

**A LITERATURE REVIEW OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN COLLEGE READING COMPREHENSION - EXPLORATION OF TASKS DESIGN TO FOSTER READING STRATEGIES**

**Xi Chen**

Harbin Institute of Technology, Shenzhen, China

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**ABSTRACT:** *In this study, the writer has conducted a literature review of task-based language teaching in reading comprehension under the framework of the sociocultural theory. The core concepts of sociocultural theory: the zone of proximal development (ZPD) theory, and the scaffolding theory are introduced to justify task-based approach in the reading instruction. Then, the task design are discussed with the Ellis`s task design criteria and reading strategies to show that tasks as the media can be viewed as scaffoldings to promote learners` ZPD.*

**KEYWORDS:** Task-Based Language Teaching, Reading Comprehension, Sociocultural Theory, Reading Strategies.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As an English teacher who teaches college reading, I have studied these two teaching requirements from Ministry of Education in great details. According to the Requirements (MOE, 2007), teachers should focus on the reading comprehension and the reading strategies and help to increase students` reading speed, develop skimming and scanning strategies. However, Xu (2015) exposed some problems in teaching college reading. In most cases, teachers would still adopt the traditional teacher-centered approach, where vocabulary, grammar were placed as the teaching targets. Some teachers would spend most of time talking about the details of language points at the expense of teaching reading strategies such as skimming, scanning and inference. Students in this classroom would have to listen to the teachers and take notes. In this way, their reading skills cannot be fully developed and the learning motivation is awfully low. To look back at the MOE requirements, the teaching method of college reading should be the student-centered class, with the emphasis on practical English use and autonomous learning. Bearing these specifications in mind, I would like to apply the task based language teaching (TBLT) in the reading instruction. Task-based language teaching has long been encouraged by the Ministry of Education in the Standards for English Curriculum (MOE, 2012) for secondary schools. As for the college English, plenty of researches have done to link task-based language teaching with reading. (Shen, 2005; Zhao, 2010; Li, 2011; Wei, 2011; Fu, 2015; Li, 2015) However, there are not too many researches to justify TBLT in teaching college reading comprehension, especially reading strategies in China. Furthermore, language teachers are often bewildered what exactly a language task is and how to design tasks to teach reading strategies. Tasks are often confused with activities, situational grammar exercises. Erlam (2015) has written an interesting paper titled as "I am still not sure what a task

is” for teachers designing language tasks. She proposed a research to analyze 43 tasks designed by teachers under Ellis’s 4 key criteria. Results show that the task-design aspects were difficult to teachers. Facing on the above questions in my mind, I have decided to embark on my investigation to the following research questions:

- 1) What is tasks in task-based language teaching? What is reading comprehension?
- 2) Why should we apply tasked-based language teaching in reading comprehension? What is the theoretical framework to achieve the MOE requirement?
- 3) How can teachers design tasks to promote reading strategies?

Therefore, in the interest of the clarification of this paper, it will follow the below order: 1) Definition of Tasks; 2) Definition of Reading Comprehension; 3) Review of TBLT and Reading Comprehension; 4) A Sociocultural Perspective of TBLT in Reading Instruction; 5) Task Design Fostering Learners` Reading Strategies.

### **Definition of Tasks**

As one of the earliest persons to apply TBLT in the Bangalore project, Prabhu (1987, 24) defined a task as “an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process”. Prabhu’s definition is a bit narrow with just the indication of task outcome and learner`s cognitive process. As for the scope, perspective, authenticity and linguistic skills of language tasks, they are not clarified.

To further explain the task outcome, Willis (1996: 23-25) elaborated that tasks are always the activities where the target language is used by learners for a communicative purpose to achieve an outcome. This emphasized the aspect of communication in the tasks. Here, tasks outcome is pointed out as the communication.

In Skehan`s (1998) features of tasks: Meaning is primary; There are some sort of relationship to comparable real word activities; Task completion has some priorities; The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome. The task primary perspective is focused on meaning. As for the authenticity, it should include read-world tasks.

Nunan elaborated Prabhu`s definition of the learners` cognitive process into comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the task performance. He (2011:4) divided the tasks into two types: real world tasks and pedagogical tasks. Real world tasks are used in the places out of the classrooms. Pedagogical tasks are “a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than manipulating form.” (Nunan, 2011:4) In Nunan`s definition, the linguistic skills of grammatical knowledge are used in performing tasks.

But, are there only communication skills and grammatical knowledge in the task performance? To answer this questions, Ellis (2013) argued that all the four language skills were included in

a task. The task may “require the learner to read a text and display their understanding”. (Ellis, 2013:10)

To give a comprehensive definition of tasks, Ellis (2013: 2) suggested that 6 dimensions should be taken into account: scope, perspective, authenticity, linguistic skills, psychological process and the outcome. Comparing all the above definitions by the scholars, I do agree with Ellis’s six dimensions of the task definition. Tasks should be viewed based on their scopes as the workplans, perspectives focusing on meaning, authenticity of real world process, any of the 4 linguistic skills, the cognitive process and the communicative outcome. (Ellis, 2013)

### **Reading Comprehension**

Next, we will define reading comprehension and then move on to review the researches that have been done to link TBLT with reading comprehension.

“Reading comprehension is the process of simultaneously eliciting and creating meaning through interaction with written language” (Doff, 1998: 24). To highlight both “the significance and the insufficiency of the text as a determinant of reading comprehension, researchers use the terms extracting and constructing meaning” (Setayesh, and Marzban, 2017). Therefore, reading comprehension is “the process of simultaneously exacting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language”. (Snow, 2002: 11; Caldwell, 2008: 4; Setayesh, and Marzban, 2017) The term, “cognitive structures”, was raised, which “worked as a summary of the reader's past experience that categorizes everything the reader knows about the world and works as the premise of all his/her understanding and comprehension of the world.” Understanding written language is among those cognitive structures. (Setayesh, and Marzban, 2017)

### **Review of TBLT and Reading Comprehension**

Then, how has TBLT been applied in teaching reading comprehension? Task-based language teaching has long been applied in the field of reading. (Willis, 1996; Nunan, 2011) However, theoretical and empirical articles have been inadequate and insufficient in justifying teaching reading comprehension with task-based approach.

Internationally, Hafiz et al (2014) have conducted a quasi-experimental study with pre-test and post-test to investigate the role of task-based teaching on improving reading skills for Iranian pre-intermediate learners. The reading skills were about scanning, skimming, summarizing, etc. This study showed that task-based teaching can improve the reading skills of students in the pre-intermediate level. In the quasi- experiment, the questionable reading tasks were not clearly exemplified. The authors also admitted in the limitation section that the participants of this study were all female students.

Setayesh and Marzban (2017) have explored the influence of task-based language teaching with the development of the Iranian EFL learners’ ESP reading comprehension skills. By simply arguing that teaching reading comprehension needs to engage in the process of meaning, Setayesh and Marzban (2017) linked the reading comprehension instruction with task-based

language so as to process meaning and achieve desirable results. In their study, four groups of 25 participants (Iranian ESP students majoring in Law and Mechanical Engineering: two experimental groups and two control ones) were chosen to conduct an experiment with the TBLT intervention. Results have shown that TBLT can have a positive effect on students' ESP reading ability. (Setayesh and Marzban, 2017) In this study, the experiment results were based on students' reading comprehension tests, where the reliability of the tests is doubtful. Another matter is that the paper did not specify what kinds of tasks were used in the experiment and what reading skills were enhanced.

Last but not the least, both studies were carried out in the Iranian teaching context. Political, social-cultural and linguistic features in Iran are not the same as those in China, which makes the research findings not transferable of teaching college reading in China.

In Malaysia, Sidek (2012) discussed the communicative task-based approach in the EFL instruction. Based on the literature review on Richards and Rodgers's (2001) analysis of language teaching model, research findings suggested that the majority of reading tasks in the Malaysian EFL secondary reading curriculum lacked highly the communicative task-based language teaching characteristics. This study shared the same limitations of those above studies. It lies in the secondary school reading context in Malaysia. Meanwhile, it raised the same question whether Chinese college reading tasks will also lack the communicative task-based features.

In Hong Kong, Green (2005) described the disappointing results of the implementation of the Hong Kong Extensive Reading Scheme in English and argued that extensive reading should be incorporated fully in the language curriculum as a vital component of a task-based approach to second language learning.

In mainland China, the majority of teachers support the application of TBLT in teaching college reading. Shen (2005) reviewed briefly about the origin of TBLT from Vygotsky's language learning theory and Ellis's input and interaction hypothesis. In view of Vygotsky, the sociality of learning and the important role of teachers and peers promote personal learning. As for Ellis's input and interaction hypothesis, the ultimate goal of language learners is to make use of comprehensible language input materials and use classroom and language knowledge to express and communicate, thereby promoting the ability to communicate with target language. (Shen, 2005) Fu (2015) mentioned the history of TBLT from Vygotsky to Prabhu's Bangalore Project. And then, she shared her own experiences of how to apply TBLT in the reading class. Other authors also went over the definitions of task-based language teaching and then took one reading class as an example to show how the task-based approach was adopted. (Zhao, 2010; Li, 2011; Wei, 2011; Li, 2015) However, their arguments are rather descriptive of task-based approach and it is about teaching reading with personal comments and experiences, which lacks in-depth theoretical and empirical supports.

Nevertheless, two empirical studies have carried out similar experiments with the experimental group of TBLT and control group of Grammar-Translation Method. (Gong and Zhang, 2009; Gao and Li, 2017) The experimental group followed the task-based model of pre-reading tasks,

while-reading tasks and post-reading tasks. After a semester of English reading teaching, they found out that the experimental group had more improvement in reading comprehension than the control group. However, these two studies moved straight to the descriptions of the empirical studies and they did not review thoroughly the theory behind TBLT. And the post test was based on the reading comprehension tests, which would pose limitations on the reading comprehension assessment.

Mao (2012) has reviewed tasks and reading comprehension in the Chinese secondary school. A questionnaire was designed to research on students' opinions of the reading activities. Through the questionnaire, it is revealed that most students had the passive positions in the reading classroom. The traditional teaching methods prevented them to develop reading motivation and competence. Therefore, it is argued that a shift from traditional teaching methods to task-based language teaching should be realized in teaching middle school English. This study has its own value for college English teachers to see how secondary English reading classroom is taught in terms of the teaching methods. However, this study, again, did not review the theory behind TBLT. To get to know college students' attitude for the teaching approach in reading, teachers have to carry out further empirical research.

Based on the above analysis, not only in the international contexts, but also in China, thorough theoretical foundation is not established in justifying teaching reading comprehension with task-based language teaching. Accordingly, I would like to explore the theoretical framework to rationalize the link between task-based language teaching and reading instruction.

### **A Socio-cultural Perspective of Tasks and Reading Comprehension**

In the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researches, arguments and battles have been existing for a long time between the underpinning theoretical frameworks: the psycholinguistic perspective and the sociocultural perspective. (Shi and Liu, 2008) As the focus of attention in the field of SLA, task-based researches lay predominantly on the psycholinguistic perspectives as the theoretical foundation. (Liu et al, 2013) The psycholinguistic camp accepts the linguistic innate theory, and they think that language is a constraint system of rules or principles. The process of language acquisition is the process of internalizing a set of psychological rules or principles. In this process, language learners actively and continuously establish assumptions and hypotheses to understand the rules of language learning. The contents and objectives of the psycholinguistic study are the internalization of learners' language knowledge or language ability. (Liu et al, 2013) However, the sociocultural theory is less paid attention to. (Ellis, 2013; Qin, 2017) Sociolinguistics, as a linguistic theory, focuses on the influence of social environment on the use of language. In SLA, sociocultural supporters focus on the relationship between social environment and language output, or the interdependence between the social environment of language use and the learner's cognitive process that influences learners' language changes. (Liu et al, 2013) According to the MOE (2007) requirements of college English, "the goal of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of using English, so that they can use English to communicate effectively in the future study, work and social activities, while enhancing their self-learning ability and adapting to the needs of

China's social development and international exchanges.” Based on the MOE objective, the education of college English should pay more attention on the social communication of language use instead of just focusing on the internalization of learners’ language knowledge. Therefore, I would like to adopt the social cultural paradigm to discuss how task-based approach can not only enhance the practical use but also learner autonomy in teaching reading comprehension underpinning the MOE teaching requirements.

### **A Brief Introduction of Sociocultural Theory (SCT)**

The Sociocultural Theory was first developed by L.S. Vygotsky and his colleagues in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Wertsch, 1985; Qin, 2017) However, the original theory put forward by Vygotsky was called the cultural-historical psychology. With the development of Wertsch, the Vygotskian notion of “cultural-historical theory” was then transformed to be the “sociocultural theory”. (Wertsch, 1995; Qin, 2017) Wertsch interpreted the sociocultural research to “understand the relationship between human mental functioning, cultural, historical and instructional setting”. (Wertsch, 1995: 56; Ellis 2013: 3; Qin, 2017: 2) Lantolf developed further of the SCT. He claimed that “it is a theory of mind that recognizes the central role that the social relationships and cultural constructed artifacts play in organizing unique forms of thinking”. (Lantolf, 2004:30-31; Lantolf and Throne, 2013:1) Qin (2017) reinforced Lantolf’s viewpoint and emphasized that the sociocultural theory places its research focus on the social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts and its influence or function in organizing unique forms of human thinking.

### **Core Theories in the Sociocultural Theory to Link TBLT and Reading Comprehension**

#### **The Zone of Proximal Development Theory (ZPD)**

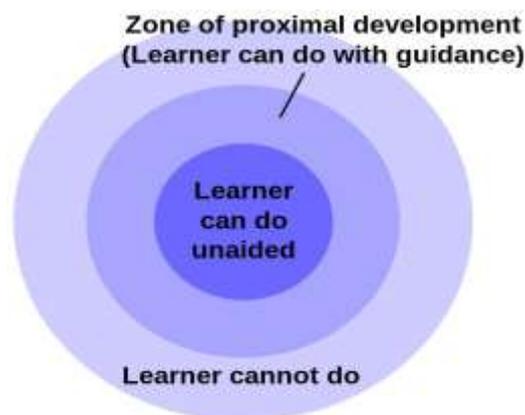


Figure 1: The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The Zone of Proximal Development (See figure 1) is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problems solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”. (Vygotsky, 1978: 86; Lantolf and Throne, 2013:266; Wei and Zhang,

2015: 7; Qin, 2017: 39) The concept of ZPD was originally used to describe children's language development ability. On one hand, there is the level that learners can solve a problem without any assistance. On the other hand, there is another level, a potential level of development, that learners cannot solve a problem unless they are guided by the adults or cooperative with their peers. The distance or difference between these two levels is called the zone of the proximal development. (Philippot and Graves, 2009; Ellis, 2013) (See figure 1)

Philippot and Graves (2009: 15) suggested that in teaching reading comprehension, the teachers would be the "more knowledgeable other who assists students in successfully reading selections they could not read on their own". Apart from that, students will apply what they know to help each other to deal with readings that they cannot accomplish by themselves. (Philippot and Graves, 2009) Ellis (2013: 179) has expressed that task-based language teaching "pose appropriate challenge by requiring learners to perform functions and use language that enable them to dynamically construct ZPDs". As for the implication of ZPD of task-based language teaching, Ellis (2013) argued that teachers and peers assistance can be productively offered when performing tasks in language classroom to produce appropriate ZPDs. Therefore, when doing reading comprehension tasks, teachers and peer assistance can greatly support the learners to develop their zone of proximal of development.

### **Scaffolding Theory**

The term "scaffolding" was first raised by Bruner (1983). He (1983) claimed that the function of scaffolding was to provide help and support to the learners to make the completion of tasks possible. Ellis (2013) provided a similar definition. Scaffolding is "the dialogic process by which one speaker assists another in performing a function that he or she cannot perform alone". (Ellis, 2013: 181) Scaffolding can be between adult to children, expert to novice as well as between peers to encourage cooperative learning. (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007) According to Bruner (1983), teachers will provide guidance to the students. The guidance will act as the scaffolding to help the students to master, construct and internalize the knowledge and skills. Once the teaching objectives are achieved, the scaffold should be withdrawn to enable the learners to finish the study task independently. Wertsch (2006) further explained that the scaffolding could not only acquire from expert to novice, but also between peers.

Van Lier (1996) expressed the scaffolding process can be divided into the 6 steps. 1) Constructing the context: in this process, both sides will create conversation and interaction. 2) Non-stop cooperation. The powerful side (expert) will continue to support the novice to complete the task. 3) Intersubjectivity. It is the development of interactive mind thinking. 4) Assisting communication. The communication between the expert and the novice is assisting, guiding and implicating, instead of giving out the answers to the novice directly. 5) Random cooperation. The interaction and communication between the expert and novice is random. 6) The shift of power. When the novice can complete the task by himself, the expert will be out of the scaffolding process.

### **Empirical Researches of the ZPD Theory and the Scaffolding Theory**

Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) were among the early ones to study empirical evidences of ZPDs in the field of SLA. They (1994) investigated the corrective feedback a tutor would give to three L2 learners. In this research, a regulatory scale was designed to examine the help provided by the tutor to see whether it was implicit or explicit. It turned out that the implicit and explicit corrective feedback depended on the learners' ZPD. Ellis (2013) acknowledged that even their study was not task-based, the interesting ideas of regulatory scale could be employed into the analysis of task-based interactions. Adair-Hauck and Donato (1994) proved that ZPD is beneficial for the language classroom, especially in helping students in the intermediate or lower levels. Anton (1999) compared the teacher-centered and student-centered interaction in the language studies. When negotiation and interaction are needed, language will act as the function of scaffolding. It could effectively promote the development of learners' ZPDs. Aside from the interaction between the expert and novice, DiCamilla and Anton (1997) demonstrated that peers can also provide scaffolding when repeating and helping each other. And with the peer's help, they can complete the tasks effectively.

Ma (2012) had interpreted from the perspective of ZPD to analyze of the process of teaching reading to English majors in China. Through analyzing the students, teaching objectives, teaching methods and teaching evaluation, it is found that the teachers are in the role of the scaffolding. Furthermore, the students can easily improve their potential ZPDs in reading.

Duan (2014) applied the qualitative methods to study 282 students through readers' reports, notes and videos. She discovered that scaffolding students in teaching reading was a good way of learning. However, teachers' scaffolding can be an intervention of learners' ZPDs. Peers scaffolding would be better for the learners.

Task-based language teaching as defined above will involve completing tasks with the negotiation of meaning and the communicative outcome. When applying it in the reading instruction, teachers who act as the scaffolders will need to negotiate meaning with the learners. Meanwhile, peer communication will as well provide scaffolding for the learning process. With the help and support from both the teachers and classmates, learners will be able to perform tasks that they cannot do it on their own, which will help to promote their zone of proximal development. In the process of reading tasks, all the 4 language skills are being used to help learners to practice real-life language use. After the scaffolding process, learners will be granted the shift of power so that they can complete the tasks by themselves in the future. These concepts will fit perfectly with the MOE requirement that we discussed at the beginning to promote practical language use and learner autonomy.

### **Task Design on Reading Strategies**

The above review is about the justification of task-based language teaching in reading comprehension under the sociocultural perspective of the ZPD theory and the scaffolding theory. Next, we will investigate on the question how teachers can design tasks as scaffolding to practice reading comprehension and promote learners' ZPD to fulfill the MOE requirements.

To examine the MOE requirement closely, the reading comprehension was primarily specified as the reading strategies of increasing reading speed, skimming, scanning as well as understanding main ideas and details of the texts. Therefore, we will next deliberate how to design tasks to foster learners' development of the required reading strategies.

### **Task Design Criteria**

To enhance the reading strategies while designing tasks, we should scrutinize Ellis's criteria closely. Ellis has elaborated the four criteria as below, which overlaps with the dimensions of the task definition that we have discussed earlier before in this paper. (Ellis and Shintani, 2013:135; Erlam, 2016: 280).

From the perspective of the tasks:

1. The primary focus should be on 'meaning'. When performing reading tasks, learners should focus on the negotiation of meaning in the classroom communication.
2. There should be some kinds of 'gap'. Performing the reading tasks will provide a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning.

From the dimensions of psychological process and linguistic skills:

3. Learners should largely rely on their own resources psychologically and linguistically. In the reading classroom, learners are not taught how to read. Instead, they will learn how to read through processing cognitive information with the written language and performing tasks by interacting with their peers and teachers linguistically.

From the task outcome:

4. There is a clearly defined communicative outcome. Thus, when performing a reading task, learners will learn to achieve the reading strategies through communication with others.

### **Typologies of Tasks**

Guided by Ellis's four task criteria, we will next investigate the typologies of tasks.

From a micro perspective, 7 types of tasks was raised by Pattison (1987). They are questions and answers, dialogue and role play, matching activities, communication strategies, pictures and picture stories, puzzle and problems, discussion and decisions. Willis and Willis (2007) distinguished another 6 task types to be matching, comparing, problem solving, projects and storytelling.

From an interpersonal perspective, Prabhu (1987) put forward 3 types of tasks: information-gap activity, reasoning-gap activity and opinion-gap activity. To further develop Prabhu's types of tasks, 5 kinds of tasks were depicted: jigsaw, information gap, problem-solving, decision making and opinion exchange. (Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993; Richards, 2001)

Based on the strategies underpinning the tasks, Nunan (1999) delineated another 5 task



## Reading Strategies

Dai and Chen (2008) developed the reading comprehension strategies into predicting, previewing, skimming and scanning. However, Tian (2006) held a dual view on reading strategies and illustrated an extensive list of reading strategies. It is divided into the micro and macro levels. Micro strategies included picking out key words, recognizing basic syntactic patterns and getting the main ideas, while the macro skills involved planning on the purpose to read; previewing etc.

Anderson (1991) illustrated 5 clusters of reading strategies: supervising (prediction about the meaning of a word), supporting (skimming and scanning), paraphrasing (paraphrasing or translating a word to L1), establishing text coherence (using the context clues to interpret a word or phrase) and text taking (reading test questions before reading the passage).

Comparing the above categories of reading strategies from the reading process, Paris et al. (1991) established another grouping on the basis of the chronological time of teaching reading: before, during and after reading. The pre-reading strategies activate the prior knowledge of text. While reading strategies will get the main ideas by inferences and cross-referencing. Post-reading strategies will review the reading contents of the text. (Koda, 2007:207)

To combine all the various categorization of reading strategies, we can group the MOE required reading strategies in terms of the teaching process. In the pre-reading stage, teachers can activate the prior knowledge of the text by assigning the previewing and predicting task. While reading, we can to get the main ideas and details of the text by doing skimming and scanning tasks. Through the training of skimming and scanning, teachers can help learners to increase their reading speeds. After reading, we can review the context of the text to reinforce students' reading comprehension.

## Tasks and Reading Strategies

In terms of tasks and reading strategies, Grellet (1981) established 3 major types of reading strategies: 1) Sensitizing; 2) Improving reading speed; 3) From skimming to scanning. Based on these strategies, Grellet (1981: 62) put the classroom tasks into two categories: non-linguistic response to the text and linguistic response to the text. The non-linguistic response tasks included: ordering a sequence of pictures; comparing texts and pictures; matching; using illustrations; completing a documents; mapping out; using the information in the text; jigsaw reading. For the linguistic response tasks, there are recognizing the information; comparing several texts; completing a document; summarizing and note-taking. From Grellet's tasks categories, language teachers cannot link directly the reading strategies along with the tasks.

Comparing with Grellet, Willis (1996) had a more ready-to-use classification of reading tasks related to the reading strategies. She defined the reading tasks to be the text-based task which would involve processing text for meaning. Text-based tasks will develop reading with communicative purposes. To further elaborate reading in the task-based context, she (1996) specified several reading strategies: 1) Instead of perfect understanding of reading word by

word, it is argued that reading for meaning should be the priority concern in reaching approximate comprehension. 2) Silent reading will increase the reading speed than reading aloud. For the text-based tasks, Willis (1996:75-76) recommended 6 types:

Prediction tasks: from headline and early text; from selected parts of text; from pictures/videos with/ without words or soundtrack.

Jumbles: jumbled selection of texts; jumble key points of a summary; jumbled pictures from a series.

Restoration tasks: identified words/phrases/sentences omitted from or added to a text.

Jigsaw/split information tasks: each student in a group reads a different part of a whole text or researches an angle of themes. These are then combined to form a whole.

Comparison tasks: two accounts of the same accident/event; a diagram/picture to compare with a written account/description.

Memory challenge tasks: after a single brief exposure of the text, students list/describe/write quiz questions about what they can remember to show other pairs.

Based on Willis's (1996) categorization of tasks, we can adapt these tasks into Nunan's (1999) strategic typology of tasks.

**Table 1: Willis's (1996) categorization of tasks from Nunan (1999) 's Strategic Typology of Tasks**

Cognitive strategy	Prediction tasks; Comparison tasks; Memory challenge tasks
Linguistic strategy	Restoration tasks
Creative strategy	Jumbles; Jigsaw/Split information tasks

To apply Willis's (1996) tasks to teach the MOE required reading strategies:

- Increase reading speed
- Skimming and scanning
- Identify main ideas and details

We can use the cognitive strategic tasks like prediction tasks and the comparison tasks in the pre-reading stage to activate students' prior knowledge of the text. In the while reading, linguistic strategic tasks like restoration and creative strategic tasks like jumbles as well as jigsaw can be adopted for the students to get the main ideas and details of the texts by skimming and scanning. The pre-reading and while-reading trainings help to increase learners' reading speeds. When it comes to after reading, cognitive memory challenge tasks can be used to

reinforce students' understandings of the text.

Looking back at the tasks design criteria by Ellis (Ellis and Shintani, 2013:135; Erlam, 2016: 280), the reading tasks should have a focus on a gap to the negotiation and expression of meaning. Learners would use linguistic skills to communicate with their teachers and peers. The negotiation and communication process of tasks can be viewed as the scaffolding process to assist learners build their reading strategies to fulfill the tasks. The task-based approach is regarded as a medium for teachers and learners to build the scaffolding to aid the learners to achieve tasks that they cannot accomplish by themselves. Once the reading strategies are gained, the scaffolding will be withdrawn and the learners will learn to practice the reading strategies on their own. Through the implementation of tasks in reading strategies, students can develop their zone of proximal development (ZPD) and finish readings without assistance.

However, as for what kinds of tasks are more effective in teaching reading strategies to foster learners' ZPD, further empirical researches should be done in the future studies.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, task-based language teaching was raised to achieve the MOE requirements in teaching college reading comprehension. The writer first critically reviewed the current literature of the task-based teaching in reading. Then, the core concept of the sociocultural theory: the zone of proximal development and the scaffolding theory are adopted to justify the task-based approach in the reading contexts. Then, Ellis's task design criteria are raised. The reading strategies as well as their related tasks are discussed to argue that tasks can act as the medium of scaffolding to foster learners' ZPD. However, as for the actual performance of reading tasks and the assessment of task-based teaching to enhance learners' ZPD, further reviews and researches should be done for future studies.

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**General Requirements for College English Teaching (MOE, 2007)**

“Reading comprehension: Students will be able to read general articles with the reading speed to 70 words per minute. For long articles. The reading speed will increase to 100 words per minute. Students should learn the reading strategies of skimming and scanning. With the use of dictionary, they can grasp the main ideas and understand the details and facts.

Teaching methods: The teaching method reform not only lies in changing the teaching activities or the ways of teaching, but also the teaching concept: from teacher-centered to student-centered. The English lessons should not only teach the general language skills, but also promote practical English use and independent learner autonomy.”