The Effectiveness of the Integration of Blended Learning and Task-Based Learning Instructional Model on English Reading Skills of Undergraduate Students in Guangxi Province

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Abstract

The present study had 3 primary objectives: 1) to investigate the factors influencing the English reading skills of undergraduate students in Guangxi Province 2) to confirm the appropriateness of instructional model for English reading skills based on blended learning and task-based learning approaches specifically tailored for undergraduate students in Guangxi Province and 3) to assess the effectiveness of the instructional model developed in objective two on the reading skills of undergraduate students. The research methodology was structured into three distinct phases: Phase I: studying the internal and external factors affecting English reading skills gathering data through questionnaires administered to 190 undergraduate students and interviews conducted with 9 lecturers in Guangxi Province; Phase II: developing

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an instructional model integrating blended learning and task-based learning for English reading skills based on instructional model development theory and the findings from Phase I, plus rigorous evaluation against four standards: utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy by 5 experts using an instructional model evaluation form; and Phase III: investigating the effectiveness of the developed instructional model – putting it into practice through lesson plans for experimentation. Data collection encompassed pretests and posttests. Statistical analysis techniques such as percentage calculations, means, standard deviations, interpretation, paired t-tests for dependent samples, developmental score and content analysis were employed to analyze the collected data.

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

1) Two types of factors influencing English reading skills were identified based on data from undergraduate students. These factors were categorized as internal and external. Internal factors received a high rating with a mean score of 3.84, while external factors were also rated highly with a mean score of 3.95. The top three factors with the highest mean scores were learning environment ($\overline{X}$ = 4.03), usage of instructional methods ($\overline{X}$ = 3.95), and teacher ($\overline{X}$ = 3.88). Conversely, interest and liking for English received the lowest mean score ($\overline{X}$ = 3.82). Insights from interviews with lecturers further categorized internal factors as interest and liking for English and students' learning activities, while external factors encompassed teachers' attitudes toward the English reading course, teaching methods and materials, environments and management, and evaluation.

2) The instructional model developed for enhancing English reading skills among undergraduate students in Guangxi Province comprised five key components: principle and rationale, learning objectives, content, teaching methods and materials, and evaluation. Following a thorough program evaluation, which considered utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy, experts unanimously confirmed the suitability of this model for further implementation.

3) The implementation of the developed instructional model had a positive impact on students' English reading skills. Statistically significant improvements were observed at a significance level of 0.05, with an average relative developmental score of 56, indicating a high level of development. Teacher observations also indicated that the integration of blended learning and task-based learning instructional models for reading skills was observed and judged to be of satisfactory quality. Furthermore, students' self-assessment results revealed that the integration of blended learning and task-based instructional models had a positive effect on their English reading skills, as reported by the majority of students.

Keywords: Instructional Model, Blended Learning, Task-Based Learning, English Reading Skills, Undergraduate Students

Introduction

English reading is crucial for language learners and users, facilitating information acquisition and language skill development (Li, 1999:77; Liu, 2010; Zeng & Cao, 2020). However, it remains one of the most challenging skills in education (Kucukoglu, 2013; Holsworth, 2020; Akhmetova, 2022), particularly for English majors in Chinese universities, where it constitutes a significant part of the curriculum (Pan & Li, 2021). Current issues include rigid learning attitudes among students, who often view reading as a solitary task, leading to low engagement in classes that lack interactivity (Zeng & Cao, 2020). Moreover, there's a gap in effective reading strategies and comprehension skills among students, alongside language proficiency issues (Zhang, 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

In Guangxi province, similar challenges in English reading skills have been observed across universities (Yang, 2012; Zhang, 2016; cited in Xinyu, 2020). Teachers report shortcomings in their methods, particularly in training reading skills effectively (Joyce et al., 2009). To address these issues, innovative teaching models such as blended learning have gained traction. Blended learning combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online components, fostering more interactive and engaging learning environments (Adair-Hauck et al., 2000, as cited by Li, 2022; Bonk & Graham, 2006). This approach has shown promise in enhancing student engagement and improving reading proficiency

(Donnelly, 2009; Abaeian & Samadi, 2016; Wei, Xiaoying 2019). Task-based learning (TBLT) is another effective method increasingly applied in English language education, emphasizing real-world tasks to promote communicative language use (Prabhu, 1987; Wang, 2007). It encourages active learning and problem-solving through tasks, aligning with modern educational needs (Unesco and Unicef, 2021). Integrating these innovative approaches with technology offers new possibilities for English pedagogy, especially in enhancing reading skills amidst technological advancements (OECD, 2020).

Research supports the integration of blended learning and task-based learning as a promising strategy to address these challenges (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Wei Duan, 2020; Mufliharsi et al., 2022). Studies indicate positive outcomes in improving reading comprehension and student motivation (Elahi & Heidar, 2021; Nguyen & Chau, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to explore the development and integration of these models in higher education settings to enhance English reading skills, responding to the evolving demands of English language education.

Research Objectives

1. To study the factors affecting English reading skills of the undergraduate students in Guangxi Province

2. To confirm the appropriateness of Instructional models of Blended learning and Task-based learning for English reading skills of undergraduate students of Guangxi Province

3. To study the effectiveness of Blended learning and Task-based learning instructional models on undergraduate students' reading skills

Research Methods

The present study was divided into 3 phases with population and samples or key informants, research instruments, data collection and data analysis as follows.

Phase I – Exploring and analyzing the factors affecting English reading skills of the undergraduate students in Guangxi Province

Key Informants

The informants of this phase were divided in to 2 group. Group 1 referred to the former English major students, taking "English Reading Course" as a Foreign Language Skills Course, semester 2 of academic Year 2022 from 3 universities in Guangxi Province – 53 respondents from Guilin University of Technology (GLUT), 47 respondents from Guilin University of Electronic Science and Technology (GLUET) and 60 respondents from Guangxi University

of Science and Technology (GXUST) respectively. The total sum of participants were 160, more than the determining sample size (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). It should be considered reasonable and significant. All 160 participants were native Chinese speakers who received formal English education for three years in junior high school and three years in high school prior to entering the university. Group 2 were professional scholars/lecturers who taught "English Reading Course" from 3 universities in Guangxi Province – 3 respondents from Guilin University of Technology (GLUT), 3 respondents from Guilin University of Electronic Science and Technology (GLUET) and 3 respondents from Guangxi University of Science and Technology (GXUST) respectively.

Research Instruments

Five-point Likert scale questionnaire was employed to collect data from Group I informants. Its content validity was approved by the calculated Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) values of 0.85. The questionnaire covered the items regarding internal factors i.e., interest and like of English, attitude towards English learning, and learning methods, and those of external factors such as teachers and circumstances. An in-depth interview with IOC value of 0.96 was designed to collect data from lecturers in Group 2. It consisted of 10 questions corresponding to the internal and external factors related to problems in teaching English reading, opinions on method of instruction, development of reading and learners' learning behaviors about English reading skills

Data Collection

The duration of data collection was lasted from the 2nd of March 2023 to the 31st of March 2023. In order to collect data from Group I effectively, the informants were allowed to answer the questionnaires independently. Then they were collected back by the researcher. Each informant was labeled, marked with numbers and sorted by the researcher. As for Group II, the researcher administered the interviews to English lecturers from three universities in Guangxi Province. The answer record of each lecturer was labeled, coded with numbers and sorted by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from Group I informants were quantitatively analyzed by descriptive statistics i.e., frequency, MEAN, and standard deviation along with interpretation of MEAN on basis of 5 ranges of attitude, 1.00 – 5.00, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. According to Pimentel (2010), Yaacob et al. (2019), and Nyutu et al. (2021), these 5 levels of frequency were calculated by using the following formula:

$$\text{Interval} = \frac{\text{the highest score - the lowest score}}{\text{the number of intervals}}$$

For this reason, the interval scale of 5 levels of responses was:

$$\text{Interval} = \frac{5 - 1}{5} = 0.8$$

Therefore, range of 5 levels of frequency is detailed in Table 2.

Table 1 Mean range of five levels of frequency of questionnaire for students

Mean range	Attitude Level	Interpretation
4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree	Highest degree of factors practiced
3.41-4.20	Quite Agree	High degree of factors practiced
2.61-3.40	Neutral	Moderate degree of factors practiced
1.81-2.60	Quite Disagree	Low degree of factors practiced
1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree	Lowest degree of factors practiced

Besides, content analysis was used to analyze data collected from lecturers.

Phase II – Confirming the appropriateness of instructional model of blended learning and task-based learning for English reading skills of undergraduate students at Guangxi University of Science and Technology

Key Informants

Three specialists in curriculum and instruction, particularly program evaluation were invited to evaluate the developed instructional model.

Research Instrument

A handout with details of blended-learning and task-based learning instructional model was provided to the specialists as to introduce the components and functions of such a model

based on instructional model development theories and factor outcomes obtained from phase I. Then, instructional model evaluation form was used by the specialists to approve to quality of the model before further implementation within 4 standards i.e., utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy. IOC value of both instruments measure 1.00.

Data Collection

After collecting data in phase I and designing handout and instructional model evaluation form, the handout and instructional model evaluation form were submitted to all 5 specialists on 15th April 2023 and were collected by the end of the same month. The data of each specialist was labeled, coded with numbers and sorted by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage were employed to analyze dichotomy between 'Agree' and 'Disagree' among 5 specialists with 5 components of the model, namely principle/concepts, objectives, contents, methods of teaching and materials, and evaluation. The accepted component must be agreed by specialists not less than 90%.

Phase III – Studying the effectiveness of the integration of blended learning and task-based learning instructional models on undergraduate students' English reading skills at Guangxi University of Science and Technology

The effectiveness in this context of study refers to effects of student English reading skill achievement and instructional

model quality in terms of satisfaction. Guangxi University of Science and Technology students were studied for the achievement.

Population

The population included 65 students majoring in English, in two intact classes enrolled in English reading course at English Department, in the 2nd semester of academic year 2023 at Guangxi University of Science and Technology: 30 students in class 1 and 35 students in class 2.

Samples

Since the present study was based on one-group pretest-posttest research design, the participants from class 1 was were obtained through cluster random sampling. This class included student at various proficiency or achievement background – advanced, intermediate, and beginning learners.

Research Instrument

To implement the developed instructional model, lesson plans of 5 units – Unit 1 Little House in the Big Woods; Unit 2 Cheating; Unit 3 The Call of the Wild; Unit 4 The All-American Slurp; and Unit 5 London, was designed in line with such a model. There were 3 stages of instruction: (I) pre-reading task stage; (II) during-reading task stage; and (III) post-reading task stage involving 6 tasks in the process to practice and improve students' English reading skills.

To collect students' scores for comparison between before and after receiving the treatment, the researcher constructed pretest and posttest of 5 kinds of reading skills i.e., previewing the text, determining the main idea, guessing the meaning of words from the context, understanding supporting details, and sequence of event, in 5 units were taken by the students so that the teacher better learned about students' existed proficiency of reading skills for assessing students' reading ability in 5 areas English reading skills. Their IOC were checked by 5 experts and value of 0.98 and 0.90 were found respectively. After try-out session, facility of the tests were examined by analyzing p value (0.68) and discrimination power by analyzing r value (0.56). Also, KR-20 formula is applied to verify reliability of the tests and the output value was 0.95 which indicate the testing quality of the instrument.

Data Collection

1. Pretest was administered to the samples before the experiment relying on prepared lesson plans of 5 units.

2. Posttest was used to collected students' achievement after the experiment.

3. Within a week later, after posttest, students were asked to fill out self-assessment form. They were required to rate their attitudes about before and after learning through blended learning integrated with task-based learning.

Data Analysis

Students' English reading skill scores collected from pretest and posttest were compared by paired t-test for dependent samples to analyzed difference at significance level .05. Later, pretest and posttest results were calculated for relative developmental scores using the following formula.

$$\text{Relative Developmental Scores: } \frac{\text{Posttest Scores-Pretest Scores}}{\text{Total Scores-Pretest Scores}} \times 100$$

The calculated scores from the formula above will be interpreted according to the criteria below.

Table 2 Criteria of interpreting learning outcomes by relative developmental scores

Relative Developmental Scores	Developmental Level
76 - 100	Very High
51 - 75	High
26 - 50	Moderate
0 - 25	Low

Results

1) The factors affecting English reading skills of the undergraduate students in Guangxi Province

1.1 Students' Attitude Survey Results

After analyzing data collected from students at 3 universities in Guangxi Province, the data indicated MEAN, standard deviation, interpretation, and ranks of both internal and external factors affecting English reading skills of the undergraduate students as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Factors affecting English reading skills in overview

Factors	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank	
				Inclusive	Exclusive
Internal Factors					
I. Interest and like of English	3.82	0.93	High	7	4
II. Attitude towards English Learning	3.85	0.90	High	4	1
III. Student-teacher relationship	3.84	0.93	High	6	3
IV. Learning methods	3.85	0.89	High	5	2
Average	**3.84**	**0.91**	**High**		

Table 3 Factors affecting English reading skills in overview (Continued)

Factors	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank	
				Inclusive	Exclusive
External factors					
V. Teacher	3.88	0.89	High	3	3
VI. Usage of the instructional methods	3.95	0.92	High	2	2
VII. Learning environments	4.03	0.90	High	1	1
Average	**3.84**	**0.91**	**High**		

Table 3 shows that, according to respondents, either internal or external factors were rated at high level ($\overline{X}$ = 3.84 and 3.95 respectively). Learning environments was the sub-factor which played an important role most in supporting students' English reading skill ($\overline{X}$ = 4.03) followed by usage of the instructional methods ($\overline{X}$ = 3.95) and teacher ($\overline{X}$ = 3.88) all of them were in external factors. The rest of the item were categorized into internal factors. The item with highest MEAN was attitude towards English learning ($\overline{X}$ = 3.85) followed by learning methods ($\overline{X}$ = 3.85), student-teacher relationship ($\overline{X}$ = 3.84), and interest and like of English ($\overline{X}$ = 3.82).

1.2 Teachers' Interview Results

According to interviews with 9 lecturers, factors influencing English reading skills in Guangxi province are categorized into internal and external influences. Internally, student interest and engagement play pivotal roles, with lecturers employing strategies like scoring systems and engaging course materials to foster motivation. Group work and presentations further enhance comprehension and teamwork skills.

Externally, teacher attitudes are crucial, with some emphasizing personal interest and student-centered approaches to enhance language skills. Teaching methods vary widely, from Q&A sessions to online platforms like U-campus and WeChat, promoting interactive learning beyond the classroom. Assessments include midterm and final exams, often standardized like TEM-4, alongside formative methods like timed exercises and portfolio assessments, providing continuous feedback.

The teaching environment's impact is significant, with lecturers advocating for better resources while navigating extensive non-teaching duties that detract from classroom focus. Flexibility in adapting teaching schedules and methods is essential, allowing for responsive adjustments to student needs and external constraints. In conclusion, the study underscores the complex dynamics influencing English reading instruction in Guangxi, highlighting the need for holistic approaches to enhance teaching effectiveness and student proficiency.

2) Confirming the appropriateness of instructional model of blended learning and task-based learning for English reading skills of undergraduate students at Guangxi University of Science and Technology

To serve objective 2, the collected data from 5 specialists of confirming the appropriateness of 5 components of instructional model prior to further implementation were analyzed within 4 areas of standards i.e., utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy, and were presented by frequency and percentage of the specialists as shown in the table below.

Table 4 Frequency and percentage of conformability of utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy of the instructional model components in 5 areas by specialists

Components of Instructional Model of Blended learning and Task-based learning on English Reading Skills	Assessment							
	Utility		Feasibility		Propriety		Accuracy	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I. Principle & Rationale	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100
II. Objectives	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100
III. Contents	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100
IV. Methods of teaching & Materials	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100
V. Evaluation	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100

From Table 4 above, all 5 components of the instructional model of Blended learning and Task-based learning on English reading skills were 100% confirmed to be appropriate by 5 specialists. These results confirmed the appropriateness of the developed instructional model for further implementation (≥90%).

The aims of this model was to improve students' English reading skills in 5 necessary domains through 5 key components of the developed model – blended learning, task-based learning, teachers' instruction, students' learning methods, and technology. Also, internal and external factors were integrated with the model through instructional methods such as, creating blended learning environment between online and offline situation, plus collaborative learning in the classroom. The function of traditional teaching like grammar-translation and direct method was reduced while linguistic tasks and groupwork as well as discussion for solution were more applied.

3) Studying the effectiveness of the integration of blended learning and task-based learning instructional models on undergraduate students' English reading skills at Guangxi University of Science and Technology

In response to objective 3, 4 sub-sections are presented: (1) comparing students' English reading skills between before and after the experiment using paired t-test for dependent samples which provide significant difference between prior and after learning outcomes, (2) reporting relative

development score (RDS) according to developmental level (DL) as specified in Table 1 with table and figure, (3) reporting classroom observations which included peer observation and self-observation from the teacher's perspective, and (4) reporting self-assessment from students' perspective.

Table 5 Comparison between students' English reading skills before and after learning through the Integration of Blended learning and Task-based learning instructional model (Total Scores = 150)

Scores	n	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	t	Sig.
Pretest scores	30	40.13	12.93	17.589	0.00
Posttest scores	30	101.33	31.38		

*p<0.05

From Table 5, pretest was different from posttest by using the integration of Blended learning and task-based learning instructional model (Pretest $\overline{X}$ = 40.13, Posttest $\overline{X}$ = 101.33) and p value = 0.00 (*p<0.05). Then, it can be summarized that the given treatment influenced students' English reading skills at significance level .05.

Table 6 Relative developmental score of students' English reading skills on basis of 5 domains of reading skills

English Reading Skills	RDS	DL	Frequency and Percentage							
			Low	%	Moderate	%	High	%	Very High	%
I. Previewing the Text	48.32	Moderate	0	0.00	22	73.33	2	6.67	6	20.00
II. Determining the Main Idea	63.36	High	0	0.00	12	40.00	7	23.33	11	36.67
III. Guessing the Meaning of Words from the Context	58.61	High	1	3.33	12	40.00	6	20.00	11	36.67
IV. Understanding Supporting Details	64.45	High	0	0.00	11	36.67	10	33.33	9	30.00
V. Sequence of Event	57.13	High	3	3.33	11	36.67	7	23.33	9	30.00
Average	58.37	High	0.80	2.67	13.60	45.33	6.40	21.33	9.20	30.67

From Table 6, in general, the total relative developmental scores of English reading skills was 58.37, in the range of 'High' level. Developmental level in every domain of English reading skills was in the range of 'High' level, except previewing the text. Most students performed understanding supporting details best (RDS = 64.45) followed by determining the main idea (RDS = 63.36), guessing the meaning of words from the context (RDS = 58.61), sequence of event (RDS = 57.13), and previewing the text (RDS = 48.32).

Discussions

The factors influencing English reading skills among undergraduate students in Guangxi Province are multifaceted, encompassing both internal and external elements. Internal factors, such as goal-oriented group tasks designed to enhance student interest in learning, are crucial (Peng, 2022; Shaoqian, 2008). External factors, including teachers' technological proficiency and the quality of the learning environment, also significantly impact learners' progress and engagement (Iveson, 2019; Borup et al., 2019; Chun Lai et al., 2011; Han Min, 2012). Effective task-based language teaching incorporating summative assessment is recommended, although challenges such as resource limitations persist (Ellis, 2013; Song, 2020; Dao & Newton, 2021). In summary, both internal and external factors contribute significantly to the development of English reading skills among undergraduate students.

This study validates the integration of blended language learning and task-based language learning models, aligned with utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy standards (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The integration proves valuable in improving English reading skills, leveraging contemporary technology and meeting pedagogical needs effectively (Elahi & Heidar, 2021; Mufliharsi et al., 2022). Detailed lesson plans and materials support the feasibility standard, ensuring practical implementation within English reading classrooms (Delta Reading). Ethical considerations and participant informed consent uphold the propriety standard,

while academic progress data and student feedback validate the accuracy and efficacy of the instructional model (pretest-posttest outcomes).

The effectiveness of integrating blended and task-based learning models for English reading skills is evidenced by significant improvements post-implementation ($p<.05$). While students' ability to preview texts remains a challenge, the integrated approach enhances overall reading comprehension and motivation. Additional evaluation methods, including classroom observations and student self-assessment, are recommended to further validate the instructional model's impact on enhancing English reading skills.

Implications

The study highlights the benefits of blending BL and TBLT models in improving undergraduates' English reading skills. It suggests these integrated approaches not only enhance reading but also potentially boost writing and speaking skills (Popham, 2014). Effective integration involves structured lesson plans encompassing course details, objectives, processes, roles, resources, and evaluation methods, blending online and offline activities to cater to diverse learning environments. This approach fosters student motivation and engagement, aligning with their tech-savvy nature and promoting self-driven learning through relevant materials and tasks. Encouraging students to take a proactive role, engage in related applications,

and participate independently enhances their confidence and responsibility. Teachers are crucial facilitators in this model, guiding with comprehensive plans, instructions for online components, and varied teaching methods while monitoring progress and providing feedback. Future research should explore L2 reading in Chinese-speaking contexts, integrating social, cultural, neurolinguistic, and computer linguistic perspectives with larger sample sizes for broader insights and reliability.

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