

Applying Task-Based Language Teaching to Improve Listening and Speaking Skills of Vietnamese High School Students: A Research Proposal

Nguyen Thi Thuy Nga

Nguyen Xuan On High School Dien Chau District, Nghe An Province, Viet Nam

ABSTRACT: Developing listening and speaking skills remains a major challenge in Vietnam's exam-oriented English classrooms, where grammar and reading dominate instruction. This study proposes a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design to examine the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving these skills among 120 Grade 11 students over 12 weeks. The experimental group will receive TBLT instruction emphasizing authentic communication, while the control group follows the traditional presentation–practice–production (PPP) model. Data will be collected through pre- and post-tests, observations, questionnaires, and interviews, and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. It is expected that TBLT will significantly enhance students' listening comprehension, speaking fluency, and motivation. The findings will contribute to the theoretical understanding of task-based pedagogy, provide practical insights for teachers in exam-driven contexts, and inform policy directions for communicative English curriculum reform in Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT); listening comprehension; speaking fluency; communicative competence; English curriculum reform

1. INTRODUCTION

English education in Vietnam has undergone significant reform in the past two decades as part of the National Foreign Language Project, which aims to improve communicative competence among students. However, despite these policy efforts, Vietnamese high school learners continue to struggle with listening and speaking skills. Instruction in most schools remains teacher-centered, with an emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and reading to prepare students for high-stakes exams. As a result, students often achieve limited oral proficiency and lack the confidence to communicate in real-life contexts.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a promising approach to address this gap. Rooted in communicative language teaching, TBLT emphasizes meaning-focused communication and real-world task completion rather than rote memorization or isolated grammar drills. By engaging learners in authentic tasks such as discussions, problem-solving, or project work, TBLT encourages negotiation of meaning and provides opportunities for both input and output practice.

Although TBLT has been successfully implemented in tertiary and private education settings in Vietnam, research at the high school level remains limited. Most existing studies (e.g., Nguyen & Newton, 2019; Le, 2018) focus on university students, leaving a gap in understanding how TBLT functions within the constraints of public secondary schools—large classes, exam pressure, and limited resources.

This study aims to address that gap by investigating how TBLT can improve listening comprehension and speaking fluency among Vietnamese high school students. It also seeks to explore learner attitudes and teacher perceptions of TBLT implementation. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence for adapting TBLT to exam-oriented contexts and to inform teacher training and curriculum design in Vietnam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Background of TBLT

TBLT evolved from the communicative approach, focusing on using language as a tool for accomplishing real-world tasks. According to Long (1985), a task is “a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward.” Willis (1996) proposes a three-phase task cycle—pre-task, task cycle, and language focus—emphasizing both meaning and form. Skehan (1998) frames tasks as balancing fluency, accuracy, and complexity, arguing that repeated task performance allows learners to internalize linguistic patterns while maintaining communicative purpose.

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2.2. TBLT and Oral Communication Skills

Speaking and listening are closely intertwined in communicative competence. Studies by Bygate (2001) and Samuda & Bygate (2008) show that task-based interaction promotes fluency through negotiation of meaning and scaffolding. Learners develop the ability to manage discourse, use compensatory strategies, and produce extended turns. Research in Asian contexts (e.g., Lee, 2016) confirms that TBLT increases speaking fluency and confidence, even among students with limited proficiency.

For listening, Field (2008) and Vandergrift & Goh (2012) highlight the shift from passive comprehension to active, strategic listening. Task-based listening encourages learners to process meaning for a communicative goal—such as identifying details or solving a problem—rather than answering comprehension questions mechanically. Studies in Iran (Rahimpour, 2010) and Hong Kong (Carless, 2007) demonstrate that TBLT-based listening tasks foster greater engagement and comprehension accuracy.

2.3. Motivation and Learner Autonomy

A significant advantage of TBLT is its impact on learner motivation. Dornyei and Skehan (2003) argue that meaningful, goal-oriented tasks enhance intrinsic motivation by giving learners ownership of their learning. In Vietnam, Pham (2020) reported that task-based project work increased students' participation and positive attitudes toward English learning. Group collaboration in tasks promotes peer interaction and reduces anxiety, which are often barriers in traditional classes.

2.4. Challenges in Implementing TBLT

Despite its advantages, implementing TBLT in Asian EFL contexts remains challenging. Carless (2004, 2007) identified three major constraints: large classes, exam-oriented curricula, and teachers' limited training in communicative methods. Vietnamese teachers often equate communicative teaching with lack of structure and fear that it may not prepare students adequately for grammar-based exams. Moreover, limited classroom time and lack of authentic materials hinder task design.

2.5. Research Gap

Existing studies confirm TBLT's potential to improve communicative competence, but empirical research in Vietnamese secondary schools is scarce. Few studies have explored how TBLT can be systematically integrated into high school classrooms while aligning with curricular goals. This research therefore aims to evaluate the effectiveness of TBLT for developing listening and speaking skills in this specific educational context, providing both theoretical and pedagogical insights.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study will adopt a **quasi-experimental mixed-methods** design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Two intact Grade 11 classes from a public high school in Hanoi will be selected: one serving as the experimental group (TBLT) and the other as the control group (PPP approach). The intervention will last 12 weeks, consisting of two 45-minute lessons per week.

3.2. Participants

Participants will include approximately **120 students** aged 16–17, representing pre-intermediate (A2–B1) proficiency levels. Both groups will be taught by teachers with similar qualifications and experience to minimize instructor bias. Consent will be obtained from students, parents, and school administrators.

3.3. Instructional Treatment

- **Experimental Group (TBLT):** Students will engage in communicative tasks following Willis's (1996) task cycle. Each lesson includes pre-task activities (topic introduction and vocabulary), task cycle (pair/group task and reporting), and post-task focus on useful language forms. Tasks include role plays, information-gap activities, and problem-solving discussions.
- **Control Group (PPP):** Students will follow the conventional sequence of presentation, practice, and production, focusing on textbook dialogues and grammar drills.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

1. **Listening Test:** Adapted from CEFR-based assessment materials to measure comprehension accuracy and strategy use.
2. **Speaking Test:** An oral interview and a paired discussion rated by two trained raters using a rubric covering fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.
3. **Questionnaire:** Measures student motivation and attitudes toward English learning before and after the intervention.
4. **Observations and Interviews:** Classroom observations will document interaction patterns and engagement; semi-structured interviews with students and teachers will provide qualitative insights.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data (test scores and questionnaire responses) will be analyzed using SPSS. Paired-sample t-tests will compare pre- and post-test scores within groups, and independent-sample t-tests will compare post-test scores between groups. Effect sizes

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(Cohen's d) will determine the magnitude of improvement. Qualitative data will be analyzed thematically to triangulate quantitative findings.

3.6 Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

- **Reliability:** Listening and speaking tests will be piloted with a separate group to establish reliability coefficients. Inter-rater reliability will be ensured for speaking assessments.
- **Validity:** Task designs and rubrics will be reviewed by ELT experts to ensure content validity.
- **Ethical considerations:** Participation will be voluntary, with anonymity guaranteed. All data will be used solely for research purposes.

4. EXPECTED FINDINGS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Based on the extensive literature on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and the proposed research design, the study is expected to yield the following results:

4.1. Improvements in Listening Comprehension

It is anticipated that students in the experimental group will outperform those in the control group on post-test measures of listening comprehension. The task-based approach, which integrates authentic listening materials and goal-oriented tasks, is expected to help students develop both bottom-up (decoding sounds and words) and top-down (drawing on context and prior knowledge) listening strategies. Learners are also expected to demonstrate greater confidence in listening to real-life spoken English, moving beyond the scripted, form-focused listening passages often used in traditional classrooms.

4.2. Enhancements in Speaking Proficiency

The experimental group is expected to show significant gains in speaking fluency, measured in terms of speech rate and reduced hesitation phenomena. Accuracy (e.g., grammatical correctness, appropriate vocabulary use) is also likely to improve, although fluency gains may be more pronounced than accuracy due to the meaning-focused nature of TBLT. Increased opportunities for negotiation of meaning, interaction, and repeated task performance are predicted to foster improvements in both fluency and complexity of spoken language.

4.3. Positive Impact on Motivation and Attitudes

Students in the experimental group are expected to report higher levels of motivation and more positive attitudes toward learning English. The meaningful, interactive nature of TBLT tasks is likely to create a sense of relevance and engagement, reducing anxiety and fostering enjoyment in the classroom. Questionnaire results are expected to show that learners perceive TBLT as more useful and enjoyable compared with the PPP approach.

4.4. Teacher and Student Perceptions of Feasibility

Interviews and observations are expected to reveal both opportunities and challenges in implementing TBLT in Vietnamese high schools. Teachers may acknowledge the benefits of TBLT for student engagement and skill development but also raise concerns about time management, classroom control in large classes, and alignment with exam requirements. Students may highlight that TBLT tasks provide more authentic practice, but some may initially struggle with task instructions or group collaboration.

4.5. Potential Challenges

While improvements are expected, it is also anticipated that some limitations will arise:

- Not all students may fully adapt to the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction.
- Time constraints within the curriculum may limit the depth of task cycles.
- Teachers may need additional support in assessment and feedback strategies in TBLT contexts.

5. DISCUSSION, SIGNIFICANCE, AND CONCLUSION (CONDENSED VERSION)

This study is expected to contribute to TBLT research by extending its application to Vietnamese high schools—an underexplored, exam-driven context. Through measuring listening and speaking outcomes, it provides empirical support for interactionist and sociocultural theories of language learning, confirming that TBLT can promote communicative competence even in resource-limited settings.

Pedagogically, the research offers practical models of communicative tasks adaptable to local classrooms—such as role plays, projects, and information-gap activities—demonstrating that task-based learning can complement, rather than replace, grammar instruction. The findings may also guide teacher training programs to strengthen task design, classroom management, and performance-based assessment, thereby bridging the gap between national policy goals and classroom realities.

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At the policy level, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for integrating TBLT into Vietnam's National Foreign Language Project, including curriculum and assessment reform aligned with international standards.

Despite limitations related to quasi-experimental design and short intervention duration, the study lays groundwork for future research on long-term and technology-supported TBLT in Vietnamese and regional contexts.

In conclusion, the study holds theoretical, pedagogical, and policy significance. It aims to demonstrate that TBLT can meaningfully enhance listening and speaking skills, motivate learners, and contribute to communicative English teaching reform in Vietnam's secondary education system.

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