

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING A TASK-BASED APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH READING SKILLS TO STUDENTS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach in enhancing English reading comprehension among the first students (major in English Tourism) at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. Employing a quasi-experimental design, the research comprised two groups: an experimental group taught through task-based lesson plans and a control group receiving traditional instruction. Pre- and post-tests were administered to both groups, and data were analyzed using independent and paired samples t-tests. The results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's reading comprehension scores, indicating that TBLT positively influences learners' reading abilities. These findings highlight the potential of task-based instruction as an effective pedagogical strategy within Vietnamese higher education, contributing to the advancement of English language teaching.

Keyword: Task-Based Language Teaching, reading comprehension, English as a foreign language, quasi-experimental design, Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, proficiency in English has become indispensable for academic success, professional development, and international communication. In Vietnam, enhancing English language skills among university students is a national priority. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has implemented initiatives such as the National Foreign Language Project 2020–2025 to promote language competencies and foster learner autonomy through communicative and innovative pedagogical approaches.

Despite these efforts, many Vietnamese learners continue to encounter challenges in English reading comprehension, largely attributable to limited vocabulary, unfamiliar cultural contexts, and persistent reliance on traditional grammar-translation methods. Conventional reading instruction frequently prioritizes translation and grammatical analysis, which may impede the development of deeper comprehension and critical thinking skills.

A recent survey conducted by the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES) in 2023 revealed that only about 25% of university students nationwide demonstrated proficiency in English reading comprehension at a

satisfactory level or higher. This statistic underscores the ongoing need for pedagogical reform to better equip learners with effective reading strategies.

Moreover, with the rapid development of information technology in modern education, integrating digital tools into language teaching has become increasingly essential. The use of technology in supporting Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) enables more interactive, authentic, and learner-centered activities, facilitating communication, collaboration, and access to diverse learning resources. This integration helps foster learner engagement and adaptability, making TBLT even more effective in contemporary educational contexts.

Several studies conducted within Vietnam and in similar educational contexts have highlighted the benefits of TBLT for improving English reading skills. For instance, Doan (2023) found that task-based instruction significantly enhanced reading comprehension among Vietnamese university students compared to traditional methods. Similarly, Pham and Nguyen (2021) reported increased learner motivation and interaction through TBLT in Vietnamese higher education settings. Research from neighboring Southeast

Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia also supports the effectiveness of TBLT in fostering comprehensive language skills and learner autonomy (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). These findings emphasize the urgency of adopting task-based approaches in Vietnamese tertiary education to address persistent challenges in English language learning.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers an alternative framework that emphasizes meaningful, goal-directed tasks utilizing authentic materials. Grounded in cognitive and communicative theories, TBLT encourages learners to develop strategic reading skills including predicting, inferring, and synthesizing information through active engagement and collaborative learning.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the TBLT approach in enhancing English reading comprehension among second-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry. By comparing task-based instruction with traditional methodologies, this research contributes to the expanding literature on TBLT implementation in Vietnamese tertiary education and supports ongoing reforms in foreign language teaching.

2. Methodology and Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach in enhancing English reading comprehension among second-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry. A total of 102 students were purposively selected based on their English proficiency and randomly assigned into two groups: 51 students in the experimental group receiving TBLT instruction, and 51 students in the control group following traditional teaching methods.

Intervention Procedure:

Experimental Group: Instruction focused on communicative, task-based activities using authentic materials. Tasks were designed in three phases: pre-reading (activating prior knowledge and vocabulary introduction), during-reading (information search, inference, comprehension questions), and post-reading (group discussions, summarization, real-life application).

Control Group: Received traditional instruction emphasizing vocabulary drills, grammar explanations, and text analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis: Pre- and post-tests on reading comprehension were administered to both groups. Students' motivation was monitored through surveys and classroom observations to control its potential influence on learning outcomes. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software with independent samples t-tests to compare between groups and paired samples t-tests to assess within-group progress. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Control of Extraneous Variables: To ensure validity, experienced lecturers (over 15 years) conducted lessons, and teaching materials and environments were standardized. Extracurricular learning and external factors were observed to minimize confounding effects.

3. Result and discussion

3.1. Comparison of Reading Comprehension Scores Between Experimental and Control Groups

Student's Scores	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Verbal Interpretation
8.6 – 10.0	0	0.00%	Excellent
6.6 – 8.5	15	29.41%	Good
5.0 – 6.5	28	54.90%	Fair
Below 5.0	8	15.69%	Poor
Total	51	100.00%	

Table 1. Summary of Pre-Test Scores of Control Group.

The data in Table 1 show that the majority of students in the control group (54.90%) fell into the "Fair" category, with scores ranging from 5.0 to 6.5. This suggests that most students demonstrated a basic level of reading comprehension, although their performance still contained several inaccuracies. Additionally, 29.41% of the students achieved scores in the "Good" range (6.6 to 8.5), reflecting a moderate understanding of the reading material. Notably, no students reached the "Excellent" level, and 15.69% were classified as "Poor," scoring below 5.0. This distribution highlights the limitations of traditional instructional methods in promoting higher-level reading proficiency and deeper textual understanding.

Student's Scores	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Verbal Interpretation
8.6 - 10.0	1	1.96	Excellent
6.6 - 8.5	20	39.22	Good
5.0 - 6.5	24	47.06	Fair
4.0 and below	6	10.76	Poor
Total	51	100.00	

Table 2. Summary of Pre-Test Scores of Experimental Group

As presented in Table 2, nearly half of the students in the experimental group (47.06%) scored in the "Fair" range (5.0 to 6.5), indicating a basic level of reading comprehension with some notable errors. A considerable proportion (39.22%) achieved "Good" scores (6.6 to 8.5), reflecting a moderate understanding of the reading texts. Notably, one student (1.96%) attained an "Excellent" score (8.6 to 10.0), while 10.76% of the group were categorized as "Poor" with scores below 5.0. Overall, this distribution suggests that the experimental group had slightly higher initial reading proficiency compared to the control group.

Student's scores	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Verbal Interpretation
8.6 – 10.0	3	5.88%	Excellent
6.6 – 8.5	20	39.22%	Good
5.0 – 6.5	24	47.06%	Fair
Below 5.0	4	7.84%	Poor
Total	51	100.00%	

Table 3. Summary of post-test scores of control group

As shown in Table 3, nearly half of the students in the control group (47.06%) achieved scores within the "Fair" range (5.0 to 6.5), suggesting a

basic but limited understanding of the reading material, with recurring errors in comprehension. Additionally, 39.22% of the students attained "Good" scores (6.6 to 8.5), indicating a clearer grasp of the texts with relatively few mistakes. Only a small percentage (5.88%) reached the "Excellent" level (8.6 to 10.0), reflecting a strong command of vocabulary, structure, and overall comprehension. Meanwhile, 7.84% of the students remained in the "Poor" category, scoring below 5.0, which highlights continued difficulties in understanding the reading content.

Student's scores	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Verbal Interpretation
8.6-10.0	5	9.8	<i>Excellent</i>
6.6-8.5	26	50.98	<i>Good</i>
5.0-6.5	19	37.25	<i>Fair</i>
4.0 and below	1	1.96	<i>Poor</i>
Total	51	100.00	

Table 4. Summary of post-test scores of experimental group

According to the data in Table 4, the majority of students in the experimental group scored in the "Good" range (50.98%), indicating a strong understanding of the reading material with only minor errors. Additionally, 37.25% of the students fell into the "Fair" category (5.0 to 6.5), showing a basic level of comprehension but with some notable inaccuracies. Notably, 9.80% reached the "Excellent" level (8.6 to 10.0), demonstrating high accuracy and confidence in interpreting the texts. Only one student (1.96%) scored below 5.0 and was categorized as "Poor," indicating continued difficulty with the reading tasks. Overall, the results reflect a substantial improvement in performance following the task-based instruction.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Sd</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean of difference</i>	<i>t -critical</i>	<i>t - value</i>	<i>P- value</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
<i>Control Group</i>	1,33	100	6.25	0.60	1.660	2.40	0.018	Significant
<i>Experiment Group</i>	1,24		6.85					

Table 5. Significant difference in post – test score gained by students between Control Group and Experiment Group

Based on the data in Table 5, the p-value resulting from the comparison of post-test scores between the control and experimental groups is 0.018, which is below the significance threshold of 0.05. Furthermore, the absolute t-value of 2.40 exceeds the critical t-value of 1.660. These findings reveal a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Consequently, the null hypothesis which claims that there is no significant difference in post-test scores between the control and experimental groups is rejected. This result indicates that the Task-Based Approach significantly improved students' reading comprehension compared to the traditional teaching method.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Sd</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean of difference</i>	<i>t - critical</i>	<i>t - value</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
<i>Pre-test</i>	1,29	50	6.11	0.74	1.676	3.42	0.001	Significant
<i>Post-test</i>	1,24		6.85					

Table 6. Significant effect of Experimental Group to post – test score gained by students

The data presented in Table 6 show that the p-value for the comparison between pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group is 0.001, which is below the 0.05 significance level. Moreover, the absolute t-value of 3.42 exceeds the critical t-value of 1.676. These results demonstrate a statistically significant improvement in the post-test scores of students in the experimental group.

Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that the Task-Based Approach has no significant effect on students' reading comprehension is rejected. This confirms that the approach positively impacted students' performance.

3.2. Analysis of the Relationship Between Learning Motivation and Reading Comprehension Outcomes

substantially contributes to improvements in reading skills.

Furthermore, multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the mediating role of outcomes. The results indicated that motivation significantly explained a considerable portion of the variance in reading comprehension gains

Given the critical role of motivation in academic achievement, this study further investigated the relationship between learning motivation and reading comprehension performance. Data on students' motivation were collected both before and after the intervention, enabling an assessment of motivational changes throughout the implementation of the TBLT approach.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between post-intervention motivation levels and reading comprehension scores ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher motivation

motivation in the relationship between instructional method and reading

among the experimental group ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that the enhancement of motivation via TBLT facilitates better academic performance.

Complementary qualitative classroom observations supported these quantitative findings, revealing noticeable increases in students' active engagement, initiative, and enthusiasm within the experimental group. These observations align with the survey results, implying that motivation not only strengthened but also acted as a key driver in the effective acquisition and application of reading comprehension skills.

Collectively, these findings highlight the pivotal mediating role of learning motivation in explaining the effectiveness of the TBLT approach in enhancing students' reading comprehension.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides strong evidence that the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach is effective in enhancing English reading comprehension skills among second-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry. Students in the experimental group who were taught using TBLT achieved significantly better results than those in the control group who received traditional instruction. These findings demonstrate that TBLT not only improves reading comprehension but also fosters active learner engagement, communicative competence, and the development of strategic reading skills through meaningful and authentic tasks.

Moreover, the practical implications of this study suggest that the application of TBLT can contribute significantly to improving the quality of foreign language training. It supports teachers in adopting more interactive and student-centered teaching methods while assisting educational administrators in designing curricula that better meet the demands of international integration and the evolving needs of the globalized workforce. Nevertheless, the study has some limitations. It did not examine the long-term effectiveness of TBLT in sustaining and further advancing reading skills after the conclusion of the course. Furthermore, the transferability of reading skills to other language areas such as listening, speaking, and writing, as well as their application in wider academic contexts, remains unexplored. Therefore, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to assess the enduring impact of TBLT, extend investigations to other language skills to offer a more comprehensive evaluation of the method's effectiveness, and incorporate qualitative data including learner feedback,

classroom observations, and motivation assessments to gain deeper insights into learners' experiences and interactions with this approach.

In conclusion, in the context of ongoing educational reforms emphasizing communicative competence and learner-centered approaches, TBLT stands out as a highly promising teaching method. Its broader implementation in English language instruction at Vietnamese universities is crucial for enhancing the quality of foreign language education and aligning with national goals of language proficiency and international integration.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings and limitations, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Conduct longitudinal research to explore the durability and transferability of reading skills acquired through the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach.
2. Expand skill assessment to examine the method's impact on listening, speaking, and writing, thereby providing a more comprehensive evaluation of language development.
3. Include qualitative data such as learner feedback, motivation, and classroom observations to gain deeper insights into learner experiences and engagement with TBLT.
4. Provide detailed documentation of task design and implementation to facilitate replication and adaptation across diverse teaching contexts.
5. Strengthen control over extraneous variables like teacher effects and learners' external motivation to enhance the validity and generalizability of future research.
6. Develop comprehensive teacher training programs that focus on the principles and practical application of TBLT, ensuring high-quality instruction and effective implementation in varied classroom settings.
7. Encourage the integration of digital technology in the design and implementation of TBLT tasks by utilizing online learning platforms, interactive software, and social learning networks to

increase engagement and instructional effectiveness.

8. Recommend educational institutions to invest more in technological infrastructure and provide training to enhance teachers' digital competencies, enabling them to effectively apply technology-supported TBLT in the modern digital learning environment.

Continued exploration of TBLT through mixed-methods research in diverse educational settings is essential to maximize its pedagogical benefits and to inform future language teaching reforms.

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