

Enriching the Curriculum with Task-based Instruction

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Abstract

Task-based instruction (TBI) in the context of Japanese tertiary education faces several cultural challenges. These challenges have led some researchers to the conclusion that TBI is not appropriate for the Japanese context. However, ignoring the advantages of TBI would limit students' opportunities to develop linguistic competence and the chance to develop a new, culturally different learning style. This paper describes how TBI promotes language acquisition, reviews the literature pertaining to implementing TBI in the Japanese tertiary education context, and proposes future routes for implementing TBI at the tertiary level in Japan.

Key terms: Task-based instruction (TBI), Japanese Tertiary Education, Second Language Acquisition, Synthetic vs. Analytic Syllabus, Evidence-based teaching

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Is TBL a valid and viable approach for Japanese tertiary level students? Globally, this question is much debated with luminaries such as Willis (1996) and Nunan (2004) arguing for TBI while, on the other hand, equally famous detractors Bruton (2007) and Swan (2005) citing lack of evidence and failed cases of TBI as evidence that TBI does not work. For educators everywhere, in addition to considering the theoretical arguments for and against implementing TBI, it is also impossible to ignore contextual factors such as institutional concerns and stakeholder influence when planning curriculum and syllabi. In Japanese universities, the question of whether TBI is appropriate for our specific context is also oft discussed (see Sato, 2010; Burrows, 2008; Dickinson, 2010). An emphatic case for or against has not been proven and in all probability cannot. Therefore, as teachers rather than as researchers, the question of whether TBI is relevant to our circumstances is of less importance than questions of: "What we can expect to achieve in our classes with TBI?" How can we thus use TBI to achieve our intended aims? How do the stakeholders involved in the educational process perceive and react to the use of TBI in our classes?

As such, the need to validate TBI in the Japanese Tertiary classroom takes secondary importance to the practical considerations of helping teachers utilize tasks as another pedagogical tool. The aims of this article are twofold: first to explain what TBI is, its advantages and disadvantages; and secondly to discuss how teachers can use TBI to enrich their curriculum. With these two aims in mind this article will (a) explain what TBI is, (b) discuss the potential benefits and pitfalls of TBI, and (c) describe considerations and potential ways of using TBI in the tertiary classroom in Japan.

1.1 What is Task-based instruction? A definition

To answer this question we have to consider two approaches to language instruction: synthetic and analytical.

A synthetic approach to language pedagogy is one whereby language is broken down into constituent parts which are then relayed from teacher to student. Forms of this approach to language learning include: grammar-translation, audio-lingual, and even communicative language teaching as realised by the ubiquitous PPP (presentation, practice and produce) routine. They have in common that: the language to be studied is broken down in to small discreet items, the actions of the teacher are central to choosing which items are to be learned, and teachers play a crucial role in conveying those items to the student.

An analytical approach to language pedagogy is one whereby students are exposed to holistic chunks of language that they can analyse themselves. Project-based, content- or theme-based, and task-based syllabi all stem from this analytical approach. Following this approach, the learners' actions rather than teachers' are central to the pedagogical method (Robinson, 1998).

Central to TBI is a linguistic action or task that learners are required to perform (Prabhu, 1987). The completion of this task will generate new language or new avenues of learning. Many definitions of a task have been put forward, (see Bygate, Skehan and Swain, 2001 for a more in-depth discussion), but in terms of language learning they have in common the following points:

- Learners are expected to complete some sort of task (e.g., make a shopping list, decide what items to take to a desert island)
- The completion of the task requires learners to generate their own language, not copy and reproduce others'
- Language produced should resemble language use in the real world
- Meaning is more important than form (grammar)

The last point can be confusing; a task is not devoid of grammar, as grammar is necessary to generate different meanings. However, developing the correct meaning takes precedence over the linguistic structure chosen, and thus learners are free to select from a range of different grammars to achieve the desired outcome – rather than using a pre-specified range of linguistic structures determined by the teacher.

To further clarify what TBI is, we can compare the phases of the most common approach to a synthetic style of teaching – PPP - as described by Samuda and Bygate (2008), – with those of a popular TBI framework (Willis, 1996). The former, traditional approach as embodied in grammar-translation and audiolingualism is still quite pervasive in Asia and around the globe as noted by Littlewood (2007). In these traditional style classrooms, a cycle of Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) is used where learning usually follows these steps:

- The teacher presents (P1) the grammar to be learned
- P1 is followed by controlled, and gradually less controlled, practice (P2) of the grammar
- The cycle is completed by students producing (P3) the teacher-selected target language (Samuda and Bygate, 2008, p. 51)

In such a cycle the centre of focus is necessarily the teacher and will, by nature, encourage a focus on the form of language (e.g., grammar).

In a TBI focused class the sequence is often different from that of the PPP cycle. One such popular cycle of learning presented by Willis (1996) is as follows:

- A pre-task introducing the topic and the task
- Task cycle
 - a) Task planning
 - b) Doing the task
 - c) Preparation to report on the task
 - d) Presenting the task report
- A language focus – analysis and practice; focusing on the form (grammar)

This cycle focuses the learning on the efforts of the language learner, and due to the gap in communication that requires students to perform an action; the majority of student effort is focused on developing meaning. Forms that can be used to create this meaning are not dictated by the teacher, and thus allow for multiple language forms to be generated (Willis, 1996, p. 24).

Task-based learning can take on many forms, such as; problem solving, decision making, opinion forming and exchange, sharing ideas and experiences, analytical activities, and role-plays. These tasks can then be incorporated into a course of study in the following ways:

1. Task-based units incorporated into a course
2. Task Supported learning / teaching – using prior learnt knowledge to practice and develop fluency
3. Task based learning - tasks make up the foundation of the program
4. Project-based learning

1.2 What is Task-based instruction? Important differences between TBI and traditional learning

When considering introducing TBI into a Japanese context it is useful to consider the differences between TBI and traditional types of learning. The table below shows the major differences:

Table 1. Comparison of methodology

Aspect	TBI	Traditional
Focus of learning	Meaning	Form (grammar etc...)
Language input	Students generate language	Teacher generated language and rules of language
Learning content	Driven by student needs	Pre-determined by teacher
Learning action	Implicit learning by student deduction	Explicit learning by teacher instruction
Description of language	Holistic “chunks” of natural language	Discreet segments of synthesized language
Learning activity	Tasks to practice whole integrated skills	Exercises to practice segments of language

2.1 What are the theoretical / potential benefits of TBI considering language as a means of communication?

In the last 25 years, English teaching has seen a shift in focus from a mastery of linguistic forms, such as grammar and morphology, to a focus on English as a means of communication. Such a shift in focus has meant that learners are now required to develop a range of skills rather than just a base of knowledge about the language. These skills are described by Canale and Swain (1980) as four dimensions of communicative competence:

- Grammatical competence (grammar / phonological skills etc)
- Sociolinguistic competence (understanding relative roles of interlocutors, appreciating shared knowledge and assumptions, identifying purpose of interaction)
- Discourse competence (pragmatic skills or interpreting messages and making information match in a coherent way)
- Strategic competence (conversational skills to appropriately initiate / terminate / redirect)

Clearly, Canale and Swain’s description of communicative competences means that English as a mode of communication is a more complicated subject than it is as an academic exercise. This in turn makes the process of learning a language much more complicated under a communicative approach to English. It can be argued that while a PPP syllabus does allow for the teaching of grammatical competencies, TBI is more appropriate as a means of developing the other three competencies of sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic skills. Arguments include:

- Concurrent with the previously mentioned three competencies, TBI allows students to practice choosing the best pieces of language to use in a holistic system rather than focusing on discrete items (Brown, 1994).
- It is designed to develop learners' abilities to engage in meaningful communication (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2009) as per the needs of a focus on language as a means of communication.
- Similarly, tasks will mirror real life language.
- As Willis & Willis (2009) argue, any given task will produce a variety of interactions, thus allowing for development of multiple variations of the communicative competencies mentioned.
- Tasks include lots of uncontrolled / natural communication time, allowing for communication practice which would not be possible under a PPP syllabus.
- By nature, language developed will align with students' existing abilities and the communicative needs of the task.

2.2 What are the potential benefits of TBI considering current knowledge of SLA?

Having considered how TBI fits with the nature of language learning under a communicative approach to language teaching, we can also attribute multiple benefits to TBI by considering current knowledge of second language acquisition. The table below uses Ellis's (2005) 10 principles of instructed learning as a basis to analyze TBI.

Table 2. Examination of TBI considering SLA research

Principle of SLA	Explicitly achieved by TBI	Potentially achievable by TBI	Not attainable by TBI	Other Comments
Learners need to develop chunks of language for fluency		Yes		Repetitive PPP can easily achieve this, (e.g. audiolingual method)
Learners need control of grammars for accuracy		Achievable with a requisite focus on form		Easier to achieve by PPP grammar instruction
Learners need to focus primarily on (pragmatic) meaning	Yes Explicitly so			
Learners must also pay attention to form		Yes, if tasks are so structured		More easily achievable through PPP instruction
Focus on implicit learning while not avoiding explicit learning		Potentially yes, depending on task structure and goal		
Instruction takes into account learners natural order of acquisition	Yes, a big advantage of TBI			Under a PPP syllabus it is very difficult to determine this order
Extensive L2 input is necessary		Yes, if tasks are so structured		Extensive reading and listening activities should be considered
Opportunities for output are necessary	Yes. Valid output is a big advantage of TBI			
Interaction is necessary for	Yes. Valid interaction is a big			

successful learning	advantage of TBI			
Instruction needs to take into account learner differences including motivation		Potentially yes, assuming tasks are holistic, context appropriate, and varied		No clear advantage over a well designed PPP syllabus
Uncontrolled responses must be considered as valid as controlled responses	Yes, a big advantage of TBI type evaluations where the task outcome is the evaluation standard			Impossible to measure in traditional style assessments.

2.3 Critique of TBI in Japan

The results in the above table are a synthesis of many facets of current knowledge and theories on SLA. It is noticeable that multiple facets support TBI as a valid pedagogical construct. Furthermore, in an environment where students are already used to atomistic learning through six years of grammar instruction, but are expected to build their communicative competencies, it might be appropriate to consider that TBI is a perfect fit with the needs of newly matriculating Japanese university students. Yet, there are also theoretical disadvantages to TBI that need to be considered when designing syllabi for tertiary level students in Japan. In his 2010 MA thesis, Dickinson (2010) compiles a list of reports highlighting theoretical disadvantages of TBI including:

- TBI results in overly simple and potentially poorly constructed language use, which is not useful for learners' development of an L2. (Seedhouse, 1999 as cited by Dickinson, 2010).
- It is unsuitable for low-level learners who do not have the requisite knowledge to independently develop comprehensible output to complete tasks (Bruton, 2002; Swan, 2005).
- Students used to a strongly teacher-centered learning style may become unmotivated by classroom activities that do not resemble "proper" classroom learning rather than motivated by the student-centric aspects of TBI. (Burrows, 2008; Sato, 2009).
- The communicative goals of TBI can be unsuitable for EFL contexts where learners (feel like they) have no immediate need to use English outside the classroom (Sato, 2009; Sheen, 1994 as cited by Dickinson, 2010).
- TBI can be demotivating for students who are used to focusing on exams (Sato, 2009).

Further reading also reveals that:

- Learning Progress in TBI depends on student input. However, it is not possible to develop and learn those structures that learners do not attempt to use Ellis (2005).
- The Japanese environment is general L2 input scarce. Tasks by nature tend to focus on student output. Leading to a lack of L2 input in Japanese learning environments, (Sato, 2009; Swan, 2005). - *Unless tasks are specifically designed to feature large amounts of L2 input-* Italics indicate author's own comment.
- In addition to the above the nature of a task is such that the desired learner output is always ambiguous to the learner. Japanese students, unused to ambiguity in the classroom due to teacher centred learning histories may find classes such as this extremely difficult and stressful (author's own idea).
- Furthermore, Japanese students, who have a culturally ingrained habit of avoiding negative face (making mistakes), will prefer a lesson design in which the correct answer is explicit so that they can avoid making mistakes that would lead to negative face.

2.4 Actual failures of TBI recorded in qualitative or quantitative test

In addition to these theoretical oppositions to TBI, Burrows in a 2008 article cites the following observations of TBI failures (Burrows, 2008):

- It is very difficult to actually control what happens in a TBI activity. As such it is often noted that students often use their own mother tongue and lack the required self-discipline to try and negotiate meaning in the target language. Eldridge argued that this is noted by most teachers to be the main problem with TBI (as cited in Burrows 2008), *and we also have to consider that most Japanese universities are environments in which usually the majority if not all of the students share the same mother tongue* (Italics indicate author's own input).
- In a five month evaluation of Japanese tertiary students, Burrows (2008), referencing himself, noted that there was little evidence of students being able to notice the forms or derive the rules that they needed to master.
- Burrows (2005) as cited in Burrows 2008 further noted that Japanese students had a preference for more opportunities to interact directly with the teacher, and to receive reassurance, correction, and encouragement directly from the teacher rather than communicate with their peers.
- Robinson (2001) as cited in Burrows 2008 noticed that the focus on completing the task often led users to neglect proper form and led to poor production of the L2.
- This is supported by Seedhouse (1999), as cited in Burrows 2008 who highlights that TBI interaction often seems to be poorly structured, with utterances that would have no meaning outside of the immediate context.
- Anderson (cited in Burrows, 2008) further notes problems in tasks involving Japanese students are that:
 - (a) Students seldom initiate discussion
 - (b) Students generally avoid raising new topics
 - (c) Students rarely seek clarification
 - (d) Students are reluctant to volunteer answers

There is no emphatic proof that TBI is better or worse than any other teaching methodology. While individual teacher accounts and small scale studies do show that TBI can lead to acquisition of the language studied, there are an equally large number of accounts of TBI failures and problems. Indeed, Ellis (2009) confirms that there are few comparative studies of TBI and other forms of instruction, and cites Beretta and Davies's 1985 (as cited in Ellis, 2009) study as one of the only empirical evaluations of TBI and other forms of teaching. Foster (2009) confirms that proving or disproving the efficacy of one model of language instruction over another is indeed problematic. Both proponents and critics alike, consider TBI to be just one useful approach to teaching, and not the mythical *one best method*. Furthermore, as Kumaravadivelu (2003) underlines, for practical reasons teachers do not adhere to one best method, but often pick out practical activities and tools that achieve the particular aims of that lesson. This in itself may be one clear danger of using tasks in the classroom – Nunn (2006), cites Bygate (2001) in arguing that isolated use of a task cannot promote learning, but that tasks must be incorporated systematically and whole scale into a curriculum. In conclusion, it can be said that tasks are one more tool in the teacher's arsenal of classroom tools to enhance language learning. However, given that evidence of unsuccessful application of tasks and theoretical opposition to tasks are equally as numerous as records of successful applications and theoretical benefits, great care in planning to use tasks must be taken. The process of adapting tasks into a learning program will next be discussed.

3.1 Enriching the curriculum with TBI - Curriculum development

From mixed accounts of applying a task-based curriculum to English language learning in Asia (see Carless, 2004 describing a program in Hong Kong compared with McDonough and Chaikitmongkol's 2007 report of a course in Thailand) Ellis (2009) proposes 5 principles of applying task that need to be adhered to:

1. Tasks must be designed to match the abilities, needs, and levels of the students.
2. Tasks need to be trialed to ensure that they result in appropriate L2 use and must be revised accordingly.
3. Teachers must clearly understand what a task is.
4. Teachers and students alike must understand the communicative goals and pedagogical rationale for doing a task.
5. Teachers involved in the delivery of tasks ought to also be involved in the development of the curriculum and materials.

Clearly, implementing any kind of task-based learning requires careful planning, trialing and revision, faculty cooperation, teachers educated in the benefits of TBI, and learner training, and requires that tasks are considered as a vital component of a holistic language program rather than as an individual discreet section of a program.

In considering how to implement TBI we need a coherent approach to developing a curriculum. Brown (1995) highlights the steps in developing a curriculum as: Needs Analysis > Objectives > Developing the tests to determine if students have achieved the course objectives > Creating the materials to help the students to achieve the course objectives > Teaching the course.

Under such a structure, the first stage for curriculum planners would be to consider if students need to be able to employ language for various communicative needs. For example, in an environment where a TOEFL or TOEIC test score is considered a vital part of a student's language learning needs, it may not be appropriate to use TBI. Additionally, in an environment where students will be expected to partake in English language lectures after completion of their compulsory language program, tasks that focus on academic skills will be more appropriate than tasks that focus on business style language or travel abroad preparation tasks.

Again, objectives will also determine what type of teaching methodology is carried out. Should a needs analysis show that tasks are indeed valid for the learning environment, determining the course objectives will also determine what kind of tasks are used. For example, if it were decided that one of the course objectives was to increase L2 comprehension, then listening tasks may need to be employed more extensively than speaking tasks, or reading tasks more extensively than writing. Conversely, if the course objective is to increase student ability to output, then the opposite would be true. Furthermore, even within a particular skills area; for example, speaking, planners would need to determine if the objective is to have students speak more accurately, more fluently, or with greater complexity, and according to those decisions, design tasks appropriately.

As needs analysis is carried out, and course objectives are thus derived, it is important that curriculum planners are aware that there are many versions and multiple dimensions of a task which can be applied to various learning demands. As an example, Oxford (1997) describes that tasks can vary along a continuum with absolute points that have:

Either

- a focus on meaning – in such a task, learners are exposed to large holistic chunks of language in a natural communicative use. Teacher intervention is secondary to students themselves, either actively or passively, deriving rules of language use. As students develop their abilities, grammar structures are naturally learned as language use occurs.

Or

- a focus on form – in which tasks are used to create a gap in meaning that students have to overcome. While the predominant focus of the task is meaning, there will be a focus on form when communication breaks down due to [a] lack of learner knowledge. Teacher intervention should be designed to help students discern rules for themselves. Such a task is considered to be TBI when (1) the focus on form is occasional and (2) it is driven by learner needs as generated by a breakdown in the task.

Or

- a focus on forms – whereby teachers divide a syllabus up into various forms to be mastered in the classroom. This is actually close to a synthetic syllabus but may be considered as Task-based learning if classroom procedure follows a TBI cycle (Long, 1997).

Once the objectives of the course have been decided, planners need to develop tests that match the needs analysis and course objectives. At this stage, it is important to remember the need for coherence. If needs analysis determines that students need to be able to complete certain tasks, TBI should be employed. Determining the objectives of the course will dictate what kinds of tasks are employed – ones that focus on input or output for example, or ones that focus on accuracy, or complexity, or fluency depending on the specific goals of the program and course. If TBI is employed, then tasks must also be used to evaluate students learning and progress. Again, the question of coherence is very important. If the majority of a course is taught using oral tasks as a medium of pedagogy, then any test or evaluation must also be an oral test. If the test evaluates students' fluency, then tasks promoting oral fluency must have been used during the course. At this point it is worth noting that TBI by nature is in most cases unlikely to be able to help students gain a high level of grammatical accuracy over individual items. Therefore, the use of any test checking students ability to accurately reproduce discreet language items in a Task-based curriculum is more than likely inappropriate and unfair on students.

3.2 Enriching the curriculum with TBI - Varieties of TBI

As previously stated, in the context of Japanese tertiary education, TBI can enhance learning, but in light of the analysis of requirements for successful SLA, and the contextual critiques of TBI, as well as the multiple reports of unsatisfactory learning, it is difficult not to agree with Bygate (2001) that TBI is best situated as one important part of a curriculum. Three different approaches can be considered. These are:

1. Task-based units incorporated into a course
2. Task Supported learning / teaching – using prior learnt knowledge to practice and develop fluency
3. Project-based learning (PBI)

As TBI characterizes a strong version of communicative language teaching, PBI can be considered at the extreme end of the communicative continuum (Legtuke and Thomas, 1991). In designing a project, deciding the work that they do and completing multiple tasks to create a product, students are really using English, as opposed to communicating in contrived situations in the classroom. The major differences between Project-based syllabi and Task-based syllabi is that in Project-based syllabi classes are inter-dependent and all tasks are themed to focus on the one final goal—a product. In Task-based syllabi, lessons can be considered as discrete items and multiple foci can feature throughout the syllabus. For the purposes of comparing project-based learning with task-based learning, the following distinctions, as described by Stoller (Stoller, 2006) need to be made clear: (a) Projects focus on a final end product, such as a class newspaper or video production, as well as the process of language development, (b) projects run for multiple classes and incorporate many tasks, (c) projects often run outside of the classroom as well as inside of the classroom, (d) course goals are, in part, defined by students, (e) by nature necessarily involve some learning of content as well as language. In addition to the differential processes of learning, project-based learning theoretically imparts a potentially wider range of benefits to students than a TBI syllabus. In a meta-analysis of 16 publications Stoller (ibid.) found that project-based instruction practitioners attributed the following benefits to PBI: authentic language experience, increased motivation and creativity, interactive and integrated language practice, collaborative and cooperative working skills, increased content knowledge, high levels of learner satisfaction, autonomous learner development, and finally; analytical, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving skills. It must be noted, however, that extra benefits come at an extra cost. In my own first hand data collection of Japanese EFL students

in a PBI course, while students did report noticing the afore mentioned benefits, they also reported high levels of stress, an unusually high time demand, and confusion of class procedures and teacher / student relationships. Overall, the student determined aspect of a PBI syllabus, the product orientation, the longer period focus, the integrated lesson, and the integrated language aspects of PBI mean that it is not possible to employ PBI to achieve the same learning outcomes as a TBI focused syllabi.

Alternatively, a less extreme version of PBI is to employ task-based units within a single course, which Nunn (2006) describes as allowing a combination of exercise and tasks. Thus allowing a switch between a focus on the constituent parts (through grammar exercises), and a focus on the holistic aspects of language (through tasks). He further argues that such an approach would better suit the SLA needs of learners as laid out in table 2 on page 4 / 5 of this article – firstly it provides a focus on holistic aspects of language; such as, meaning (item 3 in the table) and chunks of language for fluency (item 1 in the table). Secondly, a task-based unit provides output practice opportunities (item 8 in the table), and finally provides the necessary focus on form (item 4) and accuracy (item 2). In addition, Nunn (ibid) states that two main concerns with TBI – due to the student centric nature of TBI the selection of grammar to be covered is ill-defined, and concerns as to whether TBI can really lead to a satisfactory focus on form - are addressed by the alternate use of TBI and non-TBI units. Nunn describes the EFL program of a university in Japan which employs TBI units and reports high levels of student and teacher satisfaction. Should this success be replicable in other universities, TBI units can be seen as a viable approach to enriching the EFL curriculum in the Japanese context.

While TBI units deal with some of the potential weaknesses of a TBI only approach, Task-supported learning can be seen from the opposite perspective as dealing with the weaknesses of a PPP approach. To understand this, it is important to consider Anderson's Skill Acquisition Theory (2000) as cited in Ellis, 2003. Anderson's suggested that in order to develop a language skill, the learner must develop ways to automatically access declarative knowledge (such as grammar and vocabulary) and thus be able to use it in an automatic way (rather than having to think carefully about what structure to apply in each situation) when necessary. In order to achieve this, enormous amounts of practice are necessary. Traditional practices such as PPP and audio-lingual approaches can achieve these repetitive practices; however they are lacking in one crucial aspect. Practice must not only entail a repetition of the structure, but crucially must also include practice of the behavior (DeKeyser, 1998 as cited in Ellis 2003). Behavior entails practicing communication and all the affective problems (stress, anxiety and so on) that communication carries. In this vital point, TBI carries important advantage in practicing communication over repetitive practices of structure under a PPP or other traditional approaches to EFL. Under the assumption that acquiring a language requires the automatization of declarative knowledge (Ellis, 2005) TBI serves as a way to practice previously taught knowledge. Task-supported learning may thus take the form of PPP and TBI in the same lesson, or due to time and logistical constraints, a PPP lesson to introduce grammar structures, followed by a lesson using a task that by nature elicits some of the previously taught language.

Which version of TBI (a fully TBI syllabus, project syllabus, task supported, task units) is most appropriate for any given context really has depended, until now, on contextually dependent judgment decisions by planners. Research to aid these decisions until now has either focused on micro-analysis of variation of task type and skill development such as the relationship between time to prepare for a task and task performance, or on questions of whether task completion can generate the conditions that are believed to be necessary for SLA (see table 2) such as negotiated interaction, negotiation of meaning, input and output. However, in a recent paper Santos proposed a new approach to evaluating the success of TBI in any educational context (Santos, 2011). Santos proposed utilizing an "Evidence-based teaching" approach to curriculum design. Evidence-based teaching requires the accumulation and meta-analysis of various sources of research on a single topic area. Where there is strong evidence of effectiveness of a particular method or activity, then it can systematically be incorporated into the curriculum. Crucially, when a technique is applied, its effectiveness is compared relative to a currently used technique. The statistical tool for doing so is effect size, whereby large (in the hundreds or thousands of members) groups of students are divided into a control group and an experimental group. Achievement over the duration of the application of the technique is measured in both groups by the administration of an identical pre- and post-

test. Difference in relative improvement in both groups is considered as the effect size and is statistically valid, easily understood and applicable to many fields and easily measurable (Coe, 2002). Evidence-based teaching offers a viable methodology to quantifying the benefits and disadvantages of implementing TBI in the curriculum.

Conclusion

The question of whether a purely TBI syllabus is appropriate for the Japanese University EFL context is a long debated question that will in most likelihood remain unanswered. There are multiple arguments for and against applying such teaching techniques. The goals of a TBI approach to language teaching theoretically match the communicative demands of learning English as a Foreign Language as a means of communication. Furthermore, multiple aspects of SLA theory and knowledge support the argument that TBI is a valid approach to developing communicative competences. However, contextual issues surrounding Japanese learners; in particular, the effects of a Confucian, teacher-centered, exam focused education system; lack of immediate need for English; and the hierarchical, reserved nature of Japanese culture, all create strong doubts as to whether TBI is contextually appropriate. On balance, some form of carefully implemented TBI can and should supplement and thus improve an EFL Curriculum, provided that it suits the communicative needs of the students and is tested fairly. The best way to apply TBI and the best individual Task-based techniques to use are undecided, however, research, especially effect size studies can provide clear, appropriate information to aid planners in utilizing TBI.

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