The Effects of Task-Based Reading Activities on Students' Vocabulary Retention at A High School

Nguyen Thi Hong Chuyen, Pham Thi Sinh, Dang Khanh Linh
Thai Nguyen University of Education,
Thai Binh high School.
English K56C- Thai Nguyen University of Education

Abstract
The study aims to investigate the effect of task-based reading activities on vocabulary retention of students at a high school. The two objectives set to reach the aim consist of (1) identifying the extent to which task-based reading activities improve the vocabulary retention of students at a high school; (2) determining the students' attitudes toward using task-based reading activities to improve their vocabulary retention. This is a quasi-experimental study with the participation of 10 English teachers and 66 students. Questionnaires and tests were used as data collection instruments to answer the following research questions: 1) To what extent do task-based reading activities improve the vocabulary retention of students at a high school? 2) What are the students' attitudes toward using task-based reading activities to improve their vocabulary retention? The research findings showed that task-based reading activities were effective in improving students' vocabulary retention, and students had positive attitudes toward using task-based reading activities to improve their vocabulary retention.
Key Word: *task-based learning, task-based reading activities, vocabulary, vocabulary retention*

I.   Introduction

For many years, English language teaching strategies have prioritized grammar and focused on teaching grammatical constructs. As a result, learning English is not derailed for students, and in this way, the teaching of vocabulary has been kept to a minimum. Because it was a component of the "structure of the day lesson," vocabulary that was intended to be comprehended was only illustrated in this manner. Grammar is a set of rules, but the vocabulary is primarily a collection of objects, it was believed. It was considered more effective because a single rule generates a large number of sentences. While vocabulary grows, grammar increases (Thornbury, 2002, p.14) [1].

Thankfully, the notion that grammar should take precedence over vocabulary has changed over time. The function of lexical chunks and the lexical syllabus, a syllabus that focuses on terms used often in spoken and written English, were two major advances that challenged grammar's hegemony. The importance of vocabulary in language learning has become more widely recognized as a result of these two developments. The amount of vocabulary students possess is strongly correlated with academic ability, according to tests, which implies that students who have a limited vocabulary will struggle academically (Anderson & Naggy, cited by Mackay, 2007)[2]. Teaching and learning vocabulary seem to be a personal issue, teachers try to give and help students to memorize as many words as possible, and students should learn to use those words as effectively as they can. Teaching vocabulary is one of the most discussed parts of teaching English as a foreign language. Teachers often encounter issues during the teaching and learning process. They have problems with how to teach students in order to gain satisfying outcomes. A good teacher should prepare himself or herself with various up-to-date techniques. Teachers should be concerned that teaching vocabulary is something new and different from students' native language.

For the above issue, the author would like to conduct the research "The effect of task-based reading activities on students' vocabulary retention at a high school."

II. Material and Methods

The study aims to investigate the effect of task-based reading activities on vocabulary retention of students at a high school.

Participants

This research mainly focuses on 66 students at a high school and 10 high school teachers. The study

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aimed to find out the effect of task-based reading activities on the vocabulary retention of students at the high school. Therefore, the study dealt with the reading activities which affect the students' vocabulary retention only. Other language abilities were not involved in the research..

Research design

The study aims to investigate the effects of task-based reading activities on vocabulary retention of students at a high school. The research objectives consist of (1) identifying the extent to which task-based reading activities improve the vocabulary retention of students at a high school; and (2) determining the students' attitudes toward using task-based reading activities to improve their vocabulary retention. To achieve these research objectives, the researcher selected the quasi-experimental design for the study. Researchers used experiments to examine the strength of connections between variables, according to Nunan (1992, p. 24–25) [3]. Language researchers sometimes wish to examine the connections between several factors, such a teaching style and a second one, like test results on an official language competence test. He also distinguishes quasi-experimental research from other types of experimental research. Specifically, a quasi-experiment has both pre-and post-test and experimental and control groups but no random assignments of subjects (Nunan, 1992, p.41) [3].

As this is a quasi-experimental design, students were divided into two groups, with 33 students in each group. The group which experienced the intervention (using task-based reading activities to improve students' vocabulary retention) is called the experimental group, and the other, taught by traditional methods, is called the control group. The effectiveness of using traditional methods and task-based reading activities was compared based on the test results of both groups.

Data collection instrument
The study uses a combination of four data collection instruments:
- Pre-test
- Pre-Questionnaire
- Post-test
- Post-Questionnaire

III. Results
Findings of the questionnaires
Teacher's questionnaire

The first question of the teacher's questionnaire aimed to investigate how frequently the teachers used task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary. The teachers answered the question by selecting the level of frequency, ranging from never to very often. The following figure summarizes the teachers' responses:
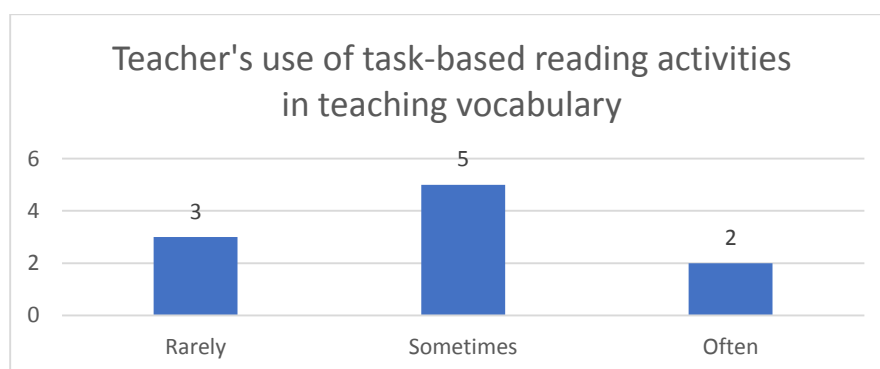

Figure 1. Teacher's use of task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary

As shown in Figure 1, all the teachers used the activities in their teaching of vocabulary ranging from rarely to often (no teachers never used or used the activities very often); specifically, five teachers said that they sometimes used task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary, two of them reported that they had often used and three teachers claimed that they had rarely used such activities.
The second question asked was what task-based reading activities the teachers often used to help their students retain vocabulary.
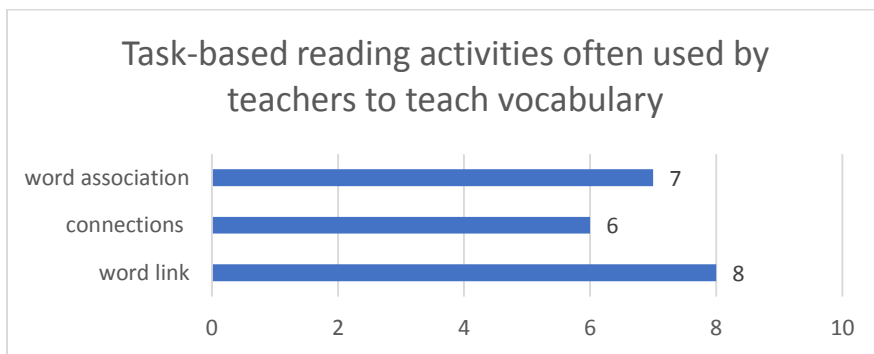
Task-based reading activities often used by teachers to teach vocabulary

word association — 7
connections — 6
word link — 8

Figure 2. Task-based reading activities often used by teachers to teach vocabulary

Eight teachers used word link activity most frequently to teach vocabulary. The second most used activity was word link which is used by seven teachers. The least used activity was "connections" with the statistics frequently used by six teachers.

The third question determined whether teachers understood how to apply task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary to their students. Collected teachers' answers could be classified into four categories, ranging from "understand a little" to "understand clearly". The teachers' responses were demonstrated in the figure below:
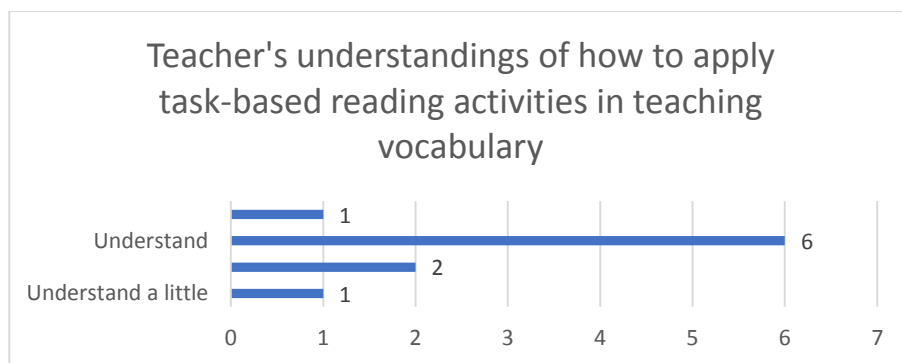
Teacher's understandings of how to apply task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary

— 1
Understand — 6
— 2
Understand a little — 1

Figure 3. Teacher's understandings of how to apply task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary

Figure 3 shows that most of the teachers understood and knew how to apply the task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary, which was chosen by six teachers. Two teachers claimed that they understood those activities at the average level. Meanwhile, one teacher reported that he/ she understood the activities clearly, and the other said that he/ she understood such activities a little. "Don't understand" was selected by no teachers. Two teachers claimed that they understood those activities at the average level. Meanwhile, one teacher reported that he/ she understood the activities clearly, and the other said that he/ she understood such activities a little. "Don't understand" was selected by no teachers.

Students' pre-questionnaire

Questions 2 identified the students' opinions on whether their English teachers organized task-based reading activities to teach vocabulary. The results were summarized in Figure 4 below:
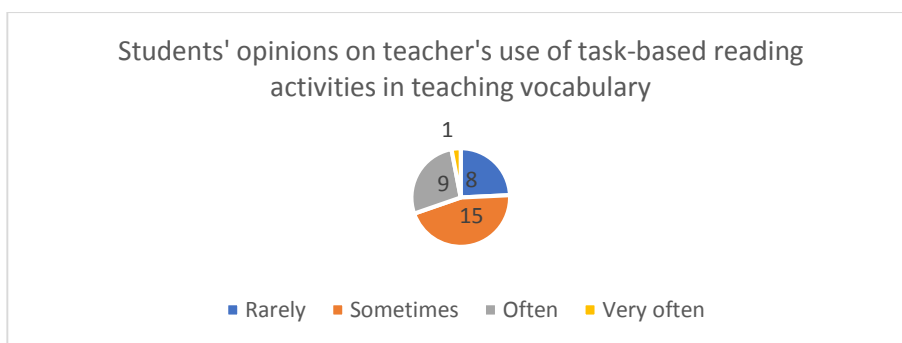
Students' opinions on teacher's use of task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary

1
9 8
15

■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Very often

Figure 4. Students' opinions on teacher's use of task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary

As demonstrated in the figure above, fifteen students claimed that their teacher sometimes used task-based reading activities in teaching vocabulary, making it the most frequent choice. Nine students reported that their teachers often used those activities, and eight students said their teachers rarely used such activities. Only one student reported that their teachers used the activities very often.

Questions 3 clarified students' interests in the task-based reading activities, used by teachers to teach vocabulary. The interests could range from uninterested to very interested, as illustrated in the following figure:
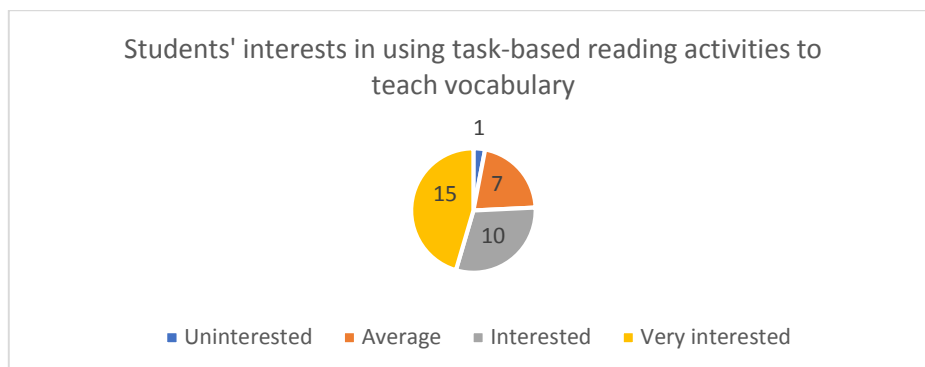

Figure 5. Students' interests in using task-based reading activities to teach vocabulary

As illustrated in Figure 5, nearly half of the students (fifteen students), showed that they were very interested in the activities used in their teachers' teaching vocabulary. Ten students said that they were interested. Meanwhile, seven students claimed that their interest was at the average level. However, there was one student declared that he/ she was not interested in the task-based reading activities used to teach vocabulary.

Question 4 aimed to identify the favourite reading topics chosen by students. The following figure presents the results:
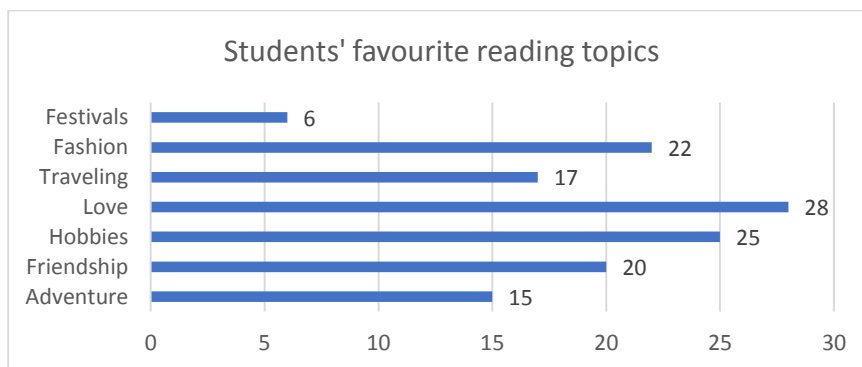

Figure 6. Students' favourite reading topics

As stated in Figure 6, the topics of Love and Hobbies were chosen by twenty-eight and twenty-five students, respectively, making them the two most favourite chosen topics; followed by Fashion and Friendship, which were chosen by twenty-two and twenty students correlatively. At the average level, Travelling and Adventure were chosen by seventeen and fifteen students correspondingly. Festivals topic was chosen by six students, making it the least frequently chosen one.

Students' post-questionnaire

The students' post-questionnaire was employed to identify the students' attitudes toward using task-based reading activities on their vocabulary retention. Students responded by specifying their levels of agreement (1 – strongly disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 – agree; 4 – strongly agree). The following table presents the results of the students' post-questionnaire:

Statements: *Task-based activities help me:*	Levels of agreement Unit: students			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
1. improve my vocabulary size.	0	0	11	22
2. remember the meaning of the words longer.	3	5	18	7
3. apply vocabulary correctly in speaking and writing.	2	5	17	9
4. develop my understanding.	2	5	11	15
5. remember the spelling of the words.	2	2	14	15
6. improve my knowledge of collocations.	3	6	16	8
7. understand many different meanings associated with a word.	5	4	12	12
8. remember long words faster.	3	5	19	6
9. know how to pronounce words.	0	0	14	19
10. express the meaning of the words in English.	2	6	15	10
11. become more interested in learning vocabulary.	1	2	14	16
12. learn vocabulary in an interesting way.	0	0	13	20
13. remember the form of the word.	2	3	13	15
14. know the word syntax.	4	6	14	9
15. avoid some grammar mistakes	4	4	15	10

Table 1. The results of the students' post-questionnaire

All surveyed students agreed that using task-based reading activities in their vocabulary learning helped increase their vocabulary size. In which, eleven students agreed, and the remaining twenty-two students strongly agreed with this statement. They also claimed that the application of reading task-based activities helped them know how to pronounce words as well as helped them learn vocabulary in an interesting way. None of the students expressed objections to these two views.

Applying task-based reading activities also helps students remember the meaning of the words longer. Eighteen students agreed, and seven other students strongly agreed with this view. However, five students disagreed, and three students strongly disagreed with this view. Most of the participants (26 students) confirmed that learning vocabulary through reading task-based activities helped them apply learned vocabulary correctly in speaking and writing. However, there are still seven students who disagreed with this idea. Also, twenty-six students confirmed that learning vocabulary using this method helped develop their understanding (No.4). However, five students disagreed, and two students strongly disagreed with the view that learning vocabulary by this method had helped to develop their understanding.

Twenty-nine students claimed that learning vocabulary by using reading task-based activities helps to remember the spelling of the words better, however, four students disagreed.

Twenty-four students confirmed that their knowledge of collocations and their ability to understand many different meanings associated with a word improved. However, there were still nine people who disagreed with these two views.

Eight students disagreed that applying reading task-based activities helped them remember long words faster or helped them express the meaning of the words in English, nor did it help them avoid some grammar mistakes. In contrast, the remaining 25 students gave the opposite opinion, they agreed that applying such activities assisted them to remember long words faster and it also helped them to express the meaning of the words in English better, as well as those activities helped them avoid grammar mistakes.

Thirty students agreed that they became more interested in learning vocabulary by the application of reading task-based activities; on the other hand, three students expressed the opposite opinion. In addition, 28 students confirmed that the activities helped them remember the form of the word; in contrast, three students disagreed, and two students strongly disagreed.

Ten students said that the application of reading task-based activities did not help them know the word syntax, but the remaining twenty-three students said that those activities did help them know the word syntax.

Findings of the tests
Pre-test
In order to find out the students' abilities before the intervention, the researcher let the students in both groups take the pre-test. The pre-test results of both groups were summarized in the table below:

	Control group	Experimental group
Average score	5.4	5.4
Minimum score	1.0	1.0
Maximum score	9.0	9.0

Table 2. Pre-test results of both groups

The results were rounded to one decimal place, as shown in the above table. Both groups had the same English level before the intervention, with the same average score of 5.4. They also had the same minimum score (1.0) and maximum score (9.0).

The number of students who scored under 5.0, between 5.5 to 7.5, and between 8 and 10 were also compared and presented in the following table:

Score range	Control group (students)	Experimental group (students)
≤5	16	17
5.5 – 7.5	10	9
8-10	7	7

Table 3. Pre-test score classifications of both groups

As illustrated in Table 3, the English ability of both groups before the intervention was almost the same range of scores. Specifically, the number of students scoring under 5, from 5.5 to 7.5, and between 8 and 10, was almost the same.

Post-test

After intervention, both groups took the post-test. The results of the post-test were then compared between groups and within experimental group to see whether task-based reading activities could help students retain vocabulary. Table 4 below presents the post-test results of both groups:

	Control group	Experimental group
Average score	6.2	6.8
Minimum score	2.0	3.0
Maximum score	9.5	10.0

Table 4. Post-test results of both groups

As seen from the data presented in the above table, the experimental group had higher results than the control group in terms of average score, minimum score, and maximum score. Specifically, the average score of the experimental group was 6.8 (0.6 higher than that of the control group); the minimum score was 3.0 (1.0 higher); and the maximum score was 10 (0.5 higher).

The classifications of the post-test scores of both groups were also compared in the following table:

Score range	Control group	Experimental group
≤5	13	4
5.5 – 7.5	10	16
8-10	10	13

Table 5. Post-test score classifications of both groups

As presented in Table 5, there was a great difference in the score range of both groups. In the experimental group, there were only 4 students having 5 or fewer while the number was 13 in the control group. However, the experimental group had more students with scores between 5.5 to 7.5 (16 students), or 8 to 10 (13 students), compared to the control group.

IV. Discussion

After eight lessons, students' vocabulary retention improved considerably, demonstrated by the improvement in the test score. Students in both experimental and control groups had higher test results. However, a score comparison within each group showed that students in the experimental group had a greater development in terms of average score (1.4 points higher), maximum score (1 point higher), and minimum score (2 points higher) compared to the pre-test. The results were 0.8 points, 0.5 points, and 1 point for the control group, respectively. The classifications of post-test results between the two groups also showed that the experimental group made better progress. The experimental group had fewer students with low scores but more with higher results.

The results of the post-questionnaire showed that all students found themselves more developed in terms of broadening their vocabulary size. They also evaluated using task-based reading activities as an exciting way to learn vocabulary. A majority of the students became more interested in studying vocabulary after the

intervention. These findings are in line with the research by Kamalian, Soleimani, and Safari (2017) [4], which also confirms that the effects of task-based reading activities on students' vocabulary retention are significant, and they help make students more interested to learn. Interestingly, all students also claimed that thanks to the intervention, they know how to pronounce the words. Task-based language teaching helps students become more engaged in the activities and more active because it is an exciting interactive method to enhance students' communication skills (Dailey, 2009, p.18; Kamalian, Soleimani, and Safari, 2017, p.43) [5]. The interactive nature of task-based language teaching enables students to use the words to communicate with others and thus develop their pronunciation.

V. Conclusion

The study aimed at investigating the effect of task-based reading activities on vocabulary retention of students at a high school. The study involved 10 English teachers and 66 students at a high school. Based on the quasi-experimental design, the students were divided into two groups, with 33 students in each group. The experimental group learned vocabulary through task-based reading activities while the control group learned it through traditional methods.

Firstly, the greater performance of students in the experimental group compared with those of the control group showed that task-based reading activities were powerful in improving students' vocabulary retention. The deviation of 1.4 points from the experimental group's post-test score compared to that of the pre-test score proved the significance of the method.

In addition, students had positive attitudes toward applying task-based reading activities to learn vocabulary. They claimed to get many benefits from the use of task-based reading activities, especially for broadening their vocabulary size and pronouncing words. They also affirmed that this new teaching method helped them become more interested in learning vocabulary and that this is an exciting way to learn it.

In sum, the findings of the study showed positive perspectives on teaching and learning vocabulary, bringing more choices to learners and teachers to facilitate the vocabulary learning process.

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