

# Developing Learners' Reading Comprehension Through Task-Based Activities

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## ABSTRACT

Task-based instruction has been one of the most popular topics in the EFL field since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a lot of English educators have joined to discuss and analyze a variety of studies on the issue. In this paper, I tried to find out whether or not task-based activities have an effect on learners' reading comprehension in English and whether it influences their test results. To conduct this experiment, I chose two classes of 40 students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade of intermediate-level. Both groups took pre-reading test and post-reading test along with 50-minute class sessions twice a week for three months. One of the classes was taught through task-based activities as the experimental group, while the other class was taught through traditional methods as the control group. The scores of both the classes were compared and analyzed. I interviewed some students in the experimental group to check whether or not there were some changes in their interests and attitudes toward English study after doing the task-based activities. The results of the experiment show that the learners in the experimental class performed more successfully than the control class.

**Key words:** Task-based activities, experimental group, pre-reading and post-reading test

## I. Introduction

Task-based learning and its contribution to foreign language learning and acquisition have been among the important topics in the field of foreign language teaching since the early nineties (McDonough, 1995; Szymansky, 2002; Klapper, 2003). Many task-based materials, activities and assessment are gaining popularity.

Therefore, this paper attempts to find out whether or not task-based activities have a positive effect upon reading in English as a foreign language and whether students get higher scores on a reading test after taking English classes doing task-based activities.

## II. Task-Based Activities and Task Types

Even though there would be many task types to be used, I have borrowed Finch(1999)'s summary of task-types, from static to dynamic, and from experience tasks to independent tasks. In this paper, I used guided and shared tasks for the experimental class.

[Table 1] Checklist of task-types (Finch, 1999)

Types of Tasks	Static (one-way)	Dynamic (two-way)
Experience tasks	- memory games	- brainstorming
	- review activities (one-way)	- review activities (two-way)
	- simple lexis activities	- basic interview

	(grammar and vocabulary)	- questionnaires (two-way)
	- questionnaires (one-way)	- storytelling
<b>Guided tasks</b>	- using classroom English	- discovery activities
	- structural activities (drills)	- group project-work
	- comprehension activities	- dramas
	- dictation activities	
	- role-plays	
<b>Shared tasks</b>	- pair-work (information gap, information transfer)	- pair-work (e.g. interviews)
	- group-work (information gap, information transfer)	- group-work (problem-solving, opinion-gap)
	- tasks about class members	- jigsaw activities
	- simple dialogs	- surveys
	- language games	- pyramid activities
		- role-plays & simulations
		- error-correction
		- peer-assessment
		- discussions
<b>Independent tasks</b>	- homework	- independent projects
	- self-study (books, internet)	- writing to an email pal
	- self-assessment	

### III. Research Design

#### 3.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to find out whether or not there would be some changes in test scores and students' attitudes and degree of interests toward English within several 50-minute class sessions. The final data would be explained by the following research questions.

1. Do task-based activities have a positive effect upon reading comprehension (results or scores)?
2. Is there any change in students' attitudes before and after using task-based activities?

#### 3.2 Participants

Forty students from two classes were involved in the study. They were selected because they are both in the intermediate level. All the students are in 11<sup>th</sup> grade in In-sang High school, Jeong-eup, South Korea. They have difficulty using it because their native language is Korean and their motivation to study English is very low.

#### 3.3 Procedures

This study has an experimental and control group research design. Both the control class and the experimental class would take pre-reading test prior to the task-based activities that would be presented to the experimental class. The results of the tests were analyzed immediately through the t-test to see whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between the mean grades of the two classes. The control class received several 50-minute instructions through traditional methods, similar with GTM and techniques. That is, the students in the

control class were taught grammatical structures of the target language from a text. The lesson covered short reading passages and exercises, as well.

The experimental class got several 50-minute task-based instructions. TBL framework proposed by Willis (1998) was adapted and kept in mind while doing the activities. The basic material was the same as the control class. They participated in the class doing individual, pair or group activity.

Both the control class and the experimental class were given the same tests. There were short interviews to check students' change in attitudes, degree of interest, expectation for future participation and etc.

## IV. Results

### 4.1 Result on pre-reading test scores

The test scores were needed to check the levels of the students before the application of task-based activities to the experimental class in order to reach reliable conclusions. Therefore, it was important to see that both the control class and the experimental class had almost the same level of proficiency.

**[Table 2] Pre-reading test mean scores, standard deviation, t-value for the control group and the experimental group**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Control class</b>	20	58.65	14.56		
<b>Experimental class</b>	20	58.35	16.37	.061	.951

Analysis of pre-reading test scores identified that there was no statistically big difference between the control class and the experimental class ( $t=.061$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). Thus, the fundamental grounds for comparing the results of two classes after taking post-reading test would be reliable.

### 4.2 Result on post-reading test scores

The research questions of the study were that task-based activities have a positive effect upon reading comprehension. After comparing the experimental class' pre-reading test mean score with its post-reading test mean score, it is easily observed that learners completed the reading comprehension in post-reading test far better than they did in pre-reading test.(Table 3).

**[Table 3] Post-reading test mean scores, standard deviation, t-value for the control group and the experimental group**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>
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<b>Control class</b>	20	53.16	20.07		
<b>Experimental class</b>	20	65.94	17.82	-2.13	.040

Analysis of post-reading test scores showed that there was a statistical difference between the control class and the experimental class after doing different instructions ( $t=-2.13$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). It is obvious in Table 3 that the hypothesis of the study is verified. That is, task-based activities have a positive effect upon reading comprehension.

### 4.3 Interviewing some students in an experimental class

Most learners in the experimental class had never heard about task-based activities besides three students. 14 of 20 learners in the experimental class were interested in task-based activities. They took part in the class actively and were motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. They said the class was really fun and that they could focus on each phase and follow easily. Asked whether they would attend the class actively again later, most students enthusiastically answered “Sure!”

## V. Conclusion and Implication

The influence of task-based instruction revealed positive effects statistically showing a difference between the experimental and control class. However, the limitation of this study is the lack of sufficient activities and the short period of the application of the task-based instructions. Also, more reliable and standardized tests for pre-test and post-test must be developed to measure the exact differences or correlations between the scores. Although there are limitations on the study, it was worthy to do such an experimental study concerning the effectiveness and applicability of task-based activities in classrooms. Also, the results were sufficient to get positive answers for the research questions. Future studies can be based on research about the effect of other kinds of task-based activities and other skills related to listening, speaking, and writing.

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**About the Presenter**

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