

A Task-Based Lesson Plan for Teaching Writing Application Letter to Undergraduate Students

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Abstract— Writing, one of the productive skills, is a vital role for students at tertiary level. Hence, undergraduate level students need to achieve the writing competency to prepare their application letters. This ability assists interns to apply the jobs needed to gain experience or courses they want to join with their related fields. This paper is an attempt to provide EFL teachers an innovative technique in teaching application letter writing by sharing a sample of lesson plan of TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching). In this paper, TBLT, a dynamic method that consists of a wide range of activities, motivates students' interest and produces powerful students' learning outcomes has been used for teaching writing application letter to undergraduate students in line with the requirement of the sustainable development in higher education. Students have achieved collaborative skill, problem-solving skill, critical thinking skill, and enabled to create their own application letter writing through TBLT. From the pedagogical point of view, unlike the traditional teaching techniques, the challenges and benefits of implementing TBLT in classroom have been discussed.

Keywords— lesson plan, TBLT, undergraduate students, writing application letter, sustainable development

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is necessary for students to develop a high level of English skills. As a result of this, students have to take English Subject as a compulsory course up to four years at undergraduate level. They have also to apply internship program before graduation thesis. Most of the students have faced the challenges how to write the appropriate application letters in accordance with their needs and wants. Mastering in English helps students to be confident to join the internship program that they desire and to apply it their prospective career after graduation. Consequently, teachers are responsible for innovating an effective teaching technique to be sustainable development in higher education.

This study came from the classroom of teaching writing application letter through the Task-Based Learning Teaching (TBLT) that involves activities or tasks to encourage students' motivation. There were 40 fourth year students at Technological University (Mandalay) (TUM) as a part of the target student group.

The aim of this paper is to share EFL teachers an innovative technique in teaching application letter writing by sharing a sample of lesson plan of TBLT. The objective of this lesson plan is to help students know the useful language of letters of application and to help them write their own application letter based on their requirements in the future developments.

In this paper, Task-Based Learning Teaching method (TBLT) has been applied to teach application letter writing

to students. A lesson plan is prepared to cope with a task-based language teaching (TBLT) and involves evaluation rubrics from theoretical and practical perspectives. TBLT is based on a variety of activities or tasks that can motivate students' interest in learning, encourage them to participate in classroom activities by giving them the ideal facts and knowledge initially, develop their critical thinking, and produce their own work effectively and efficiently (Willis J. , 1996). Tasks conducted in lesson should also be authentic in order to generate students' productive skill in real situation.

In short, this paper includes a model of TBLT lesson plan and samples of evaluation rubric how to assess students' work, authentic material and particular activities involved in. Eventually, discussion of challenges and effectiveness of this lesson plan is presented in this paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is one of the productive skills that students need to master and is also the most challenging work for students. In the present language classroom, the Grammar-Translation Method (GM) that enables students to memorized translations of words and conjugations of verbs, and the Direct Method (DM) that enables students to learn the target language with a little bit of coaching have mostly often been applying. It is thought that while the GM provides reading skill and writing skill, the DM promotes listening skill and speaking skill. Therefore, EFL teachers must constantly find the powerful technique to fulfil the students' needs and wants in line with requirement of the teaching techniques and classroom situation.

After recognizing many benefits of TBLT, most of the teachers believe that using TBLT in language classroom enables to fulfil students' English four skills through the classroom activities or tasks that teachers control a bit and let students the owners of the classroom. As a teacher, it is necessary to define tasks that are activities in classroom for students freely to do, gain rewards to use outside the classroom (Jack C. Richards, 2002). Thus, a framework of TBLT (Willis J. , 1996), presented details of framework in Methodology, is suitable for preparing the lesson for students to get involved in classroom tasks. TBLT is a powerful method to teach students English for specific purpose. That is why TBLT is chosen to apply in this paper.

Next, in recent year, the traditional approach in which teachers provide information and instruction how to do the task is transformed into a learner-centred one that produces students' own creation. Task-based learning emphasizes on a learner-centeredness and provides connection with students' performance and real world task. While the learner-centred approach is similar to the traditional designing curricula, it differs from the information of

students, possibility, initial planning, implementation, assessment and evaluation. Learning outcomes will be affected by students' attitudes about what they contribute to task, their perceptions of the situation in which they carry out the task, and their views what the nature of the task is (Nunan, 2004). In addition to the different views of students in doing activities, there will be the different responsibilities and roles assigned to teachers and students. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare the lesson through a suitable sequencing of task in order to use task as a basic part of teaching and incorporate students' learning strategies.

Furthermore, according to the taxonomy of task types that consists of six types of tasks – listing, ordering, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences and creative tasks, the task generator helps the teacher to be able to make a useful lesson plan based on the syllabus or the course book (Willis D. W., 2007). To teach application letters, the teacher selects the activities in a sequential order to reach the ending as effective as possible (matching, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences and creative tasks). By the end of the lesson, students will arouse the problem-solving skill and reach their own creation.

III. METHODOLOGY

The 40 participants were fourth year full time students at TUM who took part in the classroom activities. The Task-Based Language Teaching method (TBLT) has been used for teaching writing application letter and motivating students' interest in language learning and achieving the target outcomes. A lesson plan of TBLT and two types of evaluation rubric concerned with the lesson have also been designed for teaching procedure, assessment or feedback of students' work and task analysis. The framework for TBLT, the implementation of lesson plan, evaluation of the lesson plan and students' performance have also been presented as follows.

3.1. Framework for TBLT

In order to get students' interest in teaching learning process and to be an effective teaching environment, teachers are able to create a productive lesson plan by designing materials and using available resources. Thus, a framework for TBLT (Willis J. , 1996) is adoptable for preparation of this lesson, as shown in Figure 1.

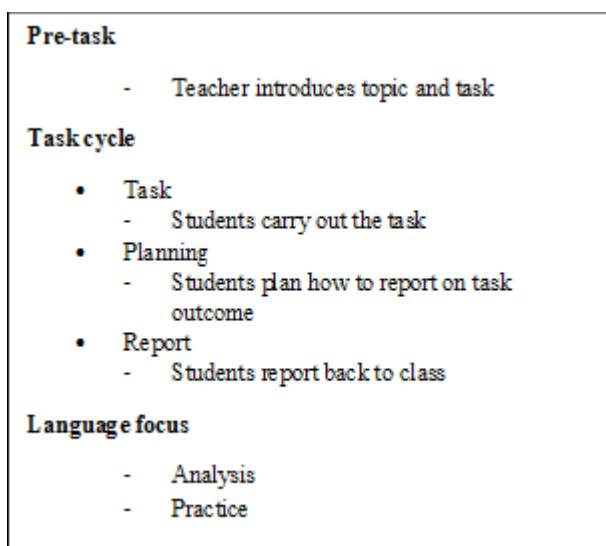


Figure 1. A framework for TBLT (Willis J. , 1996)

3.2 Implementing a Lesson Plan of TBLT

The lesson has been designed for undergraduate students who are prepared to apply internship program. There are 12 activities in the whole lesson. The time allocation of the lesson lasts around 2 hours. This lesson plan has been applied to teach intermediate level students and the class size is around 40 students. The objectives of this lesson are to help students know the useful language of application letter and to write their own application letter in accordance with their requirements. The teaching materials involved in the lesson are extracted from two books: English Results Intermediate and Successful Writing. Regarding students' learning outcomes, by the end of the lesson, students have acquired skills such as

- writing the rationale question 'why, what, and how' at the personalities of people in a real situation and the appropriate language use in a complete sentence.
- using grammatically correct sentences in questioning and answering.
- knowing the language use of how to give a positive feedback or comment to their friends' work.
- editing and reviewing their own work.
- writing their own application letter based on the internship program they want to apply.

The details of task-based language teaching activities are implemented in the classroom.

Pre-task Phase

Pre- task, a preparation stage, is an attempt to introduce the topic of the lesson and tasks that are going on teaching process. There are two pre-task activities in the lesson plan aiming to motivate students and review the vocabulary of personalities.

Activity 1. The whole class.

Teacher displays pictures who work at the different careers on the board and write down some words such as personalities and appearances of people. Students in a whole class match the personalities and appearances with the professions. Next, Teacher writes an example sentence based on the picture and given words on the board. *E.g. A teacher has to be open-minded as he/she has to be able to accept the ideas of his/her pupils.* And then, students make sentences as in the example using the pictures and qualities vocabulary given. It will last 5 minutes to do this activity.

Activity 2. Pair work.

Teacher shows video named 'The Craft' and writes two questions: "What qualities do employers seek for their workplace?" and "What are the good qualities of an employee?". Students watch this video and discuss the performance of characters according to the questions given. Teacher uses TV and video clip as teaching aids. Students guess some qualities that employers seek for their workplace with their partners. Teacher gives 10 minutes to complete the task.

Task cycle

According to the framework of TBLT (Willis J. , 1996), task cycle must include three components: task, planning and report. The activities in this lesson plan are arranged in

the chronological order of task cycle. There are five activities in task aspect – activity 3 to 7 that students must carry out in class. The activity 8 is a goal of planning how to report their learning outcomes in order to generate their own product. After conducting the activities above, students do the activity 9 so that they can report the results acquired back to the class.

Activity 3. The whole class.

Teacher gives students a handout of job ad and write three questions on the board.

- What are they looking for and what are they offering?
- How is it different from a more typical job ad?
- What should you do if you want to apply?

Students read the job ad, and then, answer questions. After that, teacher asks them to compare ads they have seen with the handout given. This activity will last 5 minutes.

Activity 4. Pair work.

Teacher gives a sample letter of application written by Edith and writes a question ‘Do you think it will make a good impression?’. Students read the sample given and discuss with their partner if the letter is a good impression. Handout of a sample letter of application is used as a material. This activity will take 10 minutes.

Activity 5. The whole class.

Teacher gives the table to the students and then play the audio. Students read the table first and listen the recording. After that, Students tick the correct information in accordance with the recording. Teacher asks students say what details the person applying for the job included in his letter of application. Using notes, Students find details of application letter that a person applied for the job. Moreover, Teacher asks a question ‘Is the letter formal or informal?’. Students make discussion on such issues: what the formal letter should be included, useful language of formal application and how the formal letter differs from the informal. The teacher gives 15 minutes to finish this activity.

Activity 6. The whole class.

Teacher asks Students to look again at the sample letter, and then, asks Students to correct mistakes. Teacher instructs how to write acronym to show errors such as:

- S for spelling,
- G for grammar,
- P for punctuation,
- WO for word order and
- WW for wrong word

Students read again the sample letter, find the mistakes and correct them grammatically. The students takes 10 minutes to accomplish the task.

Activity 7. Group work.

Teacher says Students to read again the sample letter and asks them to give the topic of each paragraph. Students see the letter again and write down the appropriate topic of each paragraph. It will last 5 minutes.

Activity 8. The whole class.

Teacher asks Students to look again at Edith’s letter of application and gives two tables. Students read and complete the information about Edith in the table, and then, fill the same information themselves like Edith. Students get 10 minutes to do the activity.

Activity 9. Group work

Teacher says Students to do group work how to write a letter of application for the internship and the data included. Students discuss the preparation of application letter and write down what detailed information will be included in each paragraph. This activity will last 10 minutes.

Post- task

The third component of the framework is language focus, also called post-task that comprises of two tasks – analyzing the previous tasks and practicing to create their own work. The activity 10 aims at examining and discussing the language use of application letter and the format and specific features of letter writing. After that, they will be able to use new words and phrases and styles of language. Practicing to produce their own application letter is emphasized on the activity 11. Meanwhile, mentoring is a must for teacher to facilitate the students who need help. The activity 12 intends to assess students’ work as a peer feedback, as well as the teacher’ feedback or comments.

Activity 10. Group work.

Teacher asks Students ‘what kind of letter is it and what are the useful language of letter of application?’. Students read the sample letter carefully and discuss how to write an impressive application letter and review the language use of application letter they have acquired in the previous activity 5 such as opening remarks, reference to experience and closing remarks. Teacher gives 10 minutes to do this activity.

Activity 11. Individual.

Students create their own application letter based on the knowledge throughout the whole task of the lesson. Teacher monitors around the class and facilitates students and guides some students who need help. Teacher gives students 20 minutes to write their own work.

Activity 12. The whole class.

Students read their partner’s letter and give positive comment on the content and accuracy using the evaluation rubrics, as shown in Appendix 1. Finally, teacher gives positive feedback or suggestion or comment to each student. It will last 10 minutes.

After implementing the application letter writing based on this lesson plan, teacher will give the students to practise other types of application letters as further studies concerned with the topics of application for job and for course, etc.

1. You want to go to Winston University to do a degree in History. Write a letter for a place on the course.
2. You have decided to spend some time working this summer. You have seen an advertisement in the paper for lifeguards to work for a month on one of

the most popular beaches in Sussex. Write a letter asking to be consider for one of the positions.

3.3 Evaluation of the Lesson Plan and students' performance

There are two types of evaluation rubric in this lesson plan. The first evaluation rubric, Table 1, as shown in Appendix 1, is designed for analyzing the usefulness and effectiveness of particular activities involved in this lesson to be aware of potential challenges and the perspective of applicability. The second, Table 2, is to use for giving peer feedback on their students' work. After implementing the whole lesson outline in classroom, the teacher asked students to give peer feedback and comments on their friends' work. And then, the teacher gave feedbacks and comments to assess learning outcome of each student.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It has been mentioned that students have to intern at the related field of their study in order to prepare their graduation thesis. Most of the students encounter the difficulty how to write the appropriate application letters in order to join the work or their internship program in accordance with their requirements. Having said that the aim of this paper is to share EFL teachers the TBLT lesson plan how to teach letters of application, it has been stated how to implement a sample of lesson plan in class by using the TBLT and how to assess the effectiveness of this model in the section of Methodology.

Even though shifting paradigm in ELT leads the teacher to encounter challenges, students' appreciation and their positive attitude concerned with this innovative teaching method for teaching writing application letter result in the implementation of the task-based lesson plan in the classroom. Their significant perceptions and comments are summarized and presented. Students appreciated (1) the enjoyable activities that motivated their interest, (2) the innovative method that can produce an effective learning environment for students, (3) the usefulness of self-assessment and peer evaluation, and (4) the powerful activities that made students produce their own application letter.

Moreover, the Grammar-Translation Method (GM) or Classical Method that aims at helping students to become more familiar with the grammar of their native language and helping them translate the target language by memorizing the language structure (Anderson, 2011) has mostly been used in language classroom. Since the Grammar-Translation Method was not very effective in preparing students to use the target language communicatively, the Direct Method (DM) that is exactly the same with the way what students learned their native language, and lets them use only their target language (Anderson, 2011) has been applied by language teachers for many years. However, the GM enables especially students to improve reading skill and writing skill. Similarly, the DM is thought to provide the improvement of listening and speaking of students.

Nowadays, language teachers always find an innovative methods to fulfil their students' English, especially in term of English four skills. TBLT has been discussed and implemented in language teaching because language teachers believe that TBLT can encourage students to

participate and enables them to promote their language skills through the classroom activities. As a result of this, TBLT is applied to teach writing application letter at undergraduate level. However, it has been faced with challenges in real teaching process owing to practical limitations. Despite recognizing the benefits of TBLT, both teachers and students may not familiar with this method in language teaching. Moreover, it is hard for some teachers to plan the teaching material and to implement in university for the sake of effective teaching and teacher-student interaction in line with TBLT. Otherwise, using TBLT in today language classroom is an effort of transforming the passive learning into the active. Before implementing the TBLT in class, it would be better to introduce the scaffolding strategy that can assist students to do the activities by motivating their interest to gain appropriate outcome and development of each related activity. Six functions of scaffolding are giving example how to do the activity, linking students' background and the knowledge of target learning, defining tasks that are suitable for the students to overcome their linguistic gaps, bringing new information and existing knowledge together in each task, presenting activities that can transform language from style to another, and reviewing the teaching learning process and their developments (Agus Santoso, 2010).

While implementing TBLT lesson plan, EFL teachers may take into account possible issues encountered. Firstly, the classroom situation is movable to do activities such as group work, pair work, individual that are good practices of creating an effective teaching learning environment. Group work, one of powerful teaching strategies, consists of 4 to 6 students in each group. By implementing group work, students can develop cooperative and collaborative skill, self-esteem, metacognition and improved students' achievement, but it is difficult for some teachers to control the class. Comparatively, pair work enables each student to participate in activities equally. Activities that students perform individually is to check their comprehension and private thinking of learning.

Secondly, even though TBLT focuses on students' learning strategies and gives students an opportunity to learn and discuss freely, the role of the teacher plays as an instructor and also facilitator in the whole teaching process. While doing activities, the teacher constantly gives instructions, mentors the classroom and guides the students who needs help to accomplish their tasks. On the other hand, some students may be unwilling to participate in classroom activities. At that situation, the teacher need to encourage them to get involved in.

Thirdly, TBLT is less control because students have to use their own ability to do the tasks. As a result of this technique, students can benefit. TBLT provides students to promote soft skill - collaborative skill, interpersonal and intrapersonal skill, problem-solving skill, and critical thinking skill. However, the teacher may face the challenges to apply this lesson in class because he/she must try to change the traditional classroom situation to the modern class that is the learners first. Besides, the teacher focuses on the learner-centered instead of using teacher-centered. Another challenge that the teacher may encounter is insufficiency of teaching resources such as materials, reference books, technology aids, ect. What is more, it is necessary to consider how to assess the effectiveness of the teaching process implementing this lesson in classroom, as stated in Appendix 1.

To put it briefly, EFL teachers will insight into the preparation of TBLT lesson plan and the implementation of TBLT in classroom through this paper. By the end of this lesson, students will be able to create their own application letter to agree with their requirements and to apply their internship program or future education or prospective career that they desire.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has provided EFL teachers an idea of how to teach letters of application to undergraduate students through TBLT as well as a sample of lesson plan of TBLT. Trying to teach the letter of application through the lesson plan of TBLT enables the students to promote their existing knowledge of linguistic use and enables them to generate their own letters of application to apply the internship, courses and prospective jobs that they desire. Additionally, due to some limitations of lesson plan, it will be necessary to carry out further studies to assist EFL teachers to be able to find alternative ways of ideal method in order to achieve the students' learning outcomes. In conclusion, it is hoped that this paper will be beneficial for EFL teachers who constantly look for an innovative method for the developments of teaching learning environment partially.

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APPENDIX 1.

TABLE 1. EVALUATING RUBRIC OF THE TASK

Task Analysis	Task name:
How does this task support students' construction of their understanding?	
How does this task support growth in students' participation over time?	
Opportunities for oral and written academic language use:	
Things to watch out for:	
How can I apply it in my own class?	

TABLE 2. EVALUATING RUBRIC OF THE LESSON

Sr.	Language Items	Yes	No	Comments/feedbacks
1	Salutation			
2	Opening Remarks			
3	Ordering			
4	Using Correct Tenses			
5	Reference to Experience			
6	Closing Remarks			
7	Informal			
8	Formal			
9	Using Language for Letters of Application			
10	Adding Other Information			