

# Using Task-Based Learning to Enhance the English Reading Comprehension ability of Matthayomsuksa 4 Students

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## Abstract

The purposes of this research were as follows: 1) To study and compare students' English reading comprehension ability before and after studying English reading comprehension using task-based learning among Matthayomsuksa 4 students, and 2) To investigate student's attitude towards teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning among Matthayomsuksa 4 students. The sample consisted of 40 Matthayomsuksa 4 students from Bungkan School, Bungkan Province, under the Bungkan Secondary Educational Service Area Office, during the first semester of the academic year 2024. The participants were selected through cluster random sampling. This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest research design. The research instruments included 12 lesson plans, an English Reading Comprehension Ability Test, and an attitude questionnaire. The experiment lasted 12 weeks, with two hours of instruction per week, totaling 24 hours. Statistics used in the study were mean, percentage, standard deviation, one-sample t-test, and t-test for Dependent samples. The findings of the research were as follows: 1) The students' pretest mean score on the English Reading Comprehension Ability Test was 15.58 (38.94%), while their posttest mean score was 30.95 (77.38%). The posttest mean score exceeded the set criterion of 70% and was significantly higher than the pretest mean score. 2) The students' attitudes toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning were rated at a very good level.

**Keywords:** Reading Comprehension; Task-based learning; Matthayomsuksa

## Introduction

English is a worldwide language franca, crucial for cross-cultural communication as well as academic and professional achievement (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). The importance of English extends to online information retrieval, where it is indispensable in today's digital era. Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum requires teaching English from elementary to secondary school, with a focus on developing comprehensive

language skills, particularly reading, which is critical for understanding diverse texts and improving overall academic performance (Carrell, 1989; Anderson, 1999). Reading demands complex cognitive processes and is necessary for daily tasks such as interpreting newspapers and medication labels (Grabe, 2009). As English-language media become more ubiquitous, reading skills become vital for Thai students, equipping them to navigate a rapidly changing, technologically driven world while fostering cultural understanding and cooperation (Eskey, 2005). Thus, having outstanding English reading comprehension skills is crucial for pupils to effectively connect with worldwide information and opportunities.

Furthermore, reading comprehension is one of the difficult skills for many Thai language learners, consequence of a lack, lack of motivation and passive learning contexts (Ruso, 1999). As a result, low English subject scores in national assessments like O-NET demonstrate that Thai students struggle with reading throughout academic levels (NIETS, 2020). In the context of learning English as a foreign language, the situation in Bungkan School, according to the learning achievement report of Matthayomsuksa 4 students Bungkan School (2021) the English language proficiency of students in the school is significantly low. In the 2024 academic year, the English reading achievement was recorded at 40.30 percent, which fell below the school's target of 70 percent. It demonstrates that the learners have problems in reading English. Moreover, one of the main factors contributing to this low achievement is the students' lack of reading comprehension abilities. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on developing and improving their reading comprehension skills. Task Based Learning (TBL) involves using tasks as the central focus within a supportive methodological framework. Tasks are essentially activities where learners engage in communication using the target language to achieve specific goals. The main aim of these tasks is to provide a genuine purpose for using language and to create a natural context for language learning. Students prepare for the task, share their experiences afterward and then focus on studying the language that naturally arises from the task cycle and its related materials. Additionally, Willis (1996; 137) emphasizes the benefits of task base learning in enabling students to use language relevant to real life situations, practice natural language usage, improve problem solving skills, increase engagement in tasks and build confidence in reading. This approach also nurtures strong relationships between teachers and students as well as peer interactions among students. In contrast, traditional teaching methods often stress direct instruction through lectures or demonstrations with the explicit aim of teaching specific skills to students who usually learn through listening and observation. Therefore, for this study, the researcher selected three types of tasks as outlined by Richards (2013); Jigsaw tasks, Problem solving tasks and Decision making tasks. These tasks were selected because they match the secondary

students age and proficiency level. To help students actively in the reading process, which could help them better grasp and interpret the material they read.

In conclusion, based on the information provided, the researcher has chosen to implement task-based learning to support students at Bungkan School who struggle with reading and exhibit low reading abilities. Task-based learning has the potential to enhance students' reading comprehension skills by providing engaging and interactive strategies. Previous theoretical frameworks and empirical studies have highlighted task-based learning as an effective approach for improving reading comprehension.

This study aims to explore the attitudes of Matthayomsuksa 4 students at Bungkan School toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning and to determine whether this approach can help improve their reading comprehension skills. Additionally, the findings of this study may provide valuable insights into strategies for enhancing reading comprehension abilities and offer practical recommendations for addressing similar challenges in other educational contexts.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine and compare the English reading comprehension ability of Matthayomsuksa 4 students before and after receiving instruction through task-based learning.
2. To investigate Matthayomsuksa 4 students' attitudes toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning.

### **Literature Review**

The following provides an overview of key concepts and theories related to reading comprehension and language learning, the use of task-based learning to engage students, and the role of positive attitudes in improving learning outcomes. These principles help create more effective and engaging learning experiences.

#### **1. Reading Comprehension Ability**

Reading comprehension is an interactive process that involves the reader's active engagement with the text. According to Harris and Hodges (1995), comprehension improves when readers connect ideas in the text to their own background knowledge and experiences. Anderson (1999) emphasizes that reading is a fluent process where meaning is constructed through the interplay of text and prior knowledge. Snow (2002) highlights the need for grammatical understanding and reader involvement to extract and construct meaning. Gunning (2010) notes that readers with strong background knowledge can make better inferences, enhancing comprehension. Grabe (2009) also frames reading as an

interactive process that promotes fluency. Overall, effective reading requires interpreting text, applying knowledge, and developing strategies to understand the author's intent.

## **2. Stages of Teaching Reading**

Teaching reading comprehension can be effectively structured into three phases: pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading. In the pre-reading phase, instructors engage students by activating their prior knowledge and interests through questions and discussions, while introducing new vocabulary to set a purpose for reading. This approach helps students connect the text to their own experiences and make predictions. During the reading phase, students read silently and independently, completing tasks that facilitate comprehension, such as answering questions or reflecting on the text's structure and content. Finally, in the post-reading phase, students reflect on their learning, discuss their responses to the text, and relate the material to their own knowledge and opinions, which enhances their language competence (Williams, 1994; Brown, 2001). Overall, this structured approach fosters a deeper understanding of the text and encourages meaningful engagement with the reading material.

## **3. Levels of Reading Comprehension Ability**

Miller (1990) identifies four levels of reading comprehension: textually explicit comprehension, where readers grasp meanings directly stated in the text; textually implicit comprehension, which requires readers to derive meanings not explicitly presented by relying on their background knowledge; critical implicit comprehension, where readers analyze and evaluate the content, distinguishing between facts and opinions; and scripturally implicit comprehension, the highest level, where readers synthesize information by connecting it to their own knowledge and experiences. Similar classifications by Lapp and Flood (1986) and Rubin (1997) emphasize literal, inferential, critical, and appreciative comprehension, highlighting the spectrum of understanding from explicit information to evaluative and emotional responses. Recognizing these levels is essential for equipping students with effective reading strategies and designing suitable assessments, and this study will employ Miller's framework to evaluate students' reading comprehension skills.

## **4. Task-based Learning**

Willis (1996) defines a task as an activity where learners use the target language for a communicative purpose to achieve a specific outcome. This aligns with Ellis's (2003) view of a task as a structured work plan that requires practical engagement with the language, allowing for the assessment of effective communication. Nunan (2004) elaborates that tasks involve classroom activities where learners acknowledge, manipulate, create, or collaborate in the target language, focusing on expressing meaning rather than just processing forms. Designed to mirror real-life situations, tasks promote genuine interaction with the language and enhance problem-solving and communication skills.

They vary in format and complexity, aiming to improve language learning and proficiency by fostering active engagement. Overall, tasks serve as essential tools for language development, enabling learners to practice and apply the target language meaningfully while also cultivating critical thinking and collaborative skills.

### **5.Task Types**

Willis (2021) identifies several task types for language learning, including listing tasks, which promote discussion through brainstorming and fact-finding; ordering and sorting tasks, involving sequencing and categorizing; comparing tasks, where learners analyze similarities and differences; problem-solving tasks, which challenge cognitive abilities; sharing personal experiences tasks, encouraging informal discussions; and creative tasks, requiring collaboration on projects. Richards (2013) adds to this by outlining jigsaw tasks, where learners piece together information; information-gap tasks, which involve exchanging distinct sets of data; problem-solving tasks, aimed at finding solutions; decision-making tasks, where students choose from multiple options; and opinion exchange tasks, fostering dialogue without the need for consensus. Despite different methods and terminology, the core principles of task-based learning remain consistent. For this study, the researcher focuses on jigsaw, problem-solving, and decision-making tasks, as they are well-suited for the age and skill levels of secondary students, promoting active engagement and language development.

### **6. Task-based Learning Process**

The task-based learning process, as outlined by Willis (2021), consists of three stages: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. In the pre-task phase, the teacher introduces the topic, helps students identify key vocabulary, and clarifies assignment guidelines. The task cycle includes three sub-phases: (1) Task, where students work in pairs or groups to complete the task while the teacher monitors; (2) Planning, where students prepare to report their findings to the class; and (3) Report, during which groups present their results and compare outcomes, possibly listening to recordings of similar tasks for further analysis. The final stage, language focus, involves students analyzing specific language features from their tasks and practicing new vocabulary and expressions. Ellis (2003) further elaborates on task-based lessons, emphasizing preparation in the pre-task phase, methodological and process choices during the task phase, and post-task objectives that encourage task reflection and attention to language form. For this study, the researcher has chosen to utilize Willis's task-based learning process due to its emphasis on planning and engaging students in practical applications of language and reasoning skills.

7. Attitude towards Language Learning

According to Oxford (1990), learners' attitudes, skills, and strategies influence their ability to grasp language details, shaped by their feelings, fears, and biases toward learning English. Brown (2001) divides attitudes into cognitive and affective dimensions, noting that early influences like parents and peers play a role. Positive attitudes toward oneself and both native and target language groups boost proficiency, while negative attitudes can hinder progress. Garrett (2010) highlights that language attitudes are common in daily life, often expressed in negative contexts. In conclusion, students' attitudes are crucial for progress, with a positive outlook enhancing engagement and enjoyment in reading comprehension lessons.

In conclusion, reading comprehension, task-based learning, and student attitudes. Furthermore, the role of learners' attitudes is highlighted, with positive attitudes promoting better engagement and outcomes. These concepts provide a foundation for designing effective learning environments and strategies to improve language proficiency.

Conceptual Framework

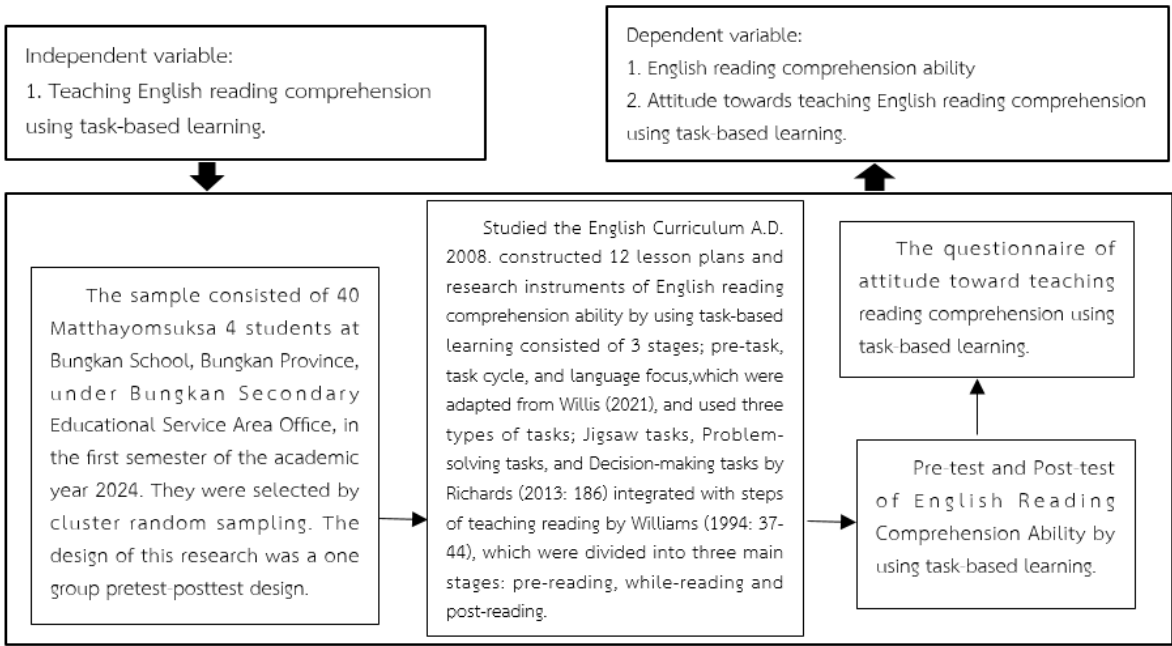


Fig.1: Conceptual Framework of Using Task-Based Learning to Improve Students' English Reading Comprehension Ability of Matthayomsuksa 4 Students

Research Methodology

This study focused on the following aspects:

1. Population and Sample

1.1 The population in this study was 424 of Matthayomsuksa 4 students of 12 classrooms enrolled in the course, Additional English (EN 31101), in the first semester of

the academic year 2024 in Bungkan School under the Bungkan Secondary Educational Service Area Office, Muang district, Bungkan Province.

1.2 The sample in this study was 40 students of Matayomsuksa 4/11 students studying English course (EN 31101) in the first semester of the academic year 2024 at Bungkan school, Muang, Bungkan Province selected by cluster random sampling using classroom as a sampling unit.

## **2. Research Instruments**

The research instruments in this research can be described as follows:

2.1 Lesson plans for teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning. The lesson plans consisted of 12 units, 2 hours per unit. The total was 24 hours. The value of the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) assessed by three experts was 1.00 for every lesson plan.

2.2 An English reading comprehension ability test was developed by the researcher based on Miller, (1990: 234) to examine the reading comprehension ability of students in 4 levels; textually explicit comprehension, textually implicit comprehension, critical implicit comprehension, and scripturally implicit comprehension. The test was used as a pretest and posttest. This test was a multiple-choice test, with 40 items altogether. This test was used to measure the students' English reading comprehension ability in task-based learning. The difficulty value of the items was between 0.30 to 0.76, and the discrimination value was between 0.20-0.60. The reliability of the test was at 0.94.

2.3 A students' attitude questionnaire towards teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning. An attitude questionnaire based on the five-point Likert's rating scales, which consisted of 20 items. The value of the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was 1.00 for every item.

## **3. Data Collection**

The researcher conducted this study with the aim of developing the students' English reading comprehension ability through the use of task-based learning. The process is outlined as follows:

3.1 The students completed a pretest on English reading comprehension, consisting of 40 items. The test duration was one hour.

3.2 The researcher implemented the teaching program using 12 lesson plans over a period of 12 weeks. Each week consisted of 2 hours of instruction, resulting in a total of 24 hours.

3.3 The students completed the posttest using the same English reading comprehension ability test administered during the pretest. The test duration was one hour.

3.4 The researcher distributed the students an attitude questionnaire to check the students' attitude towards teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning.

3.5 The researcher analyzed data from the pretest, the posttest, and attitude questionnaire towards teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning.

#### 4. Data Analysis

The data collected from the English reading comprehension ability test and the students' attitude questionnaire toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning were analyzed using the following three statistical methods:

4.1 The basic statistics used in the analysis included: percentage, to assess the effectiveness of English reading comprehension using task-based learning; mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), to analyze pretest and posttest scores; and standard deviation (S.D.), to evaluate the distribution of these scores and the responses from the students' attitude questionnaire.

4.2 The statistics used to evaluate the quality of the instruments included: the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC), the difficulty index (p) of the English reading comprehension test using the Test Analysis Program, the discriminant index of the test, and the reliability of the English reading comprehension test also assessed using TAP.

4.3 The statistics used to analyze the hypotheses included the one-sample t-test for comparing students' English reading comprehension ability after learning with the set criterion of 70 percent, and the t-test for dependent samples to analyze the differences in scores before and after learning, both using SPSS for Windows.

#### 5. Research Results

**The comparison of the students' English reading comprehension ability using Task-based learning before and after studying.**

After the experiment, the researcher used an English reading comprehension ability test which consisted of 40 questions with 40 points for Matthayomsuksa 4 students before and after studying by using t-test for Dependent Samples which were shown in Table 1

**Table 1** The comparison of the students' English reading comprehension ability scores before and after studying

Test	N	$\bar{x}$	Percentage	S.D.	t
Pretest	40	15.58	38.94	3.47	63.53**
Posttest	40	30.95	77.38	3.21	

\*\*  $p \leq .01$



Table 1 illustrated the comparison of the students' pretest mean score on English reading comprehension ability, which was 15.58 (38.94%) for the pretest and 30.95 (77.38%) for the posttest. The results revealed that the students' English reading comprehension ability after the intervention was significantly higher than before, at the 0.01 significance level.

**The comparison of the students' English reading comprehension ability using Task-based learning with the criterion of 70 percent.**

The comparison of the students' English reading comprehension ability of Matthayomsuksa 4 Students after studying with the criterion of 70 percent. The researcher used mean and compared students' English reading comprehension ability by using a One Sample t-test, which was shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** The comparison of the students' English reading comprehension ability after studying with the criterion of 70 percent.

Test	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t
Posttest	40	30.95	3.21	5.81*

\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 2 illustrated the comparison of the students' English reading comprehension ability after studying with the criterion of 70 percent. The results explained that the students' English reading comprehension ability after study English reading comprehension using task-based learning was significantly different at the .01 level. The students' posttest scores were significantly higher than the set criterion of 70 percent.

**Results of students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning**

After studying using these 12 lesson plans, an attitude questionnaire, consisting of 20 items, was administered. It was given to 40 students to survey their attitude toward the teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning. The result of the students' attitude survey as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** The study of students' attitude toward teaching students' English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning

Attitude Test	n	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Student's attitude toward teaching students' English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning	40	4.51	0.55	Very good

According to Table 3, after teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach, the mean attitude score of the 40 students was 4.51 and a standard deviation was 0.55. It was found that the student had attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning at a very good level.

## Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of task-based learning on improving English reading comprehension among Matthayomsuksa 4 students at Bungkan School through a one-group pretest-posttest design. The findings showed a notable increase in reading comprehension scores, with students' performance rising from a pretest score of 15.58 (38.94%) to a posttest score of 30.95 (77.38%), surpassing the 70% criterion. The use of jigsaw tasks, problem-solving tasks, and decision-making tasks played a key role in enhancing students' comprehension abilities by encouraging active engagement and language use in practical contexts.

Task-based learning also facilitated collaborative learning, allowing students to work in pairs or groups, which fostered language interaction and deeper comprehension. Through stages such as the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus, students had the opportunity to build vocabulary, analyze language structures, and correct errors. This process not only boosted their confidence but also made them more effective in applying language skills during tasks and presentations, aligning with the principles outlined by Willis (2021), the pre-task phase involved introducing the topic and key vocabulary, which helped students to engage cognitively with the task while lowering their affective filter. This stage was crucial for activating prior knowledge and setting clear objectives, enabling students to feel prepared and motivated.

In addition to the improvements in reading comprehension, students expressed a highly positive attitude toward task-based learning. They found the tasks engaging, well-suited to their level, and supported by visual aids that helped them understand reading passages more effectively. Group work and presentations further solidified their comprehension and retention of the material. This positive attitude mirrors findings from previous studies, such as those by Lap & Trang (2017) and Tappan (2017), which highlight the motivational benefits of task-based learning. Overall, the study concluded that task-based learning is a powerful method for enhancing reading comprehension and increasing student engagement in English language learning.

## Knowledge from Research

Teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning (TBL), which demonstrated significant success. The study found that students' reading comprehension

scores improved dramatically from 38.94% to 77.38%, exceeding the 70% target. The success was achieved through a structured three-stage process (pre-task, task cycle, and language focus) and incorporated varied tasks including jigsaw, problem-solving, and decision-making activities. The approach not only improved reading skills but also boosted students' confidence, fostered critical thinking, and generated positive attitudes toward learning English. The effectiveness of this method is supported by established theories from Richards, Willis, and Ellis, highlighting TBL's value in developing language comprehension through interactive, real-world tasks. Knowledge from research can be explained as follow:

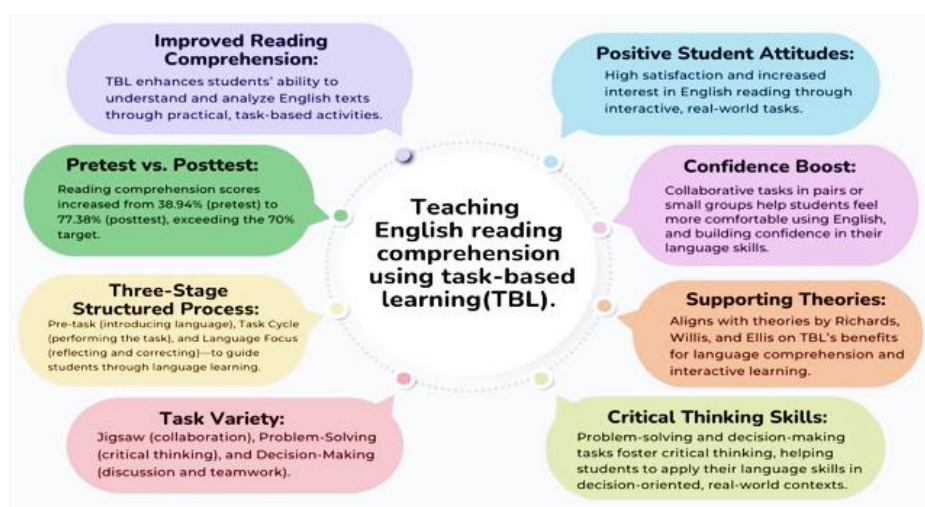


Fig.2: Knowledge from Research of Using Task-Based Learning to Improve Students' English Reading Comprehension Ability of Matthayomsuksa 4 Students

## Conclusion

A study and comparison of the pretest and the posttest scores on English reading comprehension ability and an investigation of Matthayomsuksa 4 students' attitude towards teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning can be summarized as follows: 1) The students' pretest mean score on English reading comprehension ability was 15.58 (38.94%) and that of the posttest was 30.95 (77.38%), respectively. The students' English reading comprehension ability of students after studying English reading comprehension using task-based learning was higher than the set criteria of 70 percent. The students' English reading comprehension ability was found to be significantly different at the .01 level. 2) The students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning was rated at a very good level, with a mean score of 4.51.

## Suggestions

The finding in this study presented that teaching English reading comprehension ability by using task-based learning improved the students' reading comprehension ability and students' attitude toward the teaching English reading comprehension ability by using task-based learning.

In order to make use of this study, the researcher recommended as follows:

### 1. Recommendations from the study

1.1 Using task-based learning to improve English reading comprehension motivates students to be able to study different parts of a text and then share their findings with each other, decision-making and problem-solving the passage to understand the overall reading text instead of detailing text reading. This would also improve students' confidence to accomplish the tasks.

1.2 Implementing task-based learning to improve English reading comprehension should be at least two hours per a reading text, so that the students can spend time in each step effectively.

1.3 Using task-based learning to improve English reading comprehension requires the teachers to prepare more extensive knowledge and deep understandings about the reading text to discuss and explain the answers in class, and the necessity and usefulness of preparing lesson materials and reflection.

### 2. Recommendations for further study

The researcher's recommendations for further study were as follows: Researchers should apply the using task-based learning to all learners of different levels by integrating the tasks into the topics of other English skills.

2.1 Researchers should study using task-based learning to students in various levels and educational backgrounds.

2.2 Researchers should apply new activities or tasks to activate students' prior knowledge, such as, telling stories, watching video, playing games, or etc.

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