UniPublish Journal of Science
Vol. 1 No. 2 (2026) · pp. 75-83

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing Reading Comprehension Skills among B1-Level EFL Students through Task-Based Language Teaching

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ARTICLE INFO

Received
5 November 2026

Published
5 November 2026

ISSN
applied for

Keywords: reading comprehension, task-based language teaching, B1 learners

Read online
unipublish.org

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How to cite: Rustamxonova, O. (2026). Developing Reading Comprehension Skills among B1-Level EFL Students through Task-Based Language Teaching. *UniPublish Journal of Science*, 1(2), 75-83. https://unipublish.org/articles/developing-reading-comprehension-skills-among-b1-level-efl-students-th

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Developing Reading Comprehension Skills among B1-Level EFL Students through Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract:*Reading comprehension is an essential skill in English language learning because it enables learners to understand, interpret, and use information from written texts. However, B1-level EFL students may experience difficulties in identifying main ideas, locating specific information, understanding unfamiliar vocabulary in context, and interpreting the overall meaning of a text. This article examines the use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to develop reading comprehension skills among B1-level learners. Drawing on Willis's (1996) framework of task-based learning and Nuttall's (1996) principles of teaching reading, the article discusses what reading skills should be taught, who the target learners are, and how reading instruction can be organized through meaningful tasks. The practical component describes a classroom lesson entitled "The Importance of Sleep for University Students", conducted with six participants. The lesson included prediction, skimming, scanning, vocabulary-in-context activities, comprehension questions, and a final communicative task in which learners created practical recommendations based on the reading text. All six participants completed the assigned activities. The article demonstrates how reading strategies can be integrated into a task-based lesson in which learners read not only to answer questions but also to obtain information and achieve a meaningful outcome.*

Keywords*: reading comprehension, task-based language teaching, B1 learners, EFL, reading strategies, skimming, scanning, communicative tasks.*

Introduction

Reading is one of the fundamental skills in foreign language learning. It provides learners with opportunities to acquire vocabulary, encounter grammatical structures, develop background knowledge, and understand different types of written communication. Nevertheless, the ability to read words correctly does not necessarily mean that a learner understands a text. Reading comprehension

involves constructing meaning, identifying relationships between ideas, recognizing the writer‘s purpose, and selecting relevant information. For B1-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, reading can be challenging for several reasons. Students may understand individual words but fail to recognize the central message of a passage. They may also spend too much time translating unfamiliar vocabulary instead of using contextual clues. Other common difficulties include distinguishing main ideas from supporting details, locating particular information, and making connections between different parts of a text.

Nuttall (1996) emphasizes the importance of teaching reading as an active process of understanding written texts. Reading instruction should therefore help learners develop strategies that enable them to approach texts with a clear purpose. Activities such as predicting content, reading for the main idea, searching for specific information, and using context to interpret vocabulary can support this process.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a meaningful framework for organizing such activities. Willis (1996) presents a task-based framework in which learners use language to achieve an outcome through a sequence of classroom activities. Rather than focusing exclusively on isolated language forms, this approach gives learners opportunities to understand and communicate meaning while completing purposeful tasks.

The aim of this article is to examine how TBLT can be applied to the development of reading comprehension skills among B1-level EFL students. The discussion is organized around three methodological questions: what to teach, who to teach, and how to teach. The article also describes a practical lesson conducted with six participants to demonstrate how reading strategies can be integrated into a task-based learning framework.

What to Teach

The main content of teaching should be the reading skills and strategies that enable B1-level learners to understand written information independently and effectively. Reading comprehension should not be limited to translating sentences or answering isolated questions. Learners need to understand the overall message of a text, identify relevant details, interpret vocabulary, and use information for a particular purpose. ‘The principal teaching aims are as follows: Practical aim: To develop learners‘ ability to understand B1-level texts by identifying main ideas, locating specific information, interpreting vocabulary in context, and responding to comprehension questions. Educational aim: To increase learners‘ awareness of how

written texts are organized and how information is presented through paragraphs, examples, explanations, and supporting details. Developmental aim: To develop critical thinking, prediction, information-selection skills, and independent reading strategies. Upbringing aim: To encourage learners to value reading as a source of knowledge, make informed decisions, and apply relevant information to everyday life.

The following reading strategies are particularly relevant to the proposed lesson:

Reading strategy	**Description**	**Classroom application**
Prediction	Anticipating the possible content of a text using its title or other clues.	Students predict the content of a passage before reading it.
Skimming	Reading quickly to understand the general meaning or main idea.	Students identify the main message of a passage.
Scanning	Looking through a text to find particular information.	Students locate numbers, facts, and specific details.
Vocabulary in context	Understanding unfamiliar words by examining surrounding words and sentences.	Students match unfamiliar words with their meanings using contextual clues.
Reading for evidence	Finding information in a text that supports or contradicts a statement.	Students identify relevant sentences to justify their answers.

These strategies serve different purposes and should be taught through activities that require learners to use information from the text. For example, skimming helps students understand what a passage is generally about, whereas scanning directs their attention towards particular details. Vocabulary-in-context activities encourage learners to interpret words in relation to the surrounding information rather than immediately translating every unfamiliar item.

In addition to these strategies, learners should develop the ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information. This is particularly important when reading texts that contain several paragraphs and different supporting ideas.

Who to Teach

The target group consists of B1-level learners of English as a Foreign Language. These learners are expected to understand the main points of clear written texts on familiar subjects. They generally possess sufficient basic

vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to read relatively straightforward passages. However, their reading comprehension may still be limited when they encounter unfamiliar expressions, longer paragraphs, or texts containing several connected ideas. One difficulty at this level is the tendency to concentrate on individual words instead of understanding the complete message. Some learners attempt to translate every sentence into their first language, which can interrupt the reading process and make it difficult to identify the main idea. Others may recognize familiar vocabulary but struggle to locate supporting details or explain the relationship between ideas. B1 learners also have different reading speeds, levels of vocabulary knowledge, and degrees of confidence. Consequently, reading lessons should provide clear instructions and gradually move from simpler comprehension activities towards tasks that require learners to interpret and use information. For this reason, the proposed approach combines several reading strategies with purposeful tasks. Learners first activate their background knowledge, then read for general and specific information, and finally use the information obtained from the text to complete a communicative activity. The practical lesson described in this article involved six participants. The activities were designed at an appropriate level of difficulty for B1 learners and provided opportunities to practise different aspects of reading comprehension.

How to Teach

The proposed teaching procedure is based on Willis‘s (1996) task-based learning framework and Nuttall‘s (1996) approach to reading instruction. Willis organizes task-based learning around three main components: the pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus. These components provide a framework for preparing learners, engaging them in meaningful activities, and examining language after task completion. The practical lesson was entitled “The Importance of Sleep for University Students.” A reading passage of approximately 350–400 words was used. It discussed the relationship between sleep, memory, concentration, academic performance, and students‘ daily habits. The lesson was conducted with six participants. All six completed the assigned activities.

1. Pre-task Stage

The purpose of the pre-task stage is to introduce the topic, activate learners‘ background knowledge, and prepare them for the main reading activities. The lesson began with a short warm-up discussion. Students were asked questions such as:

- How many hours do you usually sleep?

- Do you use your phone before going to bed?
- How do you feel after sleeping for only a few hours?

These questions encouraged learners to connect the topic with their personal experiences. They also introduced the subject without requiring students to read the passage immediately.

After the discussion, four key expressions were introduced:

- Concentration
- Memory
- Sleep deprivation
- Academic performance

Learners were introduced to the meanings of these expressions before encountering them in the text. This preparation helped establish the context of the reading passage.

The next activity was prediction. Students were shown the title, “The Importance of Sleep for University Students”, and asked to predict what information the passage might contain. They were encouraged to consider possible connections between sleep and learning. Prediction was used as a preparation strategy because it gave learners a reason to read and encouraged them to compare their expectations with the actual content of the passage.

2. Task Cycle

The task cycle formed the central part of the lesson. At this stage, learners interacted with the reading text and completed activities requiring them to identify, select, and interpret information.

Task 1: Skimming – Finding the Main Idea. Students were instructed to read the passage quickly and identify its main idea. They were not expected to understand every word. Instead, their attention was directed towards the overall message. They answered a multiple-choice question about the central idea of the passage. The correct answer was that sleep plays an important role in students‘ learning and daily performance. This activity encouraged learners to focus on general meaning rather than individual vocabulary items. It also helped them distinguish the main message from supporting information. Task 2: Scanning – Finding Specific Information. After identifying the main idea, students read the passage again to locate specific information.They were asked to find answers to questions such as:

1. How many hours of sleep are generally recommended for young adults?
2. What does the brain do during sleep?
3. What problems may result from insufficient sleep?

4. What should students avoid before bedtime?

Unlike the previous activity, this task required students to search for particular details. They needed to locate relevant information in the passage rather than read every sentence with equal attention.

Task 3: Vocabulary in Context. In this activity, students matched selected words from the passage with their definitions. The target expressions included words such as “responsibilities”, “concentration”, “process”, “motivation”, “deprivation”, and “approximately”. The purpose was to encourage learners to interpret vocabulary through its context. Instead of treating unfamiliar words as isolated items, students were required to consider how they were used in the passage. This activity also reinforced vocabulary encountered during reading. Task 4: Find the Evidence! Students were presented with several statements related to the reading passage. They had to decide whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement according to the information in the text. For example:

- Sleep helps the brain organize and remember new information.
- Using electronic devices before bedtime can affect sleep quality.
- Good sleeping habits are important for successful learning.

Students were required to locate evidence in the passage to support their decisions. This activity encouraged closer reading and helped learners distinguish between information explicitly presented in the text and statements that did not accurately reflect its content. Task 5: Main Communicative Task – Five Tips for Better Sleep and Better Learning The final activity was designed as the main task of the lesson. Students were asked to use the information from the reading passage to prepare a short guide entitled “Five Tips for Better Sleep and Better Learning. ”They had to select the most useful information from the text and transform it into five practical recommendations for university students. Possible recommendations included maintaining a regular sleep schedule, reducing screen use before bedtime, avoiding coffee late in the evening, and creating a comfortable sleeping environment. This task required learners to move beyond answering comprehension questions. They had to understand the information, select relevant details, and use what they had read to produce a meaningful outcome.

The activity therefore connected reading comprehension with practical communication. The success of the task depended on learners‘ ability to understand and apply information from the passage.

3. Language Focus and Feedback

Following the task-based sequence, the final stage focused on reviewing language and providing feedback. The teacher reviewed selected vocabulary items and expressions from the reading passage. Particular attention was given to words that were important for understanding the topic. Learners‘ responses to the comprehension activities were also checked. Incorrect answers could be discussed by returning to the relevant parts of the passage and identifying the information that supported the correct response. This stage provided an opportunity to clarify vocabulary and reinforce understanding after learners had completed the meaning-focused tasks.

Practical Implementation and Observation

The lesson was conducted with six participants using the reading passage “The Importance of Sleep for University Students”. The lesson included a warm-up discussion, vocabulary preparation, prediction, skimming, scanning, vocabulary-in-context practice, evidence-based comprehension questions, and a final communicative task. All six participants completed the assigned activities. The lesson therefore provided a practical opportunity to implement the proposed sequence of reading tasks with a small group of learners. The classroom observation focused on task completion and participation. The activities required learners to engage with the text for different purposes: identifying its general meaning, locating specific details, interpreting vocabulary, supporting answers with textual evidence, and applying information to a practical outcome. The practical implementation demonstrates how several reading strategies can be combined within a task-based lesson. However, the observation was descriptive rather than experimental. No pre-test and post-test measurements were conducted, and therefore the lesson does not provide statistical evidence of improvement in reading proficiency. Further research involving a larger group, repeated lessons, and systematic assessment would be necessary to measure the long-term effectiveness of the approach.

Conclusion

This article examined the application of Task-Based Language Teaching to the development of reading comprehension skills among B1-level EFL learners. It addressed three methodological questions: what to teach, who to teach, and how to teach. The content of instruction (what) includes prediction, skimming, scanning, vocabulary in context, and reading for textual evidence. These strategies help learners approach written texts with different purposes and develop a more active approach to reading. The target learners (who) are B1-level EFL students who can

understand straightforward written texts but may experience difficulties identifying main ideas, locating specific information, and interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary. The teaching procedure (how) follows Willis‘s (1996) task-based framework, combining preparation, a meaning-focused task cycle, and a language-focused stage. Nuttall‘s (1996) principles of reading instruction provide a basis for selecting and integrating reading strategies into the lesson. The practical lesson, conducted with six participants, demonstrated how these principles can be applied through a reading passage about sleep and academic performance. All six participants completed the assigned activities, including the final task of producing five practical recommendations based on the text. The main pedagogical value of this approach is that learners read with a purpose and use the information they obtain to achieve a meaningful outcome. Reading is consequently treated not merely as an activity of decoding written words but as an active process of understanding, selecting, and applying information.

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