Task-Based Language Teaching for Reading and Writing in Undergraduate EFL: A Mixed-Methods Study

Abeerah Fatimah [1*] Marium Ansari [2] Rabiah Mohyuddin [3]

[1] Alumni English Department, Bahuaddin Zakariya University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: Abeerahfatima@gmail.com
[2] Lecturer, Department of Education, The Women University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: Marium.6567@wum.edu.pk
[3] Lecturer, Department of Education, The Women University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: Rabiah.6531@wum.edu.pk

ABSTRACT: This study examined the effect of a four-week Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) intervention on the reading and writing performance of undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and explored their experiences of task-based activities. A mixed-methods design was used with 20 third-year BA students at a government degree college for women in Multan, Pakistan. Quantitative data came from pre- and post-tests in reading and writing, weekly task scores, and a weekly feedback questionnaire; qualitative data came from classroom observations, open-ended feedback, and a focus group. Paired-samples t-tests showed that post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores in both reading ($t(19) = 12.46$, $p < .001$) and writing ($t(19) = 11.40$, $p < .001$). The qualitative analysis identified five themes: initial uncertainty and gradual adaptation, peer collaboration and teamwork, confidence and learner independence, engagement and creativity, and challenges in task-based learning. Learners reported that the tasks were enjoyable and helped them participate more independently, but they also found using English, working with peers at different paces, and managing time difficult. Because the study used a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, the improvements cannot be attributed to TBLT with certainty. The findings suggest that task-based activities are a promising way to support reading and writing development in EFL classrooms.

KEYWORDS: Task-Based Language Teaching, EFL Learners, Reading Performance, Writing Performance, Mixed Methods, Learner Experiences, Undergraduate Students

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Corresponding Author
Abeerah Fatimah
✉ Abeerahfatima@gmail.com

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Introduction

Many universities expect students to reach a certain level of English proficiency. In response, communicative teaching methods have increasingly been introduced into university classrooms (Achieng, 2023). Despite this shift, EFL learners often continue to struggle with writing beyond a basic level. This may be attributed to limited opportunities for authentic communication and an instructional emphasis on the final product rather than the writing process. This issue is particularly important because writing serves not only as a means of communication but also as a medium through which learners construct knowledge and develop new ideas. It also plays an important role in language learning itself (Khudaverdiyeva, 2025). Similarly, reading is central to university study, as most academic

work involves engaging with textbooks, teaching materials, and journal articles (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2023). Thus, reading and writing are closely interconnected skills in academic learning.

One factor contributing to learners' writing difficulties is the continued reliance on product-oriented instruction. Its emphasis on memorization and the final written product may discourage learners from taking ownership of their writing and can contribute to writing anxiety. In this regard, El Ouidani and Madaoui (2024) report that process-oriented instruction improves second language writing more effectively than product-oriented instruction. Similarly, Kormos (2023) highlights the benefits of cognitive strategy instruction, particularly in planning and organizing written work. However, writing development is not solely a cognitive process. Hatab et al. (2024) suggest that instructors should also consider interpersonal and affective factors, such as motivation and attitude, when designing writing activities.

Beyond its emphasis on the final written product, traditional writing instruction has also been criticized for providing limited guidance on how learners can transfer their knowledge of grammar and structure to new contexts or more specialized forms of writing (Chatterjee & Halder, 2022). In this context, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers an alternative approach by organizing learning around meaningful tasks with communicative goals. It allows teachers to draw learners' attention to specific linguistic forms while they work towards achieving these goals (Azizifard, 2024). Furthermore, TBLT supports the development of communicative competence alongside other aspects of foreign language competence (Yolanda et al., 2025). Despite its potential, research on TBLT in undergraduate academic writing remains limited. In particular, few studies have examined learners' writing performance alongside their perceptions of task-based writing activities in higher education EFL contexts (Sharmin, 2023). Therefore, the present mixed-methods study examines changes in reading and writing performance following a TBLT intervention while also exploring their experiences and perceptions of task-based activities.

Research Questions

1. RQ1: What changes occur in undergraduate EFL learners' reading performance following a Task-Based Language Teaching intervention?
2. RQ2: What changes occur in undergraduate EFL learners' writing performance following a Task-Based Language Teaching intervention?
3. RQ3: How do undergraduate EFL learners experience Task-Based Language Teaching during the intervention in terms of their adaptation to the tasks, collaboration, confidence, engagement, and challenges?

Literature Review

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has become an influential approach to language education because of its emphasis on meaningful communication, purposeful language use, and active learner participation. Unlike conventional approaches that emphasize the explicit teaching and practice of grammatical and lexical forms, TBLT organizes classroom learning around tasks through which learners use language to achieve specific outcomes. These tasks provide opportunities for learners to exchange information, solve problems, and interact with others, thereby connecting language learning with actual language use (Zhao, 2023). Such meaningful communication is encouraged when learners are motivated to use the target language in different ways and contexts (Hossain, 2024). This task-oriented approach also reflects a shift in how classroom materials and learning activities are designed. Traditional approaches tend to organize classroom materials around the language forms to be taught (Hashim, 2025), whereas TBLT begins with the goals learners are expected to achieve, with materials and activities subsequently designed to support those goals (Mudinillah et al., 2024). This shift allows teachers to organize communicative activities that help learners achieve their goals while encouraging greater control over their own learning (Ellis, 2022).

Among the language skills, writing is particularly relevant to TBLT because it requires considerable control and integration of different language systems (Lambert, 2023). At the same time, this complexity can make second language writing a stressful experience. While attempting to master the mechanics of the language, learners may experience anxiety about writing (Gutiérrez, 2024). They also need to manage several components simultaneously, including organization, grammar, vocabulary choice, coherence, and audience awareness (Matiso, 2023). In response to these challenges, writing instruction has gradually moved beyond an exclusive focus on the final written product. More recently, instructors have placed greater emphasis on supporting students throughout the writing process through pre-drafting and post-drafting activities (Rintaningrum, 2023). Many communicative L2 writing activities are consistent with the principles of TBLT, as they provide students with opportunities to write for meaningful purposes rather than simply follow prescriptive instructions.

In this regard, effective TBLT also emphasizes social and affective factors, including interaction, confidence, and motivation (Guo et al., 2026). For example, students can interact with peers during writing activities to exchange ideas, consider different perspectives on organizing information, and suggest improvements. Such interactions may help improve the clarity and quality of their ideas while also enabling them to identify grammatical and mechanical errors in their work (Zambrano et al., 2026). By integrating task-based activities with attention to different writing components, learners can gradually develop greater control over their writing processes (Morozov, 2026). Moreover, writing tasks encourage learners to express and evaluate ideas and construct logical, well-supported arguments (Pohan et al., 2025). Overall, research has explored TBLT in both second and foreign language contexts, with considerable attention given to instructional practices and the factors that facilitate or hinder its implementation.

In addition to writing, TBLT has also been applied to reading instruction, where tasks can direct learners' attention towards meaning and comprehension. Rather than simply asking learners to read and recall information, task-based reading activities can involve identifying main ideas, locating specific information, interpreting meaning, making inferences, and responding to texts for a particular purpose. Such activities encourage learners to engage actively with reading materials and process information to accomplish meaningful outcomes. Harjono and Wachyunni (2023) found that task-based worksheets used as scaffolding significantly improved the reading comprehension of university EFL students compared with reading without tasks. Similarly, Nguyen (2022) reported improvements in reading comprehension among university EFL learners following task-based instruction. These findings highlight the potential of TBLT to support reading development through purposeful engagement with texts.

Although previous studies have examined the application of TBLT to both reading and writing, these skills have often been investigated separately. Research has reported improvements in writing through process-oriented and task-based activities (El Ouidani & Madaoui, 2024; Pohan et al., 2025), while other studies have highlighted the benefits of task-based instruction for reading comprehension (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2023; Nguyen, 2022). However, there remains a need to examine how TBLT influences both reading and writing performance within the same instructional intervention, particularly among undergraduate EFL learners in higher education. Furthermore, understanding learners' experiences during such interventions is important for identifying how they adapt to tasks, collaborate with peers, develop confidence, engage in learning activities, and deal with challenges. Addressing these aspects together can provide a broader understanding of the contribution of TBLT to language learning. Therefore, the present study examines changes in undergraduate EFL learners' reading and writing performance following a TBLT intervention and explores their experiences and perceptions of the instructional approach.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same four-week period and interpreted together. The quantitative strand followed a one-group pretest–posttest design with no control group and examined changes in students' reading and writing performance (research questions 1 and 2). The qualitative strand drew on classroom observations, open-ended feedback and a focus group to explore students' experiences of the task-based activities (research question 3). Pre-test and post-test scores (Tables 1 and 2) and weekly task scores (Table 3) address research questions 1 and 2, while the weekly questionnaire (Table 4) and the qualitative data address research question 3.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at the Government Degree College for Women, Shah Rukan-e-Alam, Multan, Pakistan. The participants were 20 third-year BA students who volunteered to take part. A volunteer sampling approach was used to recruit students who were willing to participate in the intervention. The participants were organized into four groups of five members each to facilitate peer interaction, collaboration, and completion of the weekly tasks.

Intervention

The intervention lasted four weeks. Each week, participants completed task-based reading and writing activities in their groups. The activities included reading comprehension tasks, information-gap activities, problem-solving tasks, collaborative writing, drafting, and peer review. Each task followed a pre-task, task, and post-task sequence. During the pre-task stage, the researcher introduced the topic, explained the task objectives, and provided relevant instructions. Participants then worked collaboratively to complete the assigned activities, followed by feedback, discussion, and evaluation during the post-task stage. The researcher, who also taught the sessions, facilitated the activities, monitored group work, and provided feedback. Reading passages, worksheets, and writing prompts were used as instructional materials.

Instruments and Data Collection

Reading and writing performance was measured through a pre-test administered before the intervention and a post-test administered after the fourth week, with reading and writing each scored out of 10. Both tests assessed reading comprehension and written expression. The same assessment criteria were applied to evaluate students' performance across the two testing occasions. Weekly reading and writing task scores were also recorded for each group (Table 3). At the end of each week, participants completed a ten-item feedback questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Table 4). As the questionnaire was administered four times to 20 participants, each item yielded 80 responses across the intervention. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the intervention to document students' participation, interaction, and engagement with the tasks. In addition, open-ended feedback was collected from students. Following the intervention, a focus group discussion was conducted to explore participants' experiences of task-based learning, including their adaptation to the activities, collaboration, confidence, engagement, and challenges.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores were calculated to summarize reading and writing performance. Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores in both skills. Weekly task scores and questionnaire responses

were summarized using descriptive statistics, frequencies, and percentages. Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, open-ended feedback, and the focus group discussion were analyzed thematically. The responses were reviewed, coded, and organized into recurring themes related to students' experiences of task-based learning. Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were considered together to provide an overall interpretation of the intervention's outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

All the ethical considerations for the study were duly met. It was explained to participants what the study was about, and they were free to not take part in the research. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Research data were not made available to third parties. The data were obtained solely for the research and were to be deleted after completion of the study.

Results

Quantitative Findings

The effects of the TBLT intervention were calculated using quantitative methods. Performance in reading and writing was assessed using a range of methods including pre- and post-tests, weekly task performance, and students' responses to the weekly feedback questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise scores, and paired-samples t-tests were used to test the significance of pre-test to post-test differences.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Skill	Test	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Reading	Pre-test	20	5.60	1.51	3.75	8.00
Reading	Post-test	20	9.59	0.58	8.00	10.00
Writing	Pre-test	20	5.05	1.35	3.00	7.50
Writing	Post-test	20	8.63	0.96	6.25	9.75

Note: Maximum score for each skill was 10

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test scores. On the Post-Test, the mean score for reading was 9.59, and for writing, it was 8.63. Compared to the pre-test, the mean scores for reading and writing increased by 3.99 points and 3.58 points, respectively. Expressed as a percentage of the maximum score of 10, these gains were 39.9% and 35.8%, respectively. The reduction in standard deviation in reading from 1.51 to 0.58 also indicates that students' post-test reading scores were more closely grouped than their pre-test scores. Because the post-test reading mean (9.59) is close to the maximum score of 10, a ceiling effect may partly explain this reduced variability. In writing, the standard deviation decreased from 1.35 to 0.96, suggesting a reduction in variation in students' performance after the intervention. To determine whether these observed differences were statistically significant, paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted.

Table 2

Paired-Samples t-Test of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Skill	Mean Difference	SD of Difference	t	df	p
Reading	3.99	1.43	12.46	19	< .001
Writing	3.58	1.40	11.40	19	< .001

Note: Mean difference was calculated as post-test minus pre-test

Table 2 shows the results of a paired-samples t-test of pre-test and post-test scores. The statistical results indicated that the post-test reading and writing performance were significantly higher than the pre-test performance (t = 12.46 and 11.40, respectively). Therefore, reading and writing scores were significantly higher after the intervention. Effect sizes were large (Cohen's d_z = [2.79] for reading and [2.56] for writing). Because the study used a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, these gains are consistent with a positive effect of the TBLT intervention but cannot be attributed to it with certainty; maturation, familiarity with the tests and other factors may also have contributed.

Table 3

Weekly Reading and Writing Task Performance by Group

Week	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4	
	Reading	Writing	Reading	Writing	Reading	Writing	Reading	Writing
1	18	18	20	18	20	18	19	17.5
2	20	21	21	20	26	23	19	26
3	26	22	27	25.5	27	27.5	23.5	24.5
4	29	27	29	26.5	29	28	26	27.5

Table 3 shows the results of weekly reading and writing task performance by group. Participants were given reading and writing tasks each week. The weekly activities provided opportunities for students to apply language skills through task-based activities and receive feedback during the intervention. It is worth noting that all groups performed below average at the beginning of the intervention. The trend of the groups' performance, however, was positive throughout the intervention. It is also important to note that in some groups, the scores in reading and writing increased at varying rates. Group 1, for example, had a reading score of 18 at the beginning of the intervention and 29 at the end. The group's writing score, however, increased to 27 at the end of the intervention from 18 at the beginning of the intervention. Group 3's scores rose from 20 to 29 in reading and from 18 to 28 in writing. These weekly results provide additional evidence of progressive improvement during the intervention and complement the pre-test/post-test findings.

Students' Responses to Weekly Feedback

At the end of each week, students responded to a ten-item feedback questionnaire concerning their experiences with the tasks, teacher feedback, classroom participation, and perceived learning. Because the questionnaire was administered four times to 20 students, the aggregated results represent 80 responses for each item.

Table 4

Overall Student Responses to Weekly Feedback Questionnaire

Item	Strongly Agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly Disagree n (%)
1. The teacher provided the necessary introduction.	69 (86.25)	8 (10.00)	2 (2.50)	1 (1.25)	0 (0.00)
2. The teacher provided timely evaluation.	67 (83.75)	6 (7.50)	4 (5.00)	3 (3.75)	0 (0.00)
3. I felt comfortable during the research activities.	69 (86.25)	8 (10.00)	2 (2.50)	1 (1.25)	0 (0.00)

4. The exercises helped improve my writing skills.	69 (86.25)	5 (6.25)	6 (7.50)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
5. The exercises helped improve my reading skills.	71 (88.75)	7 (8.75)	2 (2.50)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
6. I faced difficulty completing the task.	22 (27.50)	3 (3.75)	5 (6.25)	7 (8.75)	43 (53.75)
7. I did not understand the questions in the study.	18 (22.50)	0 (0.00)	8 (10.00)	7 (8.75)	47 (58.75)
8. The teacher forced me to give specific answers.	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	17 (21.25)	63 (78.75)
9. The teacher encouraged critical thinking.	68 (85.00)	9 (11.25)	3 (3.75)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
10. I learned something new this week.	76 (95.00)	2 (2.50)	1 (1.25)	1 (1.25)	0 (0.00)

Table 4 shows overall student responses to the weekly feedback questionnaire. At the end of each week, students completed a feedback questionnaire. Students also provided feedback on the tasks, teacher feedback, and class participation. Because the questionnaire was administered four times, the total number of responses was 80. In general, the responses were positive. With respect to learning, most students felt the activities helped them learn to read and write.

Feedback was overall positive. A majority of students responded "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the instructional and learning-related items. It was noted by 96.25% of the respondents that the teacher provided a clear introduction. Also, 91.25% of the respondents noted that evaluation was available when needed. Regarding the practice exercises, 92.50% of the respondents felt the exercises enhanced their writing skills and 97.50% felt the exercises enhanced their reading skills. The comments support the perception of the teacher and the learning environment. A majority of the respondents, 96.25%, felt that students were at ease while doing the research activities. Also, 96.25% of the respondents felt the teacher was enabling critical thinking.

Responses to the negative statements were mostly favorable, although a minority reported difficulty: 31.25% of responses (25 of 80) agreed or strongly agreed that they faced difficulty completing the task, and 22.50% (18 of 80) strongly agreed that they did not understand the questions. Regarding the statement, "I faced difficulty completing the task," 62.50% of the respondents felt this was not the case. Also, 67.50% of the respondents did not agree with the statement, "I did not understand the questions in the study." In addition, 100% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, "The teacher forced me to give specific answers." The last statement of the survey indicated that 97.50% of the respondents learned something new that week. Overall, the feedback indicated that students appreciated the TBLT activities.

Qualitative Findings

The experiences of learners during the four-week task-based learning intervention were explored through classroom observations, open-ended feedback, and a focus group discussion. Analysis of these data resulted in five themes: initial uncertainty and gradual adaptation, peer collaboration and teamwork, confidence and learner independence, engagement and creativity, and challenges in task-based learning.

Initial Uncertainty and Gradual Adaptation

At the beginning of the intervention, learners expressed uncertainty about the activities and expectations of group work. Classroom observations indicated that many learners appeared anxious and confused, partly because they were

accustomed to relying on the teacher for explanations, demonstrations, and answers. Similar concerns were reflected in their open-ended feedback and focus group discussions. However, as the intervention progressed, learners gradually became more comfortable with the task-based approach. Rather than waiting for the teacher to provide answers, they increasingly began developing their own responses, sharing ideas, and completing activities with greater independence.

Peer Collaboration and Teamwork

Peer interaction emerged as an important aspect of the task-based activities. Group members supported one another by sharing ideas, discussing instructions, and explaining tasks to their peers. Observations also indicated that students who were more proficient often assisted those who experienced greater difficulty with the activities. Although some participants initially faced challenges related to group formation and changes in group membership, their coordination and cooperation gradually improved. Overall, the structured task-based activities provided opportunities for peer support, shared participation, and collaborative learning.

Confidence and Learner Independence

The qualitative findings also indicated improvements in learners' confidence and independence over the course of the intervention. Initially, students frequently relied on the researcher for guidance, notes, and answers to questions. However, as they became more familiar with the task-based approach, they showed greater willingness to participate and express their ideas. They also became less dependent on the researcher when completing activities and sharing their opinions with the class. During the focus group discussion, students described feeling happy and successful when completing tasks, suggesting that these experiences contributed to their developing confidence and sense of independence.

Engagement and Creativity

Learners generally found the activities and topics interesting and engaging. Through the reading passages, they encountered new ideas, information, and vocabulary, while the writing activities provided opportunities to express their thoughts and relate tasks to personal experiences. Classroom observations indicated that students participated enthusiastically and demonstrated creativity when completing the assigned activities. In particular, activities that allowed them to discuss and write about topics relevant to their interests appeared to generate greater participation and enjoyment.

Challenges in Task-Based Learning

Despite the positive experiences, learners also encountered several challenges during the intervention. Some students initially found certain tasks confusing and depended on their classmates for clarification and support. Others reported difficulties using English to complete activities and communicate with group members. Differences in working pace also created challenges, particularly when some group members completed tasks more quickly than others. In addition to these learning-related difficulties, external factors such as power failures and high classroom temperatures affected the learning process. Nevertheless, as the intervention progressed, learners gradually became better able to manage these difficulties and continue participating in the activities.

Overall Interpretation

Both the qualitative and quantitative data from the TBLT intervention show improvement in reading and writing. Positive changes in the learners' classroom experience were also shown. The reading and writing post-tests showed a

significant improvement from the pre-tests. The qualitative data offer a possible explanation for the improvement and show that the learners were able to complete different activities with less teacher guidance and more independence. Based on the tasks, the learners were able to generate different ideas and identify new words. The activities allowed the learners to be creative with reading and writing. Using English, working with classmates who worked at different speeds, and external problems such as power failures were some of the obstacles the learners faced. Overall, reading and writing performance improved over the course of the TBLT intervention. The changes in classroom experiences were also positive.

Discussion

The results from the quantitative analysis showed an increase in both reading and writing abilities after going through the TBLT intervention. Reading scores showed a pronounced increase, with the mean score going from 5.60 to 9.59. The difference between the two means was found to be statistically significant ($t(19) = 12.46$, $p < .001$). The results from the writing section also showed a clear increase, with the mean score going from 5.05 to 8.63. The difference between the two means was also found to be statistically significant ($t(19) = 11.40$, $p < .001$). The results from this study are consistent with the findings from the study conducted by Nguyen (2022), and also show that task-based instructions improved the reading abilities of EFL learners. The writing results followed the same pattern. Because of the one-group pre-test and post-test design, the improvements should be viewed as consistent with a positive effect of the TBLT intervention rather than as proof of it.

The TBLT program was designed to improve reading and writing, and the results show improvement in both skills. Mean reading scores increased from 5.60 to 9.59. The post-test was significantly higher than the pre-test, with a large effect size (Cohen's d_z = [2.79]). The results are similar to those of a study by Nguyen (2022), in which reading scores of 58 university EFL learners improved as a result of participating in reading tasks. Writing mean scores were also improved, increasing from 5.05 to 8.63, with a large effect size (Cohen's d_z = [2.56]). Similar results of the effect of task-based instruction (TBI) on the writing of EFL learners can be found in the studies of Sharmin (2023) and Fasih (2022). The findings of the current study contribute to the body of research showing the effect of using TBI on the reading and writing of EFL learners. Considering that the study used a one-group pre-test and post-test design, the improvements in reading and writing should be interpreted cautiously and not attributed to TBLT with certainty. The qualitative findings, which showed growing confidence, peer collaboration and independence, offer a possible explanation for these gains, although learners also reported difficulties with using English, differing paces of work and time management.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. It used a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, so changes in performance cannot be attributed to TBLT with certainty. The sample was small (N = 20) and drawn from a single college, which limits generalizability. The researcher also delivered the intervention, collected the data and provided feedback, which may have introduced bias. Post-test reading scores were close to the maximum, suggesting a possible ceiling effect. Finally, external factors such as power failures and high temperatures affected some sessions.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of a four-week TBLT intervention on the reading and writing performance of undergraduate EFL learners and on their experiences of task-based activities. Scores in both skills rose significantly from pre-test to post-test, and learners reported growing confidence, collaboration and independence, alongside difficulties with using English, differing paces of work and time management. Given the one-group design, these

results suggest that TBLT is a promising approach for EFL reading and writing instruction rather than conclusive evidence of its effect.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that English language teachers use task-based activities to structure reading and writing lessons so that students have more opportunities to participate, discuss, and express themselves in English. For student-centered and collaborative activities, it is crucial that teachers carefully model and scaffold the activities, especially at the beginning. It is also crucial that teachers allow enough time for students to engage in discussion to reach a group consensus on their final output. Because learners worked at different paces, the ways that students are grouped, and the number of groups, should depend on the overall class participation and students' command of the language. Teacher education and training programs should include the design and implementation of TBLT activities. Furthermore, institutions should provide resources that facilitate the use of task-based learning. Conducting studies on TBLT with control or comparison groups and with different, larger, and more representative samples and for longer periods of time to test whether these findings hold in other contexts is highly recommended.

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