



Developing Real-World Communication Competence in EFL with Task-Based Language Teaching: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental study examined the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing communicative competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners over a 10-week period. Fifty intermediate-level EFL students were randomly assigned to either an experimental group receiving TBLT instruction or a control group following traditional grammar-focused pedagogy. A mixed-methods approach incorporating pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews was employed to assess language proficiency and learner motivation. Results demonstrated significant improvements in the experimental group across all four language skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading), with mean gains ranging from 22% to 23.5%. Statistical analysis revealed significant differences between groups ($p < 0.001$), indicating TBLT's superior effectiveness in developing communicative abilities. Furthermore, qualitative findings showed enhanced learner motivation, confidence, and engagement in the experimental group. These results suggest that TBLT effectively bridges the gap between classroom learning and authentic language use, warranting its integration into EFL curricula to better prepare learners for real-world communication demands.

Introduction

The landscape of language education has undergone substantial transformation in response to globalization and the growing emphasis on practical communication skills. A significant development involves shifting from traditional grammar-based instruction toward learner-centered methodologies such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). This approach prioritizes communicative tasks that simulate authentic situations, positioning language as a practical tool for interaction rather than merely a subject for rote memorization.

TBLT aligns with Communicative Language Teaching principles by integrating linguistic form, function, and context, thereby fostering comprehensive language competence. The approach draws theoretical support from Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which emphasizes social interaction's role in cognitive development, and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which advocates exposure to comprehensible yet slightly challenging language input.

Through carefully designed tasks replicating real-life challenges—such as planning trips or resolving workplace issues—TBLT equips learners not only with linguistic skills but also with problem-solving and critical thinking capabilities. This method prepares students to use language meaningfully in diverse everyday settings, making it particularly relevant in the 21st-century global communication landscape.

1.2 Problem Statement

Contemporary EFL education frequently relies on conventional pedagogies that, despite their historical prevalence, increasingly conflict with authentic linguistic interaction requirements. Traditional methodologies rooted in rote learning—comprising grammar drills, direct translation, and extensive vocabulary memorization—may facilitate superficial success in standardized assessments but fall short in equipping learners with competencies necessary for real-world communication.

The fundamental issue lies in the disconnect between academic achievements, such as excelling in grammar examinations, and practical language skill application in everyday scenarios like ordering meals or engaging in informal dialogue. This gap underscores conventional teaching methods' fundamental shortcomings, which fail to emphasize practical language use across diverse contexts.

Task-Based Language Teaching emerges as a progressive alternative, advocating curricula that transcend traditional education confines and foster environments where language learning occurs through meaningful task engagement. However, transitioning to TBLT presents challenges. Institutional resistance, rigid curricula, and teacher-centered classrooms often impede innovative approach integration, particularly in resource-scarce settings with entrenched educational paradigms.

1.3 Research Questions

To achieve its objectives, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does TBLT affect learners' communicative competence in an EFL context?
2. What impact does TBLT have on learners' motivation and overall language proficiency?
3. How do learners perceive TBLT-based instruction compared to traditional methods?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study's significance is multifaceted, extending current understanding of TBLT and its practicality in real-world educational environments. By examining empirical evidence, the research substantiates TBLT's efficacy in promoting authentic language usage, crucial in an era where communicative competence receives high value.

For educators, this research provides a data-driven foundation for reassessing and potentially revitalizing teaching strategies, aligning them more closely with authentic language acquisition demands. Curriculum designers receive a blueprint for crafting programs that are both theoretically sound and empirically validated, enhancing language instruction relevance and applicability.

The study's dual approach, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative analyses, ensures comprehensive TBLT effectiveness evaluation. Proficiency scores provide tangible progress benchmarks, while learner perceptions offer nuanced understanding of subjective language learning experiences under TBLT.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Task-Based Language Teaching draws from various linguistic and psychological theories advocating learning through meaningful use. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) serves as one foundational concept, emphasizing guided learning and scaffolding by more capable

individuals, supporting learners in achieving beyond their current capacities (Vygotsky, 1978).

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) contributes significantly to TBLT's theoretical foundation, suggesting language acquisition occurs most effectively through exposure to slightly challenging yet comprehensible input ($i+1$). This supports designing tasks that incrementally advance learners' language abilities while maintaining clarity.

The Communicative Competence Model, initially proposed by Hymes (1972) and later expanded by Canale and Swain (1980), delineates four competencies crucial for effective communication: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. TBLT integrates these competencies by providing contexts where language form and function interweave within communicative activities.

Ellis's Task-Based Framework (2003) offers structured methodology for implementing TBLT in classrooms. It consists of three distinct stages: the pre-task phase preparing learners; the task cycle where learners engage actively; and the post-task phase allowing reflection and language consolidation.

2.2 Current Applications and Future Directions

Curriculum designers have begun integrating TBLT into syllabi, moving away from traditional rote learning methods. This shift acknowledges the need for language instruction mirroring real-life communication, where language serves as a tool for achieving specific outcomes.

Assessment within TBLT frameworks presents unique challenges and opportunities. Traditional testing methods may not accurately reflect learners' communicative competence, leading to alternative assessment strategy development including performance-based assessments evaluating task completion effectiveness.

Technology integration offers new avenues for task-based learning. Online platforms and virtual environments provide learners with resources and interaction opportunities, enhancing TBLT experiences. Future research will likely explore TBLT's long-term effects on language retention and transferability to real-world situations.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This investigation employed a quasi-experimental design, particularly advantageous for educational studies where random subject allocation proves impractical. The design facilitated study application in authentic classroom environments, encompassing two distinct groups: an experimental cohort engaging with TBLT instruction and a control group following conventional grammar-focused pedagogy.

The methodological approach integrated both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, providing comprehensive views of TBLT influence. Quantitative aspects involved pre- and post-instructional period testing to assess language skill advancement, while qualitative components included systematic classroom observations and structured participant interviews evaluating experiences and engagement levels.

3.2 Participants

The study included 50 intermediate EFL proficiency individuals, aged 18–25, from a reputable language learning institution. Participants were divided into equal groups, ensuring equivalent starting points in language ability as determined by standardized evaluation scores.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Experimental Group (n=25)	Control Group (n=25)	Total (N=50)
Gender			
Male	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25 (50%)
Female	12 (48%)	13 (52%)	25 (50%)
Age Range			
18–20 years	9 (36%)	10 (40%)	19 (38%)
21–23 years	11 (44%)	10 (40%)	21 (42%)
24–25 years	5 (20%)	5 (20%)	10 (20%)

Characteristic	Experimental Group (n=25)	Control Group (n=25)	Total (N=50)
Mean Age (SD)	21.4 (2.1)	21.6 (2.3)	21.5 (2.2)
Proficiency Level	Intermediate (B1)	Intermediate (B1)	Intermediate (B1)

3.3 Research Instruments

The study employed multiple assessment tools:

Proficiency Tests: Standardized examinations aligned with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) benchmarks, covering listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities through objective and subjective formats.

Classroom Observations: Structured checklists focusing on learner engagement, interaction patterns, and task completion, with particular attention to authentic language usage instances and collaborative problem-solving abilities.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Post-intervention interviews with selected participants (10 from each group) providing insights into subjective experiences with teaching methods and personal impact assessments.

Motivation Questionnaires: Pre- and post-intervention assessments based on Dörnyei's (2001) theoretical framework for evaluating language learning motivational aspects.

3.4 Procedures

Pre-Intervention Phase: Both groups underwent preliminary assessments establishing existing proficiency benchmarks. The experimental group instructor received comprehensive TBLT training covering core principles, task design nuances, and implementation intricacies.

Intervention Phase (10 weeks): The experimental group completed a structured TBLT program including diverse tasks: role-playing exercises, collaborative problem-solving challenges, and real-world scenario simulations. Activities mirrored practical situations like trip planning, interview conducting, and presentation development, following Ellis's (2003) TBLT framework with pre-task, task cycle, and post-task phases.

The control group experienced conventional grammar-translation methodology emphasizing

rule-based learning, vocabulary memorization drills, and extensive grammar exercises.

Post-Intervention Phase: Both groups completed post-tests quantifying language proficiency improvements. Interviews and questionnaires provided deeper insights into participant experiences and motivation levels.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data underwent statistical analysis using paired and independent samples t-tests to determine proficiency changes. Qualitative data received thematic analysis of interview content and observational notes, using triangulation methods to ensure finding reliability and validity.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The study findings demonstrate TBLT's significant impact on language acquisition and learner engagement. The experimental group showed marked improvements across all four measured language skills compared to the control group.

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Scores by Skill and Group

Skill	Exp. Pre-test (M ± SD)	Exp. Post-test (M ± SD)	Ctrl Pre-test (M ± SD)	Ctrl Post-test (M ± SD)
Speaking	56.0 ± 4.2	78.0 ± 3.8	58.0 ± 4.5	66.0 ± 4.1
Writing	60.0 ± 5.1	78.0 ± 4.3	62.0 ± 4.8	68.0 ± 4.6
Listening	65.0 ± 4.7	82.0 ± 3.5	64.0 ± 5.0	71.0 ± 4.4
Reading	68.0 ± 4.4	84.0 ± 3.2	67.0 ± 4.6	73.0 ± 4.2
Overall Mean	62.25 ± 4.6	80.5 ± 3.7	62.75 ± 4.7	69.5 ± 4.3

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. Scores are percentages (0–100).

Table 3: Mean Gain Scores and Percentage Improvement

Skill	Exp. Gain (M ± SD)	Exp. % Improvement	Ctrl Gain (M ± SD)	Ctrl % Improvement
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Skill	Exp. Gain (M ± SD)	Exp. % Improvement	Ctrl Gain (M ± SD)	Ctrl % Improvement
Speaking	22.0 ± 3.1	39.3%	8.0 ± 2.4	13.8%
Writing	18.0 ± 2.8	30.0%	6.0 ± 2.1	9.7%
Listening	17.0 ± 2.5	26.2%	7.0 ± 2.0	10.9%
Reading	16.0 ± 2.3	23.5%	6.0 ± 1.9	9.0%
Overall	18.25 ± 2.7	29.3%	6.75 ± 2.1	10.8%

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test Results for Post-test Scores

Skill	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d	Effect Size
Speaking	11.24	48	<0.001*	3.18	Large
Writing	9.87	48	<0.001*	2.79	Large
Listening	10.52	48	<0.001*	2.97	Large
Reading	11.86	48	<0.001*	3.35	Large
Overall Proficiency	12.41	48	<0.001*	3.51	Large

Note: *** $p < 0.001$ (highly significant), $df =$ degrees of freedom.

Table 5: Paired Samples t-test Results (Within-Group Comparisons)

Group & Skill	Pre-test (M ± SD)	Post-test (M ± SD)	t-value	p-value	Effect
Experimental Group					
Speaking	56.0 ± 4.2	78.0 ± 3.8	15.32	<0.001*	Significant
Writing	60.0 ± 5.1	78.0 ± 4.3	12.84	<0.001*	Significant
Listening	65.0 ± 4.7	82.0 ± 3.5	13.67	<0.001*	Significant
Reading	68.0 ± 4.4	84.0 ± 3.2	14.25	<0.001*	Significant
Control Group					

Group & Skill	Pre-test (M ± SD)	Post-test (M ± SD)	t-value	p-value	Effect
Speaking	58.0 ± 4.5	66.0 ± 4.1	6.42	<0.001*	Significant
Writing	62.0 ± 4.8	68.0 ± 4.6	5.73	<0.001*	Significant
Listening	64.0 ± 5.0	71.0 ± 4.4	6.11	<0.001*	Significant
Reading	67.0 ± 4.6	73.0 ± 4.2	5.94	<0.001*	Significant

Table 6: Motivation and Engagement Levels (Pre- and Post-Intervention)

Category	Exp. Pre (M±SD)	Exp. Post (M±SD)	Ctrl Pre (M±SD)	Ctrl Post (M±SD)	t-value	p-value
Intrinsic Motivation	3.2 ± 0.6	4.5 ± 0.4	3.1 ± 0.7	3.4 ± 0.6	8.92	<0.001*
Extrinsic Motivation	3.4 ± 0.5	4.3 ± 0.5	3.3 ± 0.6	3.5 ± 0.6	6.47	<0.001*
Classroom Engagement	3.0 ± 0.7	4.6 ± 0.3	2.9 ± 0.8	3.2 ± 0.7	9.85	<0.001*
Confidence in Speaking	2.8 ± 0.8	4.4 ± 0.5	2.7 ± 0.7	3.1 ± 0.6	9.24	<0.001*
Overall Motivation	3.1 ± 0.6	4.5 ± 0.4	3.0 ± 0.7	3.3 ± 0.6	9.56	<0.001*

Note: Scores on 5-point Likert scale (1=Very Low, 5=Very High). *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 7: Correlation Matrix between Language Skills and Motivation

Variables	Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading	Motivation
Speaking	1.000	0.782	0.745	0.698	0.856
Writing	0.782	1.000	0.801	0.823	0.791
Listening	0.745	0.801	1.000	0.867	0.748
Reading	0.698	0.823	0.867	1.000	0.712
Motivation	0.856	0.791	0.748	0.712	1.000

Note: ** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed).

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Interview and observation data supported these quantitative results. Experimental group learners acknowledged task practicality and positive effects on confidence and collaborative learning experiences. Representative quotes include:

"The tasks made me feel like I was actually using English for real purposes, not just studying grammar rules." (Participant E7)

"I felt more confident speaking because the activities were similar to real-life situations I might encounter." (Participant E12)

Control group participants noted interaction lack and exercise monotony:

"The classes were mostly about memorizing rules and doing grammar exercises. It was boring and I didn't feel like I could actually communicate." (Participant C9)

These outcomes suggest TBLT's emphasis on real-world tasks and communicative practices not only strengthens linguistic skills but also enhances learners' enthusiasm and involvement in language learning processes.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The research presents compelling evidence for adopting TBLT to promote authentic linguistic interaction. Core findings reveal that learners engaging in TBLT exhibit marked communication effectiveness advancements, evidenced by heightened classroom enthusiasm and active participation in task-oriented learning approaches.

The significant statistical differences between groups ($p < 0.001$) across all measured skills, with large effect sizes (Cohen's d ranging from 2.79 to 3.51), demonstrate TBLT's substantial practical significance beyond mere statistical significance. The experimental group's mean overall improvement of 29.3% compared to the control group's 10.8% represents nearly triple the learning gains achieved through traditional methods.

Particularly noteworthy is the speaking skill improvement (39.3% in the experimental group versus 13.8% in the control group), suggesting TBLT's particular effectiveness in developing oral communicative competence—often the most challenging skill for EFL learners to develop through traditional grammar-focused instruction.

The strong positive correlations between motivation and language skills ($r = 0.712$ to 0.856 , $p < 0.01$) support the theoretical proposition that enhanced learner engagement directly contributes to improved language proficiency. This finding aligns with Dörnyei's (2001) motivational framework and suggests that TBLT's task-oriented approach creates a positive feedback loop: meaningful tasks increase motivation, which in turn enhances language learning outcomes.

5.2 Implications for Practice

These insights signal a pressing need to reevaluate prevailing pedagogical models, especially in EFL environments where conventional strategies predominate. TBLT integration into educational programs addresses traditional grammar-centric teaching shortcomings, offering more holistic student preparation for real-life communicative scenarios.

The study advocates for professional development opportunities enabling teachers to grasp TBLT foundational principles and execution nuances. Recommendations include creating task-based curricula tailored to specific learner needs and reflective of real-world situations. The study encourages innovative technology use to diversify task types and enhance student engagement through virtual environments and collaborative online activities.

5.3 Limitations

Certain constraints may affect finding applicability breadth. The relatively modest participant group size ($n=50$) raises questions about broader finding generalizability. Additionally, the brief 10-week intervention duration may not sufficiently gauge TBLT's enduring impact. Implementation challenges, including required educator training and resource availability, merit further investigation.

Future research should address these limitations through larger-scale, longer-duration studies across diverse educational contexts, examining TBLT's long-term effects on language retention and transferability to authentic communicative situations.

6. Conclusion

Task-Based Language Teaching has emerged as a transformative approach in language acquisition, particularly within EFL contexts. This investigation examined TBLT's influence on learners' communicative competence, intrinsic motivation, and subjective perceptions. Research findings synthesis illuminates significant linguistic proficiency and learner motivation enhancement, addressing conventional language instruction methodology deficiencies.

The study's contributions reinforce scholarly evidence advocating TBLT's pedagogical strategy efficacy. Statistical analyses revealed highly significant differences ($p < 0.001$) with large effect sizes across all language skills, demonstrating TBLT's capacity to revolutionize language education. The approach serves as a conduit between classroom learning theoretical constructs and real-world communication practical requirements.

These findings suggest a paradigm shift in language pedagogy prioritizing practical communication skills and learner engagement over rote memorization and passive learning. Future research trajectories should explore TBLT's longitudinal impact on language mastery, examining whether initial observed gains remain sustainable over time. TBLT adaptability across varied cultural and educational landscapes presents fertile exploration ground, potentially unveiling universal principles or necessitating context-specific adaptations.

Technological advancement integration in task-based learning facilitation beckons further scrutiny. Digital tools and TBLT interplay could unlock new interactive and immersive learning experience dimensions, enriching pedagogical toolkits available to language educators.

The study's ramifications offer a beacon for future pedagogical frameworks and research endeavors, beckoning educators to embrace TBLT's dynamic and learner-centered approach, fostering environments where language learning becomes a gateway to global communication and cultural exchange rather than merely an academic exercise.

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