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TEMA:

**IMPROVING ENGLISH READING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING
IN ECUADORIAN HIGH SCHOOLS**

Autor:

KERLY MARÍA CABRERA SALAVARRÍA

Tutor:

MSC. FRANS ANDRÉS RECALDE GARCÍA

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RESUMEN

Las habilidades de lectura mejoran la comprensión de las estructuras de los párrafos, la comunicación y la toma de decisiones. Desarrollar habilidades sólidas en inglés relacionadas con la lectura, es significativo para la enseñanza en estudiantes de básica superior. El Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas (ABT) ofrece un enfoque innovador al involucrar a los estudiantes en tareas prácticas y significativas que fomentan el aprendizaje activo y el desarrollo cognitivo. El presente estudio, profundiza en los efectos del ABT en las habilidades de lectura en inglés de los estudiantes de básica superior; en otras palabras, el propósito de este estudio es analizar el impacto del ABT enfocándose en habilidades de lectura como mejoras en la comprensión, el compromiso, la motivación y las habilidades de pensamiento de orden superior. El estudio utiliza pruebas previas y posteriores en una muestra de 22 estudiantes de la Unidad Educativa Emilio Isaías Abihanna de octavo año EGB para demostrar que integrar el ABT en las habilidades de lectura mejora las habilidades de los estudiantes. Además, incluye los modelos de Lewin (1946) y Elliot (2014) los mismos que incluyen cuatro etapas en las que los estudiantes tienen la oportunidad de mejorar sus conocimientos.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Aprendizaje basado en tareas, habilidad de lectura, comprensión lectora, enfoque de enseñanza

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ABSTRACT

Reading skills enhance the comprehension of paragraph structures, communication, and decision making. Developing strong English skills in reading is significant for teaching in high school students. Task-Based Learning (TBL) bestows an innovative approach by involving students in practical, meaningful tasks that promote active learning and cognitive development. This study delves into the effects of TBL on high school students' English reading skills, in other words the purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of TBL focusing on reading skills such as improvements in comprehension, engagement, motivation, and higher-order thinking abilities. The study uses pre- and post-tests in a sample of 22 eighth-grade students of Emilio Isaías Abihanna´s High School to demonstrate that integrating TBL into reading skills enhances students' proficiency. Also, it includes Lewin´s (1946) and Elliot´s (2014) teaching model to follow up four stages in which students can have the opportunity to improve their knowledge.

KEYWORDS

Tasked-based learning, reading skill, reading comprehension, teaching approach

1.   INTRODUCCIÓN (OBJETIVO DEL ARTÍCULO)

High school students usually have significant difficulties in learning English skills, which hinder their language proficiency and academic success. English reading methods often fail to capture students' interest or accommodate diverse learning needs. Students lead with challenges such as interpreting complex texts, understanding context, and meanings, and critically analyzing content.

Educators have applied innovative teaching approaches such as Task-Based Learning (TBL) to address these issues. TBL teaching emphasizes the use of real-world tasks and interactive activities which motivates active student´s engagement and participation. According to Smith (2020) TBL facilitates students to complete meaningful tasks, improving their communication skills in authentic contexts. It enhances problem-solving abilities and critical thinking, as students must navigate challenges without relying solely on traditional instruction. Additionally, TBL fosters greater motivation and autonomy, as students take more control over their learning process.

Tasked-based learning is an approach that was developed in the 80´s by Prabhu (1987) an Indian educator who focused on teaching English through tasks instead of grammar translation method, memorizing, or traditional methods. Besides, in 1990 Jane and Dave Willis played a vital role in TBL by outlining the structure and organizing it by stages such as pre-task, task, and post-task. Willis and Willis helped to popularize and formalize it.

Emilio Isaías Abihanna is a High School located in a rural area of San Jacinto de Yaguachi, Pedro J. Montero Boliche. It has 1300 students in total and for this study, the researcher uses a sample of 22 participants of 8th grade between 11 to 13 years old. A quantitative type and research investigation that employs pre- and post-tests, examines the effectiveness of TBL in enhancing critical reading skills and deeper understanding.

This study aims to evaluate the effect of Task-Based Learning (TBL) on 8th grade students' English reading comprehension, engagement, and motivation in reading activities at Emilio Isaías Abihanna High School.

The research seeks to answer the question: What is the effect of Task-Based Learning on 8th grade students' English reading comprehension activities? By using a pre-test and post-test design, the study will assess changes in students' reading comprehension levels before and after the implementation of TBL. This comprehensive approach will contribute valuable insights into the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning in enhancing cognitive aspects of learning among high school students.

2.   MARCO TEÓRICO

This study is grounded in the theoretical principles of Task-Based Learning (TBL) and the cognitive and constructivist theories of language acquisition. It explores the role of TBL in enhancing reading comprehension among Ecuadorian eighth-grade students in public education.

Task-Based Learning (TBL)

TBL is rooted in the communicative language teaching paradigm, where language is acquired more effectively when learners engage in meaningful tasks (Prabhu, 1987; Willis & Willis, 2007). In contrast to traditional grammar-based instruction, TBL places students in active, real-world learning scenarios that mirror authentic use of language.

Willis (1996) outlines a structured three-phase model—Pre-task, Task, and Post-task—which aligns with cognitive engagement and progressive knowledge construction. These phases encourage students to interact, collaborate, and reflect on their learning processes. According to Ellis (2003), TBL enhances learners' linguistic output and promotes higher-order thinking skills by emphasizing the completion of purposeful activities.

Constructivist and Cognitive Theories of Learning

The research also draws on constructivist perspectives, particularly those of Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1938), which emphasize the social context of learning and the importance of experience in constructing knowledge. Learning is seen as an active, contextualized process where students build understanding through interaction, exploration, and reflection.

In the context of reading, this aligns with Duke and Pearson's (2002) model of reading comprehension, which highlights the role of active engagement, strategic reading behaviors, and scaffolding.

Furthermore, Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy supports the notion that students' belief in their ability to succeed influences their motivation and engagement—both key outcomes of TBL as observed in this study.

Stages of Change Model by Kurt Lewin (1946) and Elliot (2014)

- The intervention follows the change model which includes the stages of:
- Unfreeze (Pre-task): Awareness of current limitations in reading skills.
- Change (Task): Implementation of new strategies through TBL.
- Refreeze (Post-task): Consolidation and reinforcement of improved reading abilities.

This model complements the instructional design used in the study, where each stage of the lesson plan progressively builds students' reading comprehension, vocabulary, and inference-making skills.

TBL in the Context of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension involves more than decoding text; it encompasses skills such as inferencing, recognizing literary elements, and reflecting critically. The study's tasks—such as vocabulary games, story mapping, clue hunts, and think-alouds—are strategically aligned with this broader view of reading. This approach is supported by Krashen's (1982) Input

Hypothesis and Nation's (2001) work on vocabulary acquisition, both emphasizing the need for meaningful, contextualized input.

3.   METODOLOGÍA

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the impact of Task-Based Learning (TBL) on English reading skills among Ecuadorian high school students. A quantitative design is particularly suitable for assessing measurable outcomes, such as improvements in reading comprehension, speed, and accuracy. The study uses pre-test and post-test assessments to quantify changes in students' reading abilities before and after the TBL intervention. This approach provides objective, statistical data to evaluate the effectiveness of TBL in enhancing reading skills, allowing for a clear analysis of any improvements or lack thereof in students' English proficiency. The study's experimental design also enables the manipulation of the independent variable (TBL) and measures its impact on the dependent variable (students' reading skills), helping establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the intervention and the observed outcomes.

The design of the study follows a pre-test/post-test structure, with initial and final assessments to track improvements in reading skills. By comparing the pre-test and post-test results, the study evaluates how TBL influences reading comprehension among the students. The experimental group will engage with the TBL approach, while the control group will continue with traditional instructional methods, allowing the study to attribute any changes in reading performance specifically to the intervention. Additionally, the research aligns with the stages of Elliot's (2014) models, which emphasize the gradual process of behavior change. These models—comprising the stages of unfreeze, change, and refreeze (or pre-task, task, and post-task)—suggest that students have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge through structured learning phases, which is integrated into the TBL method.

Additionally, it was developed an educational lesson plan to apply stages approach for improving reading skills among the participants. The first stage, Pre-Task, involves administering a pre-test to assess students' reading abilities, including their vocabulary comprehension, understanding of literary terms, ability to make inferences, and overall reading process. In the second stage, "Determine what needs to change," the focus shifts to replacing outdated learning strategies. The goal is to introduce Task-Based Learning (TBL) as a more effective approach to addressing students' reading challenges. The third stage involves the implementation of various tasks that target specific reading skills, such as vocabulary, comprehension, inference-making, and reading process understanding. It was designed a lesson plan for each skill area, ensuring that tasks were aligned with the students' needs and delivered in a structured way to support their learning growth and, finally the post-test to gather the last information and analyzed the results.

The study has a duration of one month, with the implementation of Task-Based Learning (TBL) designed to address students' reading challenges. Over the course of this month, various tasks were introduced to target specific reading skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, inference-making, and understanding the reading process. A detailed lesson plan was created for each skill area, ensuring that tasks were tailored to the students' needs and delivered in a structured manner to foster their learning progress. At the end of the month, a post-test was administered to gather final data, which was then analyzed to assess the effectiveness of the TBL approach.

Table 1.

Lesson plan

	Vocabulary Understanding
	Activity: Vocabulary Matching Game
	● **Topic:** Daily Routines
	● **Objective**: Help students understand and memorize new daily routines vocabulary.
	● **Task**: Prepare a set of flashcards with vocabulary words and another set of flashcards with pictures. Teach them before working in pairs the definition with the right picture then explain to students that they will work in pairs. Give students to match the words with their definitions or corresponding images. They will have 5 per group to finish the activity. The winner group will be the one that will have more pictures and words matched. After completing the matching task, students will use the vocabulary words in simple sentences, and share them with the class.
	● **Skills Developed**: Vocabulary acquisition, contextual understanding, speaking practice.
	● **Reflection**: After the activity, students reflect on how the vocabulary words were used in the context of the reading passage.
	Comprehension and Literary Terms
	Activity: Story Mapping
	● **Topic:** My life as an adolescent
	● **Objective**: To reinforce comprehension and introduce basic literary terms like plot, character, setting, and theme.

- **Task**: Provide students with a short reading passage. After reading, students complete a story map, identifying the main character, setting, plot, and theme. They can draw pictures to represent each element of the story. Students will then explain their maps in pairs or groups, practicing how to use the terms correctly.
- **Reading passage:**

Lily's Daily Routine

Lily is a 16-year-old high school student with a busy daily routine. Every morning, she wakes up at 6:30 AM to get ready for school. After a quick breakfast, she grabs her backpack and heads out the door to catch the bus. School starts at 8:00 AM, and she spends the day in classes like math, science, and English. During lunch, she meets up with her friends in the cafeteria, and they talk about their day and what's coming up.

After school, Lily goes to the library to study for her upcoming exams. She's preparing for a big test in history, so she spends about an hour there reading her notes and practicing questions. When she gets home, she has a snack and helps her mom with some chores around the house. After dinner, she finishes any leftover homework before taking a short break to relax. By 9:30 PM, she gets ready for bed and reads a book to unwind before going to sleep around 10:30 PM.

Lily's routine keeps her organized, and she balances her schoolwork with time for relaxation and family.

- **Skills Developed**: Comprehension, identification of literary elements, use of literary terms.
- **Reflection**: After the task, students reflect on how understanding these literary terms helped them to understand the story better.

Reading comprehension

Activity: Clue Hunt

- **Objective**: To encourage students to make inferences based on context.
- **Task**: Select a short passage or dialogue that includes clues about a character's feelings or actions. After reading, give students a set of questions that require them to infer emotions, motivations, or outcomes (e.g., "Why do you think the character is upset?" or "What do you think will happen next?"). Students can discuss their inferences in pairs or small groups and share with the class.

- **Skills Developed**: Making inferences, critical thinking, reading comprehension.
- **Reflection**: Students discuss how they used clues from the text to understand the character's emotions or predict future events.

Reading Process Understanding

Activity: Think-Aloud Reading

- **Objective**: To improve the understanding of the reading process, including how to decode and make sense of texts.
- **Task**: The teacher or a student reads a short passage aloud, pausing at key points to "think aloud." For example, the reader might say, "I'm not sure what this word means, but I can guess it based on the rest of the sentence." Afterward, students practice reading similar passages aloud in pairs, using the think-aloud technique to discuss how they understand and interpret the text.
- **Skills Developed**: Reading process awareness, comprehension strategies, oral skills.

	● **Reflection**: Students reflect on how using strategies like prediction, asking questions, and clarifying helped them understand the text.
	Engagement and Reflection **Activity: Group Discussion and Reflection** ● **Objective**: To engage students with the text and encourage reflection on the reading. ● **Task**: After reading a passage, students will participate in a group discussion where they answer specific questions related to the text. These questions can include personal reactions to the story, connections to their own experiences, or how they feel about the characters' decisions. Following the discussion, students write a brief reflection on what they learned and how the text made them feel or what they found interesting. ● **Skills Developed**: Speaking, listening, critical thinking, self-reflection. ● **Reflection**: Students write or share their reflections about how the text affected their thinking and whether their understanding of the text changed through discussion.

Stage 4. Post-Test

A Post-Test is used to identify if students improve their English Reading skills after the Tasked-Based Learning approach.

4. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS

The results of the pre-test and post-test assessments indicate a general improvement in students' reading comprehension skills after the Task-Based Learning intervention. Most students showed a noticeable increase in their scores from the pre-test to the post-test as indicated in table 2.

Table 2.

Reading Comprehension Level of Students during Pre-test and Post-test

Student	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score
1	2	4
2	2	7
3	3	10
4	1	1
5	3	11
6	10	6
7	4	11
8	3	12
9	1	11
10	2	9
11	3	3
12	4	10
13	5	11
14	3	9
15	5	12
16	2	12
17	1	11
18	6	12
19	5	12
20	3	12
21	3	12
22	2	11

Additionally, the mean pre-test score was 3.32, with a standard deviation of 2.03, reflecting low initial comprehension levels and varied performance among students. However, post-test results show a mean score of 9.50 with a standard deviation of 3.25, indicating higher overall comprehension and a slight increase in score variability.

Table 3.

Statistics

	Student	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
N	22	22	22
Mean	11,50	3,32	9,50
Standard Deviation	6,494	2,033	3,248

5. DISCUSIÓN

The results from the pre-test and post-test assessments provide compelling evidence of the positive impact that Task-Based Learning (TBL) had on improving students' reading comprehension skills. The increase in post-test scores across the majority of students highlights the effectiveness of the TBL methodology in addressing various aspects of reading, including vocabulary comprehension, literary terms, inferencing, and overall reading process understanding. While the scores of some students, such as Student 4, showed minimal improvement, the general trend of progress reflects the advantages of TBL in engaging students and fostering a deeper understanding of reading materials.

One of the key strengths of TBL is its emphasis on active student participation and problem-solving, which contrasts with traditional methods that often rely on passive learning strategies. By engaging students in tasks that require critical thinking and application of reading strategies, TBL encourages higher cognitive involvement and sustained motivation. This aligns with research that supports the idea that task-based approaches, by focusing on meaningful, real-world tasks, can significantly improve students' learning outcomes (Ellis, 2003).

Moreover, the structured phases of pre-task, task, and post-task allow students to progressively build on their reading skills, reinforcing their learning and enabling greater retention of knowledge.

However, it is important to note that the variation in students' scores, particularly with some students showing limited improvement, suggests that the success of TBL may depend on several factors. These may include the students' initial reading proficiency, their engagement with the tasks, and the extent to which they can apply the strategies learned during the tasks. While TBL has shown potential to enhance reading comprehension overall, the individualized nature of students' learning experiences means that ongoing adjustments to instructional strategies may be necessary to address the diverse needs of all learners (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

6. CONCLUSIÓN

In conclusion, the application of Task-Based Learning in this study has proven to be an effective pedagogical approach for improving the reading comprehension skills of 8th-grade students at Emilio Isaías Abihanna High School. The significant improvements observed in most students' post-test scores demonstrate the potential of TBL to engage students actively and enhance their reading abilities in a meaningful way. These findings align with previous research that underscores the effectiveness of task-based learning in fostering student engagement and improving cognitive skills (Long, 1985; Nunan, 2004). While there were some individual differences in student progress, the overall results suggest that Task-Based Learning is a valuable tool for enhancing reading comprehension in secondary education. To further optimize its effectiveness, future research should explore the factors influencing the variability in student responses to TBL and investigate the long-term impact of TBL on students' literacy development.

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- Frans Andrés Recalde García

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