

Research Article

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## Enhancing Reading Comprehension through Critical Dialogs as Pre-task: The Case of the Students of Psychology and Accounting

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### Abstract

The effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on reading comprehension of EAP students has not received due attention in the literature. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examines whether TBLT improves reading comprehension more effectively compared to traditional English for academic purposes methodologies. In this study, a sample of 100 intermediate-level Iranian university students was selected through convenience sampling and randomly divided into four groups of 25 participants each (comprising two control groups and two experimental groups). The experimental groups, one in psychology and one in accounting, were instructed using TBLT, while the control groups, also in psychology and accounting, followed traditional EAP instruction as dictated by the curriculum and course instructor. Initially, all groups completed a piloted, researcher-developed reading comprehension pretest. In the experimental groups, the syllabus was co-constructed through negotiation, reflecting the students' needs and rights. In contrast, the control groups were taught using textbooks predetermined by the curriculum. Upon the completion of the treatment sessions, all participants took a posttest. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that TBLT significantly enhanced the reading comprehension skills of Iranian university students compared to traditional EAP methods. Additionally, the study found that the field of study did not influence the effectiveness of the instructional method (TBLT or EAP). These findings provide valuable insights for English for specific purposes (ESP) teachers and material developers, emphasizing the potential benefits of incorporating TBLT into EAP instruction.

**Keywords:** English for academic purposes, reading comprehension, sequential mixed-methods study, task-based language teaching

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## 1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, English proficiency has become a crucial factor for academic success, particularly in higher education institutions where English serves as the primary medium of instruction (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020). This is especially significant in non-native English-speaking countries, where students must attain a high level of English proficiency to excel in their academic pursuits (Hyland, 2006). English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been the cornerstone of language education in such contexts, focusing on equipping students with the necessary academic skills to understand and produce academic texts (Anthony, 2018; MacDonald, 2016).

However, despite its widespread adoption, traditional EAP approaches often emphasize rote learning and decontextualized language practice, which may not adequately prepare students for real-world language use (Li, 2020). This gap in effective language instruction necessitates exploring innovative teaching methodologies that foster meaningful and practical language learning experiences. One such promising approach is TBLT, which emphasizes the use of language as a tool for achieving specific tasks, thereby making the learning process more engaging and relevant to students' academic and professional needs (Van den Branden, 2016).

TBLT is a communicative approach that has gained considerable attention in the field of language education (Littlewood, 2014). Unlike traditional EAP, which relies on a pre-determined syllabus and often involves passive learning (Benesch, 2013), TBLT uses tasks as the central unit of planning and instruction (Sholeh et al., 2020). Tasks are defined as activities in which the target language is used by learners for a communicative purpose to achieve an outcome (Kafipour et al., 2018).

TBLT promotes active learning by engaging students in tasks that mirror real-life situations, thus encouraging the use of language in a meaningful and authentic context (Subrahmanyam Vellanki & Bandu, 2021). This approach not only enhances students' linguistic abilities but also develops their problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Chen & Wang, 2019). By focusing on task completion, TBLT helps students integrate language skills in a practical manner, which can lead to improved language proficiency and greater motivation (Córdoba Zúñiga, 2016).

In the context of Iranian higher education, where students often face challenges in acquiring academic English proficiency, TBLT offers a promising alternative to traditional EAP methods (Alhadih, 2021; Sholeh et al., 2020). By aligning language learning with students' academic and

professional goals, TBLT can better prepare them for the demands of their respective fields (Guardado & Light, 2020; Sholeh et al., 2020).

Given the empirical gap, this study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of TBLT in improving reading comprehension among Iranian university students majoring in psychology and accounting. The findings of this study would contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the use of TBLT in higher education and offer practical implications for language educators seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching practices. To achieve this objective, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative assessments of reading comprehension with qualitative insights from student interviews. Specifically, the research sought to address the following questions:

**RQ1.** Does TBLT improve reading comprehension more effectively than traditional EAP methodologies among Iranian university students?

**RQ2.** How do students' perceptions of TBLT compare to their experiences with traditional EAP methods?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Overview of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

TBLT is an instructional approach that has been widely recognized for its effectiveness in language education (Van den Branden, 2016). Rooted in the principles of communicative language teaching, TBLT centres on the use of tasks as the primary unit of planning and instruction (Jackson, 2022; Kafipour et al., 2018). Tasks in TBLT are defined as activities that require learners to use the target language to achieve a specific outcome, often reflecting real-life scenarios. This approach encourages active engagement and meaningful language use, as learners focus on completing tasks that simulate real-world language demands (Subrahmanyam Vellanki & Bandu, 2021).

One of the key features of TBLT is its emphasis on learner-centered instruction. By involving students in communicative tasks, TBLT promotes interaction, collaboration, and negotiation of meaning, which are essential components of language acquisition (Jackson, 2022). Additionally, TBLT provides a context for integrating various language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, in a cohesive and practical manner (González-Lloret, 2015). TBLT shifts the focus from form-focused instruction to meaning-focused activities. Where traditional EAP may involve repetitive drills and isolated grammar exercises, TBLT engages students in authentic tasks that require the use of language in context (Jackson, 2022). This approach not only enhances linguistic competence but also fosters critical thinking and

problem-solving skills (Chen & Wang, 2019). Furthermore, TBLT's interactive nature promotes student motivation and engagement, which are crucial for effective language learning.

This holistic approach contrasts sharply with traditional methods that often isolate language skills and focus heavily on form rather than function (Jackson, 2022). Traditional EAP methodologies have long been employed to prepare students for the linguistic demands of higher education (see Li, 2020). These methods typically involve a pre-determined syllabus that focuses on teaching academic vocabulary, grammar, and writing conventions through structured exercises and decontextualized language practice (Hyland, 2012). While traditional EAP courses aim to develop students' academic literacy, they often emphasize rote learning and passive knowledge absorption (Li, 2020).

Research has shown that traditional EAP methodologies, while effective in imparting academic skills, may not fully prepare students for the dynamic and interactive nature of real-world communication (Tavakoli & Tavakol, 2018). In contrast, TBLT addresses this gap by providing opportunities for learners to practice and apply language skills in a meaningful way, thereby better preparing them for academic and professional contexts (Chen & Wang, 2019).

## **2.2. Previous Studies on TBLT and Reading Comprehension**

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of TBLT on various aspects of language learning, including reading comprehension. For instance, Ellis et al., (2020) demonstrated that TBLT can significantly improve learners' reading comprehension skills by engaging them in tasks that require critical thinking and inferencing. Similarly, Robinson (2011) found that TBLT tasks designed to reflect academic reading demands led to greater improvements in reading comprehension compared to traditional EAP methods. A study by Carless (2015) explored the effects of TBLT on secondary school students' reading skills and found that students who were taught using TBLT showed significant gains in their ability to understand and analyse texts. The study highlighted the effectiveness of TBLT in promoting deeper engagement with reading materials and enhancing comprehension skills.

In the context of higher education, a study by Skehan (2014) revealed that university students who participated in TBLT-based reading tasks outperformed their peers in traditional EAP courses on measures of reading comprehension and retention. The researchers attributed these gains to the interactive and task-oriented nature of TBLT, which encourages active processing and application of reading strategies. Additionally, Kafipour et al. (2018) explored how task-based writing instruction impacted the writing proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Their findings revealed that the learners

who engaged in writing activities through task-based language teaching methods experienced significant enhancements in their writing skills.

Moreover, Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) conducted a study with Iranian EAP students and found that those who were exposed to TBLT activities demonstrated significant improvements in their reading comprehension compared to those who received traditional EAP instruction. The study emphasized the role of task complexity and authenticity in enhancing learners' engagement and comprehension.

In a separate study, Khany and Tarlani-Aliabadi (2016) investigated the influence of feedback from EAP students and teachers on the development of the EAP curriculum. The study found minimal collaboration among students, educators, and academic departments during the curriculum development process. Furthermore, Sharndama et al. (2014) examined the impact of an EAP course on learners' proficiency in English language skills. Their study indicated that the EAP course primarily influenced students' success in their specific academic disciplines rather than in general English.

Furthermore, the research highlighted that the EAP course was not designed with sufficient consideration of students' specific language needs for learning English. In a related study, Karimi and Dastgoshadeh (2018) investigated the impact of strategy-based instruction on the reading ability and autonomy of Iranian EAP students. The findings revealed positive effects on comprehension, although autonomy did not show significant improvement. Notably, the treatment influenced the relationship between reading ability and autonomy.

Furthermore, Zohoorian and Pandian (2014) evaluated the authenticity of EAP textbooks in Iran using a checklist, gathering qualitative and quantitative data through interviews with lecturers. The findings indicate that, although teachers prioritize authenticity in context, teacher, student, and text, the current EAP textbooks are considered to have limited authenticity. This observation underscores the necessity for significant revisions, a recommendation expressed by the majority of EAP teachers during interviews.

Overall, the body of research on TBLT and reading comprehension suggests that TBLT offers a more effective and engaging alternative to traditional EAP methodologies. By focusing on meaningful tasks that integrate language skills and promote active learning, TBLT has the potential to significantly enhance students' reading comprehension and overall language proficiency.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effects of TBLT on reading comprehension among Iranian university students. The sequential exploratory design (QUAN → QUAL) was chosen to first gather quantitative data on the effectiveness of TBLT using a quasi-experimental research design, and then supplement these findings with qualitative insights to explore students' experiences and perceptions using semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' views on the instructional methods used.

#### 3.2. Participants

A sample of 100 out of 125 students, selected through convenience sampling technique from private universities in a city in central Iran, took part in this research. These fields were chosen to ensure a broader spectrum of academic disciplines, ensuring the generalizability of the findings. The participants were all at an intermediate level of English proficiency, as determined by the Quick Oxford Placement Test. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 32 years, with a mean age of 21.3 years. Both male and female students were included in the study to capture a diverse sample.

Additionally, the qualitative phase involved 10 ESP students, specifically from the control groups, with 5 students from psychology and 5 from accounting. These students were chosen according to a predetermined criterion: they had successfully completed the ESP courses for computer science and architecture students. This selection process was conducted prior to sampling, as recommended by Dörnyei (2007). All participants were Iranian and native speakers of Persian.

#### 3.3. Materials and Instruments

##### 3.3.1. Materials

Based on the purpose of this study, a textbook, titled English in psychology (Leal, 2023) was used for selecting 10 topics on psychology. Moreover, 10 topics were chosen from another textbook special English for the students of accounting (Moghadam, 2005). The procedures of how these topics were selected are elaborated in the procedure.

The selected topics for the computer group were as follows: cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), developmental stages in childhood, the impact of

trauma on mental health, neuroplasticity and brain development, social psychology and group dynamics, the psychology of motivation and emotion, theories of personality, mental health disorders and treatments, the role of genetics in behavior, psychological effects of social media, cognitive biases and decision making, stress and coping mechanisms. Moreover, the following are the topics for the accounting group: financial statement analysis, accounting principles and standards, cost accounting and budgeting, auditing practices and procedures, taxation and tax planning, forensic accounting and fraud examination, management accounting and performance evaluation, international financial reporting standards (IFRS), accounting information systems, corporate governance and ethics in accounting, financial modelling and forecasting, accounting for mergers and acquisitions.

### ***3.3.2. Quick Oxford Placement Test***

The Quick Oxford Placement Test was administered to all participants to determine their level of English proficiency and ensure homogeneity across the experimental and control groups. This standardized test comprises multiple-choice questions that assess various aspects of language proficiency, including grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The results of the QOPT were used to confirm that all participants were at an intermediate level of English proficiency.

### ***3.3.3. Reading Comprehension Pretests and Posttests***

Two researcher-made reading comprehension tests were developed to measure the participants' reading comprehension skills before and after the intervention. Each test consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions designed to assess the ability to understand and analyse academic texts. The pre-tests were administered prior to the instructional period to establish a baseline for each group. After seven weeks of instruction, the post-tests were administered to measure any changes in reading comprehension. The tests were piloted with a similar group of students to ensure their reliability and validity, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 indicating high internal consistency.

### ***3.3.4. Interview Protocol***

Following the quantitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants from each group to gain qualitative insights into their experiences with TBLT and traditional EAP methods. The interview protocol was designed to elicit detailed responses about the students' perceptions of the instructional methods, their engagement with the tasks, and any challenges they faced. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for

thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of common themes and patterns in the data.

### **3.4. Procedure**

Initially, a sample of four ESP classes, comprised of 125 students, was selected from private universities through the convenience sampling technique. The decision as to which groups received the treatments was made randomly. Then, to homogenize the sample in terms of English proficiency, the Quick Oxford Placement Test was administered to all participants. Afterward, 100 students, identified as intermediates in the matter of English proficiency, were selected. Then, each of the two researcher-made reading pretests were administered to the related groups before the treatment sessions.

Subsequently, in the experimental groups (i.e., TBLT classrooms), the syllabus was neither predetermined nor imposed by the teacher or institution. By the same token, the syllabus was constructed dialogically, providing a chance for the class members to engage in a group dialog (Ellis et al., 2020). To that end, the teacher chose 25 topics from the ESP coursebooks of each discipline and presented them to the participants so that they might negotiate and select the topics based on their interest. Accordingly, they studied and interrogated their linguistic and cognitive challenges with those topics in their courses, rather than unconditionally accepting them. The main task in the TBLT classrooms involved the negotiation of topics from the presented list. Dialog was used as a pre-task, enabling students to discuss their preferences and interests regarding the topics before engaging in the primary learning activities (Chen & Wang, 2019). This dialogic interaction served as a pre-task option that prepared students for subsequent reading and other related tasks (Kamalian et al., 2013). From a TBLT perspective, the procedure involved using the dialog to facilitate engagement and ensure that the topics chosen were relevant and motivating for the students.

For that purpose, the teacher instructed the whole group to rely on their experiences and interests for topic choice because a crucial aspect of community development in a critical classroom is democratic decision-making, which is necessary when choosing a common topic for the entire class. For the same reason, the teacher encouraged the participation of all students and welcomed all participants' remarks. Moreover, the participants' role was to share their topic choices with the other class members and explain the choices upon the request of others, which led to the discussions of unmapped issues and ideas. As a result, it involved students in developing the EAP curriculum as they learned about the demands (Jackson, 2022). Then,



the participants selected the topics they needed most and were asked to gather relevant information on them from different sources. Finally, the participants presented one topic clearly in every session and explained the terms and concepts, and engaged in challenging and critical dialogues over the presented topic (Ellis et al., 2020).

In the control groups, the traditional method of EAP teaching was used. In keeping with Benesch (2001), the traditional EAP syllabus adhered to the curricular requirements, and the participants were not involved in syllabus design. For the same reason, the topics from the content course were assigned by the teacher, excluding students' contribution to the syllabus and curricular decision-making (Benesch, 2001). In the same vein, the participants were required to study the textbook chosen by the language teacher as the syllabus was predetermined by the curriculum and was imposed by the teacher, and the curricular goals just focused on content course goals (Benesch, 2009). The prepared students for the demands, their academic programs would place on them and pursue the objectives of the course such as the micro-skills of reading (Benesch, 2009).

Accordingly, the teacher translated the reading passages and defined new words, and students noted down the translations, sometimes definitions in English, and equivalents in their first language (i.e., Persian). Hence, most of the class time was devoted to comprehending the reading passages (Benesch, 2001). As a consequence, there was little collaboration between the teacher and students in the control groups, and the teacher did not allow the participants to choose any topics to meet the expectations of the target contexts (Benesch, 2001). Afterward, the students did the relevant exercises in the imposed textbooks. Finally, the teacher checked their responses. After five weeks of treatment, the RC posttests were administered to all participants, and the collected quantitative data were analyzed.

In the second phase of the study, the face-to-face semi-structured interviews were run with 10 participants of the quantitative phase (i.e., 10 ESP students). Before running an interview, each interviewee was briefed on these concepts for five minutes at the beginning of each interview to ensure that no misunderstanding occurred during data collection. To anonymize the interviewees' identities, care was taken not to reveal their details. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Methodological rigor was met through validation of data analysis and coding, which were replicated by a senior researcher, who had a PhD in applied linguistics (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, to achieve research validity, verification was fulfilled through

literature analyses, using an adequate sample, and interviewing until data saturation (Meadows & Morse, 2001).

### 3.5. Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0 was utilized. Initially, the reliability of the researcher-developed reading comprehension (RC) tests was assessed using Cronbach's alpha method following a pilot study. Furthermore, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to address the research question. In the second phase of the study, a phenomenological analysis was performed to interpret participants' experiences with the phenomenon under investigation, specifically EAP pedagogy. The interview data were transcribed, organized, and subsequently analyzed within the discussion section.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Results for the First Research Question

To evaluate the impact of TBLT with that of traditional EAP pedagogy on the Iranian ESP students' reading comprehension, a two-way ANOVA was conducted. This statistical method was used to analyse the pre-test and post-test scores of the participants from both experimental (TBLT) and control (traditional EAP) groups across two disciplines: psychology and accounting.

Before the intervention, the pre-test scores were analysed to ensure the homogeneity of the groups. The two-way ANOVA results indicated no significant differences between the groups' pre-test scores, suggesting that all groups had comparable reading comprehension levels at the start of the study.

**Table 1**  
*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Pretest*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial $\eta^2$
Group	.36	1	.36	.040	.84	.001
Fields	.16	1	.16	.018	.89	.001
group * Fields	.04	1	.04	.004	.94	.001
Error	855.68	96	8.91			
Total	24082.00	100				

The lack of significant differences in pre-test scores ( $p > 0.05$ ) confirmed that the groups were homogenous in terms of their initial reading comprehension abilities. After the seven-week instructional period, post-test scores were analyzed.

The two-way ANOVA results showed significant differences between the experimental and control groups, indicating that the TBLT method had a substantial impact on reading comprehension.

**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics for the Posttest; Group v. Fields of Study*

Group	Fields of Study	M	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Experimental	Psychology	22.56	.58	21.41	23.71
	Accounting	21.52	.58	20.37	22.67
Control	Psychology	18.32	.58	17.17	19.47
	Accounting	18.52	.58	17.37	19.67

As shown in Table 2, the experimental psychology ( $M= 22.56$ ,  $SE = .58$ ), and accounting ( $M = 21.52$ ,  $SE = .58$ ) had larger means on the posttest than the control psychology ( $M= 18.32$ ,  $SE = .58$ ), and accounting ( $M = 18.52$ ,  $SE = .58$ ). The post-test mean scores of the students in the experimental groups (both psychology and accounting) were higher compared to those in the control groups. Table 3 shows the results of the two-way ANOVA for the posttest.

**Table 3***Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Posttest of RC*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared
Group	327.61	1	327.61	39.01	.000	.28
Fields	4.41	1	4.41	.52	.47	.00
group * Fields	9.61	1	9.61	1.15	.28	.01
Error	806.08	96	8.39			
Total	42073.00	100				

As Table 3 displays, the significant F-value for the group variable indicated that the experimental groups (TBLT) significantly outperformed the control groups (traditional EAP) on the post-test,  $F = 39.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

#### 4.2. Results for the Second Research Question

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants from each group to gain insights into their experiences with TBLT and traditional EAP methods. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes and patterns in the interview data.

### ***Theme 1: Engagement and Motivation***

Participants in the TBLT groups reported higher levels of engagement and motivation, attributing this to the relevance and interest of the tasks. The interactive and communicative nature of TBLT provided students with a sense of purpose, as the tasks were often aligned with real-life scenarios that required practical language use. This approach contrasts with traditional EAP methods, which often focus on rote memorization and isolated language exercises that can feel disconnected from students' academic and personal lives. According to Carless (2015), the authenticity of tasks in TBLT plays a crucial role in making learning more meaningful, which in turn enhances students' intrinsic motivation. When students perceive tasks as relevant and applicable to their future academic or professional contexts, they are more likely to invest effort and show sustained interest in their learning activities. The increased engagement observed among TBLT participants is supported by the findings of Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018), who noted that task-based approaches naturally foster a more interactive and dynamic classroom environment. This environment not only encourages students to participate more actively but also promotes collaboration and communication among peers, which further enhances their learning experience. By engaging in tasks that mimic real-world challenges, students can better see the value of what they are learning, leading to deeper cognitive processing and improved retention of information (Pintrich & Schragben, 2012). This is supported by Dörnyei (2001), who argues that task-based activities can effectively boost learners' motivation by providing immediate, tangible goals that are directly relevant to their needs. Example excerpts are as follows:

- "The tasks were very engaging and related to real-life scenarios, which made learning enjoyable."
- "I felt more motivated to participate in class because the activities were interesting and interactive."

### ***Theme 2: Practical Application of Skills***

Students in the TBLT groups appreciated the practical application of language skills. They felt that TBLT helped them better understand and retain the material by engaging them in meaningful tasks that closely resembled real-life situations. This practical approach aligns with findings by Ellis et al., (2020) , who noted that TBLT fosters deeper cognitive processing and encourages learners to use language purposefully, enhancing their comprehension and retention of information. Moreover, Bygate (2016) emphasized that the task-based approach allows students to practice language

in context, which improves their ability to recall and apply language skills in both academic and real-world settings. The authenticity of tasks used in TBLT, such as problem-solving and discussions on real-world topics, allows students to see the relevance of what they are learning, thereby increasing their motivation and engagement. According to Pintrich and Schragben (2012), when students perceive tasks as relevant and related to their personal or future professional lives, they are more likely to invest effort in understanding and mastering the material. This relevance helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, leading to improved retention and understanding. The following are two excerpts:

- "TBLT allowed me to apply what I learned in a practical way, which helped me remember the concepts better."
- "The tasks required us to use language in real situations, which was very helpful."

### ***Theme 3: Challenges with Traditional EAP***

Participants in the traditional EAP groups expressed frustration with the rigid and less interactive approach. They felt that the traditional methods were monotonous and less effective in improving their reading comprehension. Participants in the traditional EAP groups expressed frustration with the rigid and less interactive approach. They felt that the traditional methods were monotonous and less effective in improving their reading comprehension. This dissatisfaction is consistent with previous research indicating that conventional EAP approaches often rely heavily on teacher-centered instruction, textbook exercises, and rote memorization, which can lead to a lack of engagement and motivation among students (Jordan, 2002). According to Benesch (2001), traditional EAP methods typically emphasize linguistic accuracy and the passive acquisition of language skills rather than fostering interactive and meaningful communication. This approach can create a classroom environment that feels disconnected from real-world language use, leaving students feeling unprepared for authentic academic and professional communication tasks. Two excerpts are the following:

- "The traditional EAP classes were boring and repetitive. It was hard to stay focused."
- "I didn't find the traditional methods very useful. The tasks were not related to real-life situations."

## 5. Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative analyses both indicated that TBLT significantly improved reading comprehension among Iranian university students compared to traditional EAP methodologies. The results of this study showed that TBLT was more effective than traditional EAP in improving reading comprehension among Iranian university students. The quantitative analysis, which involved pre-tests and post-tests, demonstrated that students in the TBLT groups achieved higher scores on the post-tests than those in the traditional EAP groups. This suggests that the interactive, task-oriented nature of TBLT effectively enhances students' reading comprehension skills.

One critical component contributing to the success of TBLT in this study was the pre-task phase, which prepared students for the main reading tasks by activating relevant background knowledge and introducing key vocabulary and concepts (Chen & Wang, 2019). This phase helped students understand the context and purpose of the tasks, leading to better comprehension and performance (Kamalian et al., 2013). By focusing on pre-task activities, TBLT ensures that students are adequately prepared, which is crucial for engaging with and successfully completing complex reading tasks (Chen & Wang, 2019). The effectiveness of the pre-task phase in this study aligns with Ellis's (2013) findings, which emphasized the importance of task preparation in promoting meaningful language use and improving reading comprehension.

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on the benefits of TBLT. Previous research has shown that TBLT promotes active learning, improves language proficiency, and enhances student motivation and engagement (Ellis et al., 2020; Robinson, 2011; Subrahmanyam Vellanki & Bandu, 2021). The present study corroborates these findings, demonstrating that TBLT is particularly effective in improving reading comprehension among university students. For instance, Ellis (2013) highlighted the effectiveness of TBLT in engaging learners and promoting meaningful language use. Similarly, Robinson (2011) found that TBLT tasks designed to reflect academic reading demands led to greater improvements in reading comprehension compared to traditional EAP methods. The current study extends these findings by providing empirical evidence from a non-native English-speaking context, further validating the efficacy of TBLT.

Additionally, Carless (2015) and Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) emphasized the role of task complexity and authenticity in enhancing learners' engagement and comprehension. The qualitative findings of the present study align with these insights, showing that students in the TBLT groups were more

engaged and found the tasks more relevant and practical than those in traditional EAP groups.

The dissatisfaction expressed by students in the traditional EAP groups also echoes the concerns raised by Jordan (2002) and others regarding the limitations of traditional EAP methods. These studies have pointed out that traditional approaches often fail to adequately prepare students for real-world communication, leading to lower levels of student motivation and engagement. The present study supports these critiques, demonstrating the need for a shift towards more dynamic and interactive teaching methodologies like TBLT (Sholeh et al., 2020; Subrahmanyam Vellanki & Bandu, 2021).

Additionally, the secondary outcome of the quantitative phase revealed that the participants' field of study did not influence the effectiveness of the treatment. Consequently, students in both experimental groups, regardless of their academic discipline, experienced similar benefits from the CEAP pedagogy. This indicates that the approach was equally effective across different discipline-specific contexts, thereby negating the need for tailoring the methodology of ESP courses to specific fields of study. This finding aligns with Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) definition of ESP, which emphasizes that methodological and material choices should be driven by the learners' motivations for learning. It also echoes Clapham's (2001) recommendation for student-provided materials, regardless of the specificity of their ESP courses.

The qualitative findings further supported the effectiveness of TBLT. Students in the TBLT groups reported higher levels of engagement and motivation (Ellis et al., 2020; Robinson, 2011). These findings suggest that TBLT not only enhances reading comprehension but also promotes a more positive and effective learning experience. The integration of meaningful tasks that reflect real-life scenarios appears to be a key factor in the success of TBLT, making it a valuable approach for language educators seeking to improve their teaching methods and student outcomes (Subrahmanyam Vellanki & Bandu, 2021). They found the tasks relevant and enjoyable, which contributed to a more positive learning experience. These students also noted that TBLT helped them apply language skills in practical contexts, leading to better retention and understanding of the material (González-Lloret, 2015). Jackson (2022) supports this observation by highlighting TBLT's focus on learner-centered instruction, which fosters interaction, collaboration, and negotiation of meaning—key elements in effective language acquisition.

## **6. Conclusions and Implications**

This study demonstrated that TBLT significantly enhances reading comprehension among Iranian university students majoring in psychology and

accounting compared to traditional EAP methods. Key findings include higher post-test scores and increased student engagement and motivation in the TBLT groups. Despite these positive results, the study had limitations, such as the use of convenience sampling and a relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and explore the long-term effects of TBLT on various language skills. Additionally, educators are encouraged to integrate TBLT into their curricula to foster practical language use and improve student learning outcomes in higher education.

The findings of this study have several important implications for the implementation of TBLT in higher education. The significant improvement in reading comprehension scores among students taught using TBLT suggests that this method can effectively enhance learning outcomes in higher education. Educators should consider incorporating TBLT into their language teaching practices to foster better comprehension and retention of material. The qualitative data indicate that TBLT increases student engagement and motivation. By making learning tasks relevant and enjoyable, TBLT can create a more stimulating and effective learning environment. This increased engagement can lead to higher levels of participation and effort from students, further enhancing their learning experience.

TBLT's focus on real-life tasks allows students to apply their language skills in practical contexts. This not only improves their academic performance but also prepares them for real-world communication. Higher education institutions should integrate TBLT into their curricula to ensure that students develop practical and transferable language skills. The success of TBLT highlights the need for curriculum designers to move away from rigid, traditional EAP syllabi and towards more flexible, task-oriented approaches. By aligning the curriculum with the principles of TBLT, educators can better meet the needs of their students and enhance the overall effectiveness of language instruction.

Despite these results, the study had limitations, such as the use of convenience sampling and a relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and explore the long-term effects of TBLT on various language skills. Additionally, limitations such as the lack of control over extraneous variables and the short duration of the intervention may impact the validity of the results. To address these limitations, future studies could employ randomized controlled trials and extended intervention periods to better assess the impact of TBLT.



The findings of this study have several important implications for the implementation of TBLT in higher education. The significant improvement in reading comprehension scores among students taught using TBLT suggests that this method can effectively enhance learning outcomes in higher education. Educators should consider incorporating TBLT into their language teaching practices to foster better comprehension and retention of material. The qualitative data indicate that TBLT increases student engagement and motivation. By making learning tasks relevant and enjoyable, TBLT can create a more stimulating and effective learning environment. This increased engagement can lead to higher levels of participation and effort from students, further enhancing their learning experience.



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