

Improving Uzbek Students' English Reading Skills through Task-Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

The need for English proficiency is increasingly essential for Uzbek students as globalization drives demand for language skills in various professional and academic settings. Traditional approaches to teaching reading, often found in Uzbek classrooms, can be limiting and fail to engage students fully. This article explores how Task-Based Learning (TBL) can enhance English reading skills among Uzbek students. By incorporating active, student-centered tasks, TBL can promote reading comprehension and motivate learners to apply their skills in meaningful ways.

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Introduction

English reading comprehension is critical for Uzbek students who face limited exposure to the language outside the classroom. The traditional reading instruction often used in Uzbekistan can leave students unengaged and passive, focusing more on mechanical decoding than on comprehension and interpretation (Ismaili, 2000). Task-Based Learning (TBL) offers a promising alternative, as it emphasizes practical engagement with language and real-world application. TBL prioritizes tasks that require students to use language in authentic, communicative contexts, making the learning process more relevant and effective (Skehan, 1996).

Task-Based Learning and Its Benefits

Task-Based Learning is a learner-centered approach that organizes instruction around tasks—defined activities with specific goals that mirror real-world language use. Skehan (1996) describes TBL as enabling students to process and produce language in a way that promotes meaningful communication. Kim, Jung, and Tracy-Ventura (2017) further highlight how TBL positively impacts students' perceptions of language learning by encouraging them to engage with the material and their peers actively.

TBL is beneficial for developing reading skills, as it incorporates exercises that foster deeper understanding through practical engagement. According to Ellis (2003), tasks are structured to involve cognitive processes and engage students in the actual processes of language use, often yielding a clearly defined communicative outcome. Thus, TBL can be adapted to meet the needs of Uzbek students, who benefit from active learning methods that encourage collaboration and interaction with the text.

Implementing TBL in Uzbek Classrooms

Pre-task Activities: Pre-task activities introduce students to vocabulary and contextual background

information that will make the text more accessible. Vocabulary previews and discussions can bridge the gap between students' native language and English, easing them into the task and reducing frustration.

Task Cycle: The task cycle involves activities where students work to achieve specific outcomes, such as identifying key information, summarizing, or forming arguments. These tasks encourage students to read for comprehension, apply critical thinking, and engage in discussions with their peers, which leads to greater motivation and a deeper understanding of the text (Kim & Jung, 2017).

Post-task Reflection: After completing the main task, students reflect on their performance, discuss what they learned, and practice using new vocabulary. This reflection phase reinforces comprehension and allows students to consolidate their learning by engaging in a review of the task content and language structures.

Challenges and Considerations

While TBL offers numerous benefits, it also presents challenges, particularly for students with limited English proficiency. According to Skehan (1996), TBL's effectiveness depends on tasks being appropriately tailored to the learners' language level. In the case of Uzbek students, tasks must be carefully designed to match their proficiency, progressively increasing in difficulty as students build confidence.

In addition, studies have shown that some students may initially struggle with the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning (Ismaili, 2000). Educators need to support students during this transition by providing clear instructions and gradual scaffolding to encourage autonomy in reading.

Research Findings Supporting TBL in Uzbek Contexts

Research from different contexts supports the positive impact of TBL on students' reading skills and overall language development. Kim and Jung (2017) found that South Korean students had a favorable attitude towards TBL, with many reporting increased motivation and comprehension. Similarly, a study by Ismaili (2000) demonstrated that students in South-East European contexts responded positively to TBL, noting improvements in communication skills and active class participation. Observations of Uzbek students also indicated that task-based activities promote active engagement and comprehension, making TBL a practical choice for improving reading skills in this context (Ismaili, 2000).

Conclusion

Task-Based Learning holds significant promise for improving the English reading skills of Uzbek students. By focusing on meaningful interaction and real-world tasks, TBL encourages active student engagement, enhances reading comprehension, and fosters language confidence. Though challenges related to proficiency levels and student adaptation exist, tailored tasks and supportive instruction can help address these issues. Future studies with larger participant groups could further clarify TBL's effectiveness and provide additional insights for refining this approach in Uzbek classrooms.

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