The Effects of Task-based Vocabulary Instruction: A Case Study at a Center for Vocational Training and Continuing Education

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Abstract: The effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' vocabulary learning have been well-recognized. However, few studies on the topic have been conducted in the Vietnamese context, and there is a scarcity of research that examines how learner proficiency levels impact the effectiveness of using such a teaching approach. The current study addresses these gaps by using a quasi-experiment on a sample of 70 EFL learners at a center for vocational training and continuing education in Vietnam to investigate changes in learners' lexical knowledge following TBLT vocabulary lessons and their perceptions of TBLT instruction. Quantitative data came from learners' scores on the vocabulary pre and posttests, while qualitative data were semi-structured interviews among a subsample of 12 students. Main findings include learners' improved performance on the vocabulary posttest and their overall positive feelings about the implementation of TBLT instruction for vocabulary lessons. However, low-achieving learners expressed reservations about the effectiveness of TBLT on their vocabulary acquisition due to time constraints and lack of confidence when doing tasks in vocabulary lessons. Pedagogical implications are accordingly presented at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Center for vocational training and continuing education, task-based language teaching, traditional teaching method, vocabulary learning, perceptions

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary instruction in English language learning has gained research attention over the last few decades (Ketabi & Shahraki, 2011). Traditional teaching approaches to vocabulary instruction have recently been criticized due to the limited opportunities to communicate in English that they create for learners. As a result, researchers and language teachers are proposing a variety of vocabulary teaching and learning tools and procedures to improve language learning quality and teaching effectiveness. One of the methodologies worth mentioning is task-based language teaching (TBLT) for English language learners’ vocabulary learning. Tasks have been implemented in ESL contexts to enhance learners’ motivation and vocabulary acquisition in language classes (De la Fuente, 2006; Gulden, İnözü & Yumru, 2007; Joe, 1998). Tasks have also been acknowledged as effective vehicles for language teaching contexts during the last few decades (Ellis, 2003; Erlam, 2016; Samuda & Bygate, 2008).
In EFL contexts, a number of Asian countries (e.g., China, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand) have examined incorporating TBLT into language instruction curricula. At all levels of the English curriculum, teachers are expected to employ task-based language teaching (Carless, 2007; Hu, 2005; Sung, 2005; Zhang & Luo, 2007). Because learners in Asian EFL contexts rarely get the opportunity to use English outside of the classroom and have limited access to utilizing the target language on a daily basis, it is essential to provide numerous opportunities for target vocabulary use in the classroom. In an EFL context like Vietnam, there is a scarcity of research to investigate learners’ perceptions of TBLT and the effects of using tasks to teach vocabulary, especially in a vocational training and continuing education center where learners are low-achieving with little exposure to the target language outside the classroom. In addition, vocabulary instruction is usually considered secondary to the language skill lessons, although vocabulary knowledge forms a critical part of student learning. Consequently, learners’ performance in English skills tends to be unsatisfactory due to a lack of vocabulary. It is, therefore, the goal of this research to examine how Vietnamese EFL learners perceive the use of TBLT in vocabulary instruction and the impact of TBLT-based vocabulary lessons on learners in a vocational training and continuing education center.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. What is a task?

Tasks play a significant role in syllabus design, classroom instruction, and assessment in different teaching and learning settings (Nunan, 2004). The concept of the task as a key unit of planning and teaching is used in TBLT (Bygate et al., 2001; Lee, 2000; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996). According to Prabhu (1987, cited in Nunan, 2004), a task is an activity that demands learners to go through some phases of thought while under the teacher’s instruction in order to achieve a goal. Nunan (1989), on the other hand, defines a task as a component of classroom work in which learners understand, manage, generate, or engage in the target language while emphasizing meanings over structures. A task should also entail a sense of completion, since it should be able to stand on its own as a communicative act. In Willis’ (1996) words, a task is an activity in which language is utilized for a communicative purpose to achieve a goal. Similarly, Skehan (1998) proposes that tasks are activities in which there is a communicative problem to solve. Most task definitions stress the communicative side to the learning activity, and the outcome of those activities are set as goals to be achieved by learners.

2.2. Task-based language teaching

Task-based language teaching is considered a strong version of the communicative approach where language is acquired through use (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Depending on their focuses and perspectives, a number of scholars have established different aspects of TBLT. Tasks can be efficiently planned, according to Nunan (2005), using systematic components such as goals, input data, setting, activities, roles, and task assessment. Regarding goals, one of the most important considerations is that goals should accurately reflect learners’ needs and interests in order to increase their enthusiasm to use the language. Goals, according Sanchez are inherent to the nature of the task and can help learners stay engaged in it. When conducting a task, task participants must deal with input data, which can be verbal or nonverbal. For language acquisition, the supplied input must be as rich as possible. Learners in an EFL classroom need to hear the language from classmates and teachers, as well as be given as much rich, authentic discourse as possible. Every task is completed in a certain context called a classroom setting. In terms of classroom setup, Wright (1987) provides numerous strategies to physically engage participants in individual, pair, small group, and entire class modes.
Different scholars have categorized different task types in TBLT. Prabhu (1987, cited in Nunan, 2004) identifies three types of tasks: information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap. An information-gap task is an activity in which learners need to talk to each other to find out missing information to complete a task. Reasoning-gap tasks are those in which the teachers ask learners to derive some information from that which they give them. They are required to use their reason and logic to make a decision and generate optimal solutions for the problem. Opinion-gap tasks require learners to give their personal preferences, feelings, or attitudes towards an issue in order to complete a task. Later, Willis (1998) proposes six types of tasks including listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creating. From a different angle, tasks can be either those that learners might need to achieve in real life or those that have pedagogical purposes specific to the classroom (Feez, 1998).

2.3. Task implementation framework

A TBLT lesson, according to Willis’ (1996) task-based language framework, has three primary stages: the pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus. The pre-task stage provides quick access to the topic that the students will explore, usually via a short task activity. During this stage, the teacher assists the students in comprehending the themes and goals of the task to prepare them for the main stage, task cycle (also called the while- or during- task). Task cycle is made up of the planning phase and the actual report phase. In the planning phase, learners discuss and work out their findings and prepare their presentation. Students present their findings, exchange written reports, or discuss and compare their results during the report phase (Willis, 1996). Feedback or evaluation is given in the language focus after students have presented their results to the class and are divided into two sections: analysis and practice. In this phase, some of the specific features of the language, which occurred naturally during the task, were identified and analyzed. Word functions, syntax, parts of speech, usage, semantics, and phonological qualities are all acceptable beginning points for analysis activities. Throughout the analysis activities, the students engage in the practice of those words, phrases or patterns that appeared during the analysis activities. The language focus phase has three key pedagogic goals: (1) it allows students to repeat the performance; (2) it allows students to reflect on the performance outcome; and (3) it focuses on form, particularly those forms that were challenging for them during the task cycle (Ellis, 2009). After the language focus phase, the TBLT framework comes to an end.

2.4. Teaching vocabulary through tasks and learners’ vocabulary acquisition

As opposed to traditional approaches to vocabulary teaching in which lists of lexical items are usually decontextualized and provided for learners’ memorization (Nation, 2001), there are three vocabulary principles that tasks should follow: Deliberate attention, meaning negotiation, and utilizing or hearing the words (Nation & Hamilton-Jenkins, 2000). To begin, paying conscious attention to learning from word lists can enhance or reinforce vocabulary learning. Second, when the meanings of words are negotiated, vocabulary learning is facilitated. According to Newton (2013), learner-learner task-based interactions result in peer support when learners focus on the negotiation of the meaning of the word to carry out tasks jointly. Finally, vocabulary learning is enhanced when learners use the vocabulary or hear the vocabulary used in ways that broaden and enrich the learners’ knowledge of the word. For the above characteristics of TBLT vocabulary instruction, the integration of this approach is widely believed to increase learners’ involvement in diverse communicative tasks. Students feel less psychological strain when working on activities with peers, which fosters cognitive progress by bridging information gaps and encouraging discussion as well as language competency through the repeated use of newly taught vocabularies and negotiations.

A handful of studies looked into the effectiveness of TBLT in helping learners improve their lexical knowledge. Sarani and Sahebi (2012) investigated vocabulary instruction in ESP
courses using the task-based language teaching paradigm. The study involved two groups of Persian literature students in Iran. Vocabularies were taught in the control group using a traditional approach, whereas technical vocabularies were taught using a task-based approach in the experimental group. Main findings revealed that the task-based approach was more effective in helping the students gain in technical vocabularies. Similarly, through conducting jigsaw and information-gap tasks, Khoshsimina and Saed (2016) examined whether the use of task-based instruction helps 60 Iranian intermediate EFL learners improve their vocabulary knowledge and prepares them for communication in the real world outside of the classroom. This study also sought to examine how individuals felt about task implementation. The findings showed that participating learners were able to enhance their vocabulary knowledge and language ability by participating in task completion, suggesting a substantial impact of TBLT on improving vocabulary among these learners.

Erlam and Ellis’s (2019) experimental study investigated the effect of input-based tasks on incidental acquisition of vocabulary by adolescent near-beginner learners of French. Learners’ receptive and productive knowledge of the vocabulary items were evaluated in the pre, post, and delayed vocabulary posttests. The findings showed learners’ significant gains in both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge of the target words following two and a half lessons using input-based tasks. Via questionnaire responses, students also expressed positive views of the use of tasks and the interactive nature of the classes during task-based lessons. However, some reservations remain as students were not sure if they had learnt anything out of the incidental vocabulary learning tasks.

Regarding students’ perceptions about TBLT, Bui (2019) conducted a qualitative study on the implementation of TBLT in EFL primary classrooms. Using interview data from both the teachers and students, the findings revealed that all of the three teachers successfully implemented the two task-based lessons and that their classrooms had a higher level of learner engagement and communication. The interviewed students’ responses also added support to the teachers’ views. The task-based sessions facilitated all students’ interest and engagement, with the stronger students emphasizing the scaffolding role of the pre-tasks and the communicative value of the main tasks.

2.5. Research questions

TBLT is regarded as an effective strategy for assisting learners in expanding their vocabulary. However, little research has looked into how much it affects students in Vietnam, particularly low-achieving learners. The goals of the present study are to examine the impacts of TBLT on EFL learners’ vocabulary learning in a Vietnamese vocational training and continuing education center. Specifically, three research questions guided this study,

1). Does lexical knowledge of EFL learners at a center for vocational training and continuing education significantly improve following TBLT vocabulary lessons?

2). How does the effect of TBLT vocabulary instruction compare to that of the traditional method on EFL learners in terms of lexical knowledge gains?

3). What are the EFL learners’ perceptions of the use of TBLT for vocabulary instruction at a center for vocational training and continuing education?

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants
This study included 70 tenth graders from two intact classes in a vocational training and continuing education center. Because most of the learners at the center failed the entrance exam to high school due to failing scores in three subjects (English, Maths and Literature), they are supposed to have the same levels of English language proficiency prior to the study, presumably pre-intermediate level. Moreover, the participants did not enroll in any English classes as English is not a core subject in the center since they do not have to study it when they are in grade 12. A total of 70 pre-intermediate learners were chosen and divided into two groups: one experimental group (n=35) and one control group (n=35). The age range was between 16 and 18 years, with an average of 17.1 years of age. The control group includes 20 males and 15 females while there are 22 males and 13 females in the experimental group.

3.2. Instructional treatments and data collection procedures

To investigate the effectiveness of TBLT on students’ vocabulary learning, this quasi-experiment adopted a mixed methods approach. Prior to the vocabulary lessons, all of the participants took a vocabulary pre-test with 35 items measuring their lexical knowledge. The vocabulary test was based on the course book’s content. The vocabulary in the course book was also covered in the six lessons spanning the duration of the research. Over the duration of the six weeks’ intervention, the participants in class class A (the control group) received vocabulary instruction using the traditional teaching method (TTM). The lessons following the traditional method were created in a fixed and structured way, adhering to a three-stage process, namely opening, drilling, and closing. Following a greeting activity in the first section called “opening”, the teacher immediately addressed the lesson’s main points to the class. Before giving learners any explicit instruction, the teacher first presented the learners with a list of discrete language elements (lexical and grammatical features) associated with the topic being covered. The drilling session that followed was for learners’ practice when they were given a variety of form-focused activities. Under a strictly limited time period, learners were required to complete the exercises. After this stage, the teacher explicitly corrected the exercises and provided comments on students’ performance.

Learners in class B, on the other hand, were taught using TBLT lesson plans based on Willis’ (1996) TBLT framework. The treatment was delivered in six sessions over six weeks. Each session in the experimental group carefully followed three stages of TBLT: pre-task, task circle, and post-task. See Appendix A for the differences between these two types of instruction by means of two lesson plans on the same set of vocabulary, one using the TBLT and the other using the TTM. Following that, participants from both groups were given the same vocabulary test as posttest after the treatment to see if task-based and traditional instruction had any influence on learners’ vocabulary knowledge. After the treatment, 12 of the 35 learners in the treatment group were purposefully invited for individual interviews. As learners’ proficiency level was low, the interview was conducted in their mother tongue – Vietnamese – to ensure the best expressions of ideas. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and double-checked for accuracy by the first named author.

3.3. Research instruments

3.3.1. Vocabulary tests

The same vocabulary test was administered as the pre-test and posttest to compare the learners’ vocabulary knowledge before and after the study. The only difference between the pre and posttests is that the order of the items of the posttest were shuffled to avoid the participants’ ‘practice effect’ (Bachman, 1995). The vocabulary test was divided into five sections, with fifteen recognition items and fifteen production items. The items in Parts 1 and 2 tested students‘ receptive vocabulary knowledge, whereas Parts 3 through 5 tested students ‘productive
vocabulary knowledge. Prior to the official administration of the pre-test, the vocabulary test was piloted on 34 learners in another class in the same center (class C). Based on the test results, the items were reviewed and revised accordingly, and the time duration of the test (45 minutes) was found to be suitable for the students’ levels.

3.3.2. Interviews

After the intervention is finished, 12 of the experimental group members, numbered from 1 to 12, were purposely selected and invited to take part in individual interviews. Participants were selected for the interview based on their vocabulary test results showing differential levels of gains in vocabulary knowledge from the pre to the posttests. Specifically, four students who made least improvement from the pre-test to the posttest (numbered 3, 5, 7, and 9), four learners who made the greatest gains in vocabulary knowledge (numbered 1, 2, 4, 6), and four learners having average gains (numbered 8, 10, 11 and 12) participated in the individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese so that the interviewees can fully comprehend the question and provide as much detail as possible. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by six main questions (see Appendix B), but the questions are extended in further directions depending on each student’ answers.

3.4. Data analyses

3.4.1. Vocabulary tests

The reliability of the vocabulary test was checked. Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was computed to check internal consistency for each part of the test. The results are 0.80 for Part 1, 0.86 for Part 2, 0.84 for Part 3, 0.76 for part 5, 0.75 for part 5. Such value was interpreted as good internal consistency of the items in the scale (George & Mallery, 2013).

Descriptive statistics were calculated for both groups, followed by the test of normality conducted on the two groups’ pre-test and posttest scores. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test established that the pre-test and posttest scores for the control group (p= .129 and p=.102) were normally distributed, and the pre and posttests for the experimental group were also normally distributed (p=.142 and p=.135). Therefore, assumptions of normal distribution were not violated, and the parametric tests of paired and independent samples t-tests could be calculated to compare within and between groups’ performance on the vocabulary tests.

3.4.2. Interviews

The 12 interview transcripts were translated into English and checked for accuracy by two EFL teachers in the center who gave suggestions for the overall translation of the transcripts. Interview data was then analyzed by means of a qualitative thematic analysis. The researchers adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework to analyze interview data by following the five steps of (1) be coming familiarized with the data when the researcher took notes and wrote down initial ideas for coding,(2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, and (5) defining themes.

IV. RESULTS

4.1. Learners’ lexical knowledge following TBLT vocabulary lessons

The presentation of findings for vocabulary achievement from the pre-test to the post test of two groups starts with descriptive statistics, followed by the graph visualizing their vocabulary changes, and ends with inferential statistics related to the intervention effect of using TBLT over a six-week period for the experimental group and how that compares to the use of TTM for the
control group. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the participants’ vocabulary achievement before and after the intervention.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Two Groups’ Pre- and Post-test Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Control group</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 1, the pre-test scores of the learners in the control and experimental groups are approximately the same. To examine whether the control and experimental groups were statistically different in terms of their vocabulary knowledge prior to the intervention, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results show that the two groups’ pre-test scores were not statistically different, $t(68) = -0.39, p = .97$. Thus, it can be said that both groups’ performances were comparable and their vocabulary levels were about the same before the intervention was conducted. Figure 1 visualizes how the two groups’ vocabulary knowledge changed from the pre-test to the post-test, which shows that the post-test mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group, although pre-test scores of the two groups are similar.

![Figure 1](https://www.ijsmsjournal.org)

**Fig.1.** Learners’ vocabulary knowledge changes before and after the intervention

In order to examine whether learners in the experimental group gained in vocabulary knowledge from the pre-test to the post-test, a paired samples t-test was calculated to compare the mean scores of vocabulary pretest and posttest of the experimental group. Results show that the experimental group’s pre-test and post test scores were statistically different, $t(34) = -16.23, p < .001$. The results suggest that TBLT vocabulary lessons may have contributed to the acquisition of
vocabulary knowledge among learners in the experimental group. In other words, learners gained in vocabulary knowledge, as demonstrated in their statistically higher post-test scores, which is partially attributable to the implementation of TBLT in vocabulary lessons.

4.2. Comparative effects of TBLT vocabulary instruction and traditional method on EFL learners in terms of lexical knowledge gains

As the two groups were comparable at pre-test, an independent samples t-test was calculated to compare the mean scores of vocabulary post-tests of the experimental and the control group. The results suggest that the two groups’ post-test scores were statistically different, t(68) = -4.01, p < .001. In addition, the experimental group’s post-test score in vocabulary (M=19.51, SD=3.80) was higher than the control group (M=15.89, SD=3.27). In other words, this finding showed that TBLT learners performed better on the vocabulary post-test than their TTM counterparts, which suggests a stronger effect of TBLT vocabulary lessons on students’ lexical learning and acquisition than that of the TTM.

4.3. Learners’ perceptions of the use of TBLT for vocabulary instruction

Regarding learners’ attitudes towards the use of TBLT for vocabulary lessons at this center for vocational training and continuing education, interviewed students’ opinions centered around three main themes: (1) benefits of TBLT, (2) limitations of TBLT, and (3) learner’s suggestion for a better TBLT implementation. Data analysis also reveals interesting patterns in the learners’ perceptions across those making bigger gains in lexical knowledge vs. others who made minimal gains.

4.3.1. Benefits of TBLT

Interviewed students mentioned three major benefits they enjoyed when taking TBLT vocabulary lessons, namely improved confidence in learning English, enhanced motivation to learn, increased peer interaction during tasks.

**Improved confidence in speaking English.** The majority of the learners thought that TBLT increased their confidence and frequency with speaking English. Learner 1’s comment was representative among the interviewees:

*TBLT allows us to become more confident in speaking English in front of the crowd. Also, this type of instruction is really useful because when we have better vocabulary, we definitely have more confidence about the knowledge to communicate or express ideas to others.*

Most learners referred to the benefit of having more vocabulary which allows them to conduct better communication (Learner 2) or to “converse with other students more freely and naturally” (Learner 8).

Students’ improved confidence levels when engaging in language skill activities is frequently mentioned as added benefits of TBLT vocabulary lessons as evidenced in comments made by Learners 6, 8, and 10. Learners 11 and 12 further stressed the reasons why TBLT lessons increased the breadth and depth of their vocabulary knowledge:

*I’m into doing vocabulary tasks because they enable me to attain more vocabulary by finding the meanings of unknown words set in clear contexts and TBLT helps develop vocabulary expanding skills. If I know a word, I can know its part of speech and find out its related word form. Then, I can put these words into practice.* (Learner 11)

Similarly, Learner 12 said: “Thanks to vocabulary tasks, after exploring the meaning of new vocabulary, I can make sentences containing these new words, then I can remember the
words better and use them later”(Learner 12). Generally, these learners reported having the chance to gain both receptive (i.e., word meaning, part of speech, word family) and productive vocabulary knowledge (i.e., putting words to practice/making sentences containing the newly learned vocabulary) thanks to the implementation of TBLT lessons. Interestingly, Learner 11 commented on learning words in clear contexts, which allows for more effective retention and usage of the learned lexical items.

**Enhanced motivation to learn.** Six learners mentioned that they became more motivated when learning with TBLT vocabulary lessons. Regarding this, Learner 2 firmly concurred that using TBLT greatly interested him and made him feel more engaged in the learning process. His reasons were “the teacher’s use of a variety of activities, such as communicative exercises, interaction games, and other tasks that call for students to actively and critically think” which attracted students’ attention and motivated them to complete the tasks. Learner 12, who shared the same idea, stated, “TBLT enhances learners’ critical thinking skills and increases their enthusiasm for studying. As a result, they become more excited and engaged in class activities”.

**Enhanced interactions in class.** The findings indicate learners’ perceptions about enhanced interactions during TBLT lessons. For instance, Learner 8 commented on more chances to interact with their peers through meaningful activities, “TBLT successfully enhances interaction through communicative tasks. In fact, I can accomplish a lot with my friends, such as exchanging information and working through issues as a team” (Learner 8). The same point was made by Learner 6,

*TBLT, in my perspective, generates plenty of interaction in the classroom. I have benefited a lot from classroom activities that give me the chance to talk with my peers and exchange thoughts. I could take part in the conversation on a number of topics with better vocabulary.*

The teacher in the TBLT classroom created activities that allowed students to interact with one another. By encouraging interaction through communicative activities and reflection on what they were learning, learners were able to share information with their friends and find solutions for problems (Kim, 2009; Nuevo, 2006).

### 4.3.2. Limitations of TBLT

Besides the positive comments about the benefits of TBLT, some learners shared negative views of task implementation to vocabulary teaching. Firstly, these learners perceived the inappropriateness of TBLT for low-achieving learners in a very short period of time. Learner 3 mentioned,

*As some of us are not good at English in class, I think we are not accustomed to the new type of instruction of learning new words through tasks. As a result, rather than attempting conversational activities, we should undertake more exercises under the supervision and instruction of the teacher.*

Learner 5 further added the necessity of controlled practice exercises to prepare students for task completion:

*Some low-achieving learners found it difficult to express their ideas to complete a given task without known words. As a result, we need to practice more tasks under the guidance and instruction of the teacher rather than undertaking vocabulary tasks by ourselves.*

The second limitation relates to the lack of teaching aids when implementing TBLT lessons. Learners perceived that they needed more support, particularly from teaching aids that complement this new instructional approach. Learner 7 stated: “Learners get bored when learning
vocabulary in new textbooks with only a few visuals. The teacher mainly used the textbook to teach us and visual aids were scarcely used during the lessons”.

In addition, time constraints which emerged as a common complaint among the interviewed learners were reported to prevent students from completing tasks while learning new vocabulary. Learner 5, for example, said that she found it hard to finish the tasks within the time limits allotted by the teacher. Learner 9 made a typical comment on the same issue to explain why tasks may not be appropriate all the time,

*I don’t think students want to work with tasks all the time, even though we could converse more and feel more confident. We only have one or two learning periods per week to work in pairs or groups, therefore the teacher had to spend time correcting our mistakes as we presented or reported on a specific task.*

Overall, learners in the sub-group whose scores improved minimally from the pre-test to the posttest (Learners 3, 5, 7, 9) reported primarily the challenges they encountered during TBLT vocabulary lessons, while those gaining satisfactorily or a lot in vocabulary knowledge after the intervention expressed willingness to continue receiving TBLT vocabulary instruction. Learner 2, being among the students with greatest gain in scores from the pre- to the posttest, said: “I firmly feel that TBLT can effectively boost my language learning. I truly like it and wish to study with it”. Similarly, Learner 6 stressed the potentials of such a teaching approach in their language learning process: “I want to learn using TBLT because it has many benefits for me. My increased vocabulary from the lessons will help me perform better with my language skills” (Learner 6). Learner 1’s comments provide a nice and clear wrap-up to this section,

*TBLT is a very good teaching approach and it helps me a lot in learning English. It makes me more active and confident when working with my classmates and freely share my ideas to complete the tasks. So, I would like to continue learning with it when I’m in grade 11 and grade 12.*

In this section, TBLT was perceived to have a positive effect on learners’ vocabulary learning at a vocational training and continuing education center. While a few learners remained skeptical of the application of TBLT to vocabulary instruction (Learners 3, 5, 7, 9), the majority of learners (Learners 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 12) whose scores improved significantly at posttest confirmed that it increased their learning motivation and greatly aided them not only in vocabulary but also in their English skills.

V. DISCUSSION

The first key finding of the current research is that EFL learners’ lexical knowledge significantly improved following TBLT vocabulary lessons. The finding suggests that TBLT may have contributed to learners’ increased vocabulary knowledge, as demonstrated in their statistically higher post-test scores. Such results mirror what was found in studies conducted by Khoshshima and Saed (2016) and Erlam and Ellis (2019). The remarkable progress of the experimental group in vocabulary knowledge is partially attributable to the type of teaching they received during the six-week intervention period. The motivating nature of tasks seems to be an aspect that may influence learners’ performance. Task completion is a result of the task taker’s motivation (Richards & Rogers, 20001; Brown, 2000), and two thirds of the interviewed learners in the current research reported experiencing increased motivation while learning vocabulary with TBLT. In general, TBLT is potentially beneficial for EFL learners’ vocabulary learning thanks to its characteristics of using rich input in the form of authentic materials, learner-centered communication, opportunities for meaning negotiation, and the incorporation of new and prior knowledge. Learners are provided more chances to practice their vocabulary in pairs or groups.
after receiving vocabulary tasks from the teacher. When they performed their tasks in the classroom, the teacher did not interrupt them if they made mistakes, which enables learners to learn vocabulary better and have longer retention of vocabulary items.

Furthermore, the teacher simulates real life situations when designing vocabulary tasks to encourage students to engage in the learning process. A real communicative context allows for acquisition to happen spontaneously without demanding any deliberate effort on the part of teachers or learners (Ellis, 2003). The results echo Ellis’ (2002) argument which emphasizes the role of tasks in generating a conducive learning environment for language acquisition. As a result, the core of the acquisition process is shifted from the lesson contents to the interaction that takes place in the classroom. As task-based language teaching values learner-centeredness, thus learners can engage in more meaningful communication and more useful extra linguistic skill building (Brown, 1989), which entails more opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning. The interview data in this research reveals learners’ satisfaction with the opportunities to engage and experience English with their peers by trying more English practice in the classroom. These findings corroborate the results in Bui’s (2019) study which showed that TBLT classes facilitated a higher level of learner engagement in tasks and communication.

Another result worth highlighting is that the TBLT learners outperformed their TTM counterparts on the vocabulary posttest. Explanations for such discrepancy in vocabulary knowledge gains can be found in learners’ comments regarding their learning strategies to increase receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge when engaging in task activities. In other words, this approach of teaching supports learner-centeredness (Long, 1985; Van den Branden, 2006), which boosts not only students’ vocabulary knowledge but also learning strategies to actively explore the newly presented lexical items. This characteristic, in marked contrast, was not featured in the traditional vocabulary lessons (Al-Muhaimeed, 2013). Additionally, with TBLT, the teacher placed a strong emphasis on the learners’ interests as the center of the learning experience, with the teacher only serving as a facilitator or mentor of their learning process. In TTM vocabulary lessons, however, learners tend to play a more “passive” role while teachers play a more “active” role (Candela, 1995) and focus their feedback on the accuracy of their learners’ answers. In addition, translation and memorization of new vocabularies are stressed more frequently in the traditional method than recognizing the context in which vocabulary is employed. As a result, the collaborative and interactive aspect of the TBLT group is an element as well as an explanation for its outperformance in comparison to the control group over the studied period.

It is interesting to see that within the experimental group, despite the fact that all the learners were low achieving at the beginning of the research, their perceptions and vocabulary knowledge changes were not homogeneous following the intervention. A group of four learners who experienced the least improvement from the pretest to the posttest were not positive about the implementation of TBLT vocabulary lessons. Their concerns relate to lack of visual aids in vocabulary lessons, time constraints, and unfamiliarity with the ways to do tasks while learning. All these concerns are justified considering the nature of TBLT which requires learners to be in charge of managing their own learning process (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Van den Branden et al., 2009). This finding also reflects a major source of criticism of TBLT which indicated that this strategy may not work for low-achieving learners in some cases (Bruton, 2002; Swan, 2005). Without enough motivation and preparation when learning with a new approach, a lot of learners, especially low achieving ones, may face frustration, which negatively impacts their learning outcomes. It is indeed possible that some learners started off at a lower level than others, making their vocabulary learning improvement less noticeable. An alternative interpretation is that Vietnamese learners tend to depend on their teachers to offer them explicit instruction.
Therefore, motivating them to engage in vocabulary tasks is challenging (Li, 1998). Added to this, language instruction at upper secondary school level in Vietnam is still exam oriented. Although a task-based approach promises improved communicative competence, it does not place enough emphasis on form (Burrow, 2008; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005). As a result, the implementation of TBLT vocabulary lessons in this research falls short of adequately preparing students for form-oriented examinations that affect or mold students’ future learning (Littlewood, 2007).

VI. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the current research inform several pedagogical implications for the teaching of English in centers of vocational training and continuing education, vocabulary teaching methodology, materials development and teacher training programs. On a positive note, the majority of interviewed learners were able to make good progress after the intervention. They generally enjoyed the opportunities to interact with peers during task completion, which is a core value of TBLT to create favorable acquisition conditions for learners (Ellis, 2002). However, a few learners were still struggling to catch up with the lessons following this teaching approach. Such findings point to the need for training sessions where learners are initially introduced to the characteristics and techniques associated with TBLT vocabulary lessons.

Moreover, motivation stands out from the interviews as a driving factor behind learners’ vocabulary gains, and therefore, should be given adequate attention. A focus on creating engaging and appropriate tasks that meet the needs and proficiency of learners is needed. EFL teachers can create and deliver lesson plans that contain a variety of vocabulary-building tasks. Moreover, understanding learners’ perceptions may help teachers develop a suitable module for teaching vocabulary and adjust tasks that suit their local teaching contexts.

The findings of this study suggest the importance of including TBLT in English classes in a center of vocational training and continuing education as an innovative alternative to the common TTM model in order to make vocabulary learning a more engaging and effective process. Learners can build up their lexical knowledge by doing different types of tasks. Therefore, tasks in the textbook can be adapted to be as communicative as possible. Furthermore, the vocabulary tasks themselves should be fully adaptable to the learners’ vocabulary level (Breen, 1989; Skehan, 1996). Having a better understanding of how crucial it is for learners to acquire vocabulary through tasks will help teachers advocate for the collaborative and interactive nature features of tasks rather than the traditional method.

In addition, teachers should be sent to workshops and seminars as facilitators for the new curriculum. According to Hui (2004), Jeon and Hahn (2006), it is teachers as facilitators who grasp how tasks truly work, and it is the teachers- facilitators who are expected to have a deep understanding of the TBLT instructional framework, along with its goal, procedure, and assessment. It is impossible to deny the importance of conducting seminars and workshops as part of professional development for English teachers to become better agents in their language classrooms.

A few limitations have to be acknowledged in this research. Firstly, the study was conducted in a center for vocational training and continuing education whose learners are not representative of other learner groups in state and private high schools. Secondly, the number of learners is quite limited, with only thirty-five learners in each group. Therefore, any conclusions about the impacts of TBLT on vocabulary learning may not be generalizable to other populations other than learners at vocational training and continuing education centers. In order to ensure generalizability and to provide stronger evidence for or against the effectiveness of task-based vocabulary teaching, future research should reach a larger scale to include more participants and extend its scope to cover a variety of learning contexts.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Two lesson plans for two types of instruction

TOPIC 1. NEW WAYS TO LEARN

Lesson 1 (FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP)

Level: Pre-intermediate

Objectives.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to make use of some new words and phrases related to electronic devices that can assist us learn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher and learners’ activities</th>
<th>Aims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity 1</strong>: T asks learners to work in pairs. Look at the picture of digital devices and give the English word for each of them. (Learners can use a dictionary) Learners work out the meanings of the words.</td>
<td>- Introduce the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity 2</strong>:</td>
<td>- Activate learners knowledge of vocabulary related to the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- T asks learners to match each of the phrases on the left with its explanation on the right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learners work in pairs and do the activity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Task cycle
### Task cycle 1

**Activity 3.**

**Planning 1:** Learners work in pairs, read the conversation and match pictures A-C with their uses as learning tools.

**Report 1:** 
- T invites some learners to report their answers. T may support them if necessary.
  - T has learners give peers’ feedback.
  - T gives feedback.

**Activity 4.**

**Planning 2:** Learners read the conversation again and check if the statements are true (T), false (F) or not given (NG).

**Report 2:** 
- T invites learners from some groups to report their answers. T may support them if necessary.
  - T has learners give peers’ feedback.
  - T gives feedback.

### Language focus

**Analysis 1**

**Activity 5**

- Learners work in pairs. They read the given sentences from the conversation. And underline ‘which’, ‘that’, ‘who’ and ‘whose’, then answer what these words are used for. Determine the meanings of the relative pronouns in the sentences. Finally, they decide if the clauses are defining or non-defining relative clauses.
- Learners discuss the meaning of the relative pronouns in the sentences.
- T gives feedback.

**Practice 1**

**Activity 6**

- Learners work individually. Use ‘who’, ‘which’, ‘that’ or ‘whose’ to complete each of the sentences.
- Learners compare their answers with their friends.
- T gives feedback.

- Learners get exposed to language and make use of the target language by learning new words by sharing their knowledge of vocabulary together.
- Learners read the conversation and complete activity 3.
- Learners report their answers to class.

- Learners get exposed to language and use it.
- Learners read the conversation and complete activity 4.
- Learners report their answers to class (explaining their choices).

- Learners analyze and practice the target language.
- Learners themselves explore the language.
- Learners learn some new words from activity 5.

- Learners fill the gaps by using relative pronouns.
Homework

Write down all new words you have learnt from the lesson and make at least 4 sentences using these words - Consolidate learnt vocabulary

LESSON PLANS
(FOR THE CONTROL GROUP)

TOPIC 1. NEW WAYS TO LEARN

Lesson 1

I. Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

Remember some lexical items related to personal electronic devices

II. Preparations: Textbook

III. Procedures:

D. Procedures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Opening</td>
<td>Ask Ss these questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Have you ever owned any personal electronic devices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What are they used for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Leads in the new lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Drilling</td>
<td>- T provides learners with a list of vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. <em>take notes:</em> <em>ghi chép</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. <em>take advantage of:</em> tận dụng lợi thế của….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. <em>look something up:</em> tra cứu cái gì đó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. <em>access something:</em> truy cập 1 cái gì đó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. <em>electronic devices:</em> <em>thiết bị điện tử</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. <em>tablet:</em> <em>máy tính bảng</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. <em>do calculations:</em> <em>làm phép tính</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. <em>do assignments:</em> <em>thực hiện nhiệm vụ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. <em>record:</em> <em>ghi lại</em> (âm thanh,..)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. <em>touch screen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher elicits new words, gives pronunciation, has ss repeat the words, records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the words, checks meanings, pronunciation and stress
- Teacher asks learners to copy down into their notebook.

* Checking voc: R.O.R

T has learners remember vocabulary they have just learned.

**Activity 1: complete the words with the missing letters**

1. take n_t_s
2. take adv_nt_geof
3. l_ _k something_p
4. acc_sssomething
5. el_ctr_nic d_vices
6. t_blet
7. acc_ss
8. do c_le_lations
9. do ass_gnm_nts
10. rec_rd
- T prepares a word list of missing letters and asks learners to fill the missing vocabulary.
- Learners do the activity individually.
- T corrects the answers and gives feedback.

**Activity 2. Write the Vietnamese meaning on the right column for each of the English words on the left.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. take notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. take advantage of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. look something up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. access something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. electronic devices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. tablet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. access</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. do calculations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. do assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. record</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. touch screen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 3: Reorder the letters to make complete words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. taek notse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. tkea aadvanetgof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. loko smoethnigup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. acsesssmethoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. electreonci dviceses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. taeblt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ccssea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. do clcaluationsn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. do asgnimntse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. roecrd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. tucoh screne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- T has learners to rearrange the jumbled words to make the meaningful words.

- Learners do the activity individually.

- T corrects the answers and gives feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 4:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T says the words in English and ask a learner to give the Vietnamese meaning randomly. Then, this learner says the word (either in English or in Vietnamese) and points at any learners in class. The process continues until the last learner in class is invited to say the word.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners are asked to match each of the words on the left column to its Vietnamese meaning on the right column.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T asks learners to go to the board and write down as many words they remember as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- T asks learners to give their answers

- T gives feedback.

3. Closing

- Ask Ss: What have you learnt today? How many words can you remember?
- Summarize the main points of the lesson.
- Ask Ss to learn by heart the words or phrases related to the personal electronic devices and prepare for the next lesson.
Appendix 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:
1. How do you evaluate task-based language teaching (TBLT)?
2. What do you think are the advantages or benefits that TBLT brings you? (Teacher can bring some suggestions such as language use ability, vocabulary learning, communication skills, interaction skills, etc.) Do you think that TBLT can help you learn vocabulary better?
3. Similarly, please mention the limitations of TBLT?
4. What are your wishes if you continue studying with TBLT?
5. In your opinion, is it possible to learn with TBLT or What suggestions can you think of?
6. If TBLT is compared with the old methods, is TBLT better and more feasible?