

Effects of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Method in Improving Lao EFL College Students' Basic English Grammar

Khonesak Keomaneevong

Department of Administration and Finance, Savannakhet Teacher Training College

Abstract

This research employed Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), in teaching English grammar in an English teacher training course in Lao PDR, with the objectives of examining the efficiency of TBLT-based lesson plans against the 75/75 criterion, comparing Lao EFL college students' grammar ability before and after instruction through pre-test and post-test mean scores, and investigating students' levels of satisfaction on the TBLT method. It adopted a one-group pre-test–post-test design, involving a population of 24 third-year English teacher training students at Savannakhet Teacher Training College, Lao PDR, from which 16 students were selected through convenience sampling. The research instruments included eight lesson plans designed based on the TBLT framework, pre- and post-tests, and a satisfaction questionnaire. Quantitative data was analyzed by using basic statistics such as mean, percentage, standard deviation, and a one-sample t-test, while qualitative data was decoded and interpreted descriptively; the findings revealed that the effectiveness of the TBLT-based lesson plans exceeded the 75/75 criterion, with E2 scores of 78.75/80.88, the post-test mean score (80.88) was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score (55.44), representing an improvement of 19.71%, and students demonstrated a very high level of satisfaction with learning through TBLT, as indicated by an overall mean score of 4.44 (S.D. = 0.54), with the highest satisfaction reported for item 5 (\bar{x} = 4.81, S.D. = 0.40) and the lowest for item 2 (\bar{x} = 3.63, S.D. = 0.72); moreover, most participants perceived TBLT as highly effective for enhancing English grammar, although time consumption in completing tasks was identified as a common challenge. Overall, the study concludes that the implementation of TBLT in teaching English grammar to English teacher training students in a Lao college context was effective and fostered positive student attitudes toward grammar learning through this method.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Basic English Grammar,

Standard Criterion set 75/75, Lao EFL College Students, Grammatical Test, Efficiency.

***Corresponding author. E-mail:** khonesak480@gmail.com

Introduction

English is used to communicate among people around the world for various objectives such as business, educations, medicine, politics, tourism, engineering, cultural exchange, sports, and so on. Lao People Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a member of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which English is used for every event ranging from youth exchanging activities to official meetings. To promote and encourage its citizens and officers to effectively take part in each regional or international activities, English is a foreign language that is compulsory for general education starting from the third year of primary school through tertiary education in Lao PDR (MOES, 2015).

In consistent with teacher training department's policy, Savannakhet Teacher Training College (STTC) has produced teachers mainly for two provinces Khammouane and Savavannakhet, but it also frequently receives students who are from some nearby provinces. English teacher is one of four majored programs has trained at STTC since 1995. To complete the program, students are need to obtain knowledge of language skills, language components, and also pedagogical theories. Based on the provided syllabus, Grammar is one of many subjects that are taught in the English teacher training course for a teaching bachelor degree.

Based on observation, most teachers apply either Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) (Hinkel 2011) or Test-Teach-Test (TTT) (Coelho, 1998) grammar teaching methods in their English grammar classrooms. At worse, some students at the grammar classes are taught by using Grammar Translation Method (GTM) (Yang, 2008). However, these teaching methods seemed only focused on grammar rather than meaning and comprehension. The lack of linking the language learned in the grammar classes with the real-world language applications, some students fail to understand the authentic using contexts.

To enhance students' language structures and real-world usage, the researcher applies a language teaching method called, Task-based language teaching method in his English grammar classrooms. This teaching method is regarded as a contemporary teaching approach that is popular applied in both English as Second Language (ESL) and particularly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at the current world. It yielded effective outcomes in many recent studies including in Asian contexts (Bao & Du, 2015; Khademi, Mellati & Moghaddam, 2017; Mesbah, 2016; Najjari, 2014; Robinson, 2011).

In short, the research on applying TBLT in Lao EFL classroom, especially grammar, is rare regardless its' potential benefits which it can emphasizes both accomplishing the real-world interactive tasks and practicing language elements. This research will be useful for students who are trained to be the teacher to witness the teaching own their own and further apply the method in the future if they find it useful for their learning context. In addition, this

research will reveal the possibility of this contemporary language teaching approach in employing grammar classes, so that, it can be an alternative method for teaching English grammar class in Laos.

Research objectives

There are three main objectives in this research including:

1. To examine the efficiency of the lesson plans by using task-based language teaching methods in Lao EFL college students.
2. To compare students' grammar ability before and after using TBLT in Lao EFL college students.
3. To examine students' satisfactory level on the implementation of TBLT.

Research methodology

This research is applied one group pre-post-test design.

Research participants

The population of this research were 24 third year of English teacher training students at Savannakhet Teacher Training College, Lao PDR, which the samples were 16, selected by using the convenience sampling technique.

Data collection

The data was collected from undertaking the pre-test, orientating the research process, teach by using the TBLT framework and conduct exercises each class, and distributing the satisfaction questionnaire and collecting them back to analyze the data.

Data analysis

The quantitative data analysis deployed descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and one sample t-test to examine the hypotheses. For qualitative data analysis, the content analysis by classification was used to summarize the main themes that emerged from the open-ended questions in the satisfaction questionnaire.

Research instruments

There were 4 primary instruments used in this research as follow:

- Pre-test
- Lesson plans
- Post-test
- Satisfaction questionnaire

Results and Discussions

Research results

1. The efficiency of the lessons planned by using task-based language teaching framework to improve Lao EFL college students' grammar knowledge conducted by researcher at STTC was 78.91/80.88 which was higher than the criterion set 75/75. It indicates that the students learned English grammar through TBLT method gained scores from exercises of eight lessons at 78.91 % and the achievement test after learning at 80.88 %.

For more details can be found in the following table:

Table 1

Activities scores of Learning through using TBLT

No.	Activities scores of Learning through using TBLT (The highest score of each activity was 100)								Post-test	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Total
1	76	77	76	78	77	79	80	78	621	81
2	79	79	80	78	79	80	80	82	637	81
3	78	80	79	79	80	82	81	82	641	81
4	78	78	78	79	79	80	80	81	633	82
5	76	77	76	78	74	78	80	79	618	79
6	77	78	79	78	80	81	81	77	631	80
7	76	78	74	79	79	80	82	80	628	76
8	78	78	76	79	81	80	80	78	630	83
9	77	79	79	80	79	78	79	80	631	80
10	77	78	80	80	78	78	81	82	634	84
11	76	74	81	81	79	78	82	81	632	80
12	76	78	79	75	80	79	80	81	628	79
13	78	79	78	80	82	75	80	80	632	82
14	78	79	77	80	82	79	79	79	633	84
15	77	80	79	79	74	81	80	81	631	82
16	76	81	80	82	81	80	81	80	641	80
Total	1233	1253	1251	1265	1264	1268	1286	1281	10101	1294
\bar{X}	77.06	78.31	78.19	79.06	79.00	79.25	80.38	80.06	78.91	80.87
S.D	0.998	1.580	1.905	1.569	2.366	1.653	0.885	1.526	1.56	2.03
%	77.06	78.31	78.19	79.06	79.00	79.25	80.38	80.06	78.91	80.88

2. Comparing student’s grammar ability before and after using TBLT finds that the pre-test mean score of the students who learned English grammar by using task-based language teaching was ($\bar{x} = 55.44$, S.D = 3.78) and the post-test mean score was ($\bar{x} = 80.88$, S.D = 2.03), which the comparisons of these sets of scores will be seen in the following table.

Table 2: Difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores.

Student No	Pre-test score	Post test score	Difference	Double difference
1	58	81	23	529
2	56	81	25	625
3	50	81	31	961
4	57	82	25	625
5	55	79	24	576
6	53	80	27	729
7	54	76	22	484
8	60	83	23	529
9	58	80	22	484
10	61	84	23	529
11	56	80	24	576
12	49	79	30	900
13	49	82	33	1089
14	60	84	24	576
15	54	82	28	784
16	57	80	23	529
Total score	887	1294	407	10,525
\bar{x}	55.44	80.88	25.44	
S.D	3.78	2.03	-1.75	
%	55.44	80.88	25	

After calculating the dependent sample t-test to find the statistical significance of the differences between pre-test and post-test mean scores from applying task-based language teaching method to improve Lao EFL college students’ grammar knowledge, it finds that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test in learning through the use of TBLT method at a .01 level.

Table 3: Comparing the Difference of Pre-test and Post-test mean scores

Achievement	Total Students	Total Scores	\bar{X}	S.D	t
Pre-test	16	100	55.44	3.78	30.05**
Post-test	16	100	80.88	2.03	

3. Students' satisfactory level on the implementation of TBLT reveals that students hold positive attitude toward learning through TBLT method, which the questionnaire in overall mean score shown (\bar{x} = 4.44, S.D 0.54 or at the very satisfied level. The highest score was item 5 (\bar{x} = 4.81, S.D. = 0.40). The lowest score was item 2 (\bar{x} = 3.63, S.D. = 0.72).

The further details can be discovered in the following table.

Table 4: Results of the satisfactory questionnaires

No	Statements	Mean	S.D	Levels
01	TBLT helps foster my confidence in English communication.	4.75	0.45	The most satisfactory
02	Because the discussion is conducted in a fast way, I sometimes get trouble with participating it.	3.63	0.72	More satisfactory
03	I usually actively participate in my group's discussion during class.	4.5	0.52	More satisfactory
04	Every student in my group actively participate in the discussion.	4.75	0.45	The most satisfactory
05	I have better understanding of how grammar works rather than exploring plenty of rules.	4.81	0.40	More satisfactory
06	Students have more opportunity to use language within and outside the classroom since we started using TBLT.	4.25	0.77	More satisfactory
07	I find my English skills has lifted from participating in TBLT classes	4.5	0.52	More satisfactory
08	The topics in my language classes are closely relevant and more meaningful to me.	4.56	0.73	The most satisfactory
09	Since TBLT has introduced, I have more motivation for learning and studying English.	4.69	0.48	More satisfactory

10	TBLT method is fit with the way I learn.	4.56	0.63	The most satisfactory
11	The teacher in the language class that uses TBLT is much more relaxed.	4.13	0.5	More satisfactory
12	The teacher seems to like it when we do group works, I think it may be easier for them.	4.38	0.72	More satisfactory
13	The task-based learning has shown up some deficiencies in the teachers' own English ability.	3.88	0.5	More satisfactory
14	The teacher likes it when we do peer based assessment of each other's communication ability.	4.63	0.5	The most satisfactory
15	The teacher appears to like this method of teaching better.	4.31	0.79	More satisfactory
Grand Total		4.44	0.54	More satisfactory

Discussions

1. The Efficiency of Applying Task-based Language Teaching Method in Improving Lao EFL college students' Basic English Grammar illustrated that the efficiency of the lesson was 78.91/80.88, which was higher than the criterion set 75/75. The findings showed that the first efficiency of the process (E1) was lower than the second efficiency of outcome (E2). In other words, the post-test scores were higher than exercise scores. The results were undoubtedly stemmed from the class participation of eight classes and the community of practice, which allowed students to genuine interact with their peers. The result confirms the usefulness of eight lessons planed by using TBLT framework to improve Lao EFL college students' basic grammar knowledge. The result is consistent with the previous studies conducted by several researchers including Yildiz and Senel (2017) who found that TBLT the students' grammar knowledge was significantly improved in their quasi-experimental research. Accordingly, Khademi et al. (2017) also reported that TBLT helped foster not just social and interactive skills, but also students' functional and grammatical ability. Therefore, it can be concluded that TBLT is an effective method that is useful for improving students' grammar knowledge.

2. A Comparison of the students' Grammar knowledge before and after Applying Task-Based Language Teaching in Improving Lao EFL College Students' Basic English Grammar illustrated that the post-test mean score was higher than the pre-test mean score.

This could be interpreted that task-based language teaching method was efficient as students could improve their grammar knowledge after learning. The result confirms the research conducted by Yildiz and Senel (2017) which concluded that the post-test scores of their experimental group were significantly higher than their pre-test scores and those of the control group. This was because the students with TBLT classes had more opportunities to engage in the real world interactive and more authentic language. Accordingly, Khademi et al. (2017) also found that their students' posttest scores were higher than the pretest scores after implementing TBLT in their class. They asserted that TBLT encouraged students to automatically participate in the learning task in more natural manner because they wish to complete their task which they have the obligations with their teammates while English was used in the process. From involving such the meaningful and relaxing learning activities, Nunan (1998) asserted that students could automatically absorb their authentic language abilities. Therefore, it could be summarized that eight lessons planned by using TBLT framework taught Lao EFL college students were effective in improving their grammar knowledge.

3. The Satisfaction Toward the Application of Task-based Language Teaching in Improving Lao EFL College Students' Basic English Grammar revealed that students' satisfaction in learning with TBLT lessons were at more satisfactory level. It showed the pupils were more satisfied with participating in the lessons designed by TBLT framework. This could be inferred that lessons were gauged by experts yielded the high quality, appropriate content and suitable for students' level. The highest score was item no. 5 "I have better understanding of how grammar works rather than exploring plenty of rules." ; no. 1 "TBLT helps foster my confidence in English communication." and no. 9 "Since TBLT has introduced, I have more motivation for learning and studying English." respectively. Furthermore, most students express their thoughts on the additional open-ended question in more positive comments that TBLT associates them with learning autonomy which they have learning options and group works for completing the real-world tasks. Although the time constraints seemed to be the primary obstacle distracted their participation. By the way, if we have a global look at the results, it noticed that the students' hold more positive attitudes toward the use of task-based language teaching to improve Lao EFL college students' grammar knowledge. The result is in accordance with Khademi et al. (2017) who found that TBLT not just helped increase their students' learning motivation and real work interactive skills but it also lifted up their grammar knowledge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it revealed that students' process (E1) and their posttest mean scores were 78.91/80.88, which were higher than the prior set criterion at 75/75. Thus, it can be claimed that the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching is effective for improving Lao EFL College students' grammar ability. Besides that, TBLT also effectively contributes to students' grammar knowledge. It showed that students' grammatical posttest mean score was significantly higher than their pre-test mean score, 80.88 and 55.44 respectively. This means that students pertained more structure knowledge from learning with TBLT. Finally, TBLT received more positive attitude from the participants. On the third result of the previous chapter show that the mean score from answering 15 items was 4.44, it means that students' perspective towards learning-teaching via TBLT was at the very satisfied level. All in all, it can be said that TBLT is possible for enhancing English grammar knowledge for students in Lao PDR.

Recommendations

For the Usage of research results

Based on the findings, it could be interpreted that TBLT method can be used to foster Lao EFL college students' basic grammar. In order to successfully apply it, the teacher should

1. understood clearly on the process and steps of implementing the approach whereas students should have at least pre-intermediate level of English language ability.
2. make sure that students have sufficient time to complete each tasks collaboratively.
3. school administration should encourage its language teachers to apply this approach in their classrooms to get students familiar with the teaching methodology

For future research

This research applies the teaching methodology with only a single group of students; it might not be generalized. Therefore, the suggestions for the future research would be that

1. the researchers could apply TBLT method with other levels of students and other language domains to find its efficiency.
2. In addition, the researchers can also apply this teaching method in improving other language structures in more autonomy manners.

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