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Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and L2 grammaticality of college students

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Abstract - This study examines the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving the grammar proficiency of college students. Many learners still find it difficult to apply grammatical rules accurately in real communication despite years of instruction. This research employed a qualitative case study design and was conducted in a college English class where TBLT was implemented. Data were gathered through classroom observations, interviews, and analysis of student outputs. The findings revealed that students became more engaged and active during task-based activities, allowing them to use grammar in meaningful and realistic contexts. Classroom interaction increased as learners collaborated and negotiated meaning while completing tasks. Although improvements in grammatical accuracy were gradual, students demonstrated better understanding, increased confidence, and greater willingness to participate in communicative activities. Furthermore, the use of authentic tasks helped learners connect grammar with real-life language use, making learning more relevant and effective. The study concludes that TBLT is an effective and learner-centred approach that enhances grammar learning when supported with proper guidance, structured tasks, and timely feedback from the teacher. It also highlights the importance of integrating communicative activities with form-focused instruction to achieve balanced language development. Overall, TBLT provides a meaningful framework for improving both grammatical competence and communicative ability among college students.

Keywords: communicative learning; college students; grammar proficiency; qualitative study, task-based language teaching

1. Introduction

Grammar proficiency remains a fundamental component of communicative competence among college students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). At the tertiary level, students are expected to demonstrate accuracy, complexity, and appropriateness in their use of grammatical structures in academic writing, presentations, and professional communication. Despite prolonged exposure to formal grammar instruction, many college learners continue to experience difficulties in applying grammatical rules effectively in authentic communicative contexts. This ongoing concern highlights the need for innovative instructional approaches that promote both grammatical accuracy and meaningful language use. In the same vein, TBLT has gained recognition as a learner-centered and communicative approach that integrates grammar within meaningful tasks rather than teaching it in isolation. According to Mudinillah et al. (2024), TBLT encourages active learner participation, contextualized language use, and the development of communicative competence through real-world tasks. By engaging students in goal-oriented

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activities, TBLT provides opportunities for learners to notice and use grammatical forms naturally while focusing on meaning, which may enhance retention and practical application.

Empirical studies further support the effectiveness of TBLT in grammar instruction. Ahmed et al. (2024) reported that grammar instruction embedded within task-based frameworks promotes greater learner engagement and aligns teachers' practices with communicative goals. Similarly, Tarbiyah and Tarbiyah (2025) found that task-based learning significantly enhances grammar proficiency by encouraging interaction, negotiation of meaning, and contextualized practice. These findings suggest that grammar learning becomes more meaningful and effective when integrated into communicative tasks rather than limited to traditional present-practice-produce models. In addition, assessment research highlights the compatibility between TBLT and grammar evaluation. Noroozi and Taheri (2022) emphasized that task-based language assessment provides a more authentic measure of learners' grammatical competence compared to conventional methods. Consciousness-raising tasks have also been shown to enhance specific grammatical abilities, such as narrative tense usage, by drawing attention to form within meaningful contexts (Tilahun et al., 2022). Furthermore, corpus-integrated instruction exposes learners to authentic language patterns, thereby strengthening their grammatical awareness and accuracy (Zhong & Wakat, 2023).

While prior studies have examined the impact of TBLT in various educational settings, research focusing specifically on college students' grammar proficiency remains limited. Although broader investigations, such as that of Sobia Nageen et al. (2025), have assessed English proficiency levels among learners, there is still a need to explore how task-based instruction directly influences grammatical development at the tertiary level. Given the academic and professional demands placed on college students, examining the role of TBLT in strengthening grammar proficiency is both timely and significant. In light of these considerations, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between Task-Based Language Teaching and grammar proficiency among college students. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. How is Task-Based Language Teaching implemented in teaching grammar to college students?
- RQ2. How do college students demonstrate grammar proficiency during task-based language teaching activities?
- RQ3. What classroom practices and learner experiences in Task-Based Language Teaching contribute to the development of grammar proficiency among college students?

By addressing these questions, the study intends to contribute to the growing body of literature on communicative language teaching and provide empirical insights into effective grammar instruction at the tertiary level.

2. Method

2.1 Research Context

This study was conducted at Dr. Emilio B. Espinosa Sr. Memorial State College of Agriculture and Technology, specifically in the College of Education. This paper focused on second-year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students from section BSED English 2A, where Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) was integrated into classroom instruction (Teng et al., 2025). The College of Education provided an appropriate academic setting for examining grammar proficiency because students in the program are expected to develop strong communicative competence, grammatical accuracy, and effective language use in preparation for future teaching practice (Mandart and Rinne, 2026). The tertiary classroom environment reflects higher academic language demands in which learners are required to apply grammatical structures in both written and spoken communication. Within this context, students participated in communicative and collaborative learning tasks designed to encourage authentic language use. This setting enabled the researcher to closely examine how Task-Based Language Learning contributes to the development of grammar proficiency among college students, particularly among second-year BSED English learners.

2.2 Research Method

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This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how Task-Based Language Teaching influences the grammar proficiency of college students (Silah, 2025). The case study design enabled the researcher to examine the implementation of task-based instruction within its natural classroom setting and to observe how students demonstrate grammatical competence during communicative and collaborative learning activities. Through direct classroom observation, the researcher was able to document students' language use, participation, interaction, and application of grammatical structures while performing task-based activities. This qualitative approach provided detailed and contextualized insights into how grammar proficiency develops within a task-based learning environment among second-year BSED English students.

2.3 Selection Criteria and Sampling

The participants of the study consisted of second-year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students from section BSED English 2A at the College of Education, together with their English course instructor. The participants were selected because they were directly exposed to Task-Based Language Learning activities during classroom instruction. Purposive sampling was utilized in selecting the participants of the study. This sampling technique is appropriate in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to intentionally choose individuals who possess relevant experiences and can provide rich, meaningful, and detailed information related to the phenomenon being investigated (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024).

2.4 Instrument Validity

To ensure the credibility, trustworthiness, and consistency of the study, the researcher utilized classroom observation guides and document analysis frameworks for evaluating students' academic task outputs. Observation guide was carefully reviewed and validated by English instructors, research advisers, and subject experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the study (Estremera and Sarmiento, 2024). Revisions were incorporated based on the recommendations and feedback of validators to further improve the quality and appropriateness of the research instruments. Moreover, reliability and trustworthiness were strengthened through triangulation by comparing classroom observation records with students' written and spoken task outputs. This process helped verify recurring patterns, confirm consistency in the gathered data, and enhance the overall credibility of the findings.

2.5 Data Collection

Data were gathered primarily through classroom observations and analysis of students' academic task outputs. During classroom observations, the researcher carefully documented the implementation of Task-Based Language Learning activities, students' classroom participation, peer interaction, and the application of grammatical structures during communicative tasks (Lang and Bunch, 2025). Observation notes were used to record significant classroom behaviors, language use, and instructional practices relevant to the study. Additionally, students' written works and recorded spoken outputs produced during task completion were collected and analyzed to determine how grammar proficiency was demonstrated in authentic academic communication. These multiple sources of evidence enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how Task-Based Language Learning supports grammar development among second-year BSED English students.

2.6 Data Processing

All collected data, including observation notes and students' academic outputs, were systematically organized, reviewed, and transcribed when necessary to ensure accuracy and completeness (Martinez et al., 2025). The researcher carefully examined the gathered data to maintain faithful representation of classroom interactions and students' language performance. After organization and transcription, the data were coded and categorized according to recurring patterns and concepts related to Task-Based Language Learning and grammar proficiency. Proper data management procedures were observed to facilitate systematic analysis and interpretation of the findings.

2.7 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and meaningful themes from the gathered data. The researcher systematically analyzed classroom observation records and students' academic task outputs by assigning codes to significant behaviors,

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interactions, and demonstrations of grammatical competence (Martinez et al., 2025). Similar codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories. The emerging themes focused on students' engagement in task-based activities, application of grammatical structures during communication, classroom participation, and observable grammatical strengths and difficulties demonstrated throughout the learning process. Through thematic analysis, the researcher developed a comprehensive understanding of how Task-Based Language Learning influences grammar proficiency among second-year BSED English students in section BSED English 2A.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Approval and permission to conduct the research were secured from the appropriate authorities of Dr. Emilio B. Espinosa Sr. Memorial State College of Agriculture and Technology prior to data collection. Participants were properly informed about the purpose, procedures, and significance of the study, and voluntary participation was ensured before the conduct of classroom observations and collection of academic task outputs (Martinez et al., 2025). The researcher guaranteed the confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of all participants by protecting their identities and ensuring that all gathered information would be used solely for academic and research purposes. Furthermore, the researcher carefully considered and incorporated the recommendations and suggestions provided by the research panel and advisers in order to strengthen the quality, accuracy, credibility, and ethical integrity of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study on task-based language teaching and the grammar proficiency of college students. Data were gathered through non-participant classroom observations during two task-based activities: a short film presentation and a roleplay activity. The observations focused on students' grammatical performance, communicative strategies, and level of engagement during authentic language use.

3.1.1 Grammatical Proficiency in Task-Based Activities

The observations revealed noticeable variation in the grammatical proficiency of students during both activities. Some students were able to construct grammatically correct sentences, demonstrating appropriate use of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure. In contrast, several students exhibited recurring grammatical errors, particularly in maintaining tense consistency, forming complete sentences, and selecting appropriate vocabulary. For instance, during the short film presentations, a number of students successfully delivered their narratives using coherent and grammatically accurate sentences. However, others showed difficulty in sustaining correct tense usage throughout their dialogue, often shifting between past and present forms within the same sentence.

Table 1. Grammatical Proficiency (Short Film Activity)

Documentation	Description	Grammaticality	Interpretation
	Students presented scripted or semi-scripted dialogues in front of the class	Some students used correct sentence structures and consistent verb tenses, while others shifted between past and present tense (e.g., "He go to school yesterday"). Around half of the observed students showed at least one grammatical error during delivery.	Students demonstrate varying levels of grammatical proficiency, with stronger performance in prepared speech but noticeable inconsistencies in tense usage.

Figure 1. Students presenting their short film demonstrating varying grammatical proficiency

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3.1.2 Common Grammatical Errors Observed

Analysis of the observations identified several recurring grammatical errors among students. The most common issues observed were the inconsistent use of verb tenses, errors in subject-verb agreement, and the production of incomplete or fragmented sentence structures. Additionally, some students demonstrated incorrect or limited vocabulary use, which further affected the clarity and accuracy of their responses. These errors were more evident during spontaneous speech, particularly in the role-play activity where students were required to respond in real time. Despite these challenges, students continued to participate actively in the tasks, attempting to express their ideas even with limited grammatical accuracy.

3.1.3 Use of Communicative Strategies

Students demonstrated the use of various communicative strategies to maintain interaction and convey meaning during the activities. These included paraphrasing, self-correction, and peer assistance. For example, when students encountered difficulty in expressing a word or idea, they often rephrased their sentences or used simpler vocabulary to continue speaking. In several instances, peers provided support by suggesting words or helping restructure sentences, allowing the interaction to proceed smoothly.

Table 2. Communicative Strategies (Roleplay Activity)

Documentation	Description	Grammaticality	Interpretation
	Students performed spontaneous dialogues based on given situations	Students frequently paused, rephrased sentences, or used simpler words when unsure. In several cases, peers provided missing vocabulary or corrected sentence structure during interaction.	Students use communicative strategies to maintain interaction despite grammatical limitations, allowing them to complete tasks successfully.

Figure 2. Students using communicative strategies during interaction.

These strategies enabled students to compensate for their grammatical limitations while still participating effectively in the tasks.

3.1.4 Application of Grammar in Meaningful Tasks

The findings show that students were able to apply previously learned grammatical structures in task-based activities. During both the short film presentation and role-play, students attempted to use appropriate sentence patterns and vocabulary acquired from prior lessons. Although not all students demonstrated complete accuracy, their efforts to use correct grammar in meaningful and context-based situations suggest that task-based activities provide opportunities for practical language use. The tasks encouraged students to focus on expressing ideas while simultaneously applying their grammatical knowledge.

3.1.5 Learners Engagement During Task-based Activities

Students exhibited a high level of engagement during both activities. Many participants actively contributed to group discussions, performed confidently during role-plays, and showed increased participation compared to traditional classroom settings. Some students who were initially hesitant became more involved as the activities progressed. Their increased participation appeared to support more frequent use of the target language, providing additional opportunities to practice grammar in context.

Table 3. Learner Engagement

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Documentation	Description	Grammaticality	Interpretation
	Students worked collaboratively during task-based activities	Most students actively participated in discussions and performances. Initially quiet students became more involved as the activity progressed, showing increased willingness to speak in the target language. Slight grammar errors are noted.	Task-based activities promote active engagement, which provides more opportunities for students to practice language and apply grammar in context.

Figure 3. Students actively participating in group activities

Table 4 Story Analysis Activity

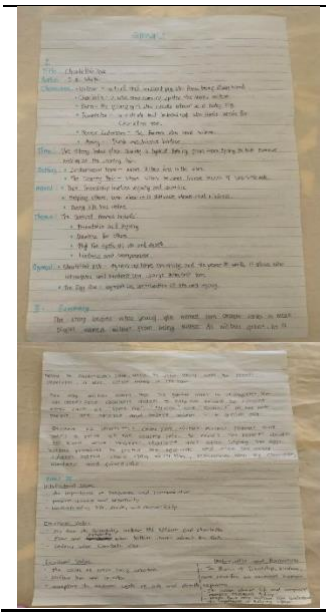
Documentation	Description	Grammaticality	Interpretation
	Students worked collaboratively in analysing the assigned story. They identified the title, author, characters, and summarized the story in their own words. They also determined the values presented in the story, such as emotional, spiritual, and etc.	Majority of the students submitted complete outputs showing a clear understanding of the story with slight grammar proficiency.	The activity strengthened students' reading comprehension and analytical skills.

Figure 4. Students analysing the literary elements and values of the story

Collectively, based on the observations, the study found that students demonstrated varying levels of grammatical proficiency during task-based activities. While grammatical errors were evident, particularly in spontaneous communication, students consistently attempted to use correct structures to express their ideas. The findings also indicate that students relied on communicative strategies to overcome difficulties in grammar, allowing them to maintain interaction and complete tasks effectively. Furthermore, task-based activities encouraged active participation and provided a context for students to apply their grammatical knowledge in meaningful situations. Overall, the results suggest that task-based language teaching supports the development of grammar proficiency by promoting the practical use of language, despite the presence of grammatical inaccuracies.

4. Discussion

The results of this study on TBLT and second-language grammaticality among college students in the site of interest make a significant contribution specifically to the broader international

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discussion on communicative and task-driven pedagogy (Bygate, 2024; Ellis & Shintani, 2022; Nassaji & Fotos, 2023). The results correspondingly indicate that TBLT can serve as a viable scaffold for assisting learners in transitioning from rote grammatical knowledge to more accurate, contextually appropriate language use in real-time communication, as intended for an international audience (Asne & Estremera, 2025; Baliwas & Estremera, 2025; Malin, 2026). In effect, students are compelled to heed to form while prioritizing content in tasks that necessitate them to negotiate meaning, solve problems, and complete authentic activities. Pedagogically, this aligns directly with the fundamental principles of TBLT as proposed by Ellis (2020) and other scholars in the related fields.

This pattern is in accordance with cross-cultural research conducted in Asia, the Middle East, and beyond, which has demonstrated that tasks that involve role-plays, information-gap activities, and collaborative projects can improve both fluency and grammatical accuracy, particularly when followed by explicit language-focus phases (Bagasala & Estremera, 2025; Crabbe & Li, 2024; Opportunity & Kim, 2023; Tran, 2025). To substantiate further, the significance of instructional design and context is also underscored by the impact of TBLT on L2 grammaticality from a global perspective. Along this line, carefully sequenced tasks can create a shared, low-threat environment for experimentation with structure in multilingual higher-education settings, where college students often possess varying levels of exposure to the target language and diverse first-language influences (Dio & Estremera, 2025; Nguyen & Duong, 2022; Sorrosa, 2025; Watcharin, 2023). In effect, international readers may observe that the improvements in grammaticality are not consistent across all grammatical features. Simpler, high-frequency forms (e.g., present and past simple tenses) tend to demonstrate a more pronounced improvement than more complex structures, which is consistent with research from other EFL contexts (Jalmasco & Estremera, 2025; Lauta & Estremera, 2025; Lopez & Estremera, 2025; Mingoy & Estremera, 2025). Accordingly, this suggests that, despite the fact that TBLT facilitates implicit grammar development, explicit attention to form, including guided feedback, error analysis, and brief metalinguistic discussions, remains necessary for the acquisition of advanced grammatical items (Ananda & Asiza, 2025; Gapayao & Estremera, 2026; Lam, 2023). Most significantly, the study emphasizes the potential of TBLT as a flexible framework, rather than a fixed method, for educators and policymakers who are not limited to a single national context. Thus, university language programs worldwide have the ability to modify task types, difficulty, and sequencing to align with local curricular objectives, class sizes, and assessment requirements, while simultaneously maintaining the fundamental principles of goal-oriented, meaning-driven interaction (Garalde & Estremera, 2026; Gersalia & Estremera, 2025; Guamos & Estremera, 2025). Simultaneously, the findings suggest that students' responses to TBLT may be influenced by their sociocultural attitudes toward grammar practice, prior instructional experiences, and learner beliefs, as evidenced by mixed-effect studies conducted in Vietnam and other regions (Borcello & Santos, 2024; Griffiths & Talebi, 2023). In the long run, combining the key tenets of this article, this paper motivates an international audience to perceive TBLT as a powerful, context-sensitive tool that, when thoughtfully integrated with form-focused instruction, may significantly enhance L2 grammaticality among college-level students, rather than a universal solution for grammatical accuracy.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the grammar proficiency of college students engaged in task-based language teaching activities, specifically a short film presentation and a roleplay activity. It primarily contributed to TBLT theory which underscores that language is best learned when learners use it to do meaningful tasks, not when they study grammar rules in isolation. Similarly, language acquisition happens through interaction and meaning-focused use, not explicit memorization. Classrooms tasks create a need to negotiate meaning, which pushes learners to notice gaps in their own language system. In the process, grammar develops as a by-product of trying to communicate effectively during tasks. Thus, based on non-participant classroom

observations, several inferences emerged. Initially, college students demonstrate varying levels of grammatical proficiency during task-based activities.

While some learners produce grammatically accurate sentences with consistent verb tense usage and proper subject-verb agreement, others exhibit recurring errors, particularly in maintaining tense consistency, forming complete sentences, and selecting appropriate vocabulary. These grammatical inaccuracies are more pronounced during spontaneous, unplanned speech compared to prepared or semi-scripted presentations. Interestingly, despite grammatical limitations, students actively employ communicative strategies to sustain interaction and complete tasks. Paraphrasing, self-correction, and peer assistance were commonly observed, indicating that learners possess the ability to compensate for grammatical gaps while maintaining meaningful communication. This finding suggests that TBLT fosters strategic competence alongside grammatical development. Likewise, task-based activities promote high levels of learner engagement.

Students demonstrated active participation, collaborative group work, and increased willingness to communicate as activities progressed. Initially hesitant students became more involved over time, suggesting that task-based instruction can reduce affective barriers to language production. This engagement provides frequent opportunities for meaningful language use, which is a fundamental condition for second language acquisition. Most significantly, students are able to apply previously learned grammatical structures in task-based contexts, although not always with complete accuracy. This finding indicates that TBLT serves as a bridge between explicit grammar instruction and practical language use, allowing students to transfer declarative grammatical knowledge into communicative performance. Collectively, predominantly the study concludes that task-based language teaching supports the development of grammar proficiency by providing authentic, engaging contexts for language use. However, the persistence of grammatical errors, particularly in spontaneous communication, suggests that TBLT is most effective when implemented alongside focused grammatical instruction rather than as a standalone approach. The combination of communicative task engagement and targeted form-focused instruction appears necessary to address both fluency and accuracy in college-level language learning.

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