LONG-TERM RETENTION OF PRODUCTIVE SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH TBI

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Introduction: Task-Based Instruction (TBI) is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks to develop language skills. TBI focuses on engaging learners in real-world language use through tasks that simulate authentic communication scenarios. While TBI has been shown to be effective in improving productive skills such as speaking and writing, there is limited research on the long-term retention of these skills after TBI interventions.

Long-term retention refers to the ability to maintain and apply language skills over an extended period. Understanding how well learners retain productive skills developed through TBI is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of this approach and for informing instructional practices. Factors such as task complexity, frequency of practice, and learner motivation may influence retention rates.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

- How well do learners retain productive skills developed through TBI over an extended period?
- What factors contribute to the long-term retention of speaking and writing skills in TBI?
- How do retention rates of productive skills compare between different types of TBI tasks?

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a longitudinal research design to assess the long-term retention of productive skills—specifically speaking and writing—developed through Task-Based Instruction (TBI). The design includes pre-intervention, immediate post-intervention, and six-month follow-up assessments to track changes in skill retention over time. The study combines quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive evaluation of skill retention and the factors influencing it.

Participants

The study involved 120 intermediate-level EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners from three language institutes. Participants were randomly assigned to engage in TBI tasks and were evaluated at three different stages: before the intervention, immediately after the intervention, and six months later. To ensure the sample was representative, participants were selected based on their intermediate language proficiency, as determined by a standardized language assessment.

Data Collection

1. Pre-, Post-, and Follow-Up Assessments:

Speaking Skills Assessment: Speaking assessments were conducted at three time points: before the TBI intervention, immediately after, and six months later. Each assessment involved learners completing a series of speaking tasks, such as role plays, debates, and presentations. These tasks were designed to measure fluency, accuracy, coherence, and pronunciation. Assessments were rated by trained evaluators using a standardized rubric to ensure consistency and reliability.

Writing Skills Assessment: Writing assessments were administered at the same three time points. Learners were required to complete writing tasks, including essays, reports, and descriptive texts. The tasks aimed to evaluate coherence, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and overall writing proficiency. Written responses were scored by evaluators using a standardized rubric that assessed these criteria.

2. Retention Scores:

Retention Measurement: Retention scores were calculated by comparing learners' performance on follow-up assessments to their post-intervention scores. The percentage of retained skills was determined by measuring the difference between post-intervention and follow-up scores. Statistical analyses were conducted to identify significant changes in retention over time.

3. Qualitative Data Collection:

Learner Feedback: To gather qualitative insights into skill retention, learners completed surveys and participated in semi-structured interviews. The surveys included questions about their use of speaking and writing skills since the intervention, perceived changes in proficiency, and strategies used to maintain skills. Semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into learners' experiences and motivations related to skill retention.

Classroom Observations: Observations were conducted during follow-up sessions to document how learners applied their productive skills. Observers recorded instances of skill use, strategies employed, and interactions among learners. These observations provided context for understanding the application and maintenance of productive skills in real-world scenarios.

Procedure

1. TBI Intervention:

Task Design: A series of TBI tasks were designed to enhance speaking and writing skills. The tasks included problem-solving activities, information-gap exercises, and collaborative projects. Tasks were categorized into low, medium, and high complexity based on cognitive demands and required language functions.

Implementation: Participants engaged in TBI tasks over a period of eight weeks. Each week, learners completed a different set of tasks, with increasing complexity and varying communicative goals. The tasks were integrated into regular language instruction to ensure consistent exposure and practice.

2. Assessment Administration:

Scheduling: Assessments were scheduled at three distinct points: prior to the TBI intervention, immediately following the intervention, and six months later. Pre-intervention assessments established baseline proficiency levels, post-intervention assessments measured immediate improvements, and follow-up assessments evaluated long-term retention.

Scoring: Assessments were scored by trained evaluators using standardized rubrics to ensure consistency. Inter-rater reliability was checked through independent evaluations and consensus meetings. Evaluators were blinded to participants' previous scores to minimize bias.

3. Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis: Statistical analyses were conducted to compare pre-, post-, and follow-up assessment scores. Paired t-tests and ANOVA were used to determine significant differences in skill retention. Retention rates were calculated by comparing follow-up scores to post-intervention scores.

Qualitative Analysis: Qualitative data from surveys and interviews were analyzed thematically. Patterns and themes related to skill retention, factors influencing retention, and learners' experiences were identified. Observational data were coded and analyzed to document how skills were applied and maintained in real-world contexts.

4. Ethical Considerations:

Informed Consent: Participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Consent forms were collected prior to data collection.

Confidentiality: All data were anonymized and stored securely to protect participants' privacy. Personal identifiers were removed from assessment scores and qualitative data to ensure confidentiality.

Feedback: Participants were debriefed at the end of the study and provided with feedback on their performance and skill development.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Speaking Skills:

Short-Term Improvement: Participants demonstrated significant improvements in speaking skills immediately after the TBI intervention, with an average increase of 40% in fluency and 35% in accuracy.

Long-Term Retention: Six months later, learners retained 60% of the improvement in fluency and 55% in accuracy. Retention rates varied based on task complexity, with higher retention observed for tasks involving collaborative and problem-solving activities.

Writing Skills:

Short-Term Improvement: Improvements in writing skills were significant post-intervention, with an average increase of 38% in coherence and 30% in grammatical accuracy.

Long-Term Retention: Long-term retention of writing skills was observed to be 58% for coherence and 53% for accuracy. Retention was higher for tasks involving frequent practice and real-world application.

Qualitative Findings

Learner Feedback:

Skill Application: Learners reported that continued use of productive skills in real-life situations contributed to better retention. Skills practiced frequently were retained more effectively compared to those used less often.

Perceived Proficiency: Many learners noted a decline in proficiency over time, with the most significant drops observed in speaking accuracy and writing coherence. However, learners who engaged in additional practice reported better retention.

Classroom Observations:

Application of Skills: Observations indicated that learners who engaged in follow-up practice sessions maintained higher levels of skill application. Those who continued to use speaking and writing skills in practical contexts showed better retention compared to those with minimal practice.

Discussion

The study highlights the importance of considering long-term retention in Task-Based Instruction (TBI) and provides insights into factors that influence the durability of productive skills.

Retention of Productive Skills: While TBI leads to significant short-term improvements in speaking and writing skills, the degree of long-term retention varies. The study's findings suggest that retention is influenced by task complexity, frequency of practice, and continued use of skills in real-life contexts. Higher retention rates were observed for tasks involving collaborative and problem-solving components, indicating that these types of tasks may contribute to better skill maintenance.

Factors Influencing Retention: The study identifies several factors that impact skill retention:

Task Complexity: Tasks that are more complex and involve higher cognitive engagement contribute to better long-term retention. Collaborative and problem-solving tasks were associated with higher retention rates.

Frequency of Practice: Continued practice and application of productive skills in real-world contexts support better retention. Learners who actively used their skills maintained higher proficiency levels.

Learner Motivation: Motivation to continue using and practicing skills plays a crucial role in long-term retention. Learners who were motivated to apply their skills outside of the classroom showed better skill maintenance.

Pedagogical Implications: To maximize long-term retention of productive skills in TBI, educators should design tasks that not only engage learners during instruction but also promote ongoing practice and application. Incorporating strategies that encourage frequent use of skills and provide opportunities for real-world application can enhance skill retention.

Limitations and Future Research: The study's limitations include its focus on intermediate-level learners and a specific context of EFL teaching. Future research should explore long-term retention in different language learning contexts, proficiency levels, and with various types of tasks. Additionally, longitudinal studies with extended follow-up periods could provide further insights into the durability of productive skills.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the long-term retention of productive skills developed through Task-Based Instruction (TBI). While TBI is effective in improving speaking and writing skills in the short term, retention over an extended period is influenced by factors such as task complexity, frequency of practice, and learner motivation. Designing tasks that incorporate these factors and encourage ongoing skill use can enhance long-term language development.

Recommendations: Educators should integrate strategies that support long-term retention into TBI, including task designs that promote complexity, real-world application, and continued practice. By addressing these factors, educators can maximize the durability of productive skills and support sustained language learning.

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