

Task-Based Reading Course for EFL Teacher Trainees with Different Experiential Learning Styles: A Transformative Orientation

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Abstract

Teacher education programs are ought to deal with the issue of language proficiency. Moreover, finding appropriate framework to help prospective teachers with different learning styles to transform the acquired knowledge and skills into actual teaching practice is highly promising. Task Based Instruction (TBI) might pave the way for such transformative learning. This study attempted to testify this hypothesis. To this end, among 105 available EFL teacher trainees, who were instructed through the TBI, 76 trainees in four experiential learning styles ($n = 19$), were selected for further analysis. There was no control group in this study. The trainees were first selected through convenience sampling; they were then administered to experiential learning style inventory. Through a mixed-method design, the TBI and experiential learning style effects on trainees' reading skills and transformation of the acquired skills were examined. A wide range of qualitative and quantitative instruments were implemented in this study. The results of the questionnaires, tests and observation checklist were analyzed quantitatively. For interview results, both quantitative (percentages) and qualitative analysis were employed. The results demonstrated that the TBI had a significant effect on trainees' reading skills; the transformation was also observed. However, no significant effect of experiential learning styles was observed. At the end, some recommendations are provided.

Key words: TBI; teacher training; transformation; experiential learning style; reading

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1. Introduction

The idea that L2 teacher education programs should be tailored to the issue of language proficiency has received considerable support in the literature (Kamhi-Stein, 2009). Academic language skills play a significant role in a teacher's pedagogical practice as they "may contribute to enhancing or undermining the teacher's confidence, therefore, affecting the teacher's instructional practices" (Kamhi-Stein, 2009, p. 95). They believe that incomplete knowledge of the target language will hinder the appropriate planning of teaching and learning objectives. This incomplete knowledge of L2 proficiency may also justify why EFL teachers mostly resist against more innovative and communicatively demanding teaching approaches. Especially, in the Iranian EFL context where we witness a drastic reform in junior/high school textbooks, targeting all four major skills, a need for more proficient EFL teachers is highly felt. However, it seems that the EFL teacher education programs have not been successful in this regard (Butler, 2004). Butler (2004) asserted that a majority of EFL teachers lack the requisite language proficiency and encounter difficulties in their professional careers.

Contrary to Freeman and Johnsons' (1998) belief that most teachers' learning actually takes place in on-the-job initiation rather than in professional teacher education programs, Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) stressed the role of these programs in promoting teachers' professionalism. During this journey of change, the teacher trainees "are more amenable to innovation than later in their careers when practical knowledge has become stabilized (p. 164). For many scholars, indeed, teacher education is considered as a strong predictor of teacher professionalism (Darling-Hamond & Young, 2002), so apparently finding appropriate framework to target the academic language skills is highly promising.

Task-Based Instruction (TBI) has the potentiality to keep step with the most recent models of teacher education, which focus on experiential learning and reflective practice. In fact, TBI as an approach deeply rooted in constructivist and experiential learning assumptions (Nunan, 2004) can be promising in enhancing L2 teacher trainees' academic language skills (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). Despite the significant role of TBI (Robinson, 2011), its applicability has not been well examined in EFL teacher training courses. Although experiential methods have been used in training adults in numerous fields, there is little research about how to use these methods in teacher education and how they transfer into teachers' curriculum and instruction (Klein & Riordan, 2011). As Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) demonstrated literature on the implementation of TBI, as a solid manifestation of experiential learning, has not adequately considered the potential influence of teacher education in promoting such innovative teaching approach on teacher trainees.

Finally, within the education field, learning styles have received considerable attention, both pedagogically and in research (Kratzig & Arbuthnott, 2006). A learning style has been broadly defined as an individual's preferred way of learning (Lodge, Hansen & Cottrell, 2015). It is assumed that planning instruction to adjust individual learning might yield improved learner outcomes (Dörnyei, 2005). As Dörnyei (2005) posits classroom practices which are tailored to a number of learning styles increase learning opportunities. As the application of traditional lecture-oriented approaches may add relatively little to trainees' knowledge since "it does not acknowledge individual differences and since it ignores the role of experience in knowledge formation" (Manolis, Burns, Assudani & Chinta, 2013, p. 44), the applicability of TBI for learners with different learning styles might be promising in this regard. A move to such "experientially based education explicitly acknowledging different learning styles or transformational learning has been forwarded as a more effective alternative to traditional pedagogy" (Manolis, et al., 2013, p. 44).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Knowledge/Skill Transformation in Teacher Education

The teacher is expected to be able to transform the subject content knowledge to pedagogical content knowledge for effective teaching (Chen & Ennis, 1995). In other words, the teacher is required to possess such a knowledge structure to integrate subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Such transformative knowledge structure, turning declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge, can help teachers to make on-line curricular decisions that is integral to the instruction. Pre-service teacher education can be highly encouraging in this regard.

According to Dyson (2010), teacher education is a lifelong developmental process. L2 teacher's learning is socially oriented and rests on knowledge structure about self, learners, subject matter, curriculum, and setting. Teacher education is, indeed, a transforming event, motivated and maintained by the trainees, yet guided, and supervised by teacher educators. Learning within this system, according to Dyson (2010), is a journey of discovery entailing systemic change. A journey presumes that the traveler changes along the way. The change can occur in the knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness with regard to language teaching (Freeman, 1989), leading to personal and professional growth. Systemic change occurs when the prospective teacher recognizes that all the small pieces of his/her knowledge structure build the whole process of making decisions when they are called upon. Such transformative orientation gives rise to the post-method reflective practitioners with the ability to theorize about their practices and practice their personal theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

Cranton (2007) as cited in Dyson (2010) referred to transformative learning as “a process by which individuals engage in critical self-reflection that results in a deep shift in perspective toward a more open, permeable, and better justified way of seeing themselves and the world around them” (p. 101). Similarly, in the eyes of “constructive-developmental theorists” (Baily, Stribling & McGowan, 2014, p. 250), critical reflection is integral for transformative learning and development. Building upon experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), constructivist theorists maintain that a transformative learning cycle occurs when an experience is followed by reflection, abstract conceptualization, examination of those abstractions, generalizations and finally coming back to concrete experiences.

2.2. Experiential Learning Style

Learning based on experience, often termed as experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), is seen as an essential part of human learning and development (Manolis, et al., 2013). According to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT), learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (p. 41). The model is centered around four learning modes — concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE). In order to empirically investigate the various learning styles in experiential learning, Kolb originated the Learning Style Inventory (LSI). The LSI identifies four distinct learning styles (Figure 1): diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating.

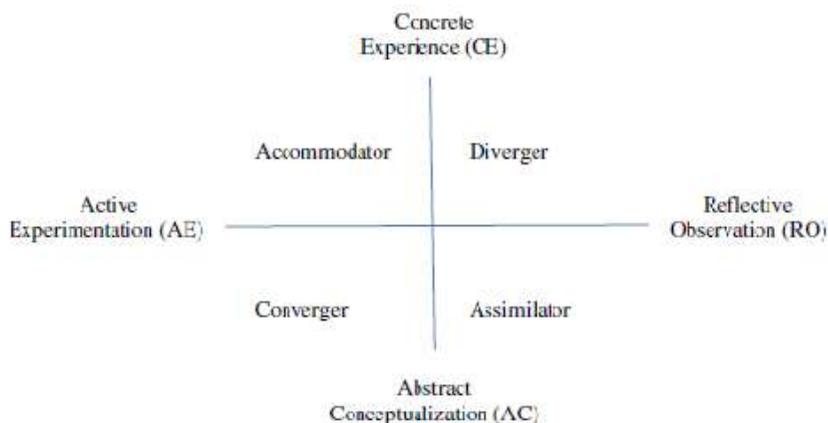


Figure 1. Kolb's learning style adopted from Manolis et al., 2013, p. 46

Divergers experience a situation first and then later assess the situation through different perspectives. These individuals have imaginative and creative abilities and are more willing to work in groups; they have vigorous communication skills, and are receptive to personal feedback (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Lecture methods and hands-on experience are convenient for them.

Assimilators embrace a large amount of information and arrange it logically (Manolis et al., 2013). They have the ability to “systematically plan, organize, analyze and engage in inductive reasoning” (p. 45). They prefer valid and logical information; they are inclined towards readings, lectures and time to think about information they have been exposed to (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

According to Manolis et al. (2013), convergers find practical implications for the ideas they have learned. They are excellent in solving new problems with the help of past experiences. They are proficient at setting goals, solve problems and make decisions. They prefer to learn by first hand techniques. They "tend to learn best when given simulations, practical applications, lab work, and opportunity to experiment with new ideas" (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 5).

Accommodators prefer active engagement in concrete situations. These individuals, in the eyes of Manolis et al. (2013), learn mainly from experiencing, challenging and planning. They make decisions more on intuition and feeling than logical analysis. They have the ability to learn basically from hands-on experience; they like to take risks and can adapt themselves to new situations. They are fond of “setting goals, working with others, and using different approaches for completing a project” (p. 5). Any instruction that encourages discovery learning and active participation in the learning process seems apt to this learning style.

2.3. Task-Based Instruction

Built upon the experiential learning theory (Norris, 2009; Nunan, 2004), constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning and in line with the communicative language teaching approaches, TBI was introduced to the field of L2 pedagogy. The notion of TBI, in fact, began in the 1980s with Prabhu’s Bangalore project in India. This was the first large-scale attempt to implement TBI and to develop a theoretical rationale for it (Robinson, 2011).

Various approaches for TBI have been developed by researchers such as Long (1985), Skehan (1996), Willis (1996), and Ellis (2003). Ellis (2003) compared these approaches in terms of five characteristics: natural language use; learner-centeredness; focus-on-form; kind of task (focused/unfocused); and rejection of traditional approaches. Ellis (2003) himself offered a general framework which draws upon four categories: input, conditions, processes and outcomes. Input centers on the nature of the input provided in the task which involves medium, and organization. Conditions specify the way information is presented. Processes are the cognitive operations and the discourse mode. Outcomes can be discussed in terms of medium, genre and scope. Nunan (2004) analyzed tasks in terms of several components, such as goals, input, procedures, teacher and learner roles and instructional settings in which tasks occur. He grouped them according to the strategies underpinning them. Accordingly, five different strategy types such as cognitive, interpersonal, linguistic, affective and creative can be distinguished. Skehan (2002) pointed to four main approaches in the discussions of tasks: A psycholinguistic

approach to interaction, a social interactive approach, a concern for structure-focused tasks, and a cognitive perspective.

In the present study, Skehan's (1996) widely-cited definition of the task was taken into account: "Meaning is primary; learners are not given other people's meaning to regurgitate; there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome" (p. 20). Additionally, this study followed Ellis's (2003) framework for TBI implementation, comprising three phases: pre-task, while-task and post-task. In the pre-task phase, students are informed about what the teacher expects of them in the task phase. A similar task is also provided. In while-task, the students perform the actual task, usually in small groups, although this is determined by the type of activity. Finally, in the post-task, which typically ends in reports, the students review each other's work. In this phase, the teacher usually addresses the linguistic forms.

2.4. Relevant Empirical Studies in EFL

In this section, some empirical studies on the academic reading TBI, TBI teacher training, and experiential learning style in EFL context are presented. With regard to the first, most studies have been done to investigate the efficiency of the reading TBI in promoting learners' reading comprehension skills (e.g., Chalak, 2015; Keyvanfar & Modarresi, 2009; Poorahmadi, 2012).

Keyvanfar and Modarresi (2009) attempted to find out whether implementing task-based reading activities had any significant effect on the development of text comprehension in Iranian low English proficiency students. Providing the experimental group with four task types and the control group with traditional reading activities, the researchers compared reading performance of the two groups. The results indicated the experimental group outperformed the control group. In the same vein, Chalak (2015) and Poorahmadi (2012) also came to the same conclusion.

Regarding the second, to the best of researcher's knowledge, only a few studies have addressed the TBI for EFL teacher education programs (e.g., Chien, 2014; Jackson, 2012; Littlewood, 2016; Moser, Harris, & Carle, 2012).

In Jackson's (2012) study, the effectiveness of the task-based teacher education approach in a teacher training center in Japan was examined. Fifteen Japanese novice language teachers' retrospective comments, classroom discourse, and survey results were analyzed. Participants gained and shared knowledge with regard to teaching practice through classroom tasks. Jackson suggested that task-based teacher training can be adopted to support curricular innovation to enhance language education in the Japanese EFL setting.

Chien (2014) in a qualitative case study investigated the integration of a task-based approach into a TESOL course in a language teacher education program in Taiwan with regard to 39 participants' attitude and learning. The

data were gathered through participants' projects, class observations and class PowerPoint slides, and class evaluations. The findings revealed that the participants held positive attitudes toward the integration of tasks into this TESOL course because they felt that they learned TESOL issues. Participants also learned TESOL issues, different types of task, and research methods through completing the tasks, group discussion, classmates' sharing, reading texts and references, and the instructor's scaffolding.

Moser, Harris, and Carle (2012) through a task-based approach, asked EFL teachers to practice providing rich comprehensible input as well as scaffolding in English through role-playing classroom tasks. The before and after performances of two teachers doing a listen-and-draw task were analyzed to demonstrate the importance of training in teacher talk. In concluding the article, the researchers reviewed the participants' survey feedback for the course. They argued that in order for Japanese teachers to provide dialogical teaching in English, they first need to gain experience conducting communicative tasks in English.

Finally, Studies on experiential learning style in EFL context centers generally on learners' style preferences (e.g., Hyland, 1993; Li & Qin, 2006; Liu, Hu & Gan, 2013; Psaltou-Joycey & Kantaridou, 2011), and the effect the style has on learners' academic achievement (e.g., Jafarigohar & Khanjani, 2015; Neuhauser, 2002; Tabatabaei & Mashayekhi, 2013). To the best of researchers' knowledge, studies on experiential learning styles—except Jafarigohar and Khanjani (2015)—rarely have targeted TBI in EFL context although TBI can provide an ideal framework for experiential learning (Norris, 2009).

Regarding the relationship between experiential learning and TBI, recently, Jafarigohar and Khanjani (2015) probed into the possible mediating effect of the experiential learning styles on academic listening skills acquired through task-based instruction in Iran. The results showed that the task-based instruction significantly affected pre-intermediate EFL learners' performance on academic listening tests. It was also found that the learners with different learning styles performed similarly on the tests.

This brief literature review reveals that the issue of teaching reading skills through TBI and the effect the experiential learning style might have on the trainees' achievement in the EFL teacher training context have not been adequately addressed so far, the gap which this study tries to fill. Hence, to fill the gap, the researchers developed the following research questions:

1. Does the academic reading task-based instruction significantly affect the pre-service EFL teacher trainees' reading skills?
2. Does the TBI lead to the change in trainees' perceptions and to the requisite transformation?
3. Does the experiential learning style have significant effect on the trainees' reading skills?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 76 male EFL teacher trainees at a teacher training center in Guilan Province, Iran. They were from four different classes (N = 105). On the basis of experiential learning style inventory, the researcher selected 76 of them and divided them equally into four learning style groups (n=19) for statistical analysis. However, all students received the treatment. The trainees were, in fact, the researcher's students at the "academic reading" and "practicum" courses in the second semester of the academic year 2016. Their ages ranged from 19 to 27. None of them had a teaching experience in high schools but they had observed high school classes several times to fulfill their practicum course requirements. There was no control group in this study, and the trainees themselves acted as their control group. To be sure about their proficiency before the task-based instruction began, the researcher asked the trainees to take the Preliminary English Test (PET) as the pre-test and to fill in the task-based perception questionnaire. In addition, 22 trainees agreed to take part in the interview.

3.2. Instruments

To obtain a valid and reliable picture of the effects of the reading tasks, different types of instruments were used: PET reading comprehension tests; a task-based perception questionnaire; a learning style inventory, semi-structured interviews; and an observation checklist. Each instrument underwent extensive piloting. The reading proficiency test (pre/post/delayed post-test) utilized was the PET test. PET is the second level of the ESOL which is at Level B1–pre-intermediate level of the CEFR. The reading component contains five parts, a total of 35 items consisting of matching, true/ false and multiple choice item types.

The second instrument was a task-based perception questionnaire adapted from Jeon and Hahn (2006). The original questionnaire, composed of 15 Likert-type items and two open-ended items, was divided into four sections. In this study, to simplify the data analysis procedure, the whole items were presented in the Likert scale. The respondents were asked to answer each question using a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The first section contained demographic questions in order to gain information about the trainees' age, and teaching experience. The second section (items 1-7) dealt with the basic concept of task and principles of task-based instruction in order to review teachers' practical understandings of TBI. The third section (items 8-15) related to participants' positions on classroom practice of TBI. In the fourth section, trainees were asked to give their own reasons for choosing (16-20) or avoiding (21-26) the implementation of TBI with reference to a total of 11 qualitative statements. Finally, the last item—a

Yes/No question—was added to the end of the questionnaire to examine whether the respondents will use the TBI in their actual practice. Eight EFL professors/teacher educators judged the relevance and coverage of the items on a Likert scale. A pilot study was, then, conducted on the trainees and the Cronbach's alpha obtained showed a high reliability index of .85 for the questionnaire.

The revised learning-style inventory 3.1 (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) was also applied. This is actually the improved form of Kolb's (1984) learning style inventory (Kayes, 2005; Manolis et al., 2013). The inventory is a short questionnaire with 12 items that ask respondents to rank four sentence endings that correspond to the four learning modes. The forced-choice format of the inventory ranks an individual's relative choice preferences among the four modes of the learning cycle. Although some studies have questioned the reliability and validity of the inventory (Manolis et al., 2013), many others have voted for its superiority (e.g. Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann, 2010; Kayes, 2005). To ensure its reliability, the researchers ran a test-retest with a sample of 38 trainees ($r=.83$).

A semi-structured interview protocol was also developed to elicit further information with regard to the TBI. The interview questions addressed the perceptions of the respondents with regard to the TBI, reading skills and strategies, the advantages and disadvantages of using TBI in schools and training programs, the effect TBI may have on learners' language proficiency, the implication of TBI in their future career and the challenges of using TBI in the EFL contexts like Iran. The interviews, taking approximately 15 minutes each, were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The interview's representativeness was judged by eight EFL professors and teacher educators.

Finally, an observation checklist (see appendix) was applied to examine whether the transformation of TBI took place in the actual practice. The observation checklist devised by the researcher to examine whether the trainees' activities were task-based or not. The items of checklist were concerned with the characteristics of TBI (Ellis, 2003, 2009; Skehan, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). The items were developed on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (not observed at all) to 5 (observed completely). The checklist was piloted with similar classes and their adequacy was discussed with the aforementioned professors.

3.3. Procedure

In the beginning of the study, the experiential learning style inventory was administered to the trainees of 4 classes ($N=105$). Only 76 trainees were selected to be analyzed and equally divided in four learning style groups. PET reading test (Test 1) and the task-based perception questionnaire were administered to the participants. The Advanced Reading Course involved one 2-hour class session per week for a semester (14 weeks). The first two sessions

were devoted to both the introduction of TBI and reading skills and strategies. These sessions were solely theoretical. After these two sessions, the trainees were asked to take another PET reading test (Test 2) and to teach reading comprehension skills in practicum (Performance 1). In the third session, the treatment–TBI reading course–started. Right after the end of treatment, participants had to take another PET reading test as their post-test (Test 3) and the task-based perception questionnaire. The trainees were also asked to teach reading skills in their Practicum course (Performance 2). Their teaching performances on reading comprehension in the practicum course before and after treatment were observed. Two weeks later, another PET reading test (Test 4) as a delayed post-test was administered to them. Meanwhile, they took part in semi-structured interviews. The data were fed into SPSS, version 20.

This study included both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative part of the study examined statistical relationships between task-based instruction and students' reading scores. The qualitative part, including observations and interviews, aimed to cross check the quantitative results and to probe into whether the transformation had taken place. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) discuss convincingly for the prominence of mixed method research, addressing its benefits in many research settings. They believe that mixed methods in comparison with either the qualitative or the quantitative approaches alone often provide more efficient and meaningful interpretations as they allow cross-method comparison and triangulation.

The TBI, which lasted seven sessions, targeted different reading sub-skills and strategies including summarizing, inferencing, transcoding information to a diagram, recognizing text structure, and understanding grammatical and semantic reference. Some techniques, including forwarded snowball, reversed snowball, and think, pair, share (Littlewood, 2016) were used in the collaborative reading tasks described below. The tasks helped the trainees to explore different aspects of reading comprehension skills and strategies, and, simultaneously, to have direct experience of task-based learning and to promote their communication skills. The TBI was composed of three steps (Ellis, 2003): pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. The teaching procedures with summary writing are as follows:

In the pre-task phase (about 10 minutes), the participants were informed about specific reading sub-skill, including summarizing, inferencing, transcoding information to a diagram, recognizing text structure, and understanding grammatical and semantic references. A similar task was also provided. The students were given some hints on using their own words, using the main points, and avoiding redundancy and copying.

In while-reading stage (about 60 minutes), the trainees read the text for the first time. During this stage, the teacher explained the technique which could be implemented for a particular sub-task. In groups of three or four trainees worked on the sub-tasks, making use of different techniques such as

forward snowball, reverse snowball and think, pair, share. In forward snowball for transcoding information to a diagram, for example, each trainee was given a set period of time (e.g. four minutes) to list three facts or ideas related to the diagram. Trainees formed pairs, discussed, and increased their ideas into a list of seven, for example. Pairs formed groups of four, who discussed and developed a combined list, removing repetitive ideas but adding more to produce fourteen. These were shared with the class. According to Littlewood (2016), the effect of such activities is similar to ‘brainstorming’, which helps to produce as many ideas as possible.

In the post-task phase (15 minutes), they reported their work, for example summaries, to the teacher, and their performance was evaluated by both the students themselves and the teacher. The grammatical structures in the texts were also discussed.

3.4. Data Analysis

The concurrent mixed-method design (Cresswell, 2003) was employed in this study. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. For semi-structured interview results, both quantitative (percentages) and qualitative analyses were conducted. More specifically, the semi-structured interview results were first categorized and then coded by the researcher and were subjected to qualitative content analysis. The PET test and observation checklist results were also quantitatively analyzed. A mixed method ANOVA was employed to investigate the significant differences among performance of participants with four learning styles in four consecutive tests. The assumptions for a mixed-method ANOVA were met, and post-hoc analysis was run using pair-wise comparisons, adjusting for multiple comparisons with Bonferroni corrections. A mixed-method ANOVA merges two different types of one-way ANOVA in a single study: Between groups ANOVA to address such between group comparisons of four experiential learning styles and within-subjects ANOVA to probe into the possible differences in the performance of the participants at four time points. Post-hoc comparisons were utilized to explore where exactly the differences occurred. A matched t-test was also run the possible differences between trainees’ performances before and after the treatment. A Chi-square test was also implemented to examine the differences in the implementation of TBI—the last item of the questionnaire. SPSS version 22.0 was used to analyze the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

A mixed-method ANOVA was used on the data obtained from the trainees' performance on the PET tests at four time points. Descriptive data for the performance of the participants on the PET reading tests at four points are

presented in Table 1. As Tables 1 and 2 show, the 72 EFL trainees' performance indicated significant difference, $F(3, 71) = 677.63$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .93$, at the first time point (test 1), $M = 19.56$, $SD = 3.01$, the second time point (test 2), $M = 20.42$, $SD = 2.98$, the third time point (test 3), $M = 27.11$, $SD = 2.55$, and the fourth time point (test 4), $M = 27.82$, $SD = 2.39$. It was also found that the differences in the means were statistically significant for the divergers, $F(4, 18) = 283.42$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .76$; for assimilators, $F(4, 18) = 279.12$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .69$; for convergers, $F(4, 18) = 577.73$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .91$; and for accommodators, $F(4, 18) = 377.36$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .86$.

Table 1

A Within-Group Descriptive Statistics for the Performance of Participants on Four PET Tests

Group	Test 1		Test 2		Test 3		Test 4	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Total	19.56	3.01	20.42	2.98	27.11	2.55	27.82	2.34
Div.	18.73	3.01	19.36	3.00	26.78	2.37	27.52	2.41
Assim.	20.00	3.39	21.31	3.59	27.73	2.84	28.31	2.42
Conv.	19.47	3.25	20.31	2.90	26.68	2.58	27.47	2.48
Accom.	20.05	3.71	20.68	2.13	27.26	2.44	28.00	2.33

Note. Dive=divergers; Assim=assimilators; Conv=convergers; Accom=accommodators.

Table 2

Mean Difference for the Performance of Participants on five TOEFL Listening Tests

Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Etta squared	Within group
Total	1527.55	4	509.18	677.63	.000	.95
Divergers	1257.15	4	419.05	283.42	.000	.88
Assimilators	1051.21	4	350.40	279.12	.000	.81
Convergers	993.30	4	331.10	577.73	.000	.77
Accommodators	1011.26	4	337.08	377.36	.000	.80

Bonferroni post-hoc tests, were, then, employed. The results (Table 3) indicated a significant difference within the total group between test1 and test 3, $MD = 7.55$, $p = .000$; between test 1 and test 4, $MD = 8.26$, $p = .000$; between test 2 and test 3, $MD = 6.69$, $p = .000$; between test 2 and test 5, $MD = 3.40$, $p = .000$; and between test 2 and test 4, $MD = 7.04$, $p = .000$. No significant difference was found between tests 1 and 2 (the pre-tests), $MD = .86$, $p = .28$; and between tests 3 and 4 (the post- tests), $MD = .71$, $p = .41$. These results revealed that the trainees' performance on two pretests was not significantly

different, and they could provide an appropriate indication of the trainees' initial academic reading proficiency level.

Table 3
Bonferroni Comparisons for Differences in Four Test Performances

<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Tests</i>		
test 1 vs. test 2	.86	.28
test 1 vs. test 3	7.55*	.000
test 1 vs. test 4	8.26*	.000
test 2 vs. test 3	6.69*	.000
test 2 vs. test 4	7.04*	.000
test 3 vs. test 4	.71	.41

* indicates significant differences

A between-group comparison of four experiential leaning styles also confirmed that the trainees with different learning styles performed similarly ($P > .05$) both on the PET reading pretests (i.e., tests 1, 2) and on the posttests (i.e., tests 3 & 4), with *Wilks' Lambda* = .71, $F(3, 18) = 1.34$, $p = .43$, *partial eta squared* = 0.08.

In addition, paired-samples t-tests were also conducted to compare trainees' perceptions on the TBI (items 1–26) before and after the treatment. The results indicated there was a significant difference in scores for the perceptions of participants on TBI before treatment ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.38$) and after treatment ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.82$); $t(75) = 6.68$, $p = 0.00$. With regard to the last item of the questionnaire (item 27), the Chi-square test revealed that there was no significant difference between trainees' perceptions in the application of TBI in their future teaching practice, $\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 476$, $p = .63$. Paired-samples t-tests were also conducted to compare trainees' application of TBI before and after the treatment. The results indicated there was a significant difference in scores for TBI implementation before treatment ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.27$) and after treatment ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.04$); $t(9) = 30.10$, $p = 0.00$.

Regarding their perception of the TBI utilized in the course, a majority of the participants (around 80%) had positive reactions. For them, it was a new useful learning experience which could help them practically engage in their future teaching career, as well. In their eyes, such methodology is much more motivating for learners compared with the traditional teaching methodology. One of them, for example, believed that:

I never imagined how motivating, collaborative and interesting this TBI would be until I myself was instructed through it. I always felt that TBI is very complicated and I cannot use it in my teaching. However, this practice actually

changed my perceptions with regard to the TBI and now I think I am in a better position to decide about my future teaching methodology.

For some of them, this reading TBI could also be a blueprint for their future teaching of other language skills. They were eager to try it on other skills. One of them:

When I saw this reading TBI and its usefulness, I asked myself “why shouldn’t we employ it on other skills?” I think practicum courses can be the best places to put our acquired skills and knowledge into practice. In my opinion, new teaching approaches such as TBI should be implemented in training courses.

Concerning the second question “Have you ever had similar TBI for different language skills in your training program?” None of them answered positively. It seems that teacher trainers mostly preferred the traditional methodology focusing presentation, practice and production.

In the third question, the interviewees were asked whether TBI should be presented in teacher training programs. For most of them (around 70%), the answer was Yes. They stated that if trainees themselves are instructed through new teaching approaches, they can transform such experience to their future teaching practice. One of the interviewee:

Now I have a better picture of TBI and its effect on one’s learning. I know how the learner can benefit from it. I can put myself in the shoes of my learners as I myself have experienced this type of learning. I guess I can provide a better learning conditions for my own learners. Now I know what problems my learners will have when they are under TBI instruction.

Some of the interviewees (nearly 60%) also pointed to the teaching affordance provided in such experientially oriented teaching training methodology. According to them, mostly the training courses are theory-based and there is little room for teaching practice in these courses. TBI can somehow fill this theory-practice gap. In this way, the prospective teachers experientially acquire the requisite knowledge and skills, hence become ready to apply them in their teaching.

With regard to the advantages and disadvantages of TBI, the results revealed that the advantages highly outweighed the disadvantages. For the majority of the respondents (around 70%), TBI is advantageous as it was a *collaborative, meaning-based, communicatively-oriented, learner-centered, language control free, personalized, naturalistic, motivating and enjoyable, and needs-based activity*. Concerning its drawbacks, the respondents believed although most teachers are aware of its uses, they have problems with its application in real classes. According to them, *preparing tasks is highly demanding; large size and diverse classes make its implementation difficult; class control is very difficult; task-based materials are rare; its applicability for beginner learners is doubtful; in communicative activities learners overuse*

mother tongue; learners are not inclined to involve in tasks; and teachers are not motivated enough to implement new teaching approaches.

Regarding the possibility of TBI implementation in high school classes, a great number of interviewees (around 80%) had a negative perception. They believed that the current EFL teachers are not ready to put TBI into practice as they don't have the requisite knowledge, skills and motivation to do so. The interviewees had their own justifications: Teachers neither theoretically nor practically are familiar with TBI; even if they have the requisite knowledge and skills in TBI, they face serious problems, including large size classes, mixed proficiency classes, low motivated students, poor proficient learners, school pass rate policies, and parents' expectations, that they are not eager to put it into practice.

The sixth question asked whether TBI can promote learners' language proficiency and if so how. About 80% of the interviewees answered affirmatively. It seemed that the TBI had a great effect on their perceptions. For them, the communicative nature of TBI can help learners to integrate different skills simultaneously. It provides sufficient exposure to the natural language. Moreover, its collaborative and learner-centered orientation can afford enjoyable and motivating conditions for learning so that most learners can actively engage in the learning tasks. It is more authentic language learning activity compared with the traditional PPP.

Finally, for the last question, about 70% stated that they would employ TBI in their future teaching. They said despite the problems aforementioned, with a good planning and high motivation it is possible to overcome the problems. They said the TBI utilized in this course can serve them as a good model. They were optimistic about the future. They referred to the modification in Iranian school textbooks and believed these communicatively-oriented books may let them better maneuver on different teaching approaches. They also maintained that nowadays there is more positive attitude toward learning English, and more and more Iranian students attend English institutes, hence the application of communicative approaches, including TBI will be more effortless.

4.2. Discussion

As the results of the tests indicated the treatment had significant effect on EFL trainees' reading comprehension skills. This finding is in line with Keyvanfar and modarresi (2009), Poorahmadi (2012), and Chalak (2015). In fact, the improvement in trainees' proficiency can be accounted for by the nature of the TBI. According to sociocultural theories of learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), the interaction afforded by TBI provided opportunities for the trainees to share their understanding of the texts and to regulate their language use. In such collaborative endeavor, self and other regulation can be enhanced as the trainees engage in dialogic mediation. As specifically the improvement of

reading skills is concerned, there is evidence that interaction can promote reading comprehension skills (e.g., Anani Sarab & Karimi, 2008; Klinger & Vaughn, 1999; Naimat, 2011).

Klinger and Vaughn (1999) contend that learners who work in collaborative settings where discussion-based social interactions take place can better make use of reading strategies to promote their reading comprehension. Though this collaboration, they can actively process difficult texts and enhance their understanding. Collaborative reading provides an opportunity for meaning negotiation in reading comprehension process. According to social constructivism, learners make sense of things through interactions with others (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Seen through this lens, the reading process has been reconceptualized and considered as a socio-cultural, convergent and collaborative experience (Koda, 2005). Accordingly, the process of making-meaning from texts is socially constructed and arises from social interactions. The TBI seems to have catered for such cooperative reading. When learners work cooperatively in small groups, they can read texts more efficiently and employ comprehension strategies to better comprehend the reading material (Vaughn & Edmonds, 2006). Doing such paired collaborative reading tasks also stimulates metacognitive awareness, hence producing apperceived input which can be used for subsequent comprehended input and intake (Gass, 1997). Moreover, the group dynamics produced in cooperative work, according to Koda (2005) gives rise to strategic reading and active involvement with the text.

In addition, the results indicated that in general there was a positive reaction toward TBI. This result rhymes with those of Jeon and Hahn (2006), McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007), and Chien (2014). Research has shown that people's goals can powerfully influence how they react to a task (Lamb, 2004). As the trainees' goal here was to promote their academic skills and they found the instruction fulfilling this goal, a feeling of satisfaction was emerged. The reaction and attitude toward an instruction or task can also be determined by the extent of the participants' motivation (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Bernaus and Gardner (2008), in the same vein, claim that attitudes and motivation are often related to each other. It seems that a felt need to acquire academic skills as the prerequisite for their future professional career had made them highly motivated, hence giving rise to positive attitudes toward TBI. Besides, the type of instruction, whether it is personally relevant to the learners, is also a determining factor with regard to the formation of positive attitudes and reactions. This might justify why there was no significant difference between participants' perceptions with regard to the application of TBI before and after treatment. In both occasions the trainees had positive attitudes toward the implication of TBI in their future teaching practice. They saw such instruction a personally significant and relevant activity contributing to their future professional success.

Considering the mediating role of experiential learning style, the findings revealed that the TBI approach to L2 reading instruction was effective for all learners regardless of their different experiential learning styles. This finding is in line with Jafarigohar and Khanjani (2015) and Neuhauser (2002). Because of the lack of significant differences of the four experiential groups in their reading performance, we can conclude that the type of learning style had little or no impact on learners' achievement in this study. This supports the findings that learning styles do not have an effect on learners' learning achievement (Neuhauser, 2002). Moreover, the equal effect of TBI on learners with different learning styles can be justified by the fact that it calls upon different activities tailoring for different types of styles (Jafarigohar & Khanjani, 2015).

Besides, the observation of the trainees' performances before and after the treatment revealed a significant difference. It was found that after treatment the trainees' inclination to the implementation of TBI significantly increased. The finding revealed that a majority of trainees employed TBI in their teaching practice, especially after the treatment. The findings of this study in line with the those of Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) propose that a constructivist-based approach such as TBI to teacher education can have a positive influence on teacher trainees' disposition towards innovative approaches. According to Dyson (2010), a synergy between thought and action is necessary in teacher education if the transformation is expected. It appears that such transformatively-oriented instruction is afforded in the TBI.

Moreover, the finding that the trainees employed their knowledge and skills in their teaching practice provides further support for experiential learning theory. The TBI seems to pave the way for such experiential learning. According to Samuda and Bygate (2008, p. 36), tasks can be considered "as a means of creating experience based opportunities for language learning". Through the TBI, the teacher trainees were in direct touch with a learning experience which could be transformed to their future teaching experiences. As Wang and Sarbo (2004) state transformational learning take place only "when it is integrated with experience. The whole notion of transformative learning is to make sense of experience . . . and can be maximized when self-direction is encouraged among adult learners" (p. 208). The collaborative nature of the TBI also helped the requisite transformation to take place. According to sociocultural theories of learning, through collaboration, creativity and reflection skills are promoted. Indeed, some studies support the affordance provided by dialogic interactions and scaffolding, especially in TBI (e.g., Nassaji & Cumming, 2000; Xu, Gelfer & Perkins, 2005). Collaborative learning, indeed, allowed trainees to work purposefully, critically and reflectively. Reflecting on one's experience, according to Dyson (2010), gives rise to transformative learning. Through the constructivist lens, the teachers are seen as reflective practitioners with the ability to theorize about their practices

and practice their personal theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Reflection helps the prospective teachers examine their practice critically and make rational and practical judgments about what to do in particular circumstances (Leather & Popovic, 2008).

Finally, in the eyes of the respondents, even if there is an inclination toward its implementation, the problems and challenges make it too difficult for teachers to practice TBI in their classes. According to Carless (2002), different procedures can be utilized to tackle these problems. Ellis (2009) believes to alleviate the problems in implementing TBI several principles should be taken care of: Tasks must be apt to the proficiency levels of the students, for example, input-providing tasks should be initially used for low proficiency learners; tasks should be designed in a way to ensure that they result in appropriate L2 use; for TBI to work efficiently, teachers need a clear understanding of what a task is; teachers and students need to be made aware of the rationale for performing tasks; and the teachers involved in a TBI must be involved in the development of the task materials.

5. Conclusion and Implications

To offer a better EFL teacher education, it is necessary for all stakeholders, including policy makers, curriculum developers, course designers, teacher educators and teacher trainees to reconstruct their understanding about teacher education. In this new orientation toward teacher education, the traditional lecture-oriented methodology may have no place. The trend, nowadays, is toward more experience-based approaches in teacher education. Task-based instruction can be used to tailor such purpose. However, as Berman and McLaughlin (1976) rightfully put forward effective implementation of innovation “depends on the receptivity of the institutional setting to change” (p. 365). They believed that “many educational innovations may fail to have desirable effects because the project is not adapted to the institutional setting or vice versa during the implementation stage” (p. 349). In their eyes, many factors, including economic, cultural, political, and organizational challenges and constraints, may play key roles in the success or failure of the innovation. The key to designing appropriate policy “lies in understanding how the stages of innovation work in different locations, for different innovations, and for the various change” (p. 351). The cultural factor, especially, is of crucial importance in the introduction of any educational innovations, as Oxford and Lee (2008) state the educator “must first think carefully whether such a change in beliefs and strategies is necessary, worthwhile, culturally respectful, and linguistically appropriate” (p. 313). The issue which has less been paid due attention is teachers’ job satisfaction (Tillman & Tillman, 2008). One key factor in the implementation of innovative approaches is the teacher. As a rule of thumb, when teachers are not satisfied with their jobs, they will not be inclined to endeavor innovative approaches. Accordingly, the teacher should

be adequately financially supported to be motivated to reconstruct their knowledge and skills, hence embracing new teaching approaches. Otherwise, the system transformation would be somehow elusive and there will be reactions against innovations.

Regarding the implementation of experience-oriented instruction, including TBI, in actual classes, some challenges seem inevitable. The first step is to change our negative perceptions on TBI. Second, by employing appropriate strategies, it is possible to ameliorate the challenging conditions. Carless (2002), for example, provides some invaluable practical suggestions which can be considered in TBI implementation. He, for example, believes that by introducing flexibility in timing and grouping, alternative roles can be assigned to students and groups being rearranged in different ways.

Finally, with regard to individuals' learning styles, as Kratzig and Arbuthnott (2006) rightfully stated helping individuals learn effective learning strategies across all modalities and contexts, rather than only identifying learning type, may prove to be more efficient for both the learners and the education system. Similarly, Hall (2011) contend that it might be unrealistic and impractical to ask teachers to adjust their lessons to their learners' style preferences. Indeed, given the lack of agreement on which learning styles actually exist, it might be "neither viable nor justified for learning styles to form the basis of lesson planning" (Hall, p. 140). However, this is not to say that the individual differences are not important. Research, indeed, has illustrated that learners can modify their learning styles so as to "adapt to the demands of instruction, context, task, or occupation" (Psaltou-Joycey & Kantaridou, 2011, p. 111). As Neuhauser (2002) suggests since learners' achievement is affected by many variables, including motivation, work commitments, the research study can be improved by investigating the possible relationship between learning styles and the effectiveness of the learning activities.

Although the study shed some light on EFL teacher education, it had its own limitations. Due to little access to the female teacher training center, only male students were invited to take part in this study. Moreover, there was no control group, which may threaten the validity of this study. Finally, the point worthy of mentioning here is the fact that mere application of TBI in the practicum course does not imply that such practice will be transformed to the actual teaching practices in high schools. The actual implementation of TBI should be investigated in longitudinal case studies.

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Appendix

Observation checklist

The instruction is highly motivating and promotes student confidence: 1 2 3 4 5

The activities provide opportunities for real-world language use: 1 2 3 4 5

Learners make use of more than one skill to accomplish a task: 1 2 3 4 5

There is a primary focus on meaning: 1 2 3 4 5

There is some kind of 'gap' (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or infer meaning): 1 2 3 4 5

It is a student-centered approach to teaching: 1 2 3 4 5

Focus on form is contextualized within the activity: 1 2 3 4 5

Learners self-correct and give each other feedback: 1 2 3 4 5

It is goal/outcome-oriented: 1 2 3 4 5

It has a report phase, targeting the linguistic form: 1 2 3 4 5