# APRENDIZAJE BASADO EN TAREAS PARA MEJORAR LA RETENCIÓN DE VOCABULARIO EN LAS AULAS DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA: UN PLAN DE INTERVENCIÓN EN ESTUDIANTES DE SECUNDARIA DE LA CIUDAD DE LOJA

## TASK-BASED LEARNING TO ENHANCE VOCABULARY RETENTION IN EFL CLASSROOMS: AN INTERVENTION PLAN AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LOJA CITY

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# Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas para Mejorar la Retención de Vocabulario en las Aulas de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera: Un Plan de Intervención en Estudiantes de Secundaria de la Ciudad de Loja

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**RESUMEN**

El presente estudio exploró la efectividad del Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas (ABT) para mejorar la retención de vocabulario en inglés en estudiantes de secundaria en Loja. Este enfoque práctico y significativo se aplicó mediante un plan de intervención con tareas contextualizadas y relacionadas con situaciones de la vida cotidiana, con el fin de fomentar una retención a largo plazo del vocabulario en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. La investigación empleó un diseño cuasi-experimental, utilizando un grupo experimental que participó en actividades diseñadas bajo el modelo ABT y un grupo de control que siguió un enfoque tradicional. Las tareas incluyeron dinámicas de conversación, resolución de problemas y actividades colaborativas, facilitando la interacción y el uso práctico del vocabulario. Para medir los resultados, se aplicaron pruebas de vocabulario antes y después de la intervención, junto con cuestionario para recoger las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el proceso de aprendizaje. Los resultados mostraron que el grupo experimental tuvo una retención de vocabulario significativamente mayor en comparación con el grupo de control, sugiriendo que el ABT es un método eficaz para mejorar la adquisición de vocabulario en el contexto de la enseñanza de inglés en secundaria. Esta investigación aporta evidencia relevante al campo de la enseñanza de idiomas en Ecuador, proporcionando una base para desarrollar estrategias pedagógicas orientadas a tareas que promuevan un aprendizaje más significativo y duradero en estudiantes de secundaria.

*Palabras clave:* aprendizaje basado en tareas, retención de vocabulario, enseñanza de inglés

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# Task-Based Learning to Enhance Vocabulary Retention in EFL Classrooms: An Intervention Plan among High School Students in Loja City

**ABSTRACT**

The present study explored the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in improving English vocabulary retention in high school students in Loja. This practical and meaningful approach was applied through an intervention plan with contextualized tasks related to everyday life situations to foster long-term vocabulary retention in learning English as a foreign language. The research employed a quasi-experimental design, using an experimental group that participated in activities designed under the TBL model and a control group that followed a traditional approach. Tasks included conversation dynamics, problem-solving, and collaborative activities, facilitating interaction and practical use of vocabulary. Vocabulary tests were administered before and after the intervention to measure the results, along with a questionnaire to collect students' perceptions of the learning process. The results showed that the experimental group had significantly higher vocabulary retention compared to the control group, suggesting that TBL is an effective method to improve vocabulary acquisition in the context of teaching English in high school. This research contributes relevant evidence to the field of language teaching in Ecuador, providing a basis for developing task-oriented pedagogical strategies that promote more meaningful and lasting learning in secondary school students.

*Keywords*: task-based learning, vocabulary retention, english language teaching

## INTRODUCTION

In the field of language acquisition, vocabulary learning is widely regarded as one of the fundamental elements of mastering a second language. For students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), having a large and well-retained vocabulary is crucial not only to express thoughts and ideas more accurately but also to improve their understanding of oral and written discourse. As stated by Ramadhan et al. (2021) without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students often face significant barriers to communicating effectively and understanding the nuances of the language. However, one of the persistent challenges in EFL teaching is ensuring that students retain the vocabulary they acquire over time. Despite successful initial learning, students frequently forget newly introduced words, leading to gaps in their language proficiency (Abdollahi, 2021). This problem is particularly evident in educational contexts where vocabulary teaching relies heavily on rote memorization or passive learning techniques. According to Ramadhan et al. (2021), in such environments, students rarely have opportunities to interact with vocabulary in meaningful, real-world situations, significantly obstructing their ability to internalize and retain words in the long term.

The problem of vocabulary retention is exacerbated when traditional teaching approaches dominate classroom practice (Xuyen & Trang, 2021). These methods typically focus on repetition and memorization, with little emphasis on the active use of vocabulary in communicative or functional contexts. As Harol et al. (2020) mention based on their study results, students may become adept at recalling isolated lists of words for short periods, only to forget them soon after which disconnect between learning and retention highlights a critical gap in current teaching methodologies, emphasizing the need for more dynamic approaches that engage students cognitively and contextually (Fasih, 2022). In the view of Tachom (2021), states that the development of pedagogical strategies that address this gap is vital to the advancement of language teaching, as these strategies can lead to more effective vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention, ultimately contributing to students' overall communicative competence in the target language (Chua & Lin, 2020).

One possible solution to this problem could be the implementation of task-based learning (TBL). In the words of Safitri et al. (2020), task-based learning is a pedagogical approach that focuses on the completion of meaningful tasks that reflect real-life scenarios. Contrasting traditional methods that

prioritize memorization and repetition, TBL encourages students to actively engage with the language through authentic tasks that require the practical application of vocabulary (Xuyen & Trang, 2021). Based on the study carried out by, Tachom (2021), not only does this approach support better retention of new words, but it also, helps students develop a deeper understanding of the context in which those words are used. Following Chua and Lin (2020),the focus on practical, real-world tasks allows students to practice the target language in situations that are relevant and meaningful to them, thereby fostering greater cognitive engagement and reinforcing vocabulary retention (Wenas et al., 2023). By integrating vocabulary into communicative tasks, students can internalize the language in a more natural and lasting way. Furthermore, task-based learning encourages collaboration and interaction between students. Additionally, enhancing their ability to use vocabulary in authentic communicative exchanges. Based on Dinh (2022) perspectives, this interaction is significant in language learning as it allows students to negotiate meanings, clarify misunderstandings, and practice fluency, all of which contribute to a more comprehensive language-learning experience.

Despite the advantages offered by task-based learning, many educational institutions continue to rely on more traditional methods of vocabulary teaching, often overlooking the potential benefits of this more interactive and communicative approach(Fasih, 2022). The persistence of these traditional methods raises important questions about the effectiveness of current teaching practices in fostering long-term vocabulary retention (Safitri et al., 2020). Given the growing recognition of the importance of communicative competence in language learning, there is a pressing need to explore alternative methods that can bridge the gap between vocabulary acquisition and retention. This research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of task-based learning on vocabulary retention among EFL learners. Specifically, the study aims to assess whether the use of authentic and meaningful tasks can assist as a more effective strategy to improve vocabulary retention.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effectiveness of task-based learning (TBL) in enhancing vocabulary retention among EFL learners. Experimental research seeks to determine if a specific treatment influences an outcome. This effect is assessed by applying a treatment to one group, censoring it from another, and then determining how both groups scored on an outcome

(Miller et al., 2020). The research involves two groups: an experimental group that receives TBL-based instruction and a control group that follows traditional vocabulary learning methods, primarily focused on memorization and repetition (Uygun & Cesur, 2024). In words of Uygun and Cesur (2024), the quasi-experimental design is chosen to compare the two instructional approaches in a real educational setting, ensuring that the findings reflect practical classroom dynamics (Miller et al., 2020).

The participants of this study consist of 42 B1-level EFL learners enrolled in a high school in Loja City. They were selected using a purposive sampling method, with 22 students assigned to the experimental group and 20 to the control group (Silva, 2013). All participants of this study, share a similar English proficiency level because they have been studying English for a comparable number of years, which ensures a relatively homogeneous sample (Swanson & Holton III, 2005). Parental consent and student assent are obtained before the commencement of the study.

To assess vocabulary retention, this study uses a combination of the ´pre-test and post-test for both groups which completed a vocabulary test to measure their knowledge of the target words. As Gul Malik and Alam, 2019) stated, that the pre-test was administered at the beginning of the study to establish a starting point for each group's vocabulary knowledge. On the other hand, the post-test was given after the intervention period to measure the retention of the target vocabulary. This post-test was administered one month after the intervention to assess long-term retention of vocabulary. As well as an observation checklist was used during the intervention period to document the interaction and engagement levels of students in the experimental group as they completed task-based activities. All tests are designed based on word lists included in the school's curriculum for B1-level students, focusing on high-frequency vocabulary words (Davison, 2024).

The intervention lasted four weeks, during which the experimental group participated in task-based learning activities, while the control group followed a traditional approach. From the point of view of (Langhout et al., 2014) action research is an opportunity to reflect on how can teachers implement their active strategies to overcome the classroom difficulties that they have in their real practice. Each group receives two 45-minute sessions per week. The interventions are applied with an experimental group (TBL Approach), in which students engage in communicative tasks that require the active use of target vocabulary in authentic contexts. These tasks were designed to mimic real-world scenarios, such as role-

playing, collaborative problem-solving, and simulated conversations. For example, one task might involve planning a trip and discussing the necessary arrangements, which requires using travel-related vocabulary. However, the control group (Traditional Approach) focused on students who were taught the same vocabulary using conventional methods, which included drilling, rote memorization of word lists, and fill-in-the-blank exercises. No emphasis is placed on the contextual use of the words or communication tasks.

Furthermore, pre-test and post-test Scores were quantitatively analyzed to determine the impact of the interventions on vocabulary retention. The tests are identical for both groups, focusing on word meaning, usage, and retention. So, qualitative data from the observation checklists was analyzed to provide insights into the level of engagement and interaction during the task-based activities (Dos Santos, 2020). Moreover, the collected data was examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using a t-test to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of vocabulary retention (Davison, 2024). The delayed post-test scores were analyzed similarly to assess long-term retention. Dos Santos (2020) mentioned that observation data from the experimental group was analyzed to identify patterns of engagement and interaction that may contribute to better retention.

Therefore, the study adheres to ethical guidelines, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Informed consent from parents and assent from students were obtained before participation. Additionally, the study aims to ensure minimal disruption to the students' normal learning process by aligning the research activities with their regular curriculum (Dos Santos, 2020).

A potential limitation of this study is the relatively short intervention period, which may not fully capture the long-term effects of TBL on vocabulary retention. Additionally, since the participants are drawn from a single institution, the generalizability of the results may be limited. Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating a longer intervention period and a more diverse sample of participants (Davison, 2024).

This methodology section outlines the study's structure, ensuring that it is replicable and that the data collection methods effectively measure the impact of task-based learning on vocabulary retention (Creswell, 2017).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study findings based on the data collected from the pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test scores. The results are presented using descriptive and inferential statistics, supported by graphical and tabular representations. Before the intervention, a vocabulary test was administered to the experimental and control groups to measure and compare their baseline knowledge. After the four-week intervention, a post-test was conducted to evaluate the immediate impact of the task-based learning (TBL) intervention on the experimental group and the traditional memorization-based approach on the control group. The mean scores for each group are presented in the table above.

**Table 1.** Results of Pre and Post-test

| Group | Pre-test | Post-test | Difference (Pre-Test - Post-Test) |
|-------|----------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| **Experimental Group** | **6.15** | **8.20** | **+2.05** |
| **Control Group** | **6.1** | **6.4** | **+0.30** |

Author: Researchers

Both groups performed similarly in the pre-test, indicating no significant differences in their initial vocabulary knowledge. Graph 1 illustrates the comparison among pre-test and post-test scores. As shown in Table 2, the experimental group demonstrated a greater improvement in vocabulary retention compared to the control group. The difference in mean scores between the two groups is statistically significant, suggesting that TBL had a more positive effect on vocabulary learning. These results are similar to the results that were shown in the study carried out by (Abdollahi, 2021).

**Graph 1.** Results comparison
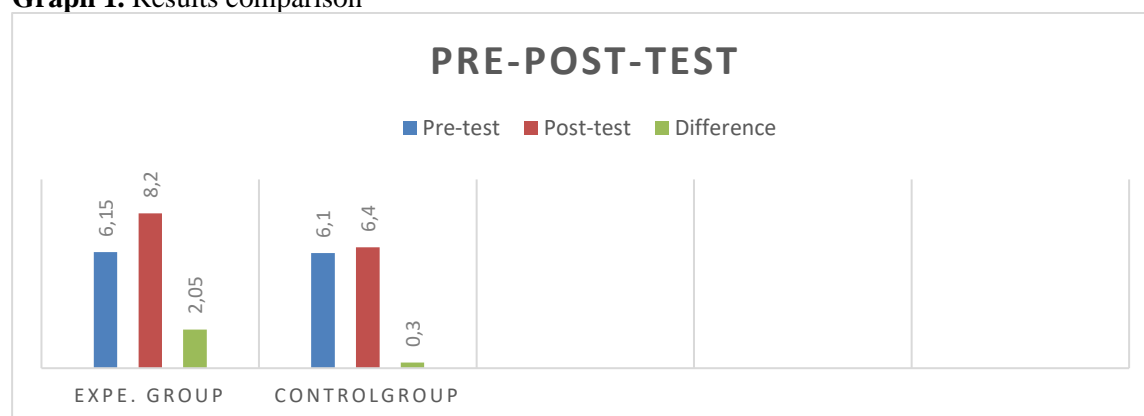


Author: Researchers

Qualitative data from classroom observations indicate that students in the experimental group exhibited higher levels of engagement and interaction during task-based learning activities. They actively participated in role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks, which involved meaningful use of the target vocabulary (Dinh, 2022). In contrast, students in the control group primarily engaged in individual tasks such as rote memorization and had limited opportunities for communicative interaction. The same findings were found by Xuyen and Trang (2021) who carried out action research, in which the integration of Task-based Learning was great effective to improve vocabulary retention. Furthermore, these observations align with the quantitative findings, suggesting that the higher engagement levels in the experimental group contributed to better vocabulary retention. These results provide strong evidence that task-based learning significantly enhances vocabulary retention compared to traditional memorization techniques. Chua and Lin (2020) found similar findings in the research that they implemented in a secondary school, where they integrated task-based learning activities to engage students' vocabulary retention, and they showed high improvement and students' motivation in class.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this study demonstrate that task-based learning (TBL) is an effective method for improving vocabulary retention among EFL learners. Compared to traditional memorization-based methods, TBL allows students to interact with new vocabulary through meaningful, real-life tasks, resulting in better short-term acquisition and better long-term retention. The experimental group consistently outperformed the control group on both posttests and posttests, indicating that when students use vocabulary in authentic communicative contexts, they are more likely to internalize and retain the words. This suggests that by incorporating tasks that reflect real-world language use, teachers can improve, both immediate comprehension and the durability of students' vocabulary knowledge. In addition to its impact on retention, TBL fosters greater student engagement and interaction in the classroom. Observations revealed that students in the experimental group were more actively engaged in the learning process, participating in collaborative activities that encouraged the practical application of target vocabulary. This higher level of engagement, along with opportunities for peer interaction and communicative exchanges, contributed to their superior performance. The findings reinforce the importance of designing tasks that are relevant to students' real-life experiences, as this relevance

increases motivation and promotes deeper cognitive engagement, making the learning process more effective and meaningful. While the study provides compelling evidence of the benefits of task-based learning, some limitations need to be considered. The length of the intervention was about four weeks, and the specific context of the study was B1-level EFL learners enrolled in a high school in Loja City, limiting the generalizability of the results. Future research should explore the long-term effects of task-based learning with more diverse student populations and examine its impact on other language skills such as grammar or pronunciation. Overall, this study highlights the potential of task-based learning to address vocabulary retention challenges and offers practical recommendations for educators seeking to implement more dynamic and interactive teaching strategies in EFL classrooms.

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