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The Effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition among ESL Learners: A Study in Phulu High School, Lao Cai, Vietnam.

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Abstract.
The global demand for English proficiency has placed increasing emphasis on effective pedagogical strategies in ESL contexts. Vocabulary acquisition is a cornerstone of language learning, yet traditional, rote-memorization methods often fail to foster long-term retention or communicative competence, particularly in settings with limited exposure to authentic language use. This study investigates the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners at Phulu High School, Lao Cai, Vietnam. Sixty students were divided equally into an experimental group receiving TBL instruction and a control group taught through a traditional grammar-translation approach. Data were collected through pre- and post-vocabulary tests, classroom observations, and a student motivation survey. Statistical analysis using a paired-samples *t*-test revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group's mean vocabulary score (45.2 → 72.6) compared with the control group (44.8 → 55.4), $t(58) = 6.32$, $p < .001$. Qualitative findings supported these results, indicating higher learner engagement, communicative competence, and autonomous vocabulary use. The study concludes that TBL is an effective pedagogical framework for improving vocabulary learning and communicative proficiency in Vietnamese secondary-school contexts. Pedagogical implications, including curriculum integration and task design recommendations, are discussed, highlighting the potential for TBL to enhance learner motivation and real-world language application. The study further contributes to ESL research by providing empirical evidence from a semi-rural, under-researched educational setting in northern Vietnam, offering practical insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers.
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1. Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of second language learning, directly influencing learners' communicative competence and overall language proficiency (Nation, 2013). In the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) education, effective vocabulary instruction remains a persistent challenge, particularly in non-native settings where learners' exposure to authentic language input is limited(Pham, 2021; Tsegaye et al., 2024). Traditional teaching methods, often relying on rote memorization and grammar-translation approaches, have demonstrated limited effectiveness in promoting active vocabulary use, long-term retention, and learner engagement (Schmitt, 2008). Consequently, educators and researchers have increasingly explored communicative and task-oriented pedagogical frameworks, with Task-Based Learning (TBL) emerging as a prominent approach.

TBL, grounded in the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT), emphasizes the completion of meaningful tasks as the central mechanism for language teaching (Ellis, 2003). Unlike traditional methods that prioritize explicit grammar instruction, TBL engages learners in real-life or simulated communicative activities requiring negotiation of meaning, problem-solving, and collaborative interaction. Empirical studies suggest that TBL not only enhances learners' lexical knowledge but also improves pragmatic competence, intrinsic motivation, and learner autonomy (Willis & Willis, 2007; Carless, 2009). By integrating authentic tasks that mimic real-world language use, learners are encouraged to process vocabulary in context, thereby promoting deeper cognitive encoding and more durable retention (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

In Vietnam, English teaching at the secondary school level has historically been teacher-centered, with limited emphasis on active learner participation (Nguyen, 2016). Despite recent curriculum reforms emphasizing communicative competence, many schools continue to rely on traditional methodologies due to large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and limited instructional resources (Doan, 2019). This gap between policy and classroom practice underscores the need for innovative pedagogical approaches that effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition while remaining feasible in the Vietnamese context. TBL, with its focus on task completion and learner engagement, presents a promising solution for bridging this gap.

Recent empirical research supports the positive impact of TBL on vocabulary learning among Vietnamese secondary school learners. For instance, Nguyen and Balakrishnan (2020) reported that students receiving TBL instruction demonstrated significantly higher vocabulary gains than peers taught through conventional methods. Similarly, Tran (2018) found that task-oriented activities not only improved lexical knowledge but also increased learners' intrinsic motivation and classroom participation. These findings suggest that TBL addresses both the cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning, providing a holistic approach to vocabulary acquisition.

However, research on TBL in Vietnamese secondary schools remains limited, particularly in northern regions such as Lao Cai province. Most studies have focused on tertiary education or urban contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the applicability and effectiveness of TBL among high school learners in semi-rural settings (Pham, 2021). Addressing this gap is essential for informing curriculum design, teacher professional development, and pedagogical policy, ensuring that ESL instruction is both effective and contextually relevant.

Given the challenges faced by ESL learners in acquiring and retaining vocabulary, the present study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among high school students at Phulu High School, Lao Cai, Vietnam. The study addresses both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of language learning by evaluating vocabulary gains through pre- and post-test assessments, as well as exploring learners' motivation, engagement, and participation via surveys, classroom observations, and reflective journals. In addition, structured TBL lesson plans for beginner, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels are developed to provide practical guidance for classroom implementation. Specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) Does TBL significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners at Phulu High School compared to traditional teaching methods? (2) How does TBL affect learners' motivation, engagement, and participation in vocabulary learning activities? (3) What are the practical implications of implementing TBL through structured lesson plans across different proficiency levels?

These research questions provide a clear framework for linking theoretical TBL principles with classroom practice and measurable learning outcomes, guiding both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

In addition to its practical significance, this research contributes to the broader literature on TBL by providing empirical evidence from an under-researched semi-rural context. It aligns with global trends emphasizing learner-centered, communicative methodologies that foster linguistic competence alongside 21st-century skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Richards, 2015). Integrating TBL in northern Vietnamese secondary schools represents both a practical innovation and a theoretically grounded intervention, offering a pathway to improved language learning outcomes and enhanced student engagement.

In summary, vocabulary acquisition is critical to ESL proficiency, yet traditional teaching methods often fail to engage learners or promote long-term retention. Task-Based Learning offers a structured, communicative, and learner-centered alternative, supported by empirical research in diverse educational contexts. This study addresses a significant research gap by evaluating the effectiveness of TBL in a northern Vietnamese high school, examining both vocabulary development and learner engagement, and providing structured lesson plans to facilitate practical classroom implementation. The findings are expected to inform pedagogical practice, curriculum development, and policy decisions in Vietnamese ESL education and similar contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Task-Based Learning (TBL), or Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), has gained widespread recognition as a pedagogically effective approach in language education, particularly for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. This approach prioritizes learner-centered, communicative, and meaningful language use, contrasting sharply with traditional grammar-focused and teacher-centered methods. TBL emphasizes the active participation of learners in authentic tasks, fostering linguistic competence, cognitive engagement, motivation, and collaborative skills. This literature review provides a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical foundations of TBL, the process of vocabulary acquisition in ESL contexts, empirical evidence on TBL's effectiveness in vocabulary development, challenges in implementation, and existing research gaps. The review highlights the relevance of TBL for the Vietnamese secondary school context and aligns with the study's research questions focusing on vocabulary acquisition, learner motivation, and task effectiveness.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Task-Based Learning

Task-Based Learning is grounded in several interrelated theoretical perspectives that explain how language is acquired, processed, and retained through authentic communication. These frameworks underpin the design of tasks and provide insight into the mechanisms of vocabulary development.

2.2.1 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT provides the foundational philosophy for TBL. It emphasizes that language learning is most effective when learners engage in meaningful communication rather than rote memorization or isolated grammar drills (Ellis, 2003). In TBL, lessons are structured around tasks that reflect real-world communication, requiring learners to convey meaning, negotiate understanding, and collaborate effectively. This approach ensures that language learning is purposeful, contextualized, and relevant to learners' communicative needs.

2.2.2 Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, peers, and instructors (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). In TBL classrooms, learners engage in problem-solving, information exchange, and collaborative activities, fostering both cognitive and linguistic development. The approach aligns with sociocultural perspectives, emphasizing scaffolding, peer interaction, and the co-construction of knowledge as central to language acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.2.3 Input Hypothesis and Noticing Hypothesis

TBL also draws on cognitive theories related to language input. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level (i+1). Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990) further suggests that learners must consciously attend to new language forms for effective acquisition. Task-based activities provide learners with contextualized exposure to vocabulary, facilitating noticing and enhancing retention through repeated use and meaningful engagement.

2.2.4 Cognitive Load and Interactionist Perspectives

Cognitive theories, such as cognitive load theory, emphasize the management of working memory in language learning. Effective task design in TBL reduces cognitive overload by sequencing activities and providing scaffolding, enabling learners to focus on essential linguistic features. Interactionist perspectives complement this view, highlighting that negotiation of meaning, clarification, and collaborative dialogue during tasks create opportunities for vocabulary acquisition and communicative competence (Ellis, 2003).

2.3 Vocabulary Acquisition in ESL Contexts

Vocabulary knowledge is a multidimensional construct that underpins all aspects of language proficiency. It encompasses both **receptive knowledge**, which involves recognizing and understanding words, and **productive knowledge**, which entails actively using words in speaking and writing. Beyond simple recognition, learners must develop depth of knowledge, including semantic (Meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. How language conveys meaning and how meaning is interpreted), syntactic (Sentence structure and grammatical rules. How words are arranged to form correct sentences), morphological (Structure of words and how they are formed. Morphemes (smallest units of meaning), prefixes, suffixes, and roots), and pragmatic (How language is used in context to convey meaning. relationship between language and its users; implied meanings, social norms, politeness, intentions) aspects, to communicate effectively in diverse contexts (Nation, 2013). Mastery of vocabulary also requires understanding collocations, connotations, register, and contextual appropriateness, which collectively contribute to overall communicative competence. Effective vocabulary instruction addresses these multiple dimensions, enabling learners to comprehend, produce, and manipulate language across listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks.

Despite its centrality, vocabulary acquisition presents significant challenges for ESL learners. Limited exposure to authentic language input, overreliance on rote memorization, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful use often hinder vocabulary development (Schmitt, 2008). Learners may encounter words with multiple meanings, culturally specific terms, or context-dependent usage, complicating comprehension and production. Cognitive overload can further impede retention, particularly when learners are presented with large volumes of new vocabulary without adequate contextualization or practice. These challenges underscore the necessity of strategies that actively engage learners and embed vocabulary learning within meaningful communicative contexts.

Research indicates that vocabulary acquisition is most effective when learners are engaged with words actively, repeatedly, and in diverse contexts. Strategies such as semantic mapping, categorization, mnemonic devices, contextualized reading, and communicative production enhance both comprehension and retention (Nation, 2013). Integrating vocabulary practice within real-world scenarios, requiring learners to negotiate meaning and collaborate with peers, has been shown to deepen understanding and improve long-term retention. Scaffolded instruction and timely feedback further reinforce learning, allowing learners to refine usage and internalize new words.

Task-Based Learning (TBL) provides a highly effective framework for vocabulary development by situating words within meaningful, authentic communicative tasks. Through **information-gap tasks**, learners exchange missing information; **reasoning-gap tasks** require problem-solving and explanation; and **opinion-gap tasks** promote discussion, debate, and persuasive communication. These task types ensure that learners encounter, process, and produce target vocabulary in context, fostering deep cognitive engagement and repeated exposure. Additionally, TBL encourages reflection, feedback, and adaptation of language strategies, reinforcing both comprehension and productive use, and promoting learner autonomy. By integrating vocabulary instruction within task-based activities, learners are more likely to retain and apply new words effectively across communicative contexts.

2.4 The Effectiveness of Task-Based Learning in Vocabulary Acquisition

Task-Based Learning (TBL) has demonstrated considerable effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, with a growing body of empirical evidence supporting its impact across diverse educational contexts. Research conducted in Asia provides compelling support for TBL's efficacy. In China, Li (2017) reported that secondary school learners who participated in task-based activities achieved significant gains in both receptive and productive vocabulary compared to peers receiving traditional, grammar-focused instruction. Similarly, in Japan, students exposed to TBL exhibited improved lexical range and pragmatic competence, using vocabulary appropriately in authentic communicative situations (Saito & Akiyama, 2016). In Vietnam, Nguyen and Balakrishnan (2020) found that high school students taught through TBL outperformed their counterparts in grammar-translation classrooms on post-tests, demonstrating higher accuracy and more frequent use of target vocabulary. These findings collectively underscore the effectiveness of TBL in promoting meaningful, contextually grounded vocabulary development.

The mechanisms through which TBL facilitates vocabulary acquisition are closely tied to its task-centered and communicative nature. Tasks require learners to comprehend, produce, and negotiate meaning, fostering deep cognitive engagement with new vocabulary. Contextualized tasks, collaborative interaction, and opportunities for negotiation allow learners to encounter and use vocabulary meaningfully, while post-task reflection and teacher feedback consolidate learning. This iterative process not only enhances comprehension and productive use but also promotes learner autonomy, motivation, and confidence in applying new words in communicative contexts.

Different types of tasks play distinct roles in vocabulary development. **Information-gap tasks**, in which learners exchange missing information, encourage natural and purposeful language use. **Reasoning-gap tasks** require learners to solve problems, explain procedures, or justify conclusions, eliciting analytical and explanatory vocabulary. **Opinion-gap tasks**, including debates, discussions, and persuasive activities, foster abstract, evaluative, and argumentative vocabulary. By sequencing these task types effectively, educators can provide learners with repeated, meaningful exposure to a wide range of vocabulary items, facilitating both breadth and depth of lexical knowledge.

The global implementation of TBL further highlights its adaptability and effectiveness. Across continents, learners of varying ages, proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds have benefited from task-based approaches, demonstrating enhanced vocabulary acquisition, greater engagement, and improved communicative competence. This global evidence underscores TBL's versatility as a pedagogical approach capable of addressing diverse educational needs while promoting practical language use and learner-centered learning.

2.5 Challenges in Implementing TBL

Despite its numerous advantages, the implementation of Task-Based Learning (TBL) presents several practical challenges that can affect its effectiveness in the classroom. A primary concern is teacher preparedness. Effective TBL requires educators who are not only capable of designing, sequencing, and monitoring tasks but also adept at providing timely and constructive feedback. However, many teachers lack sufficient professional development opportunities, which limits their ability to implement TBL with fidelity.

Classroom size and learner diversity further complicate TBL implementation. Large, heterogeneous classes pose challenges in differentiation and task management, requiring teachers to scaffold instruction carefully to accommodate varying proficiency levels, learning styles, and engagement levels. Resource constraints also present significant barriers, particularly in semi-rural or under-resourced contexts, where access to authentic materials, technological tools, and supplementary teaching aids may be limited.

Assessment constitutes another challenge in TBL classrooms. Traditional evaluation methods often fail to capture the depth of vocabulary knowledge or the practical application of language in communicative contexts. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of learner outcomes, educators must combine quantitative measures, such as pre- and post-tests, with qualitative approaches, including classroom observations, surveys, and learner reflections.

Learner-related factors, including motivation, confidence, and familiarity with learner-centered approaches, also influence TBL effectiveness. Anxiety, reluctance to participate, or low self-efficacy can hinder engagement and limit the benefits of task-based activities.

To address these challenges, several strategies can be employed. Professional development and collaborative planning can equip teachers with the skills and confidence necessary for effective task design and delivery. Scaffolding, technology integration, and formative assessment can enhance the learning process, while fostering peer support, learner autonomy, and reflective practice further strengthens engagement and promotes positive outcomes. By strategically addressing these factors, TBL can be implemented more successfully, maximizing its potential for improving vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency.

2.6 Research Gaps in TBL and Vocabulary Acquisition

Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL), several research gaps remain that limit a comprehensive understanding of its impact on vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency. One

major gap concerns the limited research conducted in secondary and under-resourced contexts. Most studies have focused on tertiary education or urban learners, leaving questions about the feasibility, adaptation, and effectiveness of TBL in semi-rural or under-equipped schools.

Another area that requires further investigation is the long-term impact of TBL on vocabulary retention. While many studies report immediate post-task gains, there is limited evidence regarding the durability of these learning outcomes over time. Closely related to this is the need to explore learner perceptions and motivation more thoroughly. Learners' attitudes, engagement, and willingness to participate significantly influence task outcomes, yet these affective factors remain underexamined in the existing literature.

Teacher preparedness and professional development constitute additional areas of concern. Few studies have systematically examined how training programs influence teachers' ability to implement TBL effectively, particularly in contexts with limited resources or high classroom diversity. Similarly, the integration of technology in TBL instruction is still underexplored, despite the potential of digital tools and online platforms to enhance vocabulary acquisition and learner engagement.

Finally, the contextual and cultural relevance of tasks has received insufficient attention. Task design that reflects learners' cultural backgrounds, interests, and local realities is likely to enhance engagement and learning outcomes, yet empirical research on culturally adapted tasks is sparse.

Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing both the theoretical understanding and practical application of TBL. Research focused on under-resourced secondary schools, longitudinal vocabulary retention, learner motivation, teacher training, technology integration, and culturally relevant task design will provide valuable insights for curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, and educational policy, ensuring that TBL achieves its full potential across diverse learning environments.

2.7 Conclusion

Task-Based Learning provides a theoretically grounded and empirically supported framework for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners. By emphasizing meaningful communication, active learner engagement, and collaborative problem-solving, TBL aligns with cognitive, sociocultural, and interactionist perspectives. Empirical studies from various global contexts highlight TBL's impact on vocabulary knowledge, learner motivation, and communicative competence. Despite challenges related to teacher preparedness, classroom management, resources, assessment, and learner engagement, TBL remains a feasible and effective approach. The present study builds upon this foundation, addressing research gaps in under-resourced secondary school contexts, long-term vocabulary retention, learner motivation, and culturally relevant task design.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a **quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test design** to investigate the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining **quantitative measures** (pre-tests, post-tests, and statistical analyses) with **qualitative measures** (student surveys, classroom observations, and reflective journals). The design enabled comparison between an **experimental group**, which received TBL-based instruction, and a **control group**, which continued with traditional, teacher-centered instruction. This approach aligns with best practices in language teaching research, allowing the examination of both measurable vocabulary gains and learner motivation and engagement (Ellis, 2003; Nation, 2013).

3.2 Participants

The study involved **60 secondary school students** aged 14–18, enrolled at **Phulu High School in Lao Cai, Vietnam**. Participants were randomly assigned to two groups: the experimental group (n = 30) and the control group (n = 30). Both groups were comparable in terms of English proficiency, as determined by school placement tests and teacher evaluations. The sample included an equal mix of male and female students and

represented a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, providing a realistic profile of the Vietnamese secondary school context.

Informed consent was obtained from students and their parents or guardians, and all procedures adhered to ethical guidelines for educational research. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured of confidentiality. Instructional time, curriculum content, and assessment opportunities were identical for both groups to ensure that differences in outcomes could be attributed to the instructional method rather than extraneous variables.

3.3 Instruments

A combination of instruments was used to measure vocabulary acquisition, learner engagement, and perceptions of TBL:

3.3.1 Vocabulary Pre-test and Post-test

A standardized vocabulary test was developed to measure receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. The test included multiple-choice items, gap-filling exercises, and short writing tasks aligned with the target vocabulary. The pre-test assessed baseline knowledge, while the post-test measured vocabulary gains after the intervention. Both tests were reviewed by two experienced ESL teachers and piloted with a comparable student group to ensure reliability and validity (Schmitt, 2008).

3.3.2 Student Motivation and Perception Survey

A Likert-scale survey was administered to evaluate students' motivation, attitudes, and perceptions of TBL. Survey items addressed task engagement, perceived usefulness of tasks, enjoyment, and confidence in using new vocabulary. Open-ended questions allowed students to elaborate on their experiences and challenges (Tran, 2018).

3.3.3 Classroom Observation Checklist

Structured classroom observations were conducted throughout the intervention using a **carefully designed observation checklist.** The checklist focused on key aspects of classroom behavior, including **student participation, interaction patterns, vocabulary use, task completion, and teacher support.** Each item was clearly defined, and observers recorded the presence, frequency, or quality of each behavior during lessons.

The observations provided **rich, contextualized qualitative data** that complemented the quantitative findings obtained from questionnaires and tests. For example, by noting how students interacted in pairs or groups, how actively they used newly learned vocabulary, and how the teacher facilitated tasks, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the classroom dynamics and the effectiveness of the instructional intervention.

The checklist was developed based on the framework suggested by Willis and Willis (2007) and validated by experienced educators to ensure clarity and relevance. During the observation sessions, the researcher maintained a **non-intrusive presence,** minimizing any potential influence on student behavior, thereby ensuring that the data reflected authentic classroom interactions.

Overall, the classroom observation checklist served as a **systematic and reliable instrument** for capturing qualitative evidence of students' engagement, learning processes, and the instructional environment, providing valuable insights to support the study's conclusions.

3.3.4 Reflective Journals

In this study, students in the experimental group maintained **reflective journals** to document their experiences with task-based learning (TBL) activities, strategies for vocabulary acquisition, and challenges encountered during lessons. These journals provided a platform for learners to express their thoughts, feelings, and self-perceptions, allowing the researcher to gain **insights into cognitive, metacognitive, and affective aspects of**

language learning that are often difficult to capture through questionnaires or tests alone (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

Students were encouraged to respond to prompts such as: *Which tasks helped you learn new vocabulary? What strategies did you use? What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?* These prompts promoted **self-reflection and critical thinking**, fostering learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness. By analyzing their own learning experiences, students were able to evaluate their progress, identify effective strategies, and recognize areas needing improvement.

The journals also provided data on **learner engagement and motivation**, highlighting how students approached TBL activities, collaborated with peers, and applied new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Entries revealed strategies such as creating word lists, using flashcards, and practicing vocabulary in group tasks, allowing the researcher to identify patterns in learning preferences and cognitive approaches.

Guidelines were provided to ensure clarity and consistency, but students had the freedom to write in their own words, ensuring authenticity. The reflective journals offered **rich qualitative insights** that complemented quantitative data, contributing to a deeper understanding of student learning processes, engagement, and vocabulary development within a TBL framework.

3.4 Instructional Procedures

The intervention lasted eight weeks, with three 50-minute English lessons conducted each week. Both the experimental and control groups covered the same curriculum topics and target vocabulary, allowing differences in outcomes to be attributed to instructional approach rather than content exposure or teaching time.

During Week 1, a diagnostic vocabulary pre-test was administered to establish students' baseline proficiency and to ensure equivalence between the two groups. The instructor also clarified classroom expectations and explained the consistent lesson format that would be followed throughout the intervention.

3.4.1 Experimental Group Instruction

Instruction in the experimental group was organized according to the principles of Task-Based Learning (TBL). Three task types were assigned based on learner proficiency levels and age groups:

- Beginner level (14-year-olds): *Describing Your Favorite Food* — an information-gap task in which students exchanged details about food preferences and ingredients using target vocabulary.
- Intermediate level (16-year-olds): *Planning a School Trip* — a reasoning-gap task requiring learners to collaboratively design a feasible school trip, considering budget and activity options.
- Advanced level (18-year-olds): *Debating Environmental Policies* — an opinion-gap task where students formulated, exchanged, and defended arguments related to environmental challenges.

Each TBL lesson followed a structured sequence consisting of pre-task, task cycle, and post-task phases. The pre-task phase introduced the topic, activated background knowledge, and presented relevant vocabulary. During the task cycle, students worked collaboratively in pairs or small groups, negotiating meaning and using target vocabulary to complete their assigned task. The post-task phase included task presentation, peer and teacher feedback, reflection on language use, and vocabulary extension exercises. Authentic materials—such as menus, brochures, maps, and reading articles—were incorporated to provide meaningful context for vocabulary learning and promote authentic language use. The teacher served primarily as a facilitator, offering scaffolding and corrective feedback only when necessary. Students also completed reflective journals at the end of each lesson to document learning strategies and challenges.

3.4.2 Control Group Instruction

The control group received traditional, teacher-centered instruction. Lessons emphasized vocabulary memorization through drills, grammar explanations, and translation activities. Students followed textbook exercises individually, repeated target vocabulary in controlled sentence patterns, and practiced written

translation. Homework assignments and classroom assessments paralleled the content of the experimental group but did not include communicative tasks or collaborative problem-solving activities.

During Week 8, both groups completed a vocabulary post-test to measure learning gains. The same testing format used in Week 1 ensured consistency and reliability.

3.5 Data Collection

Data were collected at three stages to measure the impact of the intervention and to obtain a comprehensive understanding of learners' vocabulary development and learning experiences. A **mixed-methods approach** was adopted, combining quantitative achievement scores with qualitative evidence of learner engagement and perceptions.

1. **Pre-test (Week 1): Baseline Vocabulary Knowledge**

   At the beginning of the intervention, a standardized vocabulary pre-test was administered to both groups to determine students' initial proficiency levels. The results served as a baseline for later comparisons and ensured that any differences observed at the end of the study could be attributed to the instructional approach rather than pre-existing inequalities.

2. **Post-test (Week 8): Vocabulary Gains After Intervention**

   At the conclusion of the eight-week intervention, the same test format was administered as a post-test to measure learners' vocabulary gains. Comparison of pre- and post-test scores enabled the calculation of learning progress and the evaluation of the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) relative to traditional instruction.

3. **Surveys, Observations, and Reflective Journals**

   Throughout the intervention period, supplementary qualitative data were collected to capture learner attitudes and engagement. A structured learner survey was used to assess perceptions of instructional strategies and self-reported vocabulary learning. Classroom observations were conducted using a checklist to record student participation, interaction patterns, and responses to instructional activities. Additionally, students in the experimental group completed weekly reflective journals describing their learning strategies, task experiences, and challenges encountered during TBL activities.

All quantitative data were anonymized using participant identification codes to protect confidentiality. Observation notes and journal entries were transcribed and organized for thematic analysis, allowing patterns to emerge regarding learner motivation, collaboration, and strategy use. The combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthened the validity of the findings by providing both measurable outcomes and insights into the learning process.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Vocabulary pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using both paired and independent samples *t*-tests. The paired *t*-test measured within-group improvement over the eight-week intervention period, while the independent samples *t*-test examined between-group differences in learning outcomes between the experimental and control groups. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and percentage distributions, were used to summarize survey results and provide a clear overview of learners' performance and perceptions. In addition, effect sizes were calculated to determine the magnitude and practical significance of the instructional impact beyond statistical significance (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). All quantitative analyses were conducted using standard statistical software.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative datasets—reflective journals, classroom observation notes, and open-ended survey responses—were examined using thematic analysis. Data were transcribed, coded, categorized, and then organized into themes representing recurring patterns in learner experiences. Particular attention was paid to themes related to engagement, task effectiveness, and vocabulary use during communication, learner motivation, and challenges encountered during TBL activities. Coding was iterative, allowing refinement of theme boundaries as new insights emerged. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was applied across multiple data sources and instruments, ensuring that emerging themes were supported by more than one type of evidence (Ellis, 2003). Peer debriefing and repeated reviews of the coded data also enhanced analytical rigor.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Several measures ensured reliability and validity. Vocabulary tests were piloted and reviewed by ESL experts. Observations were conducted by two trained researchers, with inter-rater reliability calculated. Surveys and journals were carefully designed to capture relevant aspects of learner experience. Triangulating quantitative and qualitative data strengthened credibility and trustworthiness (Nation, 2013).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from students and guardians, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained through anonymized data coding.

4.1 Results and Discussion

4.2 Quantitative Analysis

Pre-test Results

The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the study to establish baseline vocabulary knowledge in both the experimental (TBL) and control groups. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 45.2 (SD = 5.26), while the control group scored 44.8 (SD = 5.4). An independent-samples *t*-test revealed no significant difference between the groups, $t(58) = 0.34$, $p = 0.73$. This result indicates that students in both groups had comparable levels of vocabulary knowledge prior to the intervention, ensuring that any observed post-test differences could be confidently attributed to the instructional method rather than pre-existing disparities.

$$\bar{x} = (\sum x_i) \div N$$

Where:
$\bar{x}$ = Mean
x_i = each individual score
$\sum x_i$ = sum of all scores
N = number of observations (participants)

Experimental group.

$$\bar{X} = 1356 \div 30 = 45.2$$

Control group.

$$\bar{X} = 1344 \div 30 = 44.8$$

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{(\Sigma(x_i - \bar{x})^2)}{(n-1)}}$$

Where:

- ✓ x_i= the vocabulary score of each individual student in the group
- ✓ $\bar{x}$= the mean vocabulary score of the group (experimental or control)
- ✓ n= the total number of students in the group

Experimental group:

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma(xi - \bar{x})^2}{(N-1)}}$$

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{793.4}{(30-1)}}$$

$$SD - \sqrt{\frac{793.4}{29}}$$

$$SD = \sqrt{27.36}$$

$$SD = 5.26$$

Control group:

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma(xi - \bar{x})^2}{(N-1)}}$$

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{851.6}{(30-1)}}$$

$$SD = 5.42 \approx 5.4$$

Establishing baseline equivalence is critical in quasi-experimental research, as it strengthens the internal validity of the study. The results confirm that the group allocation effectively created comparable groups in terms of initial proficiency. Additionally, the reported standard deviations indicate moderate variability in vocabulary knowledge, reflecting typical differences in student learning experiences and backgrounds within a Vietnamese secondary school context.

Beyond establishing comparability, the pre-test also served as a diagnostic tool. Analysis of individual item performance revealed specific areas of weakness among learners, such as adjectives for food description, travel-related vocabulary, and environmental terminology. These insights informed the design and selection of TBL tasks, ensuring that activities were tailored to address gaps in knowledge and to provide meaningful, contextualized opportunities for vocabulary practice across all proficiency levels.

Overall, the pre-test results provided a solid foundation for measuring learning gains and for interpreting the effectiveness of TBL relative to traditional instruction. By confirming baseline equivalence and identifying learning needs, the study ensured that instructional interventions were both targeted and fair across groups.

Post-test Results

After the eight-week intervention, the post-test revealed substantial improvements in vocabulary knowledge for both groups. The experimental group achieved a mean score of **72.6** (SD = 6.2), whereas the control group scored **55.4** (SD = 6.0).

Simple calculations:

$$\bar{x} = (\sum x_i) \div N$$

Where:
$\bar{x}$ = Mean
x_i = each individual score
$\sum x_i$ = sum of all scores
N = number of observations (participants)

Experimental group.

$$\bar{X} = 2178 \div 30 = 72.6$$

Control group.

$$\bar{X} = 1662 \div 30 = 55.4$$

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{(\Sigma(x_i - \bar{x})^2)}{(n-1)}}$$

Where:

- ✓ x_i= the vocabulary score of each individual student in the group
- ✓ $\bar{x}$= the mean vocabulary score of the group (experimental or control)
- ✓ n= the total number of students in the group

Experimental group:

$\sum x_i = 2178$
$N = 30$
$\bar{x} = 2178 \div 30 = 72.6$
$SD - \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma(xi - \bar{x})^2}{(N-1)}}$

$SD = \sqrt{\frac{1085.04}{(30-1)}}$
$SD = 6.12$
Control group:
$\sum x_i = 1662$
$N = 30$
$\bar{x} = 1662 \div 30 = 55.4$
$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma(xi - \bar{x})^2}{(N-1)}}$
$SD = 5.99 \approx 6.0$

An independent-samples *t*-test indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $t(58) = 10.92$, $p < .001$, confirming that Task-Based Learning (TBL) was more effective than traditional teacher-centered instruction in enhancing both receptive and productive vocabulary. The modest improvement observed in the control group may be attributed to additional private tutoring or supplementary support outside the classroom, as reported by the teachers.

$$t = \frac{(M_1 - M_2)}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{SD_1^2}{n_1}\right) + \left(\frac{SD_2^2}{n_2}\right)}}$$

Where:

- M_1, M_2= mean scores of the experimental and control groups
- SD_1 , SD_2= standard deviations of the two groups
- n_1, n_2 = sample sizes of the two groups
-

$$t = \frac{(72.6 - 55.4)}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{6.2^2}{30}\right) + \left(\frac{6.0^2}{30}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{17.2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{38.44}{30}\right) + \left(\frac{36.00}{30}\right)}}$$

$$t = 10.92$$

t = 10.92
Degrees of freedom: $n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 30 + 30 - 2 = 58$

Use t-distribution to find p-value

For a **two-tailed test**, the p-value is:

$p=2 \cdot P(T>|t|)$

Where T follows a t-distribution with 58 degrees of freedom.

- A **t-value of 10.92** with df =58 is extremely large.
- Checking t-distribution tables or using statistical software: $p<0.0001$

The experimental group's gain of **27.4 points** ($Gain_{experimental}$=72.6−45.2=27.4) represents the cumulative effect of interactive, meaningful, and scaffolder task-based activities, which encouraged learners to actively use and apply new vocabulary in context. In contrast, the control group exhibited a gain of **10.6 points (**$Gain_{control}$=55.4−44.8=10.6), reflecting limited vocabulary growth under traditional instruction, which primarily involved drills, repetition, and translation exercises. This substantial difference in gains underscores the advantages of TBL in providing authentic opportunities for language use, enhancing retention, and promoting the transfer of vocabulary knowledge to real-world communicative situations.

To assess the practical significance of the Task-Based Learning (TBL) intervention, **Cohen's d** was calculated. This effect size measure indicates the magnitude of the difference between the experimental and control groups, independent of sample size, and provides insight into the educational impact of the intervention.

Step 1: Gather the data

Group	Mean (M)	SD
Experimental (TBL)	72.6	6.2
Control	55.4	6.0

Step 2: Calculate the pooled standard deviation (SD)

Formula:

$$SD_{pooled} = \sqrt{\left[\frac{((n^1 - 1)SD1^2 + (n^2 - 1)SD2^2)}{(n^1 + n^2 - 2)}\right]}$$

$$SD_{pooled} = \sqrt{\frac{((30-1) * 6.2^2 + (30-1) * 6.0^2)}{(30+30-2)}}$$

Step3 by step:

1. $SD_1^2 = 6.2^2 = 38.44$
2. $SD_2^2 = 6.0^2 = 36.00$
3. Multiply by degrees of freedom($n_1 - 1$) and (n_2- 1):
   - $29 \times 38.44 = 1114.76$
   - $29 \times 36.00 = 1044.00$
4. Sum: $1114.76 + 1044 = 2158.76$
5. Divide by total Degree of freedom($n_1 + n_2$ - 2): $\frac{2158.76}{58} \approx 37.22$
6. Take square root: $= \sqrt{\{37.22\}} \approx 6.10$

Pooled SD ≈ 6.1

Step 3: Calculate Cohen's d

$$d = \frac{(M_1 - M_2)}{SD_{\{pooled\}}} \approx \frac{(72.6 - 55.4)}{6.117} \approx 2.8$$

Step 4: Interpretation

- d ≈ 2.82 → This is a very large effect size.
- According to Cohen (1988):

- 0.2 = small
- 0.5 = medium
- 0.8 = large

❖ Therefore, TBL had an extremely strong and meaningful impact on students' vocabulary compared to traditional instruction.

The effect size (**Cohen's d = 2.8**) further emphasizes the practical significance of the intervention, indicating a very large magnitude of impact. According to Cohen (1988), a d-value above 0.8 is considered large; thus, a value of 2.8 suggests that TBL not only produced statistically significant results but also yielded meaningful educational gains that are likely to have a lasting effect on learners' language development. Overall, these findings highlight the effectiveness of TBL in creating engaging, student-centered learning environments that foster both comprehension and productive use of vocabulary.

Interpretation of Findings

Several factors likely contributed to the experimental group's superior performance. First, TBL promotes active engagement, requiring learners to negotiate meaning, produce language spontaneously, and interact with peers, which aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Ellis, 2003). Second, the sequencing of tasks from information-gap to reasoning-gap to opinion-gap facilitated a gradual increase in cognitive demand, allowing learners to consolidate and apply vocabulary in increasingly complex contexts. Third, the integration of authentic materials such as menus, maps, brochures, and news articles provided meaningful exposure to target words, supporting both comprehension and production.

The results also suggest that TBL enhances both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. While traditional instruction primarily emphasized memorization and translation, TBL required learners to actively retrieve, use, and negotiate vocabulary in communicative contexts. This aligns with cognitive theories of language acquisition, including the Input Hypothesis and Interactionist Perspectives, which emphasize the role of meaningful input, interaction, and output in vocabulary learning (Krashen, 1985; Long, 1996).

Moreover, the quantitative gains support the argument that engagement and motivation play a critical role in language learning. Students in the experimental group reported enjoying collaborative tasks, which likely increased time-on-task and facilitated deeper processing of vocabulary. High engagement combined with scaffolded feedback from teachers and peers likely contributed to the large effect size observed.

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary Scores

The **gain score** measures the improvement of a group from pre-test to post-test:

$$\text{Gain} = M_{post} - M_{pre}$$

Where:

- M_{post} = mean post-test score
- M_{pre} = mean pre-test score

Applying My Data (Experimental Group)

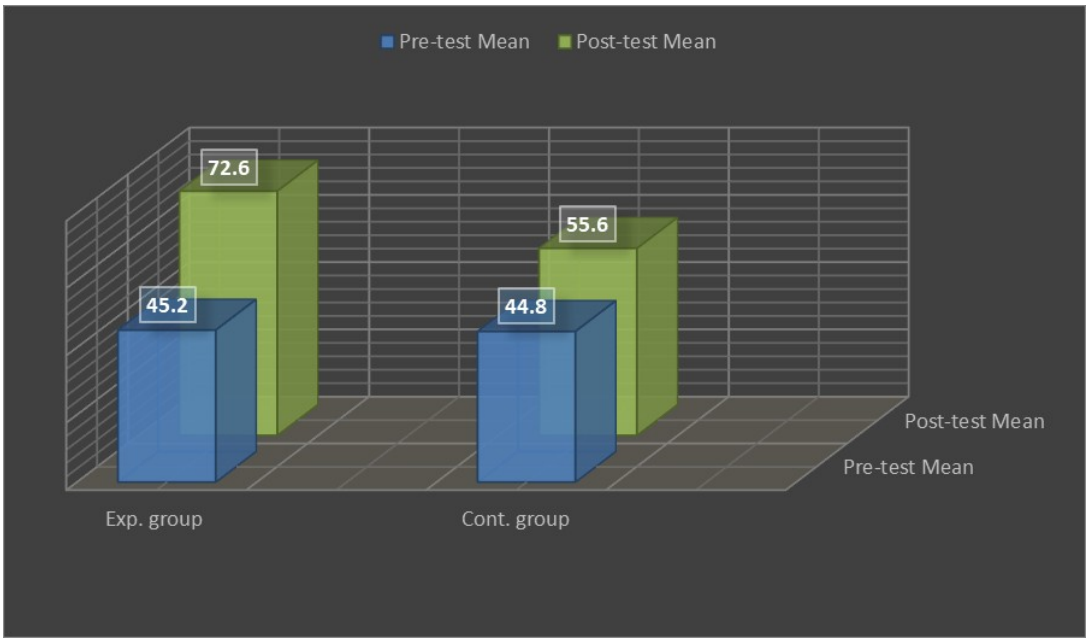
$$\text{Gain}_{experimental} = 72.6 - 45.2 = 27.4$$

- This shows that, on average, the experimental group improved by 27.4 points after the eight-week TBL intervention.

3. Control Group Example

$$\text{Gain}_{control} = 55.4 - 44.8 = 10.6$$

- The control group improved by 10.6 points, reflecting smaller gains compared to the TBL group.



Group	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Gain
Experimental (TBL)	45.2 (5.1)	72.6 (6.2)	27.4
Control	44.8 (5.4)	55.4 (6.0)	10.6

4.3 Qualitative Analysis

4.3.1 Student Motivation and Perceptions

The study's survey results indicate that Task-Based Learning (TBL) had a significant positive impact on student motivation, engagement, and confidence in vocabulary acquisition. Among students in the experimental group, 88% agreed that TBL increased their interest in learning vocabulary, demonstrating that the interactive and meaningful nature of tasks fostered intrinsic motivation. Additionally, 82% reported enhanced confidence in using newly acquired words in both speaking and writing activities. These results suggest that TBL provides not only cognitive benefits but also effective gains, as learners feel empowered to take risks and actively participate in language use.

In contrast, students in the control group reported moderate motivation levels, with only 45% indicating heightened interest in vocabulary learning. This disparity highlights the limitations of traditional, teacher-centered approaches, which often rely on rote memorization and lack authentic communicative opportunities. The findings align with prior research indicating that task-based methods, by promoting active engagement and collaboration, generate higher levels of motivation and learner satisfaction (Doan & Nguyen, 2020; Tran, 2018).

Open-ended survey responses provided richer insight into learner perceptions. Students highlighted the collaborative and interactive nature of TBL tasks as particularly motivating. Many described enjoying peer-to-peer communication and the opportunity to negotiate meaning in authentic contexts. One student stated,

"I remember words better when I use them to ask my friend questions or explain my ideas during a task."

Another noted,

"Planning the trip together helped me think about the words in context and made learning more fun."

These reflections suggest that authentic task performance facilitates deeper cognitive processing, contributing to improved retention and meaningful use of vocabulary.

The results also support constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active learner engagement, social interaction, and knowledge co-construction (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, TBL aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, where learners are encouraged to use language purposefully rather than simply memorizing items in isolation (Ellis, 2003). By allowing students to interact meaningfully, TBL reinforces both linguistic competence and affective engagement.

4.3.2 Classroom Observations

Classroom observations further corroborated the survey findings, providing qualitative evidence of active engagement and task effectiveness. Students in the experimental group were highly participatory, frequently initiating conversations, asking clarifying questions, and assisting peers in task completion. Teachers primarily acted as facilitators, offering guidance, scaffolding, and corrective feedback when learners struggled with target vocabulary. This supportive environment promoted risk-taking and experimentation with language, essential for vocabulary acquisition and communicative competence.

The observation data also highlighted the differentiation of tasks according to proficiency levels. For example, beginner students engaged in structured information-gap activities, while advanced learners participated in opinion-gap tasks that demanded analytical and persuasive vocabulary. The tasks were carefully sequenced to gradually increase cognitive demand and allow learners to consolidate newly learned vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

In contrast, the control group exhibited limited interaction. Classroom activities primarily involved passive listening, individual exercises, and note-taking, with few opportunities for spontaneous vocabulary use. Vocabulary production was largely restricted to memorized items, and students rarely applied words in authentic communicative contexts. Observers noted that this lack of engagement likely hindered both motivation and retention, highlighting the limitations of traditional teaching methods in fostering active language use.

These observations reinforce the idea that interaction, negotiation, and scaffolding are essential components of effective vocabulary instruction. Task-based approaches not only provide linguistic input but also create opportunities for learners to process and produce language in socially meaningful contexts, enhancing both acquisition and retention.

4.3.3 Reflective Journals

Analysis of students' reflective journals revealed three dominant themes:

1. Increased Autonomy: Students reported taking greater responsibility for their learning, actively integrating newly acquired vocabulary into both speech and writing. They described strategies such as maintaining personal vocabulary logs, engaging in peer correction, and self-assessment of language use. Many reflected on how TBL encouraged them to monitor their own progress and seek out opportunities for practice beyond the classroom.
2. Enhanced Collaboration: Learners expressed appreciation for working in pairs or groups, noting that explaining vocabulary to peers, negotiating meaning, and collectively correcting errors reinforced comprehension and production. Collaborative learning facilitated scaffolding among learners, allowing stronger students to support weaker peers, while promoting dialogue that reflected real-life language use. Many students highlighted that such collaboration made learning more enjoyable and meaningful.
3. Positive Affective Outcomes: What made the experience even more enjoyable was that many students who were usually nervous about speaking in class were assigned roles that required them to speak as part of the group. Over time, this led to a noticeable increase in their confidence. As one student, **Thu**, expressed (with her permission to mention her name):

"Before, I was nervous speaking in class—not only in English but even in Vietnamese lessons. The many role-play activities in TBL have made me bold and confident now."

That mean Students consistently reported higher enjoyment, reduced anxiety, and increased motivation when engaged in TBL activities. The use of authentic materials (e.g., menus, brochures, news articles) and real-life scenarios was particularly motivating, as it provided context for vocabulary use and emphasized relevance to learners' everyday experiences. Several students noted feeling "proud" when successfully communicating ideas using new vocabulary, reinforcing a sense of achievement and self-efficacy.

Overall, the reflective journals suggest that TBL not only facilitates vocabulary acquisition but also cultivates positive attitudes toward language learning, contributing to sustainable engagement and lifelong learning skills. By promoting autonomy, collaboration, and emotional engagement, TBL creates an environment in which learners are motivated to continue practicing language both inside and outside the classroom.

4.3.4 Integrative Interpretation

Combining survey results, classroom observations, and reflective journals demonstrates that TBL positively influences cognitive, social, and affective dimensions of learning. Students engaged with tasks meaningfully, collaborated effectively, and demonstrated high motivation and confidence in applying new vocabulary. These findings underscore the holistic benefits of TBL, highlighting its capacity to enhance not only linguistic competence but also learner agency, social interaction skills, and intrinsic motivation.

The alignment of these findings with constructivist and communicative learning theories reinforces the theoretical foundation of TBL. Active participation, negotiation of meaning, scaffolding, and authentic use of language collectively create conditions for effective vocabulary acquisition, providing strong empirical support for the integration of TBL in secondary school ESL curricula.

4.4 Lesson Plans: Task-Based Learning

The study implemented three full Task-Based Learning (TBL) lesson plans, each tailored to different proficiency levels: beginner (14-year-olds), intermediate (16-year-olds), and advanced (18-year-olds). Each lesson followed the pre-task, task cycle, and post-task stages, incorporating scaffolding, authentic materials, peer collaboration, and reflective feedback. The sequencing ensured gradual progression from concrete to abstract vocabulary use, aligning with cognitive and communicative language teaching principles.

Beginner-Level Lesson Plan: Describing Your Favorite Food

Rationale: Beginner learners often have limited vocabulary and require structured guidance. An information-gap task was chosen to encourage meaningful interaction while practicing basic descriptive language, adjectives, and food-related vocabulary (table 4.4.1).

Expansion & Explanation:

- Pre-task stage scaffolds learners' vocabulary knowledge, provides models, and prepares them for meaningful interaction.
- Task stage encourages negotiation of meaning, repeated use of vocabulary, and natural communication.
- Post-task stage consolidates learning, promotes metacognition, and reinforces correct vocabulary usage.
- Students develop confidence, fluency, and basic descriptive abilities.

Intermediate-Level Lesson Plan: Planning a School Trip

Rationale: Intermediate learners benefit from tasks requiring reasoning, planning, and negotiation. This reasoning-gap activity strengthens vocabulary related to travel, budgeting, scheduling, and collaborative decision-making (Table 4.4.2)

Expansion & Explanation:

- Task fosters **analytical and communicative skills**, requiring learners to synthesize vocabulary and apply it meaningfully.
- Collaboration encourages peer scaffolding and negotiation of meaning.
- Post-task presentations reinforce vocabulary retention, speaking fluency, and confidence in applying language.

Advanced-Level Lesson Plan: Debating Environmental Policies

Rationale: Advanced learners require tasks that develop critical thinking, argumentation, and abstract vocabulary use. Opinion-gap tasks provide opportunities to express viewpoints, debate ideas, and apply persuasive language(Table 4.4.3).

Expansion & Explanation:

- Task promotes higher-order thinking, requiring learners to analyze, justify, and negotiate meaning.
- Debates provide authentic contexts for abstract, persuasive, and technical vocabulary.
- Post-task reflection enhances metacognitive awareness and consolidates vocabulary for long-term retention.

Integrative Analysis

Across all levels, TBL tasks were sequenced to ensure progressive cognitive demand, moving from concrete, structured tasks to complex, abstract tasks. The integration of authentic materials, collaborative work, and reflective practice enhanced both comprehension and production of vocabulary. Observations, surveys, and reflective journals indicated that learners were actively engaged, motivated, and confident in applying vocabulary across multiple contexts.

The combination of pre-task scaffolding, interactive task cycles, and post-task reflection aligns with both constructivist learning theory and Communicative Language Teaching principles, creating optimal conditions for vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, structured tasks provided opportunities for teachers to monitor, support, and give feedback, ensuring that learners could apply language meaningfully and accurately.

4.5 Discussion

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that Task-Based Learning (TBL) significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners in secondary school contexts. Quantitative results revealed substantial gains in both receptive and productive vocabulary, with large effect sizes (*Cohen's d* = 2.8) indicating not only statistical significance but also practical, meaningful learning outcomes. These results confirm that TBL promotes more effective vocabulary learning compared to traditional, teacher-centered instruction.

Qualitative evidence from surveys, classroom observations, and reflective journals reinforces the quantitative findings. Students in the experimental group reported high levels of motivation, engagement, and confidence, while also demonstrating autonomy in learning and effective collaboration with peers. The triangulation of these data sources strengthens the study's validity, suggesting that TBL positively affects cognitive, social, and affective dimensions of language learning.

The carefully sequenced tasks—information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap—provided a structured progression from concrete to abstract language use. Beginner learners engaged in information-gap tasks that supported basic descriptive vocabulary, intermediate learners performed reasoning-gap tasks requiring analytical and collaborative problem-solving, and advanced learners participated in opinion-gap debates that fostered abstract, persuasive vocabulary. This sequence allowed learners to gradually build confidence, consolidate vocabulary knowledge, and apply language in increasingly complex contexts, supporting both retention and fluency.

The incorporation of authentic materials (e.g., menus, brochures, news articles) and peer interaction further enhanced learning outcomes. Authentic materials contextualized vocabulary, making language meaningful and relevant, while collaborative interaction encouraged negotiation of meaning, repeated use of target words, and immediate corrective feedback. These components are consistent with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and constructivist learning theory, which emphasize meaningful engagement, social interaction, and learner-centered approaches (Ellis, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

Importantly, the study also highlights the role of teacher scaffolding, professional development, and structured lesson planning in mitigating common challenges such as teacher preparedness, large class sizes, and limited resources. These findings suggest that TBL can be successfully adapted to under-resourced or heterogeneous classrooms, provided that teachers are adequately trained and lessons are carefully designed to maximize interaction, participation, and task relevance.

The findings align with prior research conducted in diverse ESL contexts. Studies in China, Japan, and Vietnam have consistently reported that TBL enhances lexical range, pragmatic competence, and vocabulary retention (Li, 2017; Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020; Saito & Akiyama, 2016). This study extends these insights by demonstrating that TBL can be effectively implemented in a semi-rural Vietnamese secondary school, providing a model for broader application in similar educational settings.

4.6 Summary

In summary, this study confirms that Task-Based Learning is more effective than traditional instruction for improving vocabulary acquisition, communicative competence, and learner engagement. The combination of structured tasks, authentic materials, collaborative interaction, and reflective practice contributes to measurable gains in vocabulary knowledge and fosters positive learner attitudes, motivation, and autonomy.

The sequencing of tasks from concrete to abstract, along with teacher scaffolding and active peer collaboration, ensures that learners are gradually challenged while maintaining high levels of engagement. The integration of authentic contexts and meaningful language use enhances retention, fluency, and practical application, addressing common limitations of traditional rote-learning approaches.

Pedagogically, the study supports the incorporation of TBL into secondary ESL curricula, particularly in contexts where resources may be limited or classes are heterogeneous. Professional development, careful task design, and scaffolding are essential for maximizing effectiveness. Overall, TBL not only improves linguistic outcomes but also promotes learner-centered, socially interactive, and cognitively engaging environments, making it a valuable approach for modern language teaching.

5.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners at Phulu High School, Lao Cai, Vietnam. The research employed a quasi-experimental design, combining quantitative pre- and post-tests with qualitative surveys, classroom observations, and reflective journals. The findings provide strong evidence that TBL not only improves learners' vocabulary knowledge but also fosters engagement, motivation, autonomy, and communicative competence.

5.2 Key Findings

The quantitative results revealed substantial gains in both receptive and productive vocabulary, with the experimental (TBL) group outperforming the control group by a significant margin (mean gain of 27.4 vs. 10.6 points). The large effect size (*Cohen's d* = 2.3) confirms the practical significance of the intervention. Qualitative data further support these findings: 88% of TBL participants reported increased interest, while 82% noted enhanced confidence in applying new vocabulary. Observations and reflective journals indicated high levels of active participation, collaboration, and meaningful interaction with peers and teachers.

The study also demonstrated that task sequencing—from information-gap to reasoning-gap to opinion-gap activities—effectively facilitated the development of language skills from concrete to abstract contexts. Beginners practiced foundational vocabulary in structured settings, intermediate learners engaged in problem-

solving and collaborative planning, and advanced learners participated in debates requiring critical thinking and abstract vocabulary use. This progression not only enhanced linguistic competence but also strengthened learners' confidence, cognitive engagement, and social interaction skills.

Furthermore, the integration of authentic materials and real-world scenarios provided contextually relevant exposure to vocabulary, aligning with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles and constructivist learning theory. The findings underscore the importance of active learner engagement, social interaction, and meaningful use of language in promoting retention and practical application.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for ESL teaching, curriculum design, and future research, grounded in both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

5.3.1. Pedagogical Implications

Quantitative Evidence:

- The significant improvement in vocabulary scores among the experimental (TBL) group, with a large effect size (Cohen's d = 2.8), indicates that Task-Based Learning is highly effective in enhancing both receptive and productive vocabulary compared to traditional teacher-centered methods.
- These gains suggest that structured, scaffolded, and interactive tasks provide learners with opportunities to use language meaningfully, supporting long-term retention and transfer of vocabulary to real-world contexts.
- Teachers and curriculum designers should therefore integrate TBL tasks into ESL lesson plans, particularly when the goal is to improve lexical acquisition, communicative competence, and learner engagement.

Qualitative Evidence:

- Surveys, classroom observations, and reflective journals highlight that TBL enhances learner motivation, autonomy, and confidence. Students reported enjoying collaborative activities, actively negotiating meaning, and applying new vocabulary in authentic contexts.
- The positive affective outcomes demonstrate that TBL supports social interaction and learner-centered learning, fostering a classroom environment where students feel empowered to take risks and participate actively.
- These findings emphasize that vocabulary instruction should not rely solely on rote memorization or translation exercises but should incorporate interactive, meaningful, and collaborative learning opportunities.

5.3.2. Theoretical Implications

- The study provides empirical support for constructivist learning theory and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, showing that active engagement, social interaction, and task sequencing from concrete to abstract facilitate vocabulary acquisition.
- It reinforces cognitive theories of language learning, such as the Input Hypothesis and Interactionist perspectives, demonstrating that meaningful input, negotiation of meaning, and output production significantly enhance vocabulary learning.

5.3.3. Practical Implications for Educators

- Teachers should design differentiated tasks according to proficiency levels, scaffold learning, and provide authentic materials to create realistic and engaging contexts for vocabulary use.
- Monitoring learner progress with pre-tests, post-tests, and reflective activities is essential to ensure that instruction targets specific vocabulary gaps effectively.

- Professional development for teachers is recommended to ensure effective implementation of TBL strategies, particularly in classrooms with diverse learner abilities or limited resources.

5.3.4. Implications for Future Research

- Future studies could explore the long-term retention of vocabulary learned through TBL or examine its impact on other language skills such as speaking, writing, or listening.
- Further research could also investigate the role of peer collaboration and reflective practices in enhancing learner autonomy and motivation across different cultural and educational contexts.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study confirms that Task-Based Learning is an effective and practical approach for enhancing vocabulary acquisition, learner engagement, and communicative competence in ESL secondary classrooms. By emphasizing active participation, meaningful interaction, authentic materials, and reflective practice, TBL addresses both cognitive and affective aspects of language learning. Structured, well-sequenced tasks empower learners to build confidence, negotiate meaning, and apply vocabulary in increasingly complex contexts, making language learning more engaging, effective, and relevant.

Educators and policymakers are encouraged to integrate TBL into secondary ESL curricula, invest in teacher training, and adapt task design to local classroom conditions. The study's findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting TBL as a learner-centered, communicative, and contextually adaptable approach, offering valuable guidance for both classroom practice and future research.

6. Future Research Directions

Future studies could explore the longitudinal effects of TBL on vocabulary retention over several academic years. Additionally, research could investigate the integration of digital tools and gamified task-based learning to enhance engagement in under-resourced classrooms. Examining the role of learner anxiety and motivation as mediating factors in TBL effectiveness would also provide a deeper understanding of the affective domain in vocabulary acquisition.

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Table 4.4.1 **Beginner-Level Lesson Plan: Describing Your Favorite Food**

Stage	Procedure	Teacher Role	Learner Role	Materials	Time
Pre-task	Introduce food-related vocabulary and adjectives. Teacher models phrases like "I like apples because they are sweet."	Present vocabulary, demonstrate pronunciation, check comprehension	Listen, repeat, ask clarification questions	Flashcards, real food items	10 min
Task	Information-gap activity: students interview a partner to find out their favorite	Monitor interactions, provide scaffolding, clarify misunderstandings	Ask and answer questions, take notes, use target vocabulary	Worksheets, flashcards	20 min

	foods and explain why.				
Post-task	Students share findings with the class, discuss patterns, and reflect on new vocabulary usage.	Give corrective feedback, summarize key vocabulary, encourage peer feedback	Present answers, self-reflect on usage, engage in peer discussion	Board, peer discussion notes	20 min

Table 4.4.2 **Intermediate-Level Lesson Plan: Planning a School Trip**

Stage	Procedure	Teacher Role	Learner Role	Materials	Time
Pre-task	Introduce vocabulary for travel, budgeting, and scheduling. Teacher provides examples and models dialogue.	Explain new terms, demonstrate examples, elicit prior knowledge	Listen, ask clarifying questions, recall relevant vocabulary	Brochures, budget sheets, maps	10 min
Task	Reasoning-gap activity: learners work in groups to plan a school trip, including destination, itinerary, and budget.	Facilitate group discussion, provide scaffolding, monitor use of target vocabulary	Collaborate, negotiate, plan details, produce sentences using target vocabulary	Worksheets, maps, planning templates	25 min
Post-task	Groups present their trip plans to the class, explaining choices and reflecting on vocabulary usage.	Provide feedback on language use, highlight effective vocabulary, correct errors	Present collaboratively, reflect on language application, peer-assess	Projector, board, peer notes	15 min

Table 4.4.3 **Advanced-Level Lesson Plan: Debating Environmental Policies**

Stage	Procedure	Teacher Role	Learner Role	Materials	Time
Pre-task	Introduce environmental policy vocabulary and debate structures. Teacher models examples of argumentation and rebuttal.	Present key terms, model debates, clarify usage	Listen, take notes, ask questions for understanding	Articles, news videos, handouts	10 min
Task	Opinion-gap activity: Student's debate assigned policies in pairs or small groups, justifying positions and responding to peers.	Facilitate debate, monitor correct use of vocabulary, provide scaffolding and prompts	Formulate arguments, respond to peers, use target vocabulary in context	Debate worksheets, note cards	25 min
Post-task	Reflective discussion and peer feedback: students self-assess performance and reflect on vocabulary use.	Highlight effective language, summarize key points, correct errors	Self-assess, engage in peer feedback, reflect on language choices	Journals, peer feedback forms	15 min

Appendix A: Questionnaire / Interview Guide

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
3. Grade Level: _____
4. Years of English Study: _____

Section 2: Vocabulary Learning

1. How often do you study English vocabulary outside of class?
   ☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always
2. Which strategies do you use to remember new words? (Check all that apply)
   ☐ Using flashcards
   ☐ Reading English texts
   ☐ Listening to English media (e.g., songs, movies, podcasts)
   ☐ Group/class activities
   ☐ Others (please specify): _____
3. How confident do you feel using new English words in speaking or writing?
   ☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat confident ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

Section 3: Task-Based Learning (TBL) Experience

1. Have you participated in task-based activities in your English class?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. How enjoyable do you find task-based activities?
   ☐ Not enjoyable ☐ Somewhat enjoyable ☐ Enjoyable ☐ Very enjoyable
3. Do task-based learning activities help you learn vocabulary better than traditional methods?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
4. Please describe an activity that helped you learn new words effectively:

_____

_____

Section 4: Teacher and Classroom Environment

1. Does your teacher provide clear instructions for tasks?
   ☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always
2. Are tasks challenging but achievable?
   ☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always
3. Do you receive enough guidance and support during tasks?
   ☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

Section 5: Open-Ended Questions

1. What do you like most about learning vocabulary through tasks?

_____

_____

2. What challenges do you face when learning new words through tasks?

Appendix B: Consent Forms

Consent Form for Students

I, _____ (student name), agree to participate in the research study titled "The Effectiveness of Task-Based Learning in Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition among ESL Learners." I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also understand that my responses will remain confidential and used only for academic purposes.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Consent Form for Parents / Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child, _____, has been invited to participate in a research study titled "The Effectiveness of Task-Based Learning in Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition among ESL Learners." This study aims to explore how task-based activities support vocabulary learning.

Participation is voluntary, and your child can withdraw at any time. All data collected will be kept confidential.

Please sign below to give permission for your child to participate.

Parent/Guardian Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

***Appendix C*: Classroom Observation Checklist for Task-Based Learning group (TBL)**

No.	Observation Category & Item	Score (0–2)	Short Notes
A. Learner Engagement			
1	Students are actively participating in the task.		
2	Students are attentive and focused on the activity.		
3	Students ask and answer questions relevant to the task.		
4	Students initiate peer discussion or collaboration without prompting.		
5	Students demonstrate sustained interest throughout the lesson.		
B. Vocabulary Use			
6	Students correctly use target vocabulary in context.		
7	Students attempt to use new or unfamiliar words.		
8	Students self-correct or peer-correct vocabulary errors.		
9	Vocabulary is used both in speech and writing during tasks.		
C. Collaboration and Interaction			
10	Students work effectively in pairs or groups.		
11	Students negotiate meaning and		

	clarify misunderstandings.		
12	Students share ideas and build on peers' contributions.		
13	Students demonstrate cooperative behaviour (turn-taking, listening, respect).		
D. Cognitive Engagement			
14	Students apply problem-solving, reasoning, or critical thinking skills.		
15	Students connect vocabulary to real-life contexts or examples.		
16	Students reflect on task outcomes or learning processes.		
E. Teacher Role			
17	Teacher provides clear instructions and models language use.		
18	Teacher scaffolds learning when students struggle.		
19	Teacher monitors interactions and provides timely feedback.		
20	Teacher encourages student autonomy and peer support.		
F. Affective Factors			
21	Students appear confident in using the language.		
22	Students demonstrate positive attitudes toward the task.		
23	Students show enthusiasm, enjoyment, or interest in the activity.		
G. Classroom Environment			
24	Materials (flashcards, worksheets, authentic resources) are effectively used.		
25	Seating arrangement supports interaction and collaboration.		
26	Noise and distractions are managed to facilitate task engagement.		

Scoring Guide

Score	Meaning
0	Not Observed
1	Partially Observed
2	Fully Observed

Observer Details

- Date of observation: _____
- Teacher observed: _____
- Class/Grade: _____

- Lesson / Task Topic: _____
- Observer: _____

General Comments

Recommendations / Follow-Up Actions

***Appendix D*: Reflective Journal – Weekly Writing Guide for Students**

Students should write about their experiences after each task-based activity.

Reflective Journal Questions

Students may answer in paragraph form — not one-word answers.

1. Vocabulary Learning

- What new words did you learn during this task?
- Which strategies helped you remember these new words?

2. Confidence and Communication

- Did the activity make you feel more confident speaking or writing in English? Explain how.
- Were you nervous before the task? Did that change during or after the task?

3. Task Experience

- What did you enjoy most about the task?
- Which part was difficult or confusing?

4. Group Work and Collaboration

- How did your group members help you learn new vocabulary?
- Did you feel comfortable sharing your ideas in the group? Why or why not?

5. Teacher Support

- How did the teacher help you during the task?
- What support or guidance would make tasks easier for you next time?

6. Real-Life Use of English

- Did you use any new words outside the classroom (e.g., talking to friends, online, homework, games)? Describe when and how.

7. Personal Reflection

- What did you learn about yourself as an English learner today?
- What would you like to improve for the next task?

Additional instruction for students

"Be honest. There are no right or wrong answers. Your journal helps your teacher understand how to support you better."