

Alleviating Anxiety, Boosting Confidence: A Proposed Model of Willis' Task-Based Learning¹

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Abstract

Sufficient attention to the second language (L2) learners' individual differences (IDs) should be given in instructional design as IDs affect differing results of individual learner's ultimate L2 achievement. To that, this paper presents an example of a lesson plan developed using Willis' Task-based Learning (TBL). Willis' TBL framework is selected as it is argued that the framework offers more advantages than Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) does in terms of the communicative goals and accommodating learners' affect. The lesson plan is informed by the findings and pedagogical implications of numerous studies on IDs suggesting that L2 instruction should be best designed to accommodate learners' IDs, for example, but not limited to, minimising learners' anxiety and boosting their confidence in speaking, through providing a psychologically safe environment stimulating learners' risk-taking behaviours in L2 learning. Rationales of each stage in the lesson plan are provided to better illustrate how the lesson plan is manifested in the classroom concerning learners' ego and feeling.

Keywords: Individual Differences (IDs), anxiety, confidence, lesson plan, Willis' Task-based Learning (TBL)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning and using a second language (L2) can pose a threat to one's ego (Ortega, 2009). Learners, especially adult ones who are accustomed to being able to communicate perfectly in their first language (L1), are particularly vulnerable to this threat (Ortega, 2009). Learners may experience this to a varying degree depending on their individual differences (IDs) and these influence the varieties of the ultimate learning achievement of learners (Dornyei, 2005). To the necessity to help learners succeed in their L2 learning, the world of the English as L2 instruction continuously works to best facilitate learners to learn. Therefore, there have been several shifts of popular teaching methods in the last few decades in which one method came into prominence due to the perceived failure of the preceding one (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for example, came into prominence in the 1980s as a response to the perceived failure of the audio-lingual method, which is seen to exclusively and excessively focus on the manipulation of the linguistic structures of the L2 (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The practice of CLT has since been crystallised into Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) in a structural approach to teaching with communicative goals (Ellis, 2013). Several authors, however, later were sceptical on how CLT in its PPP sequence could achieve its communicative purposes and proposed the idea of Task-based learning (TBL) (e.g.: Ellis, 2013; Nunan, 2004; J. Willis, 1996), which Ellis (2013) dubbed as "a strong form of CLT" (p. 2), suggesting TBL's superiority over PPP to achieve the communicative purposes of CLT.

In line with the necessity to consider learners' affect in instruction and the important role of teaching methods in facilitating learners to learn, this paper would further present elaboration on the advantages of TBL over PPP in facilitating learning, the necessity for teachers to provide a safe environment for learners to produce language, and a TBL framework-based lesson plan model developed to accommodate learners' learning in a psychologically safer, less anxiety-provoking classroom environment.

2. THE MERITS OF TBL OVER PPP

PPP may have been a familiar teaching method among language teachers when implementing CLT (Hedge, 2014; D. Willis, 1996) attributed to the possible advantages the PPP method is said to offer. In PPP, the presentation of grammar is put in the beginning. Learners practice the grammar in guided-practice activities before finally being given time to "produce" the grammar in such language production activities as delivering a short speech, writing sentences or a paragraph, and mini role-plays (Hedge, 2014). In other words, teachers are responsible for "the language grammar of the day" and they do whatever is needed through class activities to make sure that the language structure or grammar is "learned". Advocates of the PPP teaching method believe that learners will learn what is taught in the sequence in which it is taught (Hedge, 2014).

Despite the popularity of PPP in L2 instruction, especially that of the English language, several authors question the advantages the PPP method is said to offer (D. Willis, 1996; J. Willis, 1996). Advocates of PPP believe that if learners are taught a certain language structure or form, it would result in learning and automatisation. Some authors, however, believed that this belief on PPP seems to oversimplify the process of learning, as though a

language input in the presentation stage could easily be converted into a language output in the production stage after learners “practice” the language (Criado, 2013). Against PPP, some authors mentioned that when the focus on language is presented in the beginning, learners are “compelled” to use that language structure in the production stage, making the language learners produce unnatural (Hedge, 2014; D. Willis, 1996). D. Willis (1996) even highlighted that as the production stage of PPP is just “a further exercise in producing language expected by the teacher” (p. 44), what seemingly a language production stage is merely conformity where learners try to showcase the previously-presented language structure.

In comparison to PPP believing fluency as the product of accuracy, task-based learning (TBL) sees out of fluency comes accuracy (Edwards & Willis, 2005; D. Willis, 1996). Through tasks, TBL seeks to allow learners to produce language resembling real language use freely rather than to produce language constrained with a certain structure like that in PPP (Harmer, 2007). In TBL, tasks should be in the forms of “goal-oriented activities in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome” (J. Willis, 1996, p. 53). Opinion sharing and problem-solving activities can be examples. Even though Nunan (2004), Ellis (2013), and J. Willis (1996) proposed TBL frameworks quite different from each other, they agreed that tasks are very crucial as through tasks learners can use all of their language resources, extensive or not, to communicate. Regarding the importance of tasks, referring to output hypothesis proposed by Merrill Swain, L. Li (2019) even mentioned that tasks can push learners to their language resource limits. Hence, the tasks facilitate the production of “pushed output”, which is output learners are likely unable to produce unless these learners are “pushed” to do so by the tasks (L. Li, 2019).

3. PROVIDING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNERS TO DO LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

Among several IDs attributed to differing results of learners’ ultimate attainment in learning (Dornyei, 2005), anxiety has been regarded as one of the most influential and consistent factors affecting learners’ learning (Subekti, 2018a). Many quantitative studies in various L2 contexts consistently revealed that anxiety was negatively associated with language performance and achievement (e.g.: Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Subekti, 2018b among others), giving some kind of support on the debilitating effect of anxiety on L2 learning.

Furthermore, several qualitative studies in the field found several inter-related anxiety factors within L2 instruction, especially class activities, learners, and teachers. Subekti's (2018a) study in the Indonesian context, for instance, found that learners felt more relaxed and confident when they had small-group scaled activities rather than whole-class activities. This may be attributed to learners' willingness to communicate in which learners tend to have a higher willingness to communicate and be more confident to speak when they have fewer interlocutors or audience (Subekti, 2019a, 2020). It may especially be the case when learners have low self-perceived competence (Subekti, 2020) leading them to feel inferior thus feeling anxious (Subasi, 2010). Regarding this, teachers are expected to promote more co-operative activities such as group works rather than individual works which may potentially be peer-comparison-provoking (Koga, 2010).

Moreover, many L2 learners, especially those with low self-perceived competence, tend to be afraid of talking because of being afraid of embarrassment and “losing face” in front of their peers if they make mistakes (Subekti, 2018a). It may partly explain why teachers who pay attention to details excessively and give excessive error corrections (see Mak, 2011; Subekti, 2018a) as well as speaking before the whole class (Tallon, 2006) were reported to make learners anxious. As conducting error corrections is at times very necessary and research suggests learners’ desire that their errors be corrected (S. Li, 2018), it is a matter of when, how, and how often teachers do error corrections so that it can be less anxiety-provoking (Subekti, 2018a).

In comparison with anxiety-instilling factors, several factors are reported to alleviate learners’ anxiety and improve their confidence in L2 classes. For example, letting learners use their native language (L1) occasionally in L2 classes was reported to lower learners’ anxiety in an Indonesian university context (see Subekti, 2018a), and not allowing it was reported to increase anxiety China (see Mak, 2011). Seen from the cognitive viewpoint, the use of L1 is believed to assist learners, especially the less proficient ones, when they face cognitive difficulty dealing with complex matters (Swain & Lapkin, 2013), thus its association with less anxiety. However, Subekti (2018a) reminded that though the use of L1 in L2 classrooms may offer potential benefits, it should be conducted with caution as several teacher participants reported that many of their students heavily relied on their teachers’ translation and used their L1 without trying their best to speak in English, resulting in lack of challenge.

Moreover, learners’ perceptions of their teachers’ attention, efforts, and supports towards their learning (Subekti, 2018a) as well as small group activities (Liu, 2006; Subekti, 2018a) are also associated with learners’ confidence and less anxiety in L2 classes. Liu (2006), for instance, stated that learners tend to take more risks in speaking despite possibly limited ability in smaller groups with fewer interlocutors. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to use teachers’ wait-time before asking learners to speak (Mak, 2011; Subekti, 2019b). Having enough preparation time is attributed to learners’ willingness to do language production in class (Subekti, 2019a) whilst not having enough preparation before performance is associated with learners’ apprehension (Subekti, 2019b).

As learners’ anxiety in L2 classes is the results of various intertwining factors which could include learners, teachers, and class activities, teachers could design lesson in such a way that it can create a psychologically safer and more relaxing environment for learners to learn the language and thus it facilitates learners’ learning better. Concerning that, teachers could design a lesson plan based on supporting teaching methods, one of which is the TBL framework by Jane Willis (J. Willis, 1996). This TBL framework, seen from the sequence of activities, consists of pre-task, task cycle, which consists of planning stage and reporting stage, as well as language focus. This framework could be observed in Figure 1.

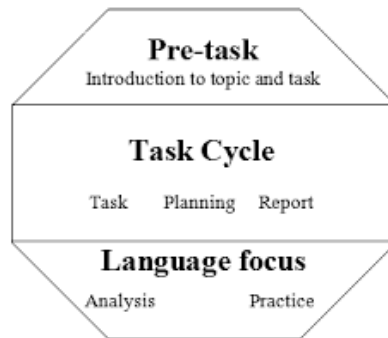


Figure 1. Willis' TBL framework

As presented earlier, the sequence of activities in which the production stage is put before the language focus stage suggests that this TBL framework resembles PPP “upside down.” Learners are given opportunities to use all the language resources they have to communicate in the production stage, which is fluency-focused, before the teachers direct their attention to the “structure of the day” in Language Focus stage (accuracy focused stage), where learners will explicitly learn about the grammatical points which they “unconsciously” produce, despite possible inaccuracies, in the production stage earlier (D. Willis & Willis, 1996; J. Willis, 1996).

Specific about L2 learning contexts, especially English as Foreign Language (EFL) ones like Indonesia, the implementation of Willis' TBL could potentially be an innovation from the typical instruction typically relying on PPP, which could at times end up on solely practising grammar rather than developing real communicative skills (Hedge, 2014). Moreover, in EFL contexts, learners tend to be more anxious and afraid of making mistakes due to their limited exposure to English outside classroom context (Subekti, 2018b), further hampering the development of their communicative skills. In relation with this, in terms of accommodating learners' needs to feel psychologically safer in using L2 in class, lessons developed using Willis' TBL could offer several advantages. Bao and Du (2015) reported that TBL can provide a comfortable and secure learning atmosphere for learners and it can help reduce their anxiety whilst at the same time improve their confidence. The framework also has potentials to accommodate several pedagogical implications of empirical studies' findings in the field of learners' anxiety on the potential roles in alleviating learners' anxiety of group works, small-group-scaled activities rather than whole-class activities, fewer error corrections, learners' preparation time before speaking, and cooperative learning (e.g.: Koga, 2010; Liu, 2006; Mak, 2011; Subasi, 2010; Subekti, 2018a; Tallon, 2006 among others).

4. ANXIETY-RESEARCH-INFORMED LESSON PLAN BASED ON WILLIS' TBL FRAMEWORK

The lesson plan in this section is developed based on J. Willis' (1996) TBL framework as informed by numerous L2 learners' anxiety studies' findings, pedagogical implications, and practical applications on factors that can help create a secure learning environment where learners can feel at ease in making meaningful communication in L2 classes. The

lesson plan, as presented in Table 1, is designed to develop the speaking skill of young-adult learners of intermediate language proficiency level with describing places as the language function. The materials of the lesson plan could be seen in the Appendix.

Table 1. Lesson plan's details

Duration: One hour	
Number of students: 32	
Age: 15-16 years old	
Level: Lower intermediate	
Skill: Speaking	
Language focus: Simple present tense	
Language function: Describing places	
Aims:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To make learners familiar with collaborative learning 2. To develop learners' presentation skills 	
Objectives:	
Students are expected to be able to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe places of their choice in small groups 2. Respond spontaneously to peers' questions related to these places 3. Identify the tense/language they use to describe places 	
Materials: Worksheets, PPT slides	
Assessments:	
Observation of learners working in small groups	
Whilst observing, the teacher can help learners if they have difficulty in communicating ideas. Explicit error corrections, however, will not be given during tasks promoting fluency.	
Anticipated problems:	Corresponding possible solutions:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the planning stage, several anxious learners may still feel reluctant to contribute ideas. 2. Some students could feel uncomfortable of the teacher's presence whilst having activities in small groups. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher gives encouragement and emphasises that there is definite "answer". They can choose any places or have their own imaginary ones. 2. She should make an appropriate distance that can enable her to monitor students whilst learners will not feel "pressure" due to the feeling of "being closely monitored."

Furthermore, each stage of the Willis' TBL lesson plan in this paper is supplemented with rationales from the perspectives of educational psychology, especially that of L2 learners' anxiety. Table 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively present the pre-task, task cycle (planning stage), task cycle (reporting stage), and language focus, based on the TBL activity sequence (see J. Willis, 1996).

Table 2. Pre-task

Time	Stages	Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Interactions
15'	1	a. Greeting b. Showing Bali map c. Having a brief discussion about Bali d. Asking students to form small groups (4 students) and distributing a paper with a map of Bali e. Inviting brainstorming activity on Bali f. Asking students to walk around and add more information to their peers' mind map	Having discussion with teacher Make groups of 4 Doing brainstorming Adding information not yet written in their peers' mind map	Discussion (through <i>Mentimeter</i> discussion software) Group work Group work
	2	a. Explaining how students can describe places through some guiding questions shown on screen b. Asking students if they can add more descriptions of places in small groups	Asking questions if necessary Adding more descriptions (the idea can be obtained from their mind map)	Group work

The first stage, pre-task, as seen in Table 2, aims to activate schemata. It functions to enable learners to predict what is to come (Harmer, 2007) as well as connect it to their previous knowledge. As the whole-class discussion is often anxiety-provoking (Tallon, 2006), moreover in the very beginning of the lesson, the use of *Mentimeter* software enabling learners to contribute ideas in class simultaneously and anonymously through their cell phones can be an alternative way to stimulate learners' participation in the whole-class discussion.

Furthermore, as low self-confidence and low perception of communicative competence negatively affect learners' spoken performance (Savasci, 2014; Subekti, 2018a, 2020), this first stage is also intended to build learners self-confidence from the beginning. As build a sense of achievement, it can increase their positive self-perception for successfully completing the next tasks (Bao & Du, 2015). In addition, movements, in which learners are asked to walk around and add information in other groups' mind maps, are often viewed as brain-friendly ways to ease tension and create a better learning atmosphere (Sousa, 2006).

The second stage aims to prime for the task. It allows learners to concentrate to the task (J. Willis, 1996). Several questions posed at this stage may have been answered in the previous stage by the students. It is done to build the students' confidence even more as early as possible.

Table 3. Task cycle (planning stage)

PLANNING STAGE				
Time	Stage	Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Interactions
15'	3	a. Introducing the task by providing a sample of profile of Bali b. Explaining the task further c. Asking students to make a brief profile of a place in groups	Asking questions if necessary In groups, deciding on a place and making a profile of it (In the reporting stage later, each student should present it in a new group, so each student should write his/her group's profile.)	Whole class discussion Group work

The planning stage, as seen in Table 3, aims to provide learners with sufficient time to prepare for language production (J. Willis, 1996) and this preparation time can help make them have less apprehension (Subekti, 2019b) and become more confident (Mak, 2011; Subekti, 2019a). As the task in this planning stage is designed to be conducted in small groups, co-operation is more emphasised. This way, learners are given the chance to support each other and whilst doing so they can minimise peer-comparison, attributed to inferiority feeling (Koga, 2010).

It is important to note that, at this stage, learners have to agree on what place to describe or what possible aspects to mention concerning that place and it may not be an easy task. As to reach a mutual agreement through the use of L2 only might pose cognitive difficulty for learners there is a possibility that at this stage learners use their L1 to complete the task. Regarding this, Ellis (2013) mentioned that occasional use of L1 is not prohibited in TBL and allowing learners to use it in L2 classes can help reduce their anxiety (Mak, 2011; Subekti, 2018a).

Table 4. Task cycle (reporting stage)

REPORTING STAGE				
Time	Stage	Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Interactions
20'	4	a. Asking students to form a new group consisting of 4 (jigsaw) and asking them to present their respective profile before their peers in the group b. Asking students to have a short question and answer after each presentation	Presenting in front of their peers the profile of place they have prepared in the previous group Doing brief question and answer session after each presentation	Presentation in small groups Discussion in small groups

From Table 4, it could be seen that the reporting stage is conducted in small groups. Though J. Willis (1996) as the advocate of TBL suggested that reporting stage can be conducted in a whole-class scale, several studies found that speaking in front of a large audience could be quite threatening for learners especially the lower proficiency ones (Liu, 2006; Subekti, 2018a, 2019a, 2020). Hence, the reporting stage, rather than conducted in a whole-class scale, is conducted in small groups. Conducting the reporting stage in small groups, Jacobs and Hall (2002) mentioned, allows each learner in class to have more time and opportunity to speak. As they speak more, their speaking confidence can gradually improve.

Furthermore, there is a brief session of question and answer after each student deliver his/her mini-presentation in the group. In this activity, the presenter may need to produce spontaneous speech when responding to his/her peers' questions and this could instil learners' nervous feelings. However, as the activity is conducted in small groups, it is expected that learners can adopt more risk-taking behaviours in speaking (Subekti, 2019a). Besides, as long as the spontaneous speech is not immediately followed with error corrections by teachers, it may not be anxiety-provoking (Yalcin & Incecay, 2014).

However, teachers need to know that learners may feel self-conscious when they realise their teachers are monitoring their language performance at very close proximity (Harmer, 2007) and they may change behaviours and be afraid of making mistakes. Hence, whilst learners are doing speaking activities in their small groups, teachers should monitor them in a distance that will unlikely make their students feel afraid to talk.

Table 5. Language Focus

Time	Stage	Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Interaction
10'	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Distributing the grammar exercise and inviting students to closely pay attention to the language structure used in the task cycle b. To encourage students, telling them they have used the grammar in the exercise quite well in the task cycle c. Asking students to work on it individually and inviting them to do the it together after that d. In case some students have not finished the exercise, asking students to work on it as homework e. Reminding students it is okay to not to understand the material right away and to study the exercise again at their own pace f. Concluding the lesson 	Doing grammar exercise	Individual work and class discussion

The Language Focus presented in Table 5 allows learners to focus their attention on language structure/grammar. The stage gives learners an accuracy-focused activity after doing fluency-focused activities in the reporting stage earlier (J. Willis, 1996). Teacher's encouragement and compliment at the beginning of this stage has the purpose of reducing learners' tension (Trang & Moni, 2015). Furthermore, motivating learners to work at their respective speed done before the lesson is concluded can potentially minimise peer-comparison (Koga, 2010) attributed to anxiety moreover if learners perceive themselves as lagging behind their classmates (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012).

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, several important points could be emphasised. Implementing TBL in an educational context that may have been very familiar with PPP may present potential challenges. Learners may at first feel unconfident when they are given a chance to communicate using all language resources they have without systematic and explicit grammar instruction in the beginning (Bao & Du, 2015). Learners may expect some "language guidance" before they do language production and teachers could also feel "tempted" to ensure that learners produce accurate language expressions. However, whilst learners' and teachers' adaptation to TBL may need some time, the TBL framework offers an opportunity to facilitate language learning by allowing learners to learn the language through using it in communication rather than treating it as an object to be studied (Ellis, 2013). As far as educational psychology is concerned, furthermore, instruction using TBL framework can be a possible alternative in providing learners with a more secure and supportive learning environment where learners have more opportunities to speak in small groups and have more cooperative activities minimising learners' self-comparison, anxiety, as well as enhancing their enjoyment in learning (Bao & Du, 2015).

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APPENDIX - Materials

PRE-TASK (15')

Part 1. Schema building



(This picture is shown on the screen. There is a short class discussion led by the teacher)

MIND MAPPING

Teacher distributes a paper containing the spider web with Bali picture on it. Students work in groups of four in which they mention anything they associate with BALI. Then, they have to walk around to the mind maps of other groups. They should add words that have not been written on their friends' mind maps.



Part 2. Questions for priming for the task (shown in a slide)

DESCRIBING PLACES

To describe places, you can use the following questions to guide you.

1. What is the name of the place?
2. Where is this place?
3. What is the general impression you get about this place?
4. How are people?
5. What is/are there?
6. What does the place have? And perhaps, what doesn't it have?
7. What are the things you like about this place?
8. Is there anything that you don't like about this place?
9. **(You can use your mind map to help you add more information. Can you add more?)**

TASK CYCLE

Part 1. PLANNING STAGE (15 minutes)

(These instructions are presented on a slide)

GROUP WORK

1. In your group, choose a place (village, island, city, or country) that you know (or you can “invent” an imaginary place).
2. Make a short profile of the place.
3. Be ready to present it in front of your friends in a new group individually (therefore, **each** of you needs to have the profile your group has created).
4. You can prepare a short note to help you present your profile.

An example that is shown on a slide after the instructions:



BALI ISLAND

Location: Indonesia (east of Java)
Capital : Denpasar
Population: 4 million people
Ethnicity: Balinese, Javanese, others
Religions: Hindu, Islam, Christianity
Occupation: Tourism, agriculture
Transportation: Motorcycle, cars
Popular sites: Kuta Beach, Tanah Lot
(Can you add more?)

1. Make a **new** group of four.
2. **Present the profile** you have made in your previous group **in front of your group members**.
3. Each presentation will be followed by short free **questions and answers in groups**.
4. **5 minutes** for each presentation and Q&A (take a turn)

LANGUAGE FOCUS (10 minutes)

(The exercise worksheet is distributed for each student.)

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate responses.

Bali Island (be) _____ (1) the most well-known tourism place in Indonesia. Every year, millions of tourists from abroad (come) _____ (2) to Bali for holidays every year. Bali (be) _____ (3) also called as “the island of gods” because the majority of Balinese (be) _____ (4) Hindus and they (believe) _____ (5) in gods. Streets in the island (be) _____ (6) typically crowded with both private cars and motorcycles. Legian Street (be) _____ (7) perhaps the most famous one among tourists. Renting motorcycles (be) _____ (8) also common in such popular site. Bali (have) _____ (9) many beautiful beaches, such as Pandawa Beach, Kuta Beach, and Sanur Beach. It also (have) _____ (10) many splendid temples too, for examples, Tanah Lot Temple and Uluwatu Temple.