed to take more time than with the traditional method since the skill was taught through several tasks. The finding is aligned with McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007), who reported testing of TBLT in a Thai context. Thai teachers also expressed that too many tasks were assigned for each lesson.

I have learned that this approach requires much more time, compared to a traditional lecture type, for learning something (e.g., summary writing) since it involves a series of tasks. We have many other things to learn and to do in the class, and I wonder whether the number of tasks can be cut down. It seems it takes too much time and effort to go through the eight steps.

As for suggestions, a few students mentioned that the new approach might be better if it was combined with the traditional method, and they expect to see a more authoritative teacher role when summarizing each task before moving on to the next ones. Regarding the schematization task, nine students suggested in their reaction to the module that they preferred having a teacher-led lecture after students’ discussions. It appears that they do not trust self-generated knowledge or information. They prefer hearing what authoritative scholars have said in an area. The following is an example of students’ typical responses.
When summarizing features of a good summary, it was good to gather ideas from other students. One thing that I missed is that I hoped a teacher would go over the list one by one. It might have been better or more effective if the teacher could have stressed or explained explicitly what is really important, in the form of a lecture.

Similarly, the vast majority of the students seemed to appreciate when a teacher provided written feedback on their writing. Students reported that the teacher’s written feedback was very helpful in revising their summaries. On the other hand, they do not seem to appreciate the peer feedback which is done as part of post-task activity. They did not express appreciation of peer comments. One typical students’ response is the following:

I really liked having the teacher’s written feedback on my summary. I could see better ways to improve my summary based on the teacher’s suggestions. Although it may be a lot of work for a teacher to provide feedback for each individual, I hope to have this type of feedback continuously.

2. Teacher-Participant’s (Observer’s) Reaction

Right after the lesson, I interviewed Ms. Kim and gathered further information via email. She was asked the following question: “What do you think about the new approach?” She first talked about advantages of the new approach as follows:

First of all, this approach seems to make students think and work a lot as they complete a series of tasks, as a group or individually. Compared to traditional lecture-type instruction, students appear to learn to manage their own learning more independently, as they complete each task. Accordingly, students may learn to value the knowledge they have constructed by themselves as they perform tasks, for example, the good features of a summary. In other words, they are not just passively accepting the list of good features of a summary transmitted from a well-known academic authority. They may learn to appreciate their own active construction of solutions as time goes on. Since Korean students are lacking in this kind of ability, it is a good way to promote an independent/voluntary learning attitude in the class.

Advantages that she mentioned are in alignment with what students indicated: (a) encouraging students’ participation; (b) making students complete tasks step by step
through a series of tasks; and (c) promoting independent and voluntary learning through two-way instruction. She further elaborated on the point that TBLT enables students to think and work as a group as well as individually. She explained that Korean college students have been used to a lecture type of teaching, a one-way information delivery teaching method, for a long time. A teacher is seen as a person who transmits knowledge formulated by an academic authority to his/her students. For example, in teaching a summary using the traditional method, a teacher would give students a well-organized list of good features of a summary from references, and they would take the knowledge, memorize it, and try to use it when it comes to writing a summary some day. She thinks that a task-based approach seems very different since students themselves gain experience in constructing the knowledge of a good summary while completing tasks one by one, whereas the traditional method seems to make students passive.

Ms. Kim seems certainly to appreciate the new approach, commenting that it is an effective way to make students more active participants in their learning, an area in which most Korean students are relatively lacking compared to those from western culture. However, in the following comment, she also expressed her concerns by pointing out that this does not mean that the new approach is better or superior to the traditional method for Korean students:

A learning community such as a university is part of this country, and thus it is under the influence of the Korean culture that all Koreans have been accustomed to for a long time. For example, there is a subordinate relationship between a teacher and a learner. Students may see learning as a process where they receive knowledge or information from their teachers. Consequently, new knowledge constructed by themselves through discussion may be seen as doubtful information, that is, not 100 percent reliable. For example, they may feel a little insecure about the list of good features of summaries that they came up with because it was not given by the teacher, a messenger who selects/delivers the knowledge of an academic authority. So, I believe that it might be better if we combine the new approach and the traditional method for the sake of effectiveness. For example, we can include lectures whenever necessary while letting students follow a complete series of tasks. Regarding the list of good features of summaries, a teacher may give students a brief lecture after recruiting the listing from students.

Ms. Kim judges that immediately adopting a new approach (learner-centeredness) seems a little radical or revolutionary for the present situation because Korean students have been accustomed to teacher-fronted class for a long time. Equally importantly, it is
hard to expect that Korean students will change their thoughts about an ideal teacher all of sudden with the introduction of a new teaching approach, since their views of what an effective learning situation is are deeply rooted in an educational culture that has existed for many centuries. Considering the cultural and educational context, she proposes an eclectic approach by combining student-centered learning and teacher-fronted lessons.

V. LOCALIZING TBLT

Students’ and an observer’s reactions towards a task-based lesson suggest that the new approach needs to be localized in three areas in order to fit into the Korean context: (a) keeping the teacher’s authoritative voice; (b) encouraging small group work; and (c) reducing the number of tasks.

First, the students and observer expressed that a teacher needs to keep a traditional authoritative voice while advocating student-centered learning. Due to their own cultural and educational backgrounds, Korean students may not deeply trust learner generated answers or solutions. The relationship between a teacher and a student is not horizontal; rather, it is vertical. To Korean students, a teacher is someone who has directive and authoritative roles in what and how to teach. Accordingly, “a good teacher is one who knows what is useful and important to the students, has an intimate knowledge of the students’ level, carefully prepares lessons, and has all the correct answers all the time” (Hu, 2002, p. 99). In other words, teachers are seen as knowledge or information providers in a vertical relationship.

Students’ expectations of teachers’ authoritative and directive roles are greatly influenced by systems of thought in Confucianism and Buddhism, which value conformity, obedience, and passivity. Such values are regarded as fundamentals in every aspect of education as well as in other aspects of their lives. Because of the strong influence of the Confucian system of learning, students have been trained to show profound respect for their teachers. Accordingly, it is not likely, since it has been rooted for a long time, that Korean students’ expectations towards their teacher’s role will change all of sudden (Song, 1995). If a teacher just monitors or facilitates their work and moves on without providing any form of lecture, the students may feel uncertain about what they have been learning. In other words, both students and a teacher-participant were of opinions that it may be more effective if a teacher keeps to the role of knowledge provider aligned with students’ involvement. Students want to check or confirm solutions through their teacher’s affirmative voice even after discovering solutions through their own group work.

For example, in the schematization and genre analysis tasks, students can complete each task as a small group and, at the same time, it may be better for a teacher to go over the list
that students come up with, along with the teacher’s elaborations. When wrapping up each task, the teacher needs to provide affirmative explanations. It seems wise to combine student-centered learning and a teacher-fronted style for the sake of effectiveness. Some studies have also demonstrated that going contrary to learners’ cultural and educational norms or beliefs in instruction may be ineffective (e.g., Degen & Absalom, 1998; Fang & Warschauer, 2004). McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) also suggested adaptation of a task-based approach after testing it in a Thai context, in order to help both learners and teachers.

Second, a task-based approach assumes student-centered learning, that is, students’ active participation. Consequently, if students are reluctant to participate in small group work, this approach cannot succeed. In general, Korean college students are not used to student-centered learning due to their unique cultural and educational beliefs and norms. Most teaching methods, such as CLT and TBLT, which have evolved in western countries, encourage active participation thorough small group work. This is a natural approach for most people from western countries since they are relatively expressive and verbal. Some of Korean students expressed that they were shy and uneasy because most of the activities required group work. Interestingly, at the same time, many of them requested that students be pushed to get engaged in group work: a teacher needs to find a way to motivate students’ participation. Accordingly, a teacher needs to help students get used to small group activities in the class. Although it may not be possible to make all students participate actively all of sudden, they may get better gradually as they get used to this type of learning.

Third, the number of tasks needs to be adjusted according to class time allotment. A task often consists of a series of sub-tasks in order to teach students the procedure step by step. However, these systematic procedures can endanger efficiency with respect to time. As students have mentioned, the whole procedure took a long time. Given the fact that a class meets for only three hours a week during a regular semester, the length of time taken seemed a bit overwhelming for teaching summary writing skills. Accordingly, the number of tasks needs to be reduced. For example, out of eight sub-tasks, two of them can be removed. The schematization task can be deleted since four types of pre-task seemed a little much and the genre analysis task can cover much of the same material. The first post-task (sharing feedback with one another) can be removed since Korean students seem to appreciate a teacher’s feedback more in revising their summaries.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the whole, students’ reactions towards a task-based approach turned out to be
positive, although they did mention a few pitfalls. They commented on more advantages with the new approach than concerns. The observer (teacher-participant) also expressed positive views—that a task-based approach has a lot of potential. However, both students and observer pointed out a few concerns regarding this new approach: keeping the teacher’s authoritative voice, encouraging students’ active participation, and reducing the number of task.

Before implementing a new approach or method in English language teaching, knowing and understanding the local context is the most crucial factor since it is connected to the success of the change in instruction and the curriculum. One of the major local conditions may be the learners’ educational and cultural backgrounds because they are deeply rooted in ideology and culture. Although learner-centered learning has been encouraged for the last decade, teacher-fronted instruction is still common in Korea. Consequently, students’ views of an ideal teacher have not been changed much. Students’ previous education has also played an important role in shaping their behavior in the classroom. Interestingly, many of the students requested that students be pushed to get engaged in group work. Thus, a teacher may need to find ways to reorient students toward a new role for students and toward the nature of language learning in the class (Li, 1998).

Overall, considering the unique Korean context, evolutionary adaptation appears to be wiser than revolutionary adoption in order to minimize the risk of failure. It seems wise to combine student-centered learning and a teacher-fronted style at the present time for the sake of effectiveness. Adopting a western-based approach blindly may bring about chaos, as many previous studies on the CLT approach in Asian contexts have demonstrated. True educational change involves many aspects, such as a teacher, a learner, the educational physical environment, previous educational backgrounds, and cultural differences. Rather than simply jumping onto the new innovation, Korean EFL teachers need to carefully study their situations and decide how TBLT can best serve their needs and interests (Li, 1998).

However, it seems that, in order to draw clearer conclusions on its feasibility in a Korean context, we need more studies, especially longitudinal studies, to test the TBLT approach. Then, based on the findings from these studies, we may need to test a localized TBLT approach for some time in order to refine and pinpoint the best method within a Korean context. The accumulated findings from these further studies may build a valuable basis for implementing TBLT on a program level in Korean tertiary institutional contexts. Equally important, all the findings from the above studies will shed light on the feasibility and adaptability of the TBLT approach in Asian EFL contexts.
REFERENCES


Applicable level: tertiary
Key words: reactions to TBLT, attitudes toward a TBLT approach, localizing TBLT

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Received in June 2008
Reviewed in July 2008
Revised version received in August 2008