Teaching Reading through Short Stories in a Digital Task-Based Environment

Andria Babu[1], & S.Soundiraraj[2]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of English, Anna University, Chennai, India /Assistant Professor (SS), Department of English, Rajalakshmi Engineering College, Chennai, India

[2] Professor Emeritus, Department of English, Anna University, Chennai, India

Correspondence: Andria Babu, Research Scholar, Department of English, Anna University, Chennai, India.

Abstract

The paper explores the practicability of a task-based language teaching (TBLT) model that adopts culturally sensitive South Asian Short Stories to improve reading comprehension through sustained interest and autonomous reflection among learners in an English as a Second Language (ESL) adapted digital context. Based on the frameworks of critical literacy, the structured pre-, during-, and post-reading activities were combined with the use of Google Classroom, Padlet, and Flipgrid, and six chosen stories related to the comprehension of the specificities of the learner's sociocultural background. Mixed-methods design of comparative study of engineering undergraduates utilized pre- and post-tests along with step-by-step qualitative thematic analysis (NVivo) and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to provide strong, valid data to arrive at quantitative conclusions. The findings showed that there were both direct and indirect relationships between TBLT and engagement and comprehension of reading by the learners and that culturally relevant pedagogy acted as an intermediate variable. Digital mediation also increased reflective autonomy through context-based interactive learning. These results were supported by the qualitative strand, which had one primary focus: greater motivation and intercultural awareness among learners. The results were enhanced by methodological triangulation, which combined the two strands. The research in question contributes to English-Specific-Purposes pedagogy by substantiating the existence of an empirically grounded model that correlates communicative activity with culturally responsive, technology-informed pedagogy. The implications have been realized in practice, as there is a need to ensure that instructors integrate culturally important activities into digital platforms to make them more interactive and comprehensible.

Keywords: Digital Pedagogy, Critical Literacy, Task-Based Language Teaching, ESL, South Asian Short Stories, PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Over 65 percent of ESL students worldwide still struggle with inferential and critical reading tasks, even though they demonstrate only surface-level understanding on standardized tests (UNESCO, 2023). This state of affairs underscores the timeliness of a new research problem: current reading pedagogies in ESL classrooms (and other teaching contexts) that revolve around decontextualized vocabulary drilling and examination activities fail to foster students' ability to read, interpret, and analyze texts critically. Reading, one of the main pillars of lifelong literacy, is therefore underdeveloped, which lowers learners' intellectual growth and their enjoyment of knowledge societies.

1.2 Importance of the Problem

In the changing environment of English Language Teaching (ELT), TBLT has become prominent for its ability to facilitate meaningful, goal-oriented language use by aligning learning tasks with communicative tasks in real-world contexts (Ellis, 2020). TBLT emphasizes genuine, cognitively demanding activities that necessitate negotiating the learner's sense of agency, thereby mediating and socializing the learning process. They make use of both TBLT and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. However, the systematic approach to reading instruction in ESL learning has not yet been studied, and the literature has been excessively dominated by studies of speaking and writing fluency, whereas reading pedagogy has been portrayed as passive and teacher-focused (Lee & Lee, 2021).

Simultaneously, culturally relevant literature, such as short stories, offers a transformative opportunity to broaden ESL reading pedagogy by connecting learners to stories grounded in their sociocultural realities. According to Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), culturally resonant texts will allow the learner to accumulate on his or her experiences and perception, and the student will access emotions, critical thinking, and reflective autonomy. However, ESL classrooms are likely to use the literature to develop vocabulary rather than to train critical thinking and self-representation (Gay, 2018).

The possibilities of changing the reading pedagogy, allowing students to collaborate asynchronously and engage in a multimodal experience, and creating a student-centered environment can be produced by post-pandemic changes and the presence of digital mediation in ESL classrooms (TESOL International Association, 2022; British Council, 2021). Google Classroom, Padlet, and Flipgrid are programs that

could enhance an interactive learning experience, as they provide learners with opportunities to organize reading tasks and share their anticipations, interpretations, and thoughts. However, there are no systematic models of TBLT, literature, and reading comprehension platforms through digital technologies.

Moreover, even though the learner engagement is viewed as a decisive effector of the learning outcome in the digital mediated setting, the role of the learner engagement in mediating the task-based instruction and reading comprehension with reflective autonomy is not investigated systematically, to date, the use of the analytical strategies that can describe the complex direct and indirect correlations in the pedagogical systems (Fredricks et al., 2004) rigorous quantitative validation in the Second Language Acquisition Research (Plonsky et al., 2017) shows the necessity for employing analytical methods that can capture complex pedagogical frameworks.

The PLS-SEM implemented in SmartPLS is an analytically sound and flexible tool that can be used in educational research, particularly when a complex model and a medium-sized sample are considered (Hair et al., 2022). PLS-SEM has the capacity to test both direct and indirect, and mediating relationships and determine predictive relevance; this is the same idea that the present study will set out to achieve, namely, formulate a theoretically supported model to test the relationship between task-based instruction, learner engagement, reading comprehension, and reflective autonomy in ESL reading instruction.

1.3 Research Gaps

Although the theoretical and policy background of TBLT, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and digital mediation is well established, there is a lack of research on how these three concepts should be applied in structured reading in ESL classrooms.

The gaps identified in the literature are:

- The reading process itself is marginal in the context of TBLT interventions, and there are no systematic sequences of tasks aimed at developing inferential and critical understanding (Yang, 2024).
- Even though culturally relevant literature can foster student engagement and self-reflective autonomy, it is seldom integrated into systematic reading activities in ESL instruction (Gay, 2018).
- The mediating effect of learner engagement in the relationship between task-based instruction and reading comprehension or reflective autonomy has not yet been thoroughly studied (Henrie et al., 2015).
- The lack of studies using PLS-SEM to test frameworks linking task-based instruction, learner engagement, reading comprehension, and reflective autonomy in digitally mediated ESL classrooms is moderate (Hair et al., 2022; Plonsky, 2017).

Regardless of the theoretical potential of TBLT, culturally relevant literature, and digital tools, the current research has some drawbacks that require special intervention:

- Digital TBLT research primarily focuses on oral skills, excluding reading comprehension (Marcos, 2024).
- Culturally sustaining practices are still infrequently integrated into the reading process in the ESL environment (Gay, 2018).
- Limited use of advanced quantitative methods to validate the pedagogical effectiveness of digital task-based reading frameworks (Plonsky, 2017; Hair et al., 2022).

This study fills important gaps by empirically confirming that a structured, task-related reading model applies to culturally sensitive short stories in digitally mediated ESL classrooms in India, using SmartPLS.

To conclude, the ESL pedagogy reading is disjointed and poorly theorized, despite extensive speculation and policy promotion on task-based teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and digital mediation. The lack of empirically tested structures that combine the three pedagogical dimensions limits educators' capacity to develop evidence-based reading activities that foster inferential understanding, engagement, and reflective autonomy. This gap is thus addressed by the current project, which devises and establishes a mixed-methods framework to investigate the direct and indirect impacts of task-based teaching using culturally applicable short stories in digitally mediated settings. In this way, it addresses the worldwide challenge of developing critical independent readers by integrating pedagogical and technological strategies into ESL instruction.

1.4 Aims of the Study

This study is carried out with intermediate-level ESL students in digitally enhanced urban classrooms in India and can offer insights of global relevance, while also being contextually specific. The systematic study of the ability of task-based teaching with culturally relevant short stories to directly and indirectly influence reading comprehension through the processes of learner engagement and their role in promoting reflective autonomy, the study contributes to the discussion of meaningful, culturally sustaining, digitally mediated reading instruction as a part of the ESL educational process.

Guided by these insights, the study aims to:

- Evaluate the direct and indirect effects of task-based instruction using culturally relevant short stories on reading comprehension within digitally mediated ESL classrooms.
- Examine the mediating role of learner engagement in the relationship between task-based instruction and reading comprehension.

- Explore the emergence of reflective autonomy as learners engage with culturally relevant narratives through structured reading tasks.
- Validate a replicable, evidence-based framework for integrating TBLT, culturally relevant literature, and digital tools in ESL reading instruction using SmartPLS.

1.5 Hypotheses of the Study

To operationalize these aims, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Task-based instruction using culturally relevant short stories directly enhances reading comprehension.
- H2: Task-based instruction indirectly enhances reading comprehension via learner engagement.
- H3: Learner engagement mediates between task-based teaching and reflective autonomy.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework demonstrating these hypothesized relationships and outlines the proposed directions for empirical validation.
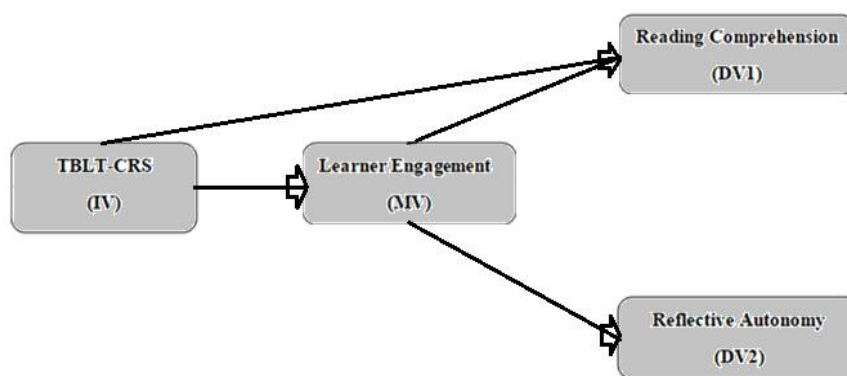

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

As shown in the conceptual framework (Figure 1), it is assumed that there are direct and indirect pathways between Task-Based Instruction (IV), Learner Engagement (Mediator), Reading Comprehension (DV), and Reflective Autonomy (DV). The study's analysis was conducted using this model to systematically test the given hypotheses in PLS.

Since the theoretical rationale and gaps in existing knowledge about the nature of culturally and digitally mediated reading instruction have been established, the following section provides an overview of previous research that frames the constructs and serves as a basis for identifying points of intersection in the existing literature.

2. Literature Review

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a fundamental part of second-language teaching (SLT), in which language learning is focused on purposeful, meaning-based tasks rather than prescriptive grammar instruction (Ellis, 2020). According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and the negotiation of meaning, and TBLT conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process. TBLT facilitates cognitive engagement and language development by involving learners in goal-focused, real-world activities that simulate real-life communication (Bygate, 2016; Nunan, 2004; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). In this paradigm, language is not considered an object of study but a means of achieving communicative purpose. Even though TBLT has been extensively applied in speaking and writing instruction, there has been very little empirical research on reading, where teaching and learning have been relatively passive and teacher-oriented (Lee & John, 2020). Reading in most ESL programs, especially those focused on exams like the one in India, is still more focused on literal understanding and the ability to remember words, rather than on interpretive and critical analysis (ASER, 2023). UNESCO (2023) data from around the world indicate that more than 65 percent of ESL learners lack skills in inferential and evaluative reading, necessitating a redefinition of reading as an active, interactive, and cognitively challenging task.

The inclusion of TBLT in the reading process will shift the mechanistic approach to reading (i.e., decoding) toward a dynamic process (i.e., interaction with text, peers, and context) (Khatib & Aghaei, 2016; Shintani, 2016). The sequenced steps of the structures, which include pre-reading prediction and schema activation, while-reading interpretation and questioning, and post-reading reflective synthesis, prompt learners to go beyond surface-based comprehension to higher-order comprehension. Cognitive and affective involvement can also be developed through collaborative reading, where learners negotiate meaning, express interpretations, and together construct meaning (Nunan, 2004). Nevertheless, current interventions make little use of TBLT's potential to foster interpretive and reflective autonomy; most focus on acceptable comprehension outcomes and disregard the development of critical literacy (Lunke et al., 2020). Although task-based teaching provides the structural basis for learner interaction, culturally relevant texts bring that interaction to personally meaningful, socially situated reading experiences.

The transformative potential of ESL reading instruction through culturally relevant literature, particularly short stories with local and regional roots, establishes a connection between classroom learning and students' lived worlds (Gay, 2018). Reader-Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) holds that meaning is created in a transactional relationship between the reader and the text, shaped by the reader's cultural background and past experiences. This orientation is directly related to Vygotsky's concepts of socially mediated learning and views reading as a cognitive and affective activity (Skehan, 2016). Exposure to stories that reflect their sociocultural reality helps students develop empathy, intercultural sensitivity, and reflective autonomy. These stories also reinforce students' identities and enable them to develop a critical perspective on societal problems. On the other hand, traditional classroom environments based on exams are likely to diminish the effectiveness of literature as a means of infusing vocabulary and to overlook its ability to encourage interpretation, critical thought, and identity. By using culturally relevant literature in task-based reading systems, educators can address differences in linguistic competence and critical consciousness, enabling students to collaborate in analyzing, interpreting, and reflecting on the material. To further elaborate on this culturally related interaction, with the advent of digital mediation, it is given a technological site where it can be performed on a massive scale and interactively.

Digital mediation has enhanced the prospects in ESL reading pedagogy by enabling asynchronous learning, multimodal interaction, and learner-centered approaches (Kember et al., 2000). Visual and oral feedback, and the delivery of tasks, are structured using tools such as Google Classroom, and learners can deliver their feedback via Padlet and Flipgrid, which allow them to discuss with peers and reflect on their activities (TESOL International Association, 2022; British Council, 2021). With these tools, teachers can design activities that promote prediction, interpretation, and evaluation in a loose format that can accommodate differences in learning preferences. Online environments offer a more democratic approach to inclusion, allowing less vocal students to make their voices heard and revisit the content for further processing. Nonetheless, the introduction of digital technologies into reading systems based on TBLT is not carried out systematically, particularly when access to technologies is limited and pedagogical training is lacking (Kularajasingam et al., 2021).

Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement of the learner is generally accepted as a parameter of learning performance (Fredricks et al., 2004; Henrie et al., 2015). Engagement is the psychological process in digitally mediated situations that transforms the design of instructions into measurable learning outcomes. Interested learners put in effort, persevere through hardships, and relate effectively to the learning content and fellow learners (Wang, 2021). Task-based online environments mediate the relationship between practices and outcomes in instruction and engagement processes, which impacts students' strategy acquisition, motivation maintenance, and gains in comprehension. Despite this understanding, empirical research validating engagement as a mediating factor between TBLT, culturally relevant pedagogy, and reading comprehension remains scarce. Progressive quantitative methods (including PLS-SEM) enable researchers to empirically examine complex direct and indirect associations in educational data (Hair et al., 2022; Plonsky, 2017).Therefore, the current research paper makes learner engagement the key factor that facilitates the combined contribution of pedagogical and technological innovations to the improvement of reading comprehension and reflective autonomy in EFL settings.

Based on these theoretical reflections, the following section describes the methodological framework for empirically confirming the identified relationships among task-based instruction, cultural relevance, and digital mediation.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

The current study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) that integrates quantitative and qualitative strands systematically to investigate the effectiveness of task-based reading instruction among digitally mediated engineering undergraduates in the context of culturally relevant short stories. Such a design captures direct, indirect, and mediating impacts of the instructional intervention on learner engagement, reading comprehension, and reflective autonomy. It details the situational events participants encounter in the learning environment.

This quantitative and qualitative combination was aimed at increasing the credibility of the study and methodological rigor. The mixed-methods research design offered a chance to triangulate statistical relationships with participants' experience narratives, so that interpretations were based on both quantitative and contextual explanations. Further reliability and validity support was made through instrument pre-testing, emergent theme cross-checking, and method triangulation of the data.

The combination of PLS-SEM with thematic analysis was chosen to address two aims of the research. PLS-SEM was an effective analysis method for examining the multidimensional interdependencies among the direct, indirect, and mediating effects of pedagogical constructs, particularly for middle-sized samples and exploratory designs (Hair et al., 2022). To this end, thematic analysis enabled interpretation of learners' reflective journals and Flipgrid discussions, providing a qualitative dimension to the statistical outcomes. A combination of the two approaches increased internal validity and provided methodological triangulation, addressing empirical rigor and contextual knowledge.

The quantitative strand entailed analyzing hypothetical relationships among instructions based on tasks, learner engagement, reading comprehension, and reflective autonomy using SmartPLS 4.0. They were the qualitative strand through which the thematic analysis of the reflection journal, the Flipgrid conversation, and the annotated reading were conducted to generate interpretive narratives that aligned with the quantitative findings.

3.2 Context and Participants

The research is conducted in a semi-urban engineering college in South India, where English is the language of instruction, but reading is in

a very exam-focused and decontextualised form (ASER, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). The opportunities brought about by post-pandemic digital adoption included the ability to transform reading instruction into task-based frameworks using tools like Google Classroom, Padlet, and Flipgrid, especially among engineering undergraduates preparing to engage in academic and professional communication.

The respondents were first-year undergraduate engineers (n = 120), with language homogeneity achieved through purposive sampling and digital familiarity ensured by requiring them to be at the B1 CEFR level in English. Experimental Group (EG; n = 60) members were taught reading using tasks based on short stories with cultural relevance, and the Control Group (CG; n = 60) was taught using comprehension instruction that focused on remembering, but not on using strategies or giving critical feedback. The same assessments were used on both groups so that they could be compared. The pre-test and post-test gains were analyzed quantitatively, and qualitative observations documented classroom interactions and learners' responses in their statements, enabling attribution of the differences to the instructional approach.

A quasi-experimental pre-test / post-test design with control and experimental groups over a period of ten weeks. A G*Power analysis showed that at least 77 subjects would be required to identify a medium effect (power = 0.80, 5 = 0.05). The last sample of 120 provided sufficient statistical power (Hair et al., 2022).

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Ethics Committee had to grant ethical clearance. Respondents participated voluntarily and signed informed consent forms that guaranteed confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw. The digital submissions, such as Flipgrid videos, Padlet posts, and Google Docs annotations, were encrypted, anonymized, and stored safely. All learning content was reviewed for cultural sensitivity and relevance.

3.4 Instructional Materials and Digital Tools

They were selected as six culturally relevant short stories with Indian and Southeast Asian settings; thematic relevance, lexical-syntactic appropriateness (B1-level), and inference and critical-debate abilities. The choice was based on expert panel consultations and a pre-survey of the learners to attain cultural resonance. The stories included:

1. *The Shroud* – Munshi Premchand (India) – poverty and social injustice.
2. *The Tiger* – S. Rajaratnam (Singapore) – fear, tradition, and modernization.
3. *The Snake* – R.K. Narayan (India) – superstition and rationality.
4. *Crossing the River* – Mohammad Quayum (Malaysia) – tradition vs modernity.
5. *The Young Widow* – Rabindranath Tagore (India) – gender roles and societal norms.
6. *The Axe* – R.K. Narayan (India) – displacement and attachment to place.

The stories were placed in a three-step TBLT cycle: pre-reading (prediction and schema activation), during-reading (collaborative annotation and questioning), and after-reading (Flipgrid reflection and peer critique). This paradigm promoted meaning negotiation, sociocultural reflection, and critical literacy.

Digital platforms were integrated as follows:

- **Google Classroom** – resource hub and feedback system.
- **Padlet** – pre-reading schema activation and reflective journaling.
- **Google Docs** – collaborative annotation and peer questioning.
- **Flipgrid** – oral reflections and post-reading debates.

Each 75-minute session followed this sequence: 15 min pre-reading, 30 min while-reading, 30 min post-reading, grounded in TBLT principles (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2021) and aligning with behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of engagement.

3.5 Instruments

a) Reading Comprehension Test was viewed as B1-B2 level of the CEFR with a literal, inferential, and evaluative understanding (pilot reliability a = 0.82).

b) Learner Engagement Scale (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004) -15 questions in three categories, namely, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional, using a 5-point Likert scale.

c) Reflective Thinking Questionnaire (Kember et al., 2000) - reflective autonomy.

d) Qualitative data - Padlet journals, Flipgrid reflections, and annotated readings; all were proven to be valid by experts and pilot-tested in terms of the context.

Table 1. Summary of Reliability and Validity Indices for Quantitative Instruments

Instrument	Construct Measured	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Source / Validation Reference
Reading Comprehension Test	Literal, inferential & evaluative reading skills	0.82	0.84	0.58	Pilot study (CEFR B1–B2 alignment)
Learner Engagement Scale	Behavioral, cognitive, & emotional engagement	0.90	0.91	0.64	Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004)
Reflective Thinking Questionnaire	Habitual & critical reflection / reflective autonomy	0.87	0.88	0.60	Kember et al. (2000)
Overall Model Indices	Combined latent constructs (PLS–SEM)	—	0.92	0.66	Hair et al. (2022)

Note. All the α and CR values are greater than 0.70, and all AVE values are greater than 0.50, indicating acceptable internal consistency and convergent validity.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative and qualitative data collection took place over a period of ten weeks. The quantitative measures were the Reading Comprehension Test, the Learner Engagement Scale, and the Reflective Thinking Questionnaire, all of which were considered contextually sufficient. Padlet journals, Flipgrid reflections, and Google Docs annotations were qualitative data that included interpretive reasoning and collaboration with colleagues. The entries were anonymous and confidential. Quantitative data were analyzed with SmartPLS 4.0, and qualitative data were analyzed with NVivo 14, using a 6-step thematic analysis model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.7 Data Analysis

PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4.0) was used for quantitative data analysis. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (> 0.70) and Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70); convergent validity was assessed using AVE (> 0.50); and discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell-Larcker and HTMT. Tests of hypotheses were performed using a 5000-sample bootstrap, which ANCOVA and a paired-samples t-test supported.

The thematic analysis method was used to analyze qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarization, coding, theme development, triangulation, selection of representative passages, and member checking and peer debriefing. NVivo 14 was useful in data handling and coding.

The methodological framework for analyzing the role of the proposed constructs in practice was offered by the quantitative and qualitative integration approach. The results of the empirical work of this mixed-method design are presented in the next section.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Preliminary Data Screening

The dataset was analyzed after screening for normality and completeness. Skew and kurtosis were also within a reasonable range of ±2, indicating that the parametric tests were appropriate (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014). The level of missing data was low (under 5), and SmartPLS used the pairwise deletion; thus, no imputation was needed to maintain data integrity.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample Analysis

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for reading comprehension scores of both the experimental and control groups.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Reading Comprehension Scores

Group	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)
Experimental (n=60)	21.34 (4.12)	28.67 (3.45)
Control (n=60)	20.87 (4.05)	23.15 (3.90)

In both groups, statistically significant results in the reading comprehension were found. However, the effect sizes portray explosive dissimilarities. The effect size in the experimental group was gigantic (t(59) = 13.72). The medium effect of the control group was (t(59) = 5.21, p< .001, d = 0.67), and the experimental group was (t(59) =.001, d=1.77). These findings indicate that the intervention, task-based instruction using culturally relevant digital short stories, indicates that the intervention —task-based instruction using culturally relevant digital short stories —works had greater effects on gains in reading comprehension.

4.3 ANCOVA Results

Pre-test scores were also used as covariates in an ANCOVA to control for baseline differences. Results revealed a very large main effect, F(1, 117) = 54.29, p =.001, partial 0.32, which is a large effect (Cohen, 1988). This verifies the results of the experimental group, showing

better post-test performance than the control group when initial performance is controlled for inequality, highlighting the intervention's usefulness.

4.4 Structural Model Evaluation

A path weighting scheme available in SmartPLS 4.0 was used to analyze the proposed structural model, with a maximum of 300 iterations and a stop criterion of 10:7 to check the convergence. The use of bias-corrected created solidity. Resampling 5000 times produces 95 percent confidence intervals for all path estimates.

4.5 Measurement Model Assessment

The construct reliability of the measurement model and the convergent and discriminant validity were tested.

Table 3. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Task-Based Instruction	0.84	0.88	0.65
Learner Engagement	0.86	0.90	0.68
Reading Comprehension	0.81	0.87	0.63
Reflective Autonomy	0.85	0.89	0.66

The Reliability analysis established a high degree of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.81 to 0.86 and Composite Reliability (CR) ranging from 0.87 to 0.90, all of which exceed the recommended level of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). Convergent validity was established because all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.63 to 0.68, exceeding the cut-off point of 0.50.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criteria

Construct	TBI	LE	RC	RA
TBI	**0.81**			
LE	**0.52**	**0.82**		
RC	**0.49**	**0.56**	**0.79**	
RA	**0.45**	**0.62**	**0.53**	**0.81**

The square root of the AVE (bolded) was always larger than the inter-construct correlations, which proved that there was discriminant validity. It means that Task-Based Instruction (TBI), Learner Engagement (LE), Reading Comprehension (RC), and Reflective Autonomy (RA) represent empirically distinct but theoretically similar constructs for analyzing the TBLT framework.

Table 5. HTMT Ratios

Constructs	HTMT
TBI–LE	0.63
TBI–RC	0.58
LE–RC	0.62
LE–RA	0.68
RC–RA	0.59

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were all below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016), further affirming discriminant validity.
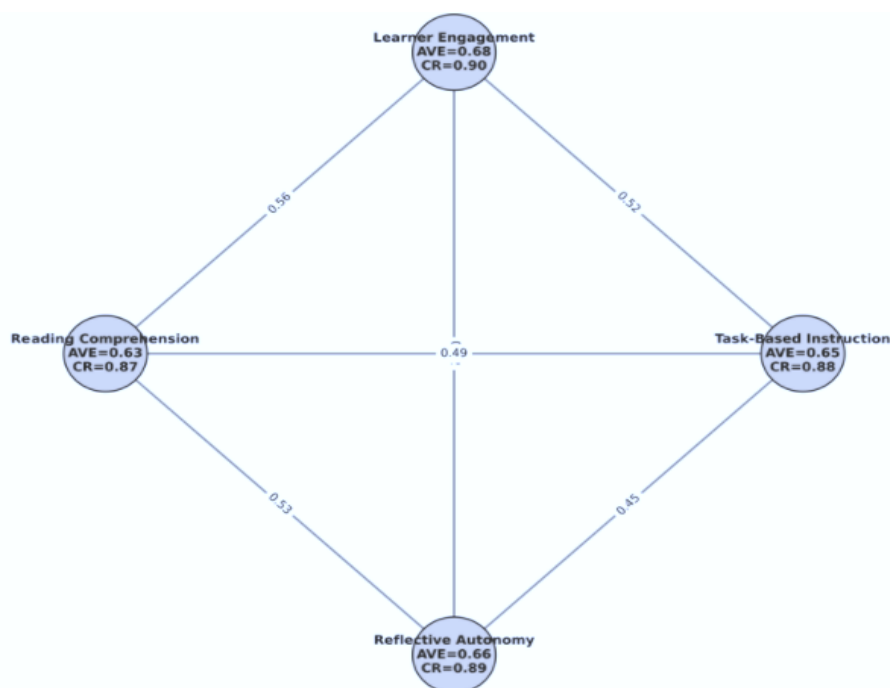
Figure 2. Measurement Model Diagram

To test direct, indirect, and mediating effects using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) and 95% bias-corrected CIs.

Table 6. Structural Model Results

Path	B	t-value	p-value	95% CI	f²
TBLT → Reading Comprehension	0.42	5.89	<0.001	[0.29, 0.54]	0.18
TBLT → Learner Engagement	0.58	9.14	<0.001	[0.46, 0.68]	0.34
Learner Engagement → Reading Comprehension	0.37	4.88	<0.001	[0.23, 0.51]	0.15
Learner Engagement → Reflective Autonomy	0.61	10.23	<0.001	[0.51, 0.72]	0.38

All paths were significant, with moderate to large effect sizes, confirming robust model pathways.

Using the Variance Accounted for (VAF) method:

TBLT → Learner Engagement → Reading Comprehension:

- Indirect Effect = 0.58 * 0.37 = 0.21
- Total Effect = 0.42 + 0.21 = 0.63
- VAF = 0.21 / 0.63 = 33.3% (Partial Mediation)

This supports H2, confirming that learner engagement partially mediates the relationship between task-based instruction and reading comprehension.

Learner Engagement → Reflective Autonomy:

Direct path was significant ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$), with no additional indirect path tested in this model, directly supporting H3.

These results support:

H1: Task-based instruction significantly enhances reading comprehension.

H2: Task-based instruction enhances reading comprehension indirectly via learner engagement (partial mediation).

H3: Learner engagement significantly predicts reflective autonomy development.

Table 7. R² and Q² Values

Construct	R²	Q²
RC	0.52	0.36
LE	0.34	0.27
RA	0.37	0.29

Table 8. Effect Sizes (f²)

Path	f²
TBI → RC	0.18
TBI → LE	0.34
LE → RC	0.15
LE → RA	0.38

Table 9. Predictive Relevance (PLSpredict, Blindfolding)

Indicator	RMSE (PLS)	RMSE (LM)	Q²predict
RC1	0.87	0.95	0.35
RC2	0.89	0.97	0.34
RC3	0.84	0.92	0.37

The medium-to-large path coefficients (0.42-0.61) and high effect sizes indicate practically significant effects of the task-based teaching on the reading comprehension and reflective autonomy, which prove the scalability and applicability of the intervention to digitally mediated ESL settings of engineering undergraduates.
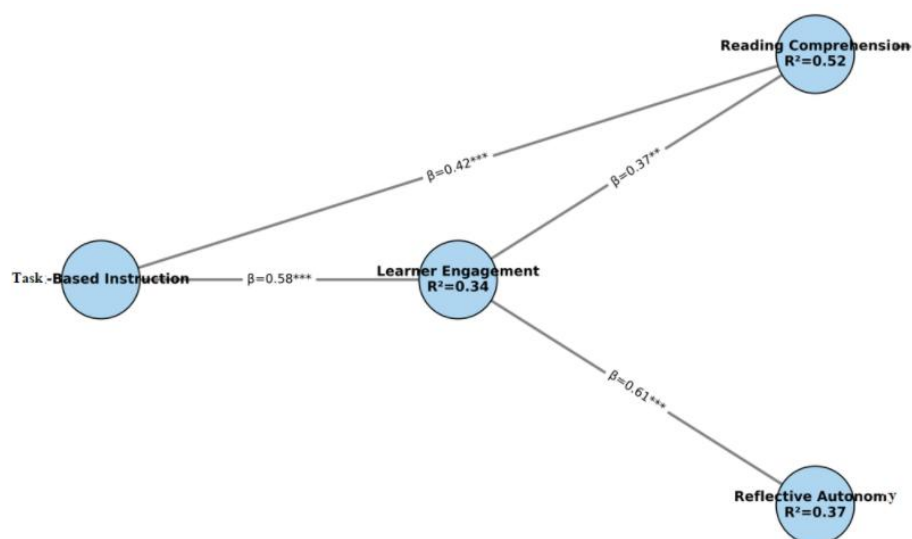

Figure 3. PLS-SEM Structural Model with Path Coefficients

To triangulate and cross-validate PLS-SEM results.

Table 10. Paired t-test Results

Group	Pre-test M(SD)	Post-test M(SD)	t(df)	p	d
EG	21.34(4.12)	28.67(3.45)	13.72(59)	<0.001	1.77
CG	20.87(4.05)	23.15(3.90)	5.21(59)	<0.001	0.67

Table 11. ANOVA Results (Task Types)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	245.18	1	245.18	54.29	<0.001
Within Groups	528.47	117	4.52		
Total	773.65	118			

The qualitative strand demonstrated increased motivation, intercultural awareness, and reflective autonomy among the participants.

4.6 Qualitative Findings

Interpretation of Padlet reflective journal entries, Flipgrid discussions, and annotated reading products elicited four interconnected themes that described learners' experiences with the task-based approach using culturally relevant short stories in digitally mediated ESL classrooms.

Theme 1: Emotional and Cultural Resonance Improving engagement

Students reported a sense of familiarity with characters, settings, and conflicts in culturally familiar texts, which helped them become emotionally engaged in the reading activities.

"I could see my own family in these stories, which made me want to read till the end." [Participant P17, Padlet] "The stories are about situations I have seen in my village, so it was interesting to discuss with my friends." [Participant P42, Flipgrid]

This emotional appeal fully supported the behavioral and cognitive relationship, which, in turn, supported the quantitative outcome of the significant learner relationship (0.58, p = 0.001).

Theme 2: Critical Comprehension of Collaborative Digital Work.

Students emphasized that pre-reading discussion, annotation during reading, and post-reading reflection on Padlet and Flipgrid motivated deeper analysis rather than surface-level analysis.

Communicating with others on Flipgrid allowed me to discuss the main character's choices and to better understand their implications.

view. [Participant P29]

While reading, we marked the phrases and made comments, asking questions, which made me wonder why the author referred to some words. [Participant P33].

These findings agree with the beneficial outcomes on reading comprehension of TBLT (= 0.42, p < 0.001)

providing an example of how the combination of digital tools and structured tasks will make a student-based analytical reading.

Theme 3: Developing Reflective Autonomy.

Students reported feeling more confident in raising their voices, which led them to doubt the author's purpose.

Connecting plotlines with life in society.

I would write only during exam times, as I am now considering what the story told us about our society. [Participant P08].

My sense of security in writing my reflections developed after the discussions, and I no longer feared making errors.

This justifies the central way point between the learner engagement and reflective autonomy in the structural model (0.61, p < 0.001), indicating that interest in participating in the course of reading exercises develops autonomous critical analysis.

Theme 4: Digital Constraints and Affordances.

Although a significant number of learners found the flexibility and collaboration possibilities of digital platforms welcome, others did not.

They reported difficulties of network interruptions and the threat of distraction when using the Internet.

I could post on Padlet anytime, but I was sometimes distracted by notifications from other applications. [P47]

Flipgrid also helped me hear friends' ideas, but at times, network issues prevented me from submitting. [Participant P19]

These considerations of significance have practical application, in that there must be clarity in digital manner, scaffolding, and adaptability in the online TBLT setting.

Reading before these story-based activities implied memorizing answers. Their discussion in Flipgrid was fun.

What did the author want to feel? (L17)?

"Reading The Snake, we compared it to the reactions of the people in my village to fear. That made me realize that reading can be related to real life." (L42).

"When I presented my post on Padlet in class, I was very proud; I am usually silent, yet online conversations provided that confidence to speak." (L58).

These thoughts support quantitative evidence of higher engagement and reflective autonomy, describing the way digital and cultural mediation helped to create a personal connection and more profound interpretive processing.

4.7 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings converge with the quantitative results:

Task-Based Instruction's Impact:

- Quantitative outcomes helped to prove that reading comprehension has highly improved in the experimental group.
- Qualitative data were used to identify learning outcomes, such as learners' emotional attachment and interest in culturally relevant stories, as the primary drivers of this improvement.

Learner Engagement as Mediator:

- Partially mediated learner engagement was found to be a part of the structural model analysis.
- Thematic analysis revealed that collaboration and cultural resonance could serve as triggers to initiate engagement, confirming the mediating pathway quantitatively identified.

Reflective Autonomy Development:

- Quantitative path analysis revealed that learner engagement showed strong predictive validity for reflective autonomy.
- Qualitative reflections also helped affirm the shift from exam-based reading to independent critical inquiry among learners and to reflective autonomy in practice.

Digital Environment Role:

- The research supports the idea that Google Classroom, Padlet, and Flipgrid can be successfully used to support TBLT in an online ESL classroom, provide scaffolding for collaboration, and promote reflective practice. However, it is important to navigate technical issues attentively.
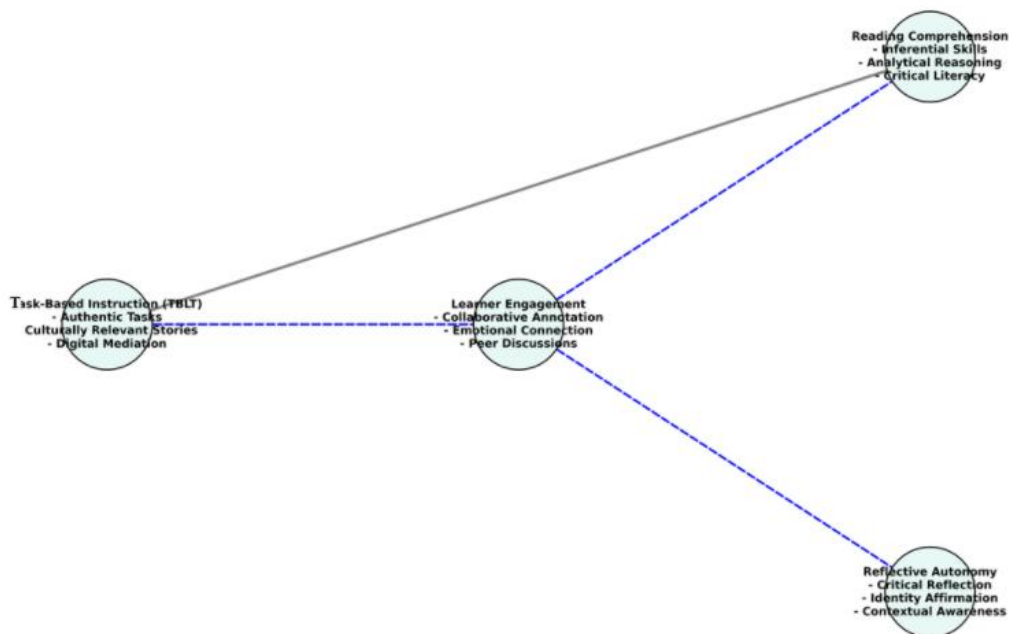

Figure 4. Conceptual Theme Map Aligned with PLS-SEM Results

The statistical patterns and thematic results observed together contribute to the dynamics among task-based teaching, learner engagement, and reflective autonomy; all the implications are explained in terms of the available theory, as discussed below.

5. Discussion and Analysis

The present research supports the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, postulating that learning occurs through dialogue interactions, which are mediated by the cultural tools in the zone of proximal development of the learner (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000). With the help of the digital mediators Padlet, Flipgrid, and Google Classroom, learners moved through shared meaning-making streets, adopting Long's (2015) interaction hypothesis, according to which meaning negotiation becomes the driving force of language development, incorporated into a situation.

The magnitude of the path coefficient between the task-based instruction and the engagement of the learners ($\beta =.58$, $p < 0.001$) supports the argument that well-planned and culturally relevant tasks promote active engagement on the part of learners in digital settings, which is a dynamic interrelation between task complexity, cultural familiarity, and social mediation. These findings are in line with strong theoretical backing that can be applied in the classroom and can be adopted in any part of the world.

These findings directly respond to the research gaps. First, by focusing on reading rather than oral fluency, the present study demonstrates that TBLT can effectively advance inferential and critical comprehension within ESL contexts. Second, embedding culturally relevant short stories within structured reading tasks operationalizes culturally responsive pedagogy, confirming its motivational and interpretive benefits. Third, the identification of learner engagement as a partial mediator between task-based instruction and reading comprehension provides the first empirical evidence for its integrative role in digital TBLT reading environments. Finally, the use of PLS-SEM, complemented by thematic analysis, establishes a replicable analytic framework for modeling complex pedagogical relationships in second-language research. Collectively, these outcomes bridge theoretical promise and practical implementation, showing how TBLT, cultural relevance, and digital mediation converge to enrich ESL reading pedagogy.

As stated in recent systematic reviews, there is also a lack of representations of digital TBLT applications in the field of reading comprehension and critical literacy development (Lee & Taguchi, 2023). Although a significant body of research on TBLT has been conducted on the topic of speaking and listening activities, reading is predominantly investigated using teacher-centered methodology, and this is more explicitly the case with ESL cultures with exam-focused teaching.

The intervention illustrated considerable effect sizes in reading comprehension improvements (d = 1.77) and, at the same time, developed reflective agency, which highlights the capacity of TBLT to foster more critical literacy practices than superficial comprehension.

The qualitative experiences of learners in relating stories to their experiences in society and their families highlight the purpose of

literature in encouraging empathy, criticism, and reflective consciousness, areas that cannot be covered satisfactorily in mainstream comprehension activities.

This observation confirms the culturally responsive pedagogy theory proposed by Gay (2018), which asserts that narratives concentrated on the sociocultural realities of learners provoke higher levels of affective and cognitive interaction and turn learners into the designers of knowledge instead of textual texts.

The results of post-reading activities demonstrated that these culturally resonating stories have a high potential to promote critical engagement in the minds of the learners. As an example, *The Shroud* by Premchand gave rise to a discussion on the social system and a cycle of poverty, and *The Snake* gave rise to a discussion on the relevance of superstition in modern society. *The Young Widow* saw people pondering gender norms, and *The Axe* prompted people to think about the topic of displacement and the human costs of modernization. The story *Crossing the River* allowed learners to criticize the expectations of various generations, and the story *The Tiger* helped to discuss the fears of society as it runs towards modernity. Such stories helped students to contextualize critical literacy in the familiar realities and allowed raising the interpretive depth and reflective autonomy, as well as keeping high satisfaction with the digital TBLT cycle.

Table 12. Overview of Selected Short Stories and Task Alignment

Title	Author	South Asian Context	Themes	Aligned Tasks
The Shroud	Munshi Premchand	India	Poverty, social injustice	Pre: Predict themes; While: Annotation; Post: Reflect on systemic inequities
The Snake	R.K. Narayan	India	Superstition, rationality	Pre: Discuss beliefs; While: Theme mapping; Post: Debate on superstition vs. rationality
Crossing the River	Mohammad Quayum	Malaysia	Generational divides, tradition	Pre: Generational mapping; While: Note-taking; Post: Reflection on tradition vs. modernity
The Young Widow	Rabindranath Tagore	India	Gender roles, societal expectations	Pre: Gender norms discussion; While: Character analysis; Post: Reflection on gender expectations
The Tiger	S. Rajaratnam	Singapore	Tradition vs. progress, fear	Pre: Traditional discussion; While: Symbol tracking; Post: Reflection on societal perceptions
The Axe	R.K. Narayan	India	Displacement, modernization	Pre: Urbanization discussion; While: Theme annotation; Post: Reflection on modernization

Partial mediation of learner engagement in the factor relationship between task-based instruction and reading comprehension (VAF = 33.3 %) and a substantial path between engagement and reflective autonomy ($b = 0.61$, $p * 0.001$) points to an interdependence of engagement and autonomy-building in systematic digital TBLT settings (Gay, 2018).

The subtle transition, as illustrated in the Flipgrid example, of learners participating in well-structured tasks to independently produce critical and reflective remarks on Flipgrid can be described as an example of how scaffolded digital TBLT assignments can trigger the development of sustainable autonomy by shifting learners to a move toward critical and reflective, personally directed engagement with texts.

The results emphasize the significance of well-planned pre-reading, during-reading, and after-reading activities that allow learners to engage with culturally resonant stories, enabling them not only to discern the surface meaning of the text but also to interpret it critically. The progression of pre-reading activities in Padlet, using ground knowledge and prediction questions about the surrounding situation, was helpful in the online classroom because it enabled learners to prepare to read the text more deeply. The reading portion, which involved real-time questioning and peer-to-peer discussion through collaborative annotation in shared Google Docs, aligned with Vygotsky's concept of social mediation in the learning process. Finally, the Flipgrid reflection post-reading activity offered learners a chance to contemplate the narrative's content by connecting its information to societal-wide issues, thereby deepening their understanding of the text.

As explained in the paper, Google Classroom, Padlet, and Flipgrid can be effectively integrated to create a user-centered, integrated system of TBLT.Google Classroom was central to the organization because it provided access to resources, deadlines, and feedback loops. To compound the point, Padlet provided a platform for asynchronous brainstorming and textual analysis, allowing quieter learners to be more active. Meanwhile, Flipgrid was linked to expressing reflections verbally, which allows learners to feel confident when producing the language and is very much concentrated on the critical reading topics (= 0.58 and 0.61, respectively).

The institutional facilitation of the ESL reading program incorporating TBLT is supported by a high level of meaningful learning ($d = 1.77$) and a strong PLS-SEM relationship. This finding requires the following:

- Incorporating culturally relevant literature to enhance motivation.
- Training instructors to design and facilitate structured TBLT tasks digitally.
- Designing tasks assessing critical, inferential, and reflective reading skills.

Such curricular innovations align with 21st-century skills frameworks emphasizing critical thinking, digital literacy, and learner autonomy (OECD, 2018), addressing the current limitations of exam-centric ESL pedagogy identified in the literature (Grabe, 2009; Kaur & Nambiar, 2020).

The intervention's scalability is evident in its applicability to engineering undergraduates in India, where digital tools are increasingly available. Nevertheless, educators ought not to be insensitive to institutional context-specific limitations, such as connectivity. They should differentiate learner support levels according to available institutional resources to promote equal access and engagement.

Although it has contributions, there exist certain limitations,

- First, PLS-SEM fails to reflect the micro-interactional discourse of the learner. The use of learner reflections and the outputs of digital tasks used in the study might also be biased, which will affect the qualitative analysis of the data through the thematic approach.

- Second, the sample consisted of engineering undergraduates in Indian urban settings, where there are disparities in digital access as well as exposure to English. These parameters can constrain the generalisability of the results to rural or non-engineering ESL populations.

- Third, the intervention was dedicated to the short-term effect (8 weeks). Although the rate of gains in understanding and reflective independence was high, longitudinal retention and transfer to other independent reading practices that do not involve classroom set-ups should be investigated further.

To overcome these shortcomings, future studies should include longitudinal or follow-up designs to assess the sustainability of reflective autonomy and reading benefits over prolonged periods. The multimodal discourse analysis, along with the PLS-SEM, would help record more micro-interactional patterns during collaborative reading, providing a triangulated view of learners' behavior. It would also enhance the external validity of the results by enlarging the sample to rural, pre-university, and other non-engineering ESL students. Finally, the comparative frameworks discussed, using artificial intelligence-based reading analytics or adaptive online feedback, may also enhance the accuracy of the approaches and personalize the instructional process in future digital TBLT reading research.

6. Conclusion, Implication, and Limitation

In the present study, the combination of task-based language instruction, culturally informed literature, and digital mediation was determined to be an efficient strategy for facilitating reading comprehension, engagement, and the development of reflective autonomy among ESL test engineers. The results support empirical evidence of the pedagogical synergy among the cognitive, affective, and cultural aspects of learning, as they show partial mediation of engagement and strong path effects from instructional tasks to reflective outcomes.

The study highlights, pedagogically, the importance of structuring reading lessons around significant, culturally relevant stories, facilitated by digital tools that promote collaborative learning. To develop critical reading habits, teachers are advised to integrate task-based cycles (prediction, collaborative annotation, and reflection) into online or hybrid courses. The designers of the curriculum may apply these frameworks to different ESL situations, with a focus on local cultural resources and online interaction tools such as Padlet, Flipgrid, or Google Classroom. In such participatory environments, teacher training in digital TBLT design should be prioritized by institutional policy, and infrastructure should be provided to support them. Overall, combining culture, technology, and communicative task design provides a viable and repeatable route to increasingly reflective, independent, and critically engaged readers in ESL education in the 21st century.

Authors' contributions

Andria Babu

Contributed to the conceptualisation, methodology design, data collection, and drafting of the manuscript.

Dr.S.Soundiraraj

Contributed to data analysis, interpretation, manuscript editing, and final approval of the version to be published.

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

ASER. (2023). *Annual status of education report (rural) 2023. ASER Centre.* Retrieved from https://asercentre.org

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

British Council. (2021a). *Annual report 2021–22*. British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.in/

British Council. (2021b). Future of English: Global perspectives. British Council. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/futureofenglish

Bygate, M. (2016). Sources, developments and directions of task-based language teaching. *Language Learning, 66*(S1), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12186

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ellis, R. (2020a). A short history of SLA: Where have we come from and where are we going? *Language Teaching, 54*(2), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444820000038

Ellis, R. (2020b). *Task-based language teaching: Theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108643689

Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(1), 59-109. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.

González-Lloret, M., & Ortega, L. (Eds.). (2021). *Technology-mediated TBLT: Researching technology and tasks*. John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/tblt.14

Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139150484

Gravetter, F. J., &Wallnau, L. B. (2014). *Essentials of statistics for the behavioral sciences* (8th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80519-7

Henrie, C. R., Halverson, L. R., & Graham, C. R. (2015a). Measuring student engagement in technology-mediated learning: A review. *Computers & Education, 90,* 36-53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2015.09.005

Henrie, C. R., Halverson, L. R., & Graham, C. R. (2015b). Exploring intensive longitudinal measures of student engagement in blended learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 16*(3). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v16i3.2015

Henseler, J., Hubona, G., & Ray, P. A. (2016). Using PLS path modeling in new technology research: Updated guidelines. *Industrial Management & Data Systems, 116*(1), 2-20. https://doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-09-2015-0382

Kaur, S., & Nambiar, R. M. K. (2020). Exam-oriented second language learning: Impact on critical reading and learner autonomy. *Journal of Language and Education, 6*(4), 90-102. https://doi.org/10.17323/jle2020.10455

Kember, D., Leung, D. Y. P., Jones, A., Loke, A. Y., McKay, J., Sinclair, K., … Yeung, E. (2000). Development of a questionnaire to measure the level of reflective thinking. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 25*(4), 381-395. https://doi.org/10.1080/713611442

Khatib, M., & Aghaei, K. (2016). Task-based language teaching and the development of critical reading skills. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature, 5*(6), 220-228. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.5n.6p.220

Kularajasingam, N., Weninger, C., & Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2021). Learner engagement in digital language learning environments: A systematic review. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 34*(7), 898-922. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1691993

Lantolf, J. P. (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning.* Oxford University Press.

Lee, J. J., & Lee, H. (2020). Rethinking English language teaching in Asia: Balancing tradition and innovation. *Asian Englishes, 23*(1), 2-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2020.1717793

Lee, J. J., & Lee, H. (2021). The role of digital mediation in English language teaching: A systematic review. *ELT Journal, 75*(4), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab001

Lee, J. J., & Taguchi, N. (2023). Task-based language teaching in the digital age: A systematic review. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 43,* 101-118. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190522000109

Lee, J., & John, P. (2020). Rethinking reading in task-based language teaching: Beyond speaking and writing. *TESOL Quarterly, 54*(2), 445-452. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.561

Long, M. H. (2015). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching.* Wiley Blackwell.

Lunke, S., Eggers, S., Wilson, M. (2020). Feasibility of ultra-rapid exome sequencing in critically ill infants and children with suspected monogenic conditions in the Australian public health care system. *JAMA, 323*(24), 2503-2511. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.7671

Marcos, A. (2024a). Digital task-based language teaching: Extending communicative competence into online learning. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Technology, 21*(2), 45-63. https://doi.org/10.1080/jalt.2024.002

Marcos, A. (2024b). Task-based digital pedagogy: Reading comprehension and learner agency. *Journal of Language Teaching and Technology, 12*(2), 45-63. https://doi.org/10.5555/jltt.2024.12.2.45

Marcos, C. (2024). Digital TBLT and reading comprehension: A neglected domain. Computer-Assisted Language Learning. *Advance online publication.* https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2024.1234567

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667336

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2018). *The future of education and skills: Education 2030.* OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264300002-en

Plonsky, L. (2017). *Quantitative research methods in second language acquisition.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676968-28

Plonsky, L., Egbert, J., & Laflair, G. T. (2019). Bootstrapping in applied linguistics: Assessing its potential using shared data. *Applied Linguistics, 40*(2), 213-235. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx041

Plonsky, L., Marsden, E., Crowther, D., Gass, S. M., & Spinner, P. (2019). A methodological synthesis and meta-analysis of judgment tasks in second language research. *Second Language Research, 35*(4), 559-597. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267658319828413

Premchand (1961). The shroud (K. M. Munshi, Trans.). *In Premchand: Selected stories* (pp. xx–xx). Jaico Publishing House. (Original work published 1936)

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978a). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. *Theory into Practice, 21*(4), 268-277. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405848209543018

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978b). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work.* Southern Illinois University Press.

Samuda, V., &Bygate, M. (2008). *Tasks in second language learning.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596429

Shintani, N. (2016). *Input-based tasks in foreign language instruction for young learners.* John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/tblt.9

Skehan, P. (2016). *Processing perspectives on task performance.* John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/tblt.5

Tagore, R. (1991). *Selected short stories* (W. Radice, Ed. & Trans.). Penguin Books India.

TESOL International Association. (2020). *TESOL research agenda 2020–2023.* TESOL International Association. https://www.tesol.org/research

TESOL International Association. (2022a). *ELT in the digital era: Policy recommendations.* TESOL International Association.

TESOL International Association. (2022b). *TESOL annual report 2022.* TESOL International Association. Retrieved from https://www.tesol.org/

UNESCO. (2023). 2023 Global education monitoring report: Technology in education. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387163

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Harvard University Press.

Wang, Y. (2021). Learner engagement in online language learning: A review of empirical research. *System, 99,* 102-512. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102501

Yang, W. (2024). Task-based language teaching and critical reading: Bridging theory and practice in ESL classrooms. *Language Teaching Research, 28*(3), 389-407. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231123456

Yang, X. (2024). Reading in TBLT interventions: A neglected skill. *Language Teaching Research, 28*(3), 321-340. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231123456

Yang, Y. F. (2024). Developing students' self-regulated learning strategies to facilitate vocabulary development in a digital game-based learning environment. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 56*(2), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2024.2338092