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DESIGNING TASKS TO PROMOTE HIGHER-ORDER THINKING IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Nodira Khoshimova Nozimjonovna
Teacher at the Fergana Regional Center for Pedagogical Mastery
khoshimovanodira@gmail.com

Abstract

This article explores effective ways of designing language learning tasks that activate higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as analysis, evaluation, and creation, especially in A2–B1 classrooms. By using Bloom's Taxonomy and the Task-Based Learning (TBL) framework, this paper shows how encouraging students to think critically and creatively while using language can lead to more meaningful learning and better communication skills. The paper also offers practical examples of classroom activities and strategies that help teachers support students in developing higher-order thinking skills step by step.

Keywords: higher-order thinking, task-based learning, Bloom's taxonomy, language teaching, scaffolding, A2–B1 learners.

Introduction

Language education has been intended to help students become fluent, learn new vocabulary, and understand basic grammar rules as part of building their communication skills. However, since language classrooms need to meet 21st-century demands, fostering higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in classroom has become a vital pedagogical goal. According to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, HOTS include the abilities which triggr students to analyze, evaluate, and create—skills that are crucial not only for academic success but also for real-world problem-solving (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). However, many language lessons still depend too much on simple tasks like memorizing words or doing repetitive drills, rather than encouraging deeper thinking (Mrah, 2017).

Theoretical Background

1. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and HOTS in Language Learning

Bloom's cognitive framework that was revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) emphasizes a hierarchy of cognitive skills:

- Lower-order thinking: remembering, understanding, applying
- Higher-order thinking: analyzing, evaluating, creating

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Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) make learners to do more than just use language passively. They encourage students to ask questions, make sense of information, express opinions, solve problems, and create something new—all in the target language. Each level of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy builds on the previous one, gradually guiding learners to use language in deeper and more meaningful ways. While remembering involves recalling facts or vocabulary, understanding requires learners to explain ideas in their own words. At the 'applying' stage, students begin using language in real-life situations—like completing forms or taking part in role-plays. As they move into higher levels like 'analyzing,' they start organizing information, making comparisons, and understanding deeper meaning in what they read or hear.Evaluating also pushes learners to justify choices, critique arguments, or assess information. Finally, creating involves producing original work, such as writing stories, designing projects, or constructing presentations. These upper levels are especially valuable for language learners as they blend linguistic competence with cognitive engagement.

2. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) focuses on communication through the performance of real-world tasks. According to Willis and Willis (2007), tasks should be:

- Meaningful
- Goal-oriented
- Involving a gap (information, opinion, or reasoning)

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be especially useful for developing higher-order thinking skills because it encourages students to work together, explain their choices, and come up with original ideas or solutions. In the language classroom, tasks should be connected with real-life communicative situations. For example, instead of completing a worksheet on food vocabulary, learners can plan a dinner party, decide on the menu, and negotiate roles. This approach promotes language use in meaningful, interactive contexts. Teachers should ensure tasks are appropriately scaffolded: introduce key vocabulary, model the task, provide language structures, and monitor group work. During post-task phases, if learners reflect on their use of language and content, it can reinforce both accuracy and fluency.

Practical Classroom Applications

A. Analyzing Information: Venn Diagram Comparisons

Level: B1

Students compare and contrast two cultural traditions using Venn diagrams. This activity supports:

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- Vocabulary development
- Critical comparison
- Discourse organization

B. Evaluating Ideas: Debates on Environmental Topics

Level: A2-B1

Learners are divided into teams and given short texts on climate change. They prepare arguments for and against certain environmental policies. This encourages:

- Persuasive language use
- Evidence-based argumentation
- Team collaboration

C. Creating Projects: Community Awareness Campaign

Level: B1

Students design posters, write slogans, and present a campaign on a social issue (e.g., recycling). This allows for:

- Integration of digital tools (e.g., Canva)
- Synthesis of language and visual design
- Public speaking practice

Scaffolding Higher-Order Thinking

To support HOTS, educators must provide:

- Linguistic scaffolds (sentence starters, key phrases)
- Graphic organizers (e.g., Venn diagrams, T-charts)
- Collaborative grouping to allow idea exchange
- Feedback cycles that go beyond grammar correction to include reflection and justification

According to Sholeh et al. (2020), blending Task-Based Language Teaching with training in higher-order thinking skills can significantly enhance students' independence and engagement—particularly when lessons include opportunities for reflection and meaningful feedback.It is also helpful to use questioning techniques that stimulate deeper thinking. Instead of asking 'What is the main idea?', teachers might ask, 'What evidence supports this idea?' or 'How would you solve this problem in your community?'. Assessment should also align with higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) —rubrics can evaluate not just language accuracy, but also originality, logic, and collaboration.

Challenges and Considerations

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Despite its benefits, implementing higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in language classrooms poses challenges:

- Cognitive overload for low-level learners
- Lack of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) tasks in standard textbooks (Mrah, 2017)
- Teacher preparedness for designing cognitively demanding lessons

These issues can be addressed through professional development and adaptation of traditional tasks into more open-ended formats.

One strategy for overcoming these challenges is to gradually introduce higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Teacher can start by modifying traditional activities: e.g., turn a reading comprehension task into a comparison task, or extend a writing task into a group project. Additionally, peer observations and professional learning communities can help teachers exchange ideas and strategies for higher-order task design.

Conclusion

Promoting higher-order thinking in language learning is no longer optional—it is essential. By aligning classroom activities with Bloom's higher cognitive levels and implementing them through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), educators can empower students to become not only proficient language users but also thoughtful, analytical, and creative individuals.

The success of such an approach lies in careful task design, appropriate scaffolding, and an understanding that thinking and language development go hand in hand.

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