

The Effect of Task-Based Learning on EF Students' Learning Reading: A Case Study in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam

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Abstract

This article reports the results of an experimental study testing the effects of the use of Task-Based Learning on EFL students' intrinsic motivation to learn reading and reading comprehension. The study was conducted in a high school in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam where English teaching methods are still lagged behind innovative developments in English language pedagogy. Sixty-nine tenth-grade students from two intact classes participated in this study. Participants were assigned in either control or experimental group. A questionnaire and two reading tests were used to collect quantitative data about participants' motivation and achievement in reading comprehension. Interviews were followed to investigate participants' attitude towards the use of task-based learning in their reading lessons. Results indicated that participants' intrinsic motivation in the experimental group increased and both groups showed significant improvement in reading comprehension. Participants in the experimental group addressed benefits and challenges in learning reading comprehension with Task-Based Learning. To help students enhance their reading comprehension, teachers may take into consideration the use of both Task-Based Learning and Grammar-Translation Method.

Keywords

Task-Based Learning (TBL), Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), reading comprehension, intrinsic motivation

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is considered as an important language skill because it fosters the process of language acquisition and helps students to read different materials for a variety of purposes (Poorahmadi, 2012). Through reading, learners can satisfy their academic and intellectual life. They can obtain information and knowledge to meet their needs of learning, researching, entertaining and so on. It is vital for students in any foreign or second language learning program to master reading

comprehension accordingly.

The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2012) emphasizes that developing communicative competence for students is one of the most essential targets in building and implementing foreign language teaching. After finish English curriculum in high schools, students are required to achieve certain linguistic knowledge and improve communication strategies and skills. In this respect, teaching reading comprehension aims to help students develop essential reading skills (e.g., skimming and scanning) and strategies (e.g., meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies) and achieve linguistic knowledge (e.g., lexical knowledge, grammatical knowledge) (MOET, 2012).

However, the aims for teaching reading comprehension, to large extent, have not been obtained in the context where this study was conducted. Most students lack motivation in learning reading and their performance in reading comprehension is still far from satisfactory. It could be argued that the use of Grammar Translation (GMT), which mainly focused on eliciting vocabularies and translating written texts, might have resulted in students' poor motivation and achievement in reading comprehension. Hence, the researchers found it necessary to seek an alternative that could work in terms of motivating students to learn reading and improving their reading comprehension.

TBL can intrinsically motivate students since it provides them with a number of opportunities to use the language without worrying failures in accuracy (Willis, D. & Willis, J., 2007); three distinct phrases (i.e., pre-task, task circle, post-task) in TBL frame work can reduce students' anxiety about new language; hence can keep them motivated (Willis, D. & Willis, J., 2007). In addition, by considering approach, design, and procedure of TBL in connecting to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) principles, Trinh (2005) maintains that TBL can help students achieve communicative competence and develop their autonomy. Principles in TBL fit the aim of communicative language teaching and theoretically connect to the sphere of SLA in terms of enhancing learners' ability to use the language communicatively and manage their own learning (Van den Branden, 2016).

The relationship between the use of TBL and students' learning motivation and reading comprehension has been explored in a number of studies conducted by researchers (e.g. Ruso, 2007; Lau, 2009; Chooma, 2013; Poorahmadi, 2012). Most of the studies indicate that the use of TBL motivated students to learn and enhanced their reading comprehension achievement. In this light, the researchers examined to what extent TBL could influence students' motivation and achievement in reading comprehension in a high school context in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Additionally, students' attitude towards the use of TBL was explored to enable the researchers gain insights into learning and teaching reading comprehension.

2. Method

2.1 Design

The study was an experimental research using a pretest-posttest with control group design, which was a common educational research design to investigate effects of educational innovations (Dugard &

Todman, 1995). Students from two intact classes were chosen and randomly assigned in the experimental group or the control group. Dependent variables included students' intrinsic motivation in learning reading comprehension and their reading comprehension. The independent variable was the use of TBL in reading lessons. A questionnaire and reading comprehension tests were used to collect the quantitative data about the students' intrinsic motivation and reading comprehension before and after the experiment. Additionally, interviews were used to collect the qualitative data about the students' attitude towards the use of TBL.

2.2 Participants

Participants were 69 students, aged from 15 to 18 years old, at a high school located in a rural area in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. All participants were supposed to be at the similar level of English proficiency since they have learned English as a foreign language for three years and just finished the first semester of their academic year. The participants from the two intact classes were randomly assigned into two groups: 35 students in the experimental and 34 in the control group. Besides, 38 students from another class at the same school participated in piloting the questionnaire and reading comprehension tests. Two English teachers of the school were also invited to administrate the reading tests and check the validity of the tests and the questionnaire.

2.3 Instruments

2.3.1 Reading Comprehension Tests

Two reading comprehension tests were used as pre- and post-tests to measure participants' reading comprehension achievement before and after the experiment respectively. The tests focused on measuring two main reading skills including scanning for specific information and skimming for general ideas. Those are some of the required objectives of the English course in teaching reading comprehension to students at tenth grade in Vietnamese high schools. Reading tests were selected from two books *Testing and Evaluation of Student's Progress of English 10* (Vu et al., 2008) and *English 10 Supplementary Review and Practice Exercises* (Vo & Ton, 2011). These two books provide achievement tests in reading comprehension that were commonly used at Vietnamese high schools.

Each test consisted of 20 items with 4 matching items, 6 True/False statements and 10 multiple choice questions. Reading comprehension skills such as reading for gist and details were focused in the two tests. Six reading passages with approximately 160 words in length for each were selected by the researcher. Three reading passages with topics about People Background, Technology, and Special Education were selected for the pre-test. Topics of readings in the post-test included Undersea World, Music, and Places.

Before the reading comprehension tests were administered, their construct validity was piloted by two English teachers at the research school. The results showed that the test could be used to measure what they claim to measure. Then, 38 students at tenth grade from another class at the school were selected to participate in piloting the tests. The internal consistency of the two tests was checked by the SPSS; the scale tests were run. The results showed that reliability of the two tests was acceptable ($\alpha = .73$ and

$\alpha = .72$ for the pre-and post-test respectively).

2.3.2 Questionnaire

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” was designed to measure the participants’ level of motivation in learning reading comprehension before and after the experiment. The questionnaire was adapted from Intrinsic Motivation Inventory by Ryan and Deci (1992), which was aimed to measure intrinsic motivation of general language learning activities with subscales (i.e., interest, pressure, perceived competence, value, relatedness). The questionnaire was adapted centering on investigating students’ intrinsic motivation in learning reading. The construct validity of the questionnaire was evaluated by the researcher and two teachers of English. 38 students of the research school participated in piloting the reliability (internal consistency) of the questionnaire. The pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire showed to be reliable ($\alpha = .87$ and $\alpha = .85$ respectively).

2.3.3 Interviews

There is a consistent relationship between learners’ motivation, attitude and their achievement. Students’ attitude towards a learning activity can directly influence their motivation and achievement in that activity (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). Therefore, interviewing was used as an instrument to collect qualitative data about participants’ attitude towards the use of TBL in reading lessons; interviews aimed to gain insights participants’ perception of challenges they encountered and benefits they earned from reading lessons taught by TBL. Six participants from the experimental group were selected for the interviews based on their performance in reading comprehension tests: two with the highest, two with the lowest, and two with average scores. The interview questions aimed to collect data on (a) students’ preference for the use of TBL in reading comprehension sessions, (b) effects of TBL in enhancing students’ reading comprehension achievement, and (c) students’ difficulties in learning reading comprehension with TBL. Taking participants’ English language proficiency into consideration, the researchers decided to conduct the interviews in Vietnamese language to guarantee participants’ comprehension of questions and their confidence in responding to the researchers’ interview questions.

2.4 Procedure

The research was carried out in the second semester of an academic year by the researcher. In week 1, the pre-test on reading comprehension and questionnaire on intrinsic motivation were administrated to the two groups to measure participants’ motivation and achievement in reading comprehension before the study. From week 2 to week 13, the experimental group was instructed with TBL and the control group was instructed with GTM. After the intervention, the post-test on reading comprehension and questionnaire on intrinsic motivation were administrated to all participants to gain insights into how the intervention influenced their motivation and reading comprehension. Six participants selected from the experimental group were purposefully selected from the experimental group to participate in the interviews about their attitude towards the use of TBL. Two participants with the highest, average and lowest scores on reading comprehension were invited to participate in the interviews. In the last weeks, the researcher computed statistical analysis tests and interpreted the data.

In the control group, students learned reading comprehension through typical traditional reading lessons, mainly focused on three stages. At the early stage, students were provided with lists of new vocabularies collected from the reading text. They worked on them through activities such as copying down, remembering Vietnamese meaning and listening and repeating word by word. In the second stage, they read a text and dealt with some reading comprehension questions or true/false statements. The third stage focused on translating the whole text.

In the experimental group, students learned reading comprehension through task-based activities designed in an order of pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. At the first phase, students were introduced to the topics and the tasks through using pictures or pre-reading comprehension questions and activating words and phrases related to the reading topics. Grammar structures and vocabularies that could be useful for comprehending the texts and for performing the tasks were highlighted. The task outcomes were also established in the phrase. The pre-task stage sometimes included performing a similar task to provide students with a clear model of the task expectation. After receiving clear instructions on what they had to do to perform the task, students worked in groups or in pairs to negotiate, plan, and carry out the task. In this phrase, the teacher played role as a mentor who gave individuals or groups with encouragement and necessary help. After doing the tasks, the students were required to report their task procedure (what they had done) and present their task outcomes. The last phase, language focus, involved the students in identifying and processing specific language features from the texts. At this phase, it was time for them to get a closer study of some of specific features of the language used during the task cycle. At this phrase, the students were also given chances to practice grammatical or lexical exercises.

2.5 Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data collected from the interviews were analyzed and interpreted in light of participants' perceived challenges and benefits learning reading with TBL. Quantitative data collected from the pre-test and post-test on reading comprehension and the questionnaires were subjected to SPSS. The reliability of the instruments was checked through *Reliability Statistical Analysis*. *Descriptive statistic tests* were computed to measure the mean scores of the two groups in the reading tests and the intrinsic motivation questionnaire. *Independent sample t-tests* and *paired Samples t-tests* were conducted to compare the mean scores between and within the two groups before and after the experiment.

3. Results

3.1 Participants' Motivation in Learning Reading Comprehension before and after the Study

Table 1 reports the results of the Descriptive Statistics test on participants' intrinsic motivation before and after the study.

Table 1. Students' Motivation in Learning Reading

Questionnaires	Conditions	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation
Pre	Control	34	2.50	3.95	3.37	.36
	Experimental	35	2.55	3.91	3.28	.39
Post	Control	34	2.68	3.95	3.36	.33
	Experimental	35	2.73	4.36	3.56	.38

From Table 1, it is observed that the total mean scores of the control group and experimental group were 3.37 and 3.28 respectively at the beginning of the study. The *Independent samples t-tests* were computed to evaluate whether there was any significant difference in motivation between the two groups before the experiment. The result from the questionnaire administered before the study indicated that the mean difference ($MD = .08$) between the control group and the experimental group was not statistically significant ($t = .92, df = 67, p = .35$). The two groups were at the same level of motivation in learning reading comprehension at the beginning of the research. The experimental group gained a considerably higher level of motivation ($M = 3.56$) whereas there was a slight decrease of motivation in the control group ($M = 3.36$) after the experiment. The result from post-questionnaires showed that the mean score of the control group was significantly different from that of the experimental group ($MD = -.19, t = -2.2, df = 67, p = .02$). The level of motivation in learning reading comprehension of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group after the intervention.

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate statistical significance of the mean difference within the two groups before and after the experiment. The result from questionnaires of the control group indicated that the mean scores at the two points of measurement ($M_{pre-Q} = 3.37, M_{post-Q} = 3.36$) was not significantly different ($t = .51, df = 33, p = .60$). This supported that participants' motivation of the control group remained unchanged after the experiment. On the contrary, the mean scores that the experimental obtained at the two points of measurement ($M_{pre-Q} = 3.28, M_{post-Q} = 3.56, MD = -.27$) was significantly different ($t = -.78, df = 34, p = .00$). Motivation in learning reading comprehension of participants in the experiment group increased after the experiment.

3.2 Participants' Reading Comprehension Achievement before and after the Experiment

Table 2 reports the results of the Descriptive Statistics test on participants' reading comprehension before and after the study.

Table 2. Participants' Performance in Reading Comprehension

Reading tests	Conditions	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation
Pre	Control	34	2.5	9.5	6.66	1.72
	Experimental	35	3.5	9.5	6.75	1.57

Post	Control	34	3.5	9.5	7.17	1.60
	Experimental	35	3.0	10	7.09	1.70

Table 2 indicates that the mean scores of reading comprehension in the control group and experimental group were 6.66 and 67.5 respectively before the study. The result from the *Independent samples t-tests* indicated that the mean difference between the control group and the experimental group was not statistically significant ($t = -.24, df = 67, p = .81$). There was no difference in reading comprehension between the two groups before the study. The mean scores of reading comprehension were 7.17 and 7.09 for the control and experimental group respectively after the study. *Independent samples t-tests* indicated that the mean difference between the control group and the experimental group was not statistically significant ($t = .22, df = 67, p = .82$). There was no difference in reading comprehension between the two groups after the study.

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the significant difference of the mean scores in reading comprehension tests within each group before and after the study. The result from reading tests performed by the control group indicated that the mean scores at the two points of measurement ($M_{pre-test} = 6.6, M_{post-test} = 7.1$) was significantly different ($t = -3.6, df = 33, p = .01$). Participants in the control group increased their performance in reading comprehension after the study. The result from reading tests performed by the experimental group revealed that the mean scores difference at the two points of measurement ($M_{pre-test} = 6.7, M_{post-test} = 7.0$) was statistically significant ($t = -2.6, df = 34, p = .01$). The experimental group also obtained a higher level of reading comprehension after the study.

3.3 Participants' Attitudes towards the Use of TBL in Reading Comprehension Sessions

Six students with three different levels of reading comprehension representing those in the experimental group participated in the interviews on their perceived challenges and benefits of learning reading with TBL. From the interviews, it was found that a majority of the participants, four, showed their enjoyment and preference for learning reading comprehension with TBL. They reported that cooperative reading tasks motivated them to learn reading comprehension communicatively. A student said,

I prefer to learn reading comprehension with TBL. I am interested in working with my classmates to complete tasks. I have many chances to confidently discuss with my classmates and share my ideas freely in task-based activities. So, not only my reading skill but also speaking and listening skills are improved. (S1 in the group with highest scores)

In addition, participants revealed that they developed their problem-solving skills while cooperating with each other to conduct reading tasks. They also showed that they felt less pressure in cooperative task-based reading activities thanks to support from her and their friends. They reported,

... I like to learn reading comprehension with TBL because I have more opportunities to work with my friends. I learn to cooperate with my friends and solve problems while doing tasks. My group has a

good group leader who is responsible for managing the time and writing down group members' opinions. Hence, my group often finishes tasks sooner and better than other groups. (S5 in the group with lowest scores)

... I found it interesting and comfortable to participate in task-based reading activities. While conducting tasks, I often receive more supports from the teachers and my friends. Although some tasks are really challenging for me, I keep trying to finish it with my group members because the teacher often go around and provide us with help and encouragement. Moreover, while participating in task-based activities, my friends often help me with many unknown words. (S4 in the group with average scores)

Participants also reported that through task-based reading activities, they could maintain good relationship with their classmates and had good chances to learn from each other. One stated,

... I have fun when learning reading comprehension with TBL. I get closed with my classmates when I work with them to conduct tasks. I can learn something such as new words and good ideas from them. (S2 in the group with highest scores)

However, two participants did not show his preference for TBL because of their learning style and habit. They also admitted that they had less motivation in conducting tasks because they lacked cooperative skills and language proficiency. She said,

TBL is unfamiliar to me. I often do not know what to do with tasks. Some tasks are difficult for me to conduct. Good students dominantly conduct tasks because they understand texts. I do not know what to do because I do not understand the text. Moreover, I do not like discussing because I am shy and I am not good at speaking. Usually, I have no good ideas to share. (S6 in the group with lowest scores)

Another participant showed that in Grammar-Translation reading comprehension could be facilitated because lists of vocabularies are provided by the teacher before the reading process. He reported, I prefer to learn reading comprehension with the traditional method. In the traditional method, the teacher provides me with lists of new words that help much for me in comprehending the text. I wish to be provided with vocabularies as many as possible to comprehend texts. (S3 in the group with average scores)

In response to effects of TBL on enhancing students' reading comprehension achievement, most of participants agreed that learning reading comprehension with TBL could improve their reading comprehension. They reported that through doing tasks they developed reading comprehension skills such as skimming for main ideas and scanning for specific information. They perceived,

... I think TBL is a good way to develop reading comprehension skills. In some tasks such as matching or listing, I learned to comprehend main ideas of the texts without translating word by word. I underline some key words in the texts. I think this is a good way to help me comprehend the texts and quickly accomplish the tasks. (S1)

... While doing some tasks, I just read appropriate information in the text rather than translate the whole text. I find out specific information through key words such as years or numbers. I find this skill

useful for my reading comprehension. (S2)

In contrast, one participant admitted that his reading comprehension is not improved as a result of his limited motivation and cooperation with his peers.

... I do not think my reading comprehension have been improved through task-based activities. Actually, I did not participate in activities because I did not like to discuss and I do not know what to do. I usually feel frustrated after activities. (S6)

Regarding students' difficulties in learning reading comprehension with TBL, four out of the six students pointed out that they are not supported time enough to accomplish tasks. In some tasks, they had to spend much time discussing and preparing vocabularies and grammar structures to report the task. They also did not have enough time for practicing exercises in language focus phrases.

... I find it difficult to finish tasks satisfactorily because I do not have enough time to prepare. (S3)

... I think language focus activities are useful to practice vocabulary and grammar. But these activities need more time. In a short time, it is really challenging. (S4)

Lacking cooperative learning skills is a problem reported by three out of the participants. They reported that some students do not know how to cooperate in groups and how to share group works. Some students did not pay positive attitude towards cooperative learning. They said

Some students are out of tasks. They do not contribute to accomplish tasks. Most of tasks are conducted by several students, not all. (S2)

Good students dominate talking. Most of tasks mainly were conducted by them. Some students keep silence or work individually. (S3)

Some students make noise when they have a chance to talk freely. This disturbs others students in the class and other classes. (S4)

In summary, the result from interviewing indicated that a majority of the participants showed their positive attitude towards learning reading comprehension with TBL. Most of them also believed that through task-based reading activities, they enhanced reading comprehension achievement. However, they admitted that when participating in the activities, they encountered difficulties such as time pressure and lack of cooperative learning skills.

4. Discussion

4.1 Effects of TBL on Motivating Students to Learn Reading Comprehension

The results from the questionnaires provided support for the confirmation that TBL had positive impact on enhancing students' motivation in learning reading comprehension. This result is in line with the findings of a large number of empirical studies concerning the value of TBL in motivating students to learn or acquire the language. For example, Lau (2009) observed that relevant tasks could arouse students' interest since they promoted a lively learning environment where students were offered opportunities for participating in cooperative activities and exerting their various abilities. Similarly, Ruso (2007) found out that TBL provided students with opportunities for the target language

receptivity in the language lessons, hence effectively motivated them to learn. In Asian EFL teaching contexts, Poorahmadi (2012) revealed that TBL could enhance EFL students' motivation in reading comprehension because it not only created a cooperative learning environment but also involved students in developing the language communicatively and cognitively.

In the current study, the most reasonable explanation for the increase of students' motivation was that TBL promoted active and cooperative language learning environment. In task-based activities, students were encouraged to accomplish tasks which appeared interesting and challenging enough to motivate them to take risk, make efforts and take more responsibility for their own learning. In addition, it was observed that students were more likely to engage in activities in which they had chances to share their ideas, knowledge, and feelings. Appropriate pair work and group work in reading task-based activities could satisfy students' needs in social interaction. In other words, cooperative works promoted through the activities might provide them with feelings of relatedness; hence motivated them to take part in the learning process. Ryan and Deci (2000) maintained that although proximal relational supports may not always be necessary for intrinsic motivation, a secure relational base are very likely to be important for the expression of intrinsic motivation to be in evidence.

In addition, students could intrinsically be motivated to take part in task-based activities because the activities might satisfy their psychological need (i.e., achieving a task outcome). Willis (1998) maintained that success and satisfaction were key factors in sustaining motivation. In fact, when students were given a chance to conduct a task, they might strive to accomplish it because they wished to be appreciated by the teacher and their classmates. Once the task was completed satisfactorily, students could build up self-confidence and a sense of competence, which were considered as essential factors for intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Furthermore, TBL appeared ideal to motivate students to learn because it promoted meaningful learning and authentic interactions. TBL was "a holistic approach where meaning is central and where opportunities for language use abound" (Stark, 2005, pp. 4-5). It was observed that students used the language for a variety of purposes (e.g., negotiating, sharing, making plans, presenting) while conducting tasks. They were encouraged to use the language to explore the tasks without being so obsessed with given language forms. They could use different structures, select vocabularies, and even employ learning and communication strategies to accomplish the tasks. Therefore, students were exposed to the language through both meaningful interaction and the tasks exploration. Skehan (1998) supported that meaningful and learner-centered learning was the most crucial characteristic of a pedagogical task. It played a significant role to encourage students' participation and creation; hence increased their motivation to learn.

4.2 Contributions of TBL and GMT to Students' Reading Comprehension

The results from students' reading comprehension in this study were consistent with those of the research conducted by Kolaei, Yarahmadi and Maghsoudi (2013). It was revealed that both TBL and GTM were beneficial in terms of improving students' reading comprehension. TBL could enhance

students' reading achievement by motivating students to participate more actively in cooperative learning activities and to devote more attention and interest to the leaning process. In addition, GMT instruction provided students with opportunities to deal with vocabularies and text translation, which could facilitate the reading comprehension process and therefore improve students reading comprehension.

In this research, it could be the case that the two methods had positive influences on enhancing students' reading comprehension achievement. The researcher found it necessary to shed light on reasons why the two kinds of reading instruction could result in improvement of participants' reading comprehension.

TBL has always aimed to promote an effective cooperative language learning environment where the language could be exposed meaningfully and naturally. In TBL, students were provided with a large number of opportunities for acquiring the language through conducting various tasks. It was observed that the tasks could arouse students' interest and motivated them to get more involvement in the reading comprehension process. At the early stage of reading lessons, task outcomes were established to build learning needs to be satisfied. To accomplish the tasks and achieve the outcomes, they made efforts to comprehend the text through using reading strategies (e.g., activating prior knowledge) or skills (e.g., skimming for main ideas, scanning for specific information). Consequently, the more students paid attention to the learning process, the better they performed the language and the more they obtained learning achievement. It was pointed out that learning motivation or involvement and positive attitudes could result in a better language performance and achievement (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). In this research, relevant tasks that promoted effective learning environment and that motivated students to learn were very likely to be determinant of participants' success in reading comprehension.

In addition to TBL, traditional instruction such as GMT could be effective in terms of improving students' reading comprehension achievement. It was pointed out that GMT had a facilitating function in the comprehension of foreign language. Hence, it could offer great help for EFL learners in the learning process and the language achievement (Mart, 2013). In this research, it could be the case that students received benefits from translating texts and memorizing a number of vocabularies. These activities allowed students to gain accuracy and clarity, which were considered as important contributions to better understanding of the foreign language (Duff, 1996). Translation could facilitate the foreign language reading comprehension. It was characterized as a useful device in the learning process of EFL/ESL students (Mart, 2013). In the research, the use of the method could solve participants' problems relating to lacking of vocabulary knowledge for reading comprehension. Participants reported that they could comprehend the text more easily and quickly if they were offered opportunities to deal with a number of unknown words in the text. In GMT, activities such as eliciting and memorizing vocabularies could enhance students' lexical competence, which might play a key role in enabling EFL students to improve reading comprehension. In summary, positive influences of the translation and vocabulary enriching might result in success of participants who was instructed with the

traditional method.

4.3 Participants' Attitude towards the Use of TBL

The results from the interviews demonstrated preference of a majority of participants to TBL, which consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted by researchers (e.g., Chooma, 2013; Keyvanfar & Modarresi, 2009). In those studies, researchers revealed that TBL was a preferable method because it could motivate students to actively participate in learning activities and contribute to improve their reading comprehension achievement. In the current research, it was noticed that task-based activities offered students senses of involvement and achievement in the cooperative and active learning environment where the language were exposed naturally and meaningfully. Cooperative activities in TBL encouraged students to make discussions and share ideas with each other. The activities offered them opportunities to learn the language meaningfully in a comfortable learning environment where there was encouragement rather than criticism. Additionally, through conducting various types of reading tasks (e.g., listing, matching, ordering and sorting), students could develop reading skills (e.g., skimming for main ideas, scanning for details). Participants also reported that learning the language through carrying out tasks provided them with good experiences of cooperative learning and problem solving. Hence, not only reading skills but also other skills such as problem solving skill, cooperative learning skill were improved through task-based reading instruction.

However, in a few cases, participants preferred learning reading comprehension with traditional method to TBL because of reasons relating to learning style and language proficiency. It was addressed that students who were familiar to oriented-dependent learning, not surprisingly, often felt a sense of discomfort being put into an environment with higher expectations of independent learning (Hu, 2005). It was noticed that some participants were unfamiliar with conducting tasks that required more interaction and independence. They were not ready to make changes in learning style and habit. In addition, the low language proficiency of students was a barrier to the implementation of communicative approaches (Li, 1998). It could be the case that some students insufficiently possessed language knowledge and skills for comprehending the texts. Hence, they found it difficult to conduct the tasks. Furthermore, they valued the role of the traditional method in facilitating their reading comprehension. They agreed that translating sentences and memorizing vocabularies could benefit them with comprehending easily, quickly and clearly the texts.

Regarding challenges students encountered, most of participants agreed that time pressure and lack of cooperative learning could hinder them from developing their reading comprehension with TBL. In fact, some types of tasks such as opinion-gap or creating took much time for discussion and report. Time allowance of a forty-five reading lesson was insufficient to maximize effectiveness of task based activities. Additionally, Kagan (2009) proposed that the learning process could go smoothly if students obtained essential cooperative learning skills. In the research, several students found it difficult and confusing to participate in task-based activities because they might lack necessary skills for pair or group works.

5. Conclusion

TBL showed to be a fruitful and innovative method in terms of motivating EFL students to learn reading comprehension. Though task-based activities, a comfortable, independent, and cooperative learning environment could be created and students' reading comprehension could be achieved. In addition to TBL, GMT was potentially beneficial in terms of enhancing students' reading comprehension because of its facilitating role in foreign language learning, especially in foreign language reading comprehension.

6. Implications

Some significant implications might be drawn for teaching and learning reading comprehension at high schools in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. TBL which promoted meaningful, active and cooperative language learning could be an innovative alternative to teaching reading comprehension for EFL students in the context. Reading tasks should be appropriately designed to motivate students to take part in the reading comprehension process. For instance, with some texts in chronological order teachers should design types of ordering and sorting tasks to arouse students' curiosity and interest. Additionally, students should be exposed to the language through the meaningfully interactive learning process. Through the process, students could gain not only academic achievement but also interpersonal skills, which have increasingly become target requirements in a number of educational settings. For example, cooperative reading tasks (e.g., putting events in a chronological order, playing role as tourist guides to introduce a historic place) aimed to foster students' skills such as negotiation skill, communication skill and decision-making skill. Hence, in addition to improving academic skills and knowledge, students were offered a number of chances to develop essential interpersonal skills fostered through meaningful interaction and cooperation.

In respect of the role of GMT in facilitating reading comprehension in foreign language, teachers should appropriately take advantages of translation as a useful strategy rather than completely exclude it from implementing the alternative method. Moreover, because some students lacked vocabulary knowledge and cooperative learning skills, teachers should offer them chances to deal with vocabularies and train them some essential cooperative learning skills (e.g., negotiation skill, turn-taking skill). For example, students should be encouraged to use polite phrases such as "you are right, but I think", "I believe", "how about you?" "What do you think?" to take or offer turns and to avoid negative arguments in group/pair works. Importantly, it should be accepted that any approach or method is not perfect. It has both good points and drawbacks. It alone does not solve all problems as well as meet all the requirements (Izadpanah, 2010). Accordingly, teachers should adapt TBL as flexibly as possible while taking consideration on aspects such as learners' language proficiency, local value, time limitation and individual characteristics, which may have great influences on the method implementation.

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