

AN ACTION RESEARCH ON IMPLEMENTING TASK-BASED LEARNING TO ENHANCE TELEPHONE SKILLS IN ENGLISH FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

This action research explores the implementation of Task-Based Learning (TBL) to enhance the telephone skills in English for Business Communication Class of 38 fourth-year students majoring in English Linguistics at Dong Nai University. The study focuses on enhancing students' ability to use appropriate telephone language, perform telephone etiquette, and improve fluency in business-related phone conversations through TBL activities such as role-play situations and peer feedback. The finding suggests the students' enhancement in business communication. The research highlights the effectiveness of TBL in developing practical, real-world language skills essential for business communication.

Keyword: *Task-Based Learning , Telephone Communication Skills , English for Business Communication Class*

1. Introduction

In today's globalized economy, effective communication in English for business purposes has become an essential skill, particularly for students in non-English-speaking countries such as Vietnam. As the demand for English proficiency in professional contexts continues to grow, it is imperative that students are equipped not only with foundational language knowledge but also with the practical ability to communicate confidently in real-world scenarios—especially through telephone communication, a frequent and critical component of business interaction.

In the Vietnamese context, English language instruction has traditionally focused on reading, writing, and grammar, often at the expense of developing speaking skills and real-time communicative competence. This imbalance has led to a persistent gap in students' ability to conduct business conversations, particularly over the phone. Such challenges are especially evident among English Linguistics majors, who are expected not only to understand English linguistically but also to apply it fluently and appropriately in professional settings.

This study explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) as a teaching method to improve students' telephone communication skills in English. The research focuses on 38 fourth-year English Linguistics students at a university in Vietnam, all with an intermediate level of English proficiency. These students often struggle with aspects of telephone etiquette, using appropriate language, and maintaining fluency during business-related phone conversations. TBL, which emphasizes authentic tasks and real-world language use, provides a student-centered alternative to traditional teaching methods. By incorporating activities like role-plays and simulated business calls, TBL promotes active engagement, builds confidence, and improves fluency in realistic situations. This study aims to evaluate how well TBL helps students gain confidence in handling business calls, use proper telephone language, and develop professional telephone manners.

In a setting where language education is mainly focused on exams and teacher-led lessons, this research aims to show the benefits of using a more communicative, task-based approach. The study expects that Task-Based Learning (TBL) can connect what students learn in the classroom with real-world business communication, helping them develop the language skills needed to succeed in a global job market. The goal of this study is to improve Business English teaching in Vietnam and offer practical advice on using TBL to improve telephone communication skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Task-Based Learning (TBL) in Language Education

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is an approach that emphasizes the use of real-life tasks as the central unit of instruction. It contrasts with traditional, teacher-centered methods by focusing on student interaction and communication. According to Willis (1996), TBL provides students with opportunities to engage in meaningful language use by performing tasks that mirror the activities they will encounter outside the classroom. Research has shown that TBL enhances language acquisition by fostering more authentic communication and active learning (Ellis, 2003). In the context of business English, TBL involves three phases: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. This approach is grounded in the belief that language is best learned through authentic use rather than traditional grammar-focused lessons. TBL has been found to increase student engagement and motivation, as it allows learners to apply their language skills in practical TBL has been found to improve students' spoken fluency and confidence in real-world scenarios (Nunan,2004).

2.2 Telephone Skills in Business Communication:

Telephone communication is a fundamental skill in the business world. According to Klee (2010), effective telephone skills involve clarity in speaking, proper telephone etiquette, and the ability to manage conversations efficiently. Business students, particularly those in English for Business Communication courses, need to develop these skills to succeed in professional environments. Telephone communication remains a crucial aspect of business interactions worldwide, and proficiency in this skill is essential for students preparing for careers in international business, customer service, or any field that requires cross-cultural communication. For Vietnamese students, challenges often arise in managing telephone etiquette, using appropriate polite expressions, and maintaining fluency during conversations. These difficulties are compounded by cultural differences in communication styles. Vietnamese students may not be accustomed to the directness required in English-speaking business cultures (Nguyen & Gu, 2013). As a result, telephone communication in English can often seem overwhelming, and without targeted practice, students may struggle to handle business calls effectively.

2.3. Task based Learning in Enhancing Telephone Skills

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of task-based approaches in developing oral communication skills, particularly within business communication settings. Engaging students in realistic telephone-based tasks enables them to practice essential skills such as responding to calls, managing interruptions, and making polite requests. For example, Le (2006) reported that task-based instruction notably enhanced learners' speaking fluency and their ability to navigate professional conversations. Moreover, the use of TBL in business communication classrooms is gaining traction as it provides students with opportunities to practice communication skills in realistic contexts. Studies have shown that TBL can effectively address challenges such as fluency issues and lack of appropriate language use by immersing students in simulated business scenarios (Beckett & Slater, 2005). Furthermore, by encouraging contextualized language use, task-based tasks help students become more confident and proficient in conducting business-related telephone interactions.

2.4. Research Questions:

1. How can Task-Based Learning improve students' telephone communication skills?
2. What changes in student engagement and confidence occur through Task-Based Learning?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 38 fourth-year students majoring in English Linguistics in Dong Nai University, Vietnam. These participants were enrolled in a Business Communication course and demonstrated an intermediate level of English proficiency, based on their prior academic performance. Most of the students were non-native English speakers with limited experience in authentic business telephone interactions.

3.2 Research Design

This study used an action research design, which involved a series of interventions followed by reflections on the outcomes. The research was conducted over a period of ten weeks, with students engaging in task-based learning activities designed to enhance their telephone communication skills. These activities included role-plays, simulations of business telephone calls, and interactive group tasks that required students to use English in authentic contexts.

3.3. Intervention:

The intervention consisted of Task-Based Learning activities, including role-plays, simulated telephone conversations, and peer feedback. These tasks were designed to help students practice business-related telephone communication in a realistic and supportive environment. Students were given tasks such as making and receiving phone calls, handling complaints, scheduling appointments, and introducing products over the phone.

3.4. Data Collection:

The main instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed to capture students' perceptions regarding their confidence, skill improvement, and level of engagement throughout the TBL activities. Utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, the survey included items assessing students' perceived progress in telephone communication skills, their enjoyment of the learning tasks, and their motivation to enhance their abilities. The questionnaire was administered both prior to and following the intervention to evaluate changes in students' attitudes and self-perceptions.

3.5. Data Analysis

The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, calculating the mean and standard deviation for each item. A comparison was made between the pre-test and post-test results to detect significant changes in students' perceptions. Furthermore, qualitative feedback was subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes related to student engagement, motivation, and skill development.

4. Reporting Results

4.1. Survey Findings on Confidence in Telephone Communication:

A significant number of students reported increased confidence when handling phone calls in English. Specifically, 70% of respondents indicated they felt more confident making phone calls (mean = 4.2), while 68% expressed greater confidence in answering business-related calls (mean = 4.1). These findings suggest that the tasks were effective in reducing communication anxiety and building self-assurance in real-life scenarios. The post-intervention survey revealed positive student perceptions regarding the implementation of Task-Based Learning (TBL) to enhance telephone communication skills in English.

4.2. Survey Findings on Improvement in Telephone Skills:

Participants also reported noticeable improvements in key aspects of telephone communication: Politeness Strategies: 76% of students agreed they could use polite phrases more effectively after the intervention (mean = 4.3). Telephone Greetings: 80% felt they had improved in appropriately greeting others over the phone (mean = 4.4). Listening and Responsiveness: 72% of students reported better listening and response capabilities during telephone conversations (mean = 4.2). These results suggest that TBL tasks successfully targeted essential pragmatic and interactional features of telephone communication.

4.3. Survey Findings on Engagement and Motivation:

The data further revealed strong levels of student engagement with the TBL approach. A total of 74% of students found the role-play activities enjoyable and beneficial for practicing phone skills (mean = 4.5), indicating that learners were actively involved and found value in the interactive format. Additionally, 70% felt motivated to improve their phone skills during the lessons (mean = 4.3), reflecting the positive impact of meaningful, interactive tasks.

4.4. Overall Effectiveness of Task-Based Learning

When asked to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the TBL approach, 82% of students agreed that the method had helped them improve their English telephone communication skills. This item received the highest average rating among all survey items (mean = 4.6), indicating a strong perception of the approach's value in fostering both linguistic and communicative competence.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Task-Based Learning (TBL) is an effective approach for improving telephone communication skills in English among Vietnamese university students. The improvements in students' confidence, fluency, and telephone etiquette support the effectiveness of TBL in addressing the challenges these students face in business communication contexts. The role of task-based activities, particularly real-world simulations, was crucial in providing students with authentic practice in business telephone conversations. By engaging in interactive tasks, students were able to practice handling telephone calls in a supportive environment, which enhanced both their language skills and their professional competence. However, challenges remain, particularly in helping students gain fluency in high-pressure situations such as negotiating deals or dealing with difficult customers. To overcome this, future research could include more complex role-plays or use digital tools to give students extra practice and feedback on their telephone skills.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This action research highlights the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in developing telephone communication skills among Vietnamese university students studying English Linguistics. The observed gains in confidence, fluency, and telephone etiquette suggest that TBL is well-suited to addressing the specific needs of Business Communication courses in Vietnam. Integrating interactive, real-life tasks into the classroom can better prepare students for professional settings where English is used in phone-based communication.

Future research should further investigate the application of TBL in more advanced business scenarios, such as client negotiations and conference calls. Expanding task variety will help students build the practical skills needed to navigate complex communication demands in global business contexts.

6. REFERENCES

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7. APPENDIXES

Student Survey on Telephone Skills Enhancement

Instructions: Please rate each statement below using the scale provided.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
 2 = Disagree
 3 = Neutral
 4 = Agree
 5 = Strongly Agree

1. Confidence in Telephone Communication

1. I feel more confident making phone calls in English now.
 1 2 3 4 5
2. I feel more confident answering business phone calls in English.
 1 2 3 4 5

2. Improvements in Telephone Skills

3. I can use polite phrases on the phone more easily now.
 1 2 3 4 5
4. I understand how to greet people properly on the phone.
 1 2 3 4 5
5. I am better at listening and responding during phone calls.
 1 2 3 4 5

3. Engagement and Enjoyment

6. The role-play activities were fun and helped me practice.
 1 2 3 4 5
 7. I felt motivated to improve my phone skills during class.
 1 2 3 4 5
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4. Overall Satisfaction

8. Task-based learning helped me improve my phone skills in English.
 1 2 3 4 5

