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Effect of Task-Based Learning on English Reading Skills of Non-English Major Freshmen in GuangXi Province

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Abstract

Background and Aims: Despite the growing demand for English reading proficiency in vocational education, non-English major freshmen at vocational colleges in GuangXi Province continue to struggle with reading comprehension. Traditional teacher-centered methods, which emphasize word-by-word translation and grammar drilling, have proven inadequate in developing students' functional reading abilities. The average reading comprehension score of non-English major freshmen at Guangxi Vocational College of Safety Engineering stands at only 58/100, significantly below the listening average of 70/100. This study investigates the effect of Task-Based Learning (TBL) on improving English reading skills among these freshmen, using vocationally relevant tasks such as interpreting safety regulations, analyzing accident case studies, and summarizing workplace procedures.

Methodology: A one-group pretest-posttest design was employed with 30 freshmen selected through cluster random sampling. The intervention consisted of seven structured reading lessons over 14 hours, each following Willis's (1996) three-phase TBL framework: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. Data were collected using a validated reading comprehension test (KR-20 = 0.78) and a satisfaction questionnaire (Cronbach's α = 0.82). Paired t-test and one-sample t-test were employed for analysis.

Results: Posttest scores (M = 16.60, SD = 2.85) were significantly higher than pretest scores (M = 11.80, SD = 2.45), $p < .01$. The posttest mean was also significantly higher than the 70% criterion ($t = 3.421$, $p < .01$). Student satisfaction with TBL was high (M = 4.25, SD = 0.71).

Conclusion: TBL significantly improves English reading skills and student satisfaction in vocational education contexts. These findings suggest that TBL, when integrated with discipline-specific content, can serve as an effective pedagogical framework for enhancing both reading competence

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and professional readiness among vocational college students, with broader implications for curriculum reform in similar institutions across China.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning; English Reading Skill; Non-English Major; Vocational College; Freshmen

Introduction

English reading is an essential skill for vocational college students, as it enables them to access a wealth of professional knowledge, technical information, and global academic resources, laying a solid foundation for their academic development and future career growth (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). In the era of economic globalization, the ability to read and understand English materials has become an important indicator of the comprehensive quality of vocational college graduates. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2020) clearly emphasizes in the "College English Curriculum Requirements" that reading proficiency is a core requirement in college English teaching, and vocational college students should be able to read and comprehend English materials related to their majors and daily life.

However, non-English major freshmen in vocational colleges face significant challenges in English reading. First, students generally adopt a word-by-word translation reading method, lacking the ability to grasp the overall meaning of the text, and leading to low reading efficiency. This bottom-up processing approach, whereby students decode individual words without engaging in higher-order comprehension strategies, is fundamentally at odds with efficient reading, which requires the integration of vocabulary knowledge, contextual inference, and discourse-level understanding (Grabe, 2009). Second, due to the disconnection between traditional English teaching content and students' majors and practical needs, students lack learning motivation and interest in reading. Many students regard English reading as a tedious learning task rather than a practical skill that can help them improve their professional abilities. Third, students lack systematic training in reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, predicting, and summarizing. Proficient readers often use these strategies to improve reading efficiency and comprehension, but vocational college students mostly rely on basic vocabulary and grammar knowledge for reading, resulting in poor reading comprehension (Grabe, 2009; Liu, 2016). At Guangxi Vocational College of Safety Engineering, the average reading comprehension score of non-English major freshmen is only 58/100, far below the listening average of 70/100, which is consistent with the national trend that vocational college students' reading skills are generally weaker than those of university students (Wang, 2017). Guangxi's unique socioeconomic context further exacerbates this challenge. As a less economically developed region in southwestern China, Guangxi faces a relative scarcity of high-quality English teaching resources and limited opportunities for students to be exposed to authentic English outside the classroom (Liu & Chen, 2020). Unlike students in

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major metropolitan areas who may encounter English in daily life through media, tourism, and international commerce, students in Guangxi's vocational colleges have few opportunities for meaningful English input beyond the textbook. This lack of authentic exposure means that the classroom must serve as the primary — and often the only — environment for developing reading competence, placing a particularly heavy burden on the choice of instructional methodology.

Task-Based Learning (TBL), rooted in constructivist and student-centered learning theories, has emerged as a promising teaching method to address the aforementioned problems. First proposed by Prabhu (1987) in the Bangalore Project, TBL organizes teaching around meaningful, real-world tasks, emphasizing that students acquire language skills through completing tasks and focusing on meaning rather than form (Willis, 2021; Nunan, 1989). Ellis (2003) points out that TBL has four core characteristics: focusing on meaning, relying on students' own language resources, involving information, reasoning, or opinion gaps that need to be bridged, and leading to clear outcomes. Crucially, TBL's emphasis on meaning-focused, contextualized learning directly addresses the word-by-word translation habit prevalent among vocational students. By engaging students in tasks that require them to process whole texts for communicative purposes — such as extracting key information from a safety manual or summarizing an accident report — TBL shifts the cognitive focus from decoding individual words to constructing meaning at the discourse level. This approach compensates for the lack of authentic English exposure in GuangXi by creating simulated authentic contexts within the classroom, thereby bridging the gap between limited environmental input and the functional reading demands of professional life (Ellis, 2017; Carless, 2009).

In the context of vocational college English reading teaching, TBL can be combined with students' professional backgrounds to design tasks such as analyzing safety case studies, interpreting technical manuals, and summarizing workplace regulations. These tasks not only help students improve their English reading skills but also enable them to apply the knowledge they have learned to practical professional scenarios, enhancing the relevance and practicality of English teaching. Previous studies have confirmed that TBL is effective in improving EFL learners' reading comprehension, enhancing learning motivation, and promoting the application of reading strategies (Ismail, Wang, & Jamalyar, 2023; Nguyen, 2022; Duong & Truong, 2022). However, there are relatively few studies on the application of TBL in English reading teaching for non-English major freshmen in vocational colleges in Guangxi, and the effectiveness of TBL in this specific context needs to be further verified.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the application of TBL in English reading instruction for non-English major freshmen at Guangxi Vocational College of Safety Engineering.

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Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in improving English reading skills among non-English major freshmen. This primary objective is operationalized through the following sub-objectives:

1. To compare the English reading skills of non-English major students before and after learning through Task-Based Learning, and to determine whether the posttest mean score is significantly higher than the criterion of 70% of full scores.

2. To assess students' satisfaction with Task-Based Learning and to explore the relationship between satisfaction levels and reading skill improvement.

Literature Review

Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is an instructional approach that takes "tasks" as the core unit of teaching, emphasizing that students acquire language knowledge and develop language skills through completing meaningful, goal-oriented tasks (Prabhu, 1987). Willis (1996) defines a task as "an activity in which learners use language to achieve a specific non-linguistic outcome, with primary attention on meaning". Nunan (1989) further points out that tasks should involve learners' comprehension, manipulation, production, or interaction in the target language, and the focus should be on meaning rather than form.

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is characterized by several pedagogical principles widely recognized in the literature (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2003). First, it emphasizes authenticity, designing tasks around real-life or professional scenarios to simulate the language demands students will face, thereby enhancing learning relevance and practicality. Second, a primary focus is on meaning rather than grammatical form during task completion, which aims to boost learners' fluency and communicative competence (Skehan, 1998). Third, TBL naturally promotes skill integration, requiring learners to comprehensively employ reading, listening, speaking, and writing abilities to achieve task goals. Fourth, it fosters learner autonomy and collaboration by having students work independently or in groups, thereby developing their problem-solving and cooperative skills. Operationally, these principles are implemented through a structured classroom procedure. A seminal and practical model is the three-phase TBL framework proposed by Willis (1996), which consists of the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus stages.

However, it is important to acknowledge that TBL is not without its limitations and criticisms. Carless (2009) notes that implementing TBL in Asian educational contexts can be challenging due to large class sizes, examination-oriented cultures, and teachers' unfamiliarity with task-based approaches. Skehan (1998) raises concerns about the difficulty of implementing TBL with students

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of very low language proficiency, who may lack the linguistic resources necessary to complete meaningful tasks without extensive scaffolding. Furthermore, Ellis (2017) acknowledges that the effectiveness of TBL is highly dependent on task design quality and teacher training, and that poorly designed tasks may lead to superficial engagement rather than deep learning. These criticisms suggest that the successful application of TBL requires careful adaptation to the specific educational context, including appropriate task difficulty calibration and adequate teacher preparation.

Theoretical Basis

TBL is based on multiple learning theories, including constructivist learning theory, social constructivist learning theory, and information processing theory. Constructivist learning theory holds that knowledge is not passively accepted by learners but actively constructed through interaction with the environment and experience (Piaget, 1970). In TBL, students construct their own language knowledge and reading skills through completing tasks, rather than passively receiving knowledge imparted by teachers. Social constructivist learning theory, proposed by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes that learning is a social process, and learners can develop their cognitive abilities through interaction and collaboration with others. TBL's group work and collaborative task completion precisely align with this theory, enabling students to learn from each other and make progress together. Information processing theory believes that human learning is a process of perceiving, processing, storing, and retrieving information (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). The three-stage teaching cycle of TBL (pre-task, task cycle, language focus stages) conforms to the laws of human information processing, helping students better encode, store, and retrieve language knowledge and reading strategies.

Application in English Reading Teaching

In English reading teaching, TBL changes the traditional teaching mode where teachers explain texts and students do exercises. Instead, it takes tasks as the guide to stimulate students' reading motivation and promote their active participation in reading activities. Teachers design different types of reading tasks according to the teaching objectives and students' actual levels, such as information-gathering tasks, problem-solving tasks, and creative tasks. In the process of completing tasks, students need to actively read texts, extract key information, analyze and process information, and apply reading strategies, thereby improving their reading comprehension and strategy application abilities. Previous studies have shown that TBL can effectively improve EFL learners' reading comprehension, enhance their learning motivation, and help them master various reading strategies (Fachruddin, 2020; Namaziandost, Nasri, & Ahmadi, 2019; Madhkhan & Mousavi, 2017).

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English reading skill refers to the comprehensive ability of learners to effectively process and understand English written texts, which is a complex combination of linguistic knowledge, cognitive abilities, and reading strategies (Anderson, 2003). Grabe and Stoller (2011) believe that reading is an interactive process involving word recognition, vocabulary understanding, syntactic analysis, discourse processing, and background knowledge application. Nunan (2003) divides reading skills into micro-skills and macro-skills: micro-skills include recognizing word forms, grammatical structures, and cohesive devices; macro-skills include identifying main ideas, making inferences, distinguishing literal and implied meanings, and summarizing texts.

Based on the research of Grabe and Stoller (2011), Anderson (2003), and Nunan (2003), this study defines English reading skill as consisting of five core components: 1) Vocabulary comprehension: The ability to recognize, decode, and understand the meaning of general academic vocabulary and professional vocabulary in context, including inferring word meanings through contextual clues, distinguishing synonyms and antonyms, etc. 2) Main idea identification: The ability to grasp the central theme and structure of the text, identify topic sentences, and summarize the core content of the text without being distracted by supporting details. 3) Detail comprehension: The ability to locate, extract, and retain specific factual information explicitly stated in the text, such as dates, numbers, names, and operational steps. 4) Inference and interpretation: The ability to draw logical conclusions, infer implicit meanings, and interpret the author's intent and attitude based on explicit information in the text and background knowledge. 5) Summarization and synthesis: The ability to condense the key information of a single text or multiple texts into a concise and coherent summary, and integrate information from different parts of the text to form a comprehensive understanding.

Importance for Vocational College Students

For non-English major freshmen in vocational colleges, English reading skill is of great significance for their academic development and future career. Academically, students need to read English textbooks, reference materials, and academic papers to acquire professional knowledge and expand their academic horizons. Professionally, with the deepening of economic globalization, many industries have increasingly high requirements for employees' English ability. Vocational college graduates may need to read English technical manuals, safety regulations, international industry standards, and other materials in their future work, and the level of English reading skill directly affects their work efficiency and professional development potential (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). In addition, good English reading skills can help students keep abreast of the latest developments in the industry, enhance their competitiveness in the job market, and lay a foundation for their lifelong learning and personal development.

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Vocational College English Teaching Context

Vocational college English teaching aims to cultivate students' practical English application ability to meet the needs of their future work and life (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, the current English teaching in vocational colleges still has some problems. Traditional teaching methods focus on grammar explanation and vocabulary memorization, ignoring the cultivation of students' language application ability and reading strategies. The teaching content is often divorced from students' majors and practical needs, resulting in students' lack of learning motivation and interest. In addition, due to the relatively weak English foundation of vocational college students and the large differences in English proficiency among students, it is difficult for traditional unified teaching methods to meet the individual learning needs of students (Wang, 2017).

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is highly consistent with the objectives and characteristics of vocational college English teaching. TBL emphasizes the practicality and relevance of teaching content, and teachers can design major-specific tasks according to students' professional characteristics and career needs, making English teaching more targeted and effective. For example, for safety engineering majors, tasks such as interpreting safety regulations, analyzing accident case studies, and summarizing safety operation procedures can be designed; for construction technology majors, tasks such as reading construction drawings, understanding technical specifications, and writing construction reports can be designed. These tasks not only help students improve their English reading skills but also enable them to integrate English learning with professional learning, enhancing the practical value of English learning. At the same time, TBL's learner-centered teaching concept and collaborative learning model help to stimulate students' learning motivation, cultivate their independent learning ability and team cooperation spirit, which are in line with the requirements of vocational education for cultivating practical and compound talents.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is structured around one independent variable, two dependent variables, and relevant intervening variables. The independent variable is Task-Based Learning (TBL), operationalized through Willis's (1996) three-phase pedagogical framework: (a) Pre-task stage, involving topic introduction, vocabulary activation, and task instructions; (b) Task cycle stage, comprising task performance, planning, and reporting; and (c) Language focus stage, involving analysis and practice of language forms encountered during the task. The first dependent variable is English reading skill, which is operationally defined as students' performance measured by a reading comprehension test assessing five core components:

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vocabulary comprehension, main idea identification, detail comprehension, inference and interpretation, and summarization and synthesis. The second dependent variable is students' satisfaction, which refers to their perceptions and attitudes toward the TBL instructional experience.

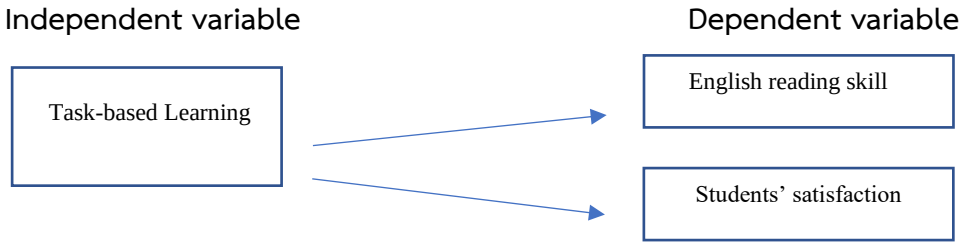


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Population and Sample

Population: 120 non-English major freshmen (4 classes) at Guangxi Vocational College of Safety Engineering (2025 academic year).

Sample: 30 freshmen (1 class) selected via cluster random sampling, majoring in safety engineering, construction technology, and industrial safety management.

Research Design

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design. While this design is practical and appropriate for an initial exploratory study in this specific educational context, it is important to acknowledge its limitations in terms of internal validity. Without a control group, improvements in reading skills cannot be definitively attributed solely to the TBL intervention, as potential confounding factors such as maturation effects, testing effects (familiarity with the test format), and other concurrent learning experiences may have contributed to the observed gains. These limitations are addressed further in the Discussion section.

Research Instruments

Instructional Innovation

TBL lesson plans covering the five reading skill components, with tasks related to students' majors (e.g., interpreting safety regulations, analyzing accident case studies).

Reading Comprehension Test: A 20-item test (full score=20) with content validity verified by three experts (IOC>0.5) and reliability (KR-20=0.78).

Satisfaction Questionnaire: A 16-item 5-point Likert scale (1=very low, 5=very high) with content validity (IOC>0.5) and reliability (Cronbach's α=0.82).

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Intervention Design

The intervention consisted of seven reading lessons delivered over 14 hours (2 hours per lesson). Each lesson was structured according to Willis's (1996) three-phase TBL framework as follows:

Pre-task stage (approximately 20 minutes): The teacher introduced the topic, activated students' background knowledge related to their major, pre-taught essential vocabulary, and clearly explained the task objectives and procedures.

Task cycle stage (approximately 70 minutes): Students worked in small groups (4–5 members) to complete the assigned reading task. This stage included three sub-phases: (a) Task performance, where students read the assigned text and completed the task collaboratively; (b) Planning, where groups prepared to report their findings; and (c) Report, where groups presented their results and received peer feedback.

Language focus stage (approximately 30 minutes): The teacher guided students in analyzing specific language features encountered during the task, practiced key reading strategies, and provided corrective feedback on common errors.

Data collection

The procedures of data collection were as follows:

1. The samples were given the pretest by measuring English reading skill with Task-based learning.

2. The samples were taught using Task-based learning.

3. After finishing the instruction, the samples received the posttest by using the same instrument that was used in the pretest.

4. The samples were given the students' satisfaction questionnaire.

Data Analysis

In this study, data were analyzed using the statistical program according to the research objectives.

Compare the students' English reading skills before and after receiving Task-based learning by using a t-test for dependent samples.

Compare the students' English reading skills with the determined criteria set at 70 percent by using a t-test for one sample.

Assess the student's satisfaction with task-based learning by using the arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

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Results

The result of comparing the students' English reading skills before and after learning through Task-based Learning. The table shows descriptive statistics and t-test for dependent samples as analyzed by the statistical package program. This table aimed to answer the research objective about whether Task-based Learning was able to enhance English reading skills.

Table 1 The result of comparing the mean score of English reading skill before and after learning through Task-based Learning.

Group	Full scores	n	Pretest scores		Post-test scores		t	p
			M	SD	M	SD		
Experimental group	30	30	11.80	2.45	16.60	2.85	9.782**	.001

**p< 0.01

As presented in Table 1, the mean scores of the pretest of English reading skill were 11.80 (SD = 2.45), and the post-test of students' reading skill was 16.60 (SD = 2.85). On average, post-test scores were 4.8 points higher than pretest scores.

The result of comparing the mean score of students' English reading skill after learning through Task-based Learning with the determined criterion set at 70 percent of full scores. The table shows descriptive statistics and a t-test for one sample as analyzed by the statistical package program.

Table 2 The result of the average score of English reading skill after learning with Task-based Learning, with the determined criterion set at 70 percent of full scores. (Full score = 20)

Group	n	criterion score	M	SD	t	p
Experimental group	30	14.00	16.60	2.85	3.421**	0.001

**p < 0.01

As presented in Table 2, the mean scores of the students' English reading skill after learning through Task-based Learning were 16.60 out of a full mark of 20, and the standard deviation was 2.85. This was statistically higher than the criterion of 70% at .01 level of statistical significance (t = 3.421, p < .01).

The result of comparing the mean score of satisfaction after learning through Task-based Learning. The table shows descriptive statistics as analyzed by the statistical package program.

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Table 3 The results of students' satisfaction after learning through Task-based Learning.

Items	M	SD	Satisfaction level
Learning aspect	**4.32**	**0.68**	**High level**
1. TBL improved my reading comprehension	4.35	0.68	High level
2. TBL motivated me to read more	4.20	0.72	High level
3. TBL helped me use reading strategies	4.40	0.65	High level
Instructional strategy	**4.24**	**0.71**	**High level**
4. Tasks were relevant to my major	4.18	0.70	High level
5. Group work enhanced my learning	4.25	0.74	High level
6. Teacher guidance was helpful	4.30	0.68	High level
Teaching efficiency	**4.18**	**0.75**	**High level**
7. I prefer TBL over traditional teaching	4.15	0.76	High level
8. TBL helped me complete tasks confidently	4.22	0.73	High level
9. TBL improved my participation	4.18	0.75	High level
Over all	**4.25**	**0.71**	**High level**

As shown in Table 3, the overall results of students' satisfaction with Task-Based Learning were at a high level (M = 4.25, SD = 0.71). Among the three components, the satisfaction level for the Learning aspect was the highest (M = 4.32, SD = 0.68), indicating that students strongly perceived TBL as effective in improving their reading comprehension, motivation, and use of reading strategies. Satisfaction with Instructional strategy was also high (M = 4.24, SD = 0.71), reflecting students' positive views on task relevance, group work, and teacher guidance. The Teaching efficiency component received slightly lower but still high satisfaction scores (M = 4.18, SD = 0.75), showing that students valued the practicality and engagement of TBL compared to traditional methods. A frequency analysis of the Likert scale responses revealed that 73.3% of students rated their overall satisfaction at 4 (high) or 5 (very high), while only 6.7% rated their satisfaction below 3, suggesting a strong positive consensus among participants. Thus, it was concluded that students' satisfaction after receiving TBL instruction was high.

Summary of results. Taken together, the findings indicate that TBL instruction led to a statistically significant improvement in English reading skills, with posttest performance exceeding the 70% criterion. Students reported high levels of satisfaction with the TBL approach, particularly regarding its impact on learning outcomes and the relevance of instructional tasks to their professional fields. Future research should conduct a component-level analysis to identify which specific reading skills benefit most from TBL instruction.

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Discussion

Task-based learning can better improve students' English reading skill and the reasons may be related to the following aspects:

1. After learning through the Task-based Learning method, the students' English reading skills improved significantly. The pretest mean score was 11.80 (SD = 2.45), while the posttest mean score rose to 16.60 (SD = 2.85), reflecting a significant gain of 4.80 points ($t = 9.782$, $p < .01$). This improvement is attributed to TBL's structured three-stage framework—pre-task, task execution, and post-task—which promotes active engagement, collaborative problem-solving, and strategic reading practice. Unlike traditional methods, TBL places students in meaningful, vocationally relevant tasks such as analyzing safety reports or interpreting technical manuals, thereby enhancing both comprehension and retention.

This finding aligns with recent studies. Ismail, Wang, & Jamalyar (2023) found that TBL significantly improved reading comprehension and motivation among Chinese EFL learners by embedding language use in goal-oriented tasks. Similarly, Nguyen (2022) reported that non-English major students in Vietnam showed marked gains in reading performance after TBL instruction, underscoring its effectiveness in similar educational contexts. The present study corroborates these results, confirming TBL as a robust pedagogical approach for reading development in vocational education.

2. After learning with Task-based Learning, students' English reading skills were higher than the 70% passing standard. The average posttest score was 16.60 out of 20, which is significantly higher than the 70% passing score of 14.00 ($t = 3.421$, $p < .01$). This means that TBL not only helped students improve but also enabled most of them to reach a set level of ability. This success is partly because the tasks were closely related to what students will do in their future jobs, such as reading materials about safety engineering and workplace management. This made the learning more meaningful and useful.

Recent research supports this outcome. Duong & Truong (2022) found that TBL helped vocational students meet reading standards in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by using relevant tasks. Also, Altarejos et al (2024) showed that TBL helped elementary students reach their reading goals. Our study adds to this evidence, showing that TBL can help vocational college students reach required reading levels.

3. TheTask-based Learning method enhances students' satisfaction. Students reported high overall satisfaction with TBL (average score 4.25 out of 5, SD = 0.71). They liked working in groups, found the reading materials relevant to their future careers, and appreciated the helpful feedback from the teacher after tasks. These factors made them less anxious, more engaged, and more confident in their learning.

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This result is consistent with other recent studies on TBL. Tran, Pham, & Tran (2022) found that students in TBL reading classes had more positive attitudes and were more motivated because the tasks were interactive and useful. Similarly, Li & Chen (2019) noted that students liked how TBL connected language learning to their field of study, which increased their satisfaction. Our study, therefore, shows that TBL is not only effective for learning but also popular with students, creating a positive and encouraging classroom environment.

Limitations and Reflections

While the findings are encouraging, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group limits the ability to attribute improvements solely to TBL. Maturation effects, testing effects (students becoming familiar with the test format), and the Hawthorne effect may have contributed to the observed gains. Second, the 14-hour intervention period, while sufficient to produce statistically significant results, may not be adequate for big cognitive changes in reading habits. It remains unclear whether these gains would be sustained over time without continued TBL instruction. Third, the small sample size (n = 30) from a single institution limits the generalizability of the findings. Fourth, some lower-proficiency students required additional scaffolding during the task cycle stage, suggesting that TBL effectiveness may vary based on students' baseline proficiency levels. Future studies should address these limitations through more rigorous experimental designs.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of Task-Based Learning on English reading skills among non-English major freshmen at Guangxi Vocational College of Safety Engineering. The findings clearly demonstrate that TBL instruction led to statistically significant improvements in overall reading performance, with posttest scores exceeding both pretest levels and the established 70% criterion.

The structured three-phase TBL framework — pre-task, task cycle, and language focus — provides a replicable instructional model that engages students in deeper cognitive processing than traditional form-focused instruction, and its emphasis on meaning-focused, vocationally relevant tasks makes it particularly suitable for the vocational education context.

These findings carry important theoretical implications for the field of vocational English pedagogy. They provide empirical evidence supporting the applicability of constructivist and social constructivist learning theories in the specific context of vocational college English reading instruction in less economically developed regions of China. The study demonstrates that when TBL tasks are designed to align with students' professional domains, the resulting learning

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becomes not merely a language exercise but an integrated professional and linguistic development experience.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that vocational colleges should consider adopting TBL as a core instructional methodology for English reading courses. The high levels of student satisfaction indicate that TBL not only improves reading outcomes but also enhances students' motivation and engagement. For curriculum designers, the findings support the integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) content with TBL methodology.

However, the conclusions must be interpreted within the context of methodological limitations, including the absence of a control group, the small sample size, and the relatively short intervention period. While the results are promising, they represent an initial exploration that warrants further investigation through more rigorous research designs.

Recommendation

Based on the results of this study, here are three practical suggestions for teachers, schools, and other training programs.

1. Focus on Students and Support Teachers

This study shows that the Task-based Learning (TBL) method helps students learn better and feel more satisfied. To make TBL work well, teachers need training and support. Training should teach teachers how to prepare students before a task, especially students who find English difficult. For example, teachers can learn how to introduce key words, explain the topic clearly, and show useful reading strategies. This preparation (the "pre-task" stage) helps every student participate successfully. Teachers can use this TBL method not only in reading classes but also in other courses to help students learn actively.

2. Create a "Task Bank" for Teachers

Schools should build a shared collection of English tasks related to different job fields, like safety engineering or construction. This is called an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Task Bank. Each task in the bank would be a real-world activity, such as "read a safety report and suggest solutions." If teachers have this bank, they can easily find and use good tasks in their classes without spending too much time creating them. This helps keep English learning connected to students' future careers and makes teaching more consistent and effective.

3. Share the Method with Other Schools

Other schools or training centers can use the TBL method from this study in their own English courses. The steps are clear and easy to follow: introduce the task, let students work in groups, then discuss and review. This method can also be used in other subjects where students

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need to read, discuss, or solve problems. Using TBL can improve students' results and make the school's programs more attractive to future students.

Integrate TBL with Digital Tools

To enhance the effectiveness and reach of TBL, vocational colleges should explore integrating TBL with digital tools and e-learning platforms. Online collaborative platforms can facilitate the task cycle stage for larger classes, while digital reading tools with built-in annotation features can support the language focus stage. Mobile learning applications can also extend TBL beyond the classroom by providing students with additional task-based reading activities related to their professional fields.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the limitations of the present study, several directions for future research are recommended. First, a quasi-experimental design with a control group should be employed to establish a more robust causal relationship between TBL and reading skill improvement. Second, longitudinal studies are needed to assess whether reading gains are sustained over time. Third, future research should involve larger, multi-institutional samples across different regions and vocational specializations. Fourth, qualitative research methods (e.g., classroom observation, student interviews) should be incorporated to provide deeper insights into cognitive processes during TBL reading tasks. Finally, future studies should examine the moderating effects of students' baseline proficiency levels and prior professional knowledge on TBL outcomes.

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