NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' LEARNING ENGAGEMENT IN TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. This paper presents the findings of a quantitative study exploring non-English major students' learning engagement in task-based language learning (TBLL) in the context of a university in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province. This study involved 200 non-English-major students in answering questionnaires. The SPSS software was employed to process the data. The findings revealed that non-English major students had a high level of learning engagement in TBLL. Three major factors, viz. *teacher-related factors*, *learning context-related factors* and *student-related factors* were believed to positively affect their learning engagement in TBLL. Among three factor groups, with their distinctive features, *learning context-related factors* proved to be the most crucial one in the TBLL class, while *teacher-related factors* and *student-related factors* played an indispensable role in enhancing students' speaking competence and motivating them to speak English. Additionally, this study also showed that the more students got involved in TBLL, the more positively their learning engagement in TBLL was affected by the three named factor groups.
Keywords: TBLL, factors, learning engagement, non-English major students.

1. Introduction

Task-based language learning (TBLL) plays one of the vital roles in learners' engagement as it enhances students' communicative competence with the use of authentic language, daily-life activities, and the chance of practicing the target language constantly. Ellis [1] points out that this methodology focuses on the integration of language learning where students are expected to conduct creative activities, infer meaning from readings and oral messages, and communicate their ideas well. Thus, learners themselves are put in a real situation where oral communication is needed. In addition, Willis [2] emphasizes the importance of this approach because it emphasizes authenticity and communicative activities. In Viet Nam, examinations are mainly grammar-focused. Hence, English teaching and learning is purely examination-based. This leads to the fact that students gradually lose their interest in acquiring/learning the new language and fail to speak fluent English. Thus, when TBLL is applied, the progress of teaching and learning English seems much positive as students have more chances to produce the language and improve the skills equally. In short, there has been a lot of research across many contexts, especially Asian recently to name the challenges posed to English teachers in using TBLL. However, little research has been undertaken to investigate the factors that affect students' learning engagement in TBLL at universities based on the obstacles they face.

Therefore, this study endeavors to scrutinize non-English major students' learning engagement in TBLL at the context of a university in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province, and it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL?

2. What are the factors that affect non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL?

3. How does non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL correlate with the factors affecting their learning engagement in TBLL?

2. Content

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Task in TBLL

Larsen-Freeman [3] describes tasks as meaningful communitive activities with clear outcomes for students. In doing these tasks, learners have to communicate in the target language to fulfill given assignments. This figuration of tasks is in line with Willis's [4] viewpoint when she calls tasks activities where learners use the target language for communication to achieve an outcome. Larsen-Freeman's [3] definition also fits Nunan's [5] focus when they state that a task of communication in the classroom work is an activity that makes learners involved in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or/and interacting in the target language while meaning is mainly focused on instead of form. Moreover, according to Bachman and Palmer [6], a task is an activity that involves learners making use of the language to achieve a specific goal or objective in a certain case. In general, concerning definitions mentioned above, tasks can be understood as meaningful communicative activities where students need to communicate for problem-solving.

2.1.2. Types of task

According to Prabu [7], meaning-focused activity in the classroom can be categorized broadly into three types namely Information-gap task, Reasoning-gap task, and Opinion-gap task. Moreover, not only Richards and Rodgers [8] but also Willis [4] point out that whenever any type of task is carried out, it should follow the procedure namely pre-task (task preparation), while-task (focus on task meaning), and post-task (further activity). Subsequently, Willis [4] introduces six steps called pre-task, task, task assessment, planning, task presentation, and post-task language focus. However, most researchers show their agreement on defining three steps of Task-based Language Teaching. Jinxia [9] states that this method comprises three main principles namely pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. In brief, tasks can be classified into different types in many ways. In any classification, task designers must understand the nature and outcome of chosen tasks to orient learners to intended goals.

2.1.3. Learning engagement in TBLL

Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris [10] define learning engagement as a "multifaceted" or "multidimensional" construct which consists of three components namely emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. For instance, getting involved in a learning activity, people tend to have more unforgettable experiences when affective states are also awoken [11]. The analysis of engagement lets us concentrate on attention (the cognitive dimension) and on the affective, behavioral, and social dimensions that enhance effective learning. Christenson et al. [12] emphasize the importance of engagement for learning as student engagement drives learning. Student engagement which requires enthusiasm and effort is determined by multiple contextual influences. Therefore, learning engagement should be considered as a multidimensional construct in which there is cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimension.

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Cognitive engagement refers to the fact that students can get engaged in self-regulated learning and highly appreciate the value of learning. In cognitive engagement, students have the motivation to study in the classroom and even outside the classroom [10], [13]. Emotional engagement is focused on students' feelings. Skinner, Kindermann, and Furrer [14] describe emotional engagement as positively motivated involvement while students take part in learning activities. Behavioral engagement is among the most common indicators used in applications and studies as it is more observable and easily measurable [15]. It normally refers to the time spent on academic or out-of-school tasks, participation in activities, and attendance during the class.

2.1.4. Factors affecting learning engagement in TBLL

Learner-related factors

*Language proficiency***:** According to Prodromou [16], the great impact of English proficiency on the attitudes of learners is described as "The more advanced the students' knowledge of English becomes, the more receptive they are to interesting content and a richer cultural input" (p. 48). Furthermore, Prodromou concludes that students' proficiency should be taken into consideration before deciding to integrate cultural aspects in the EFL. More recent evidence from previous studies [17], [18] proposes that English language proficiency is a decisive factor in language teaching and learning in general.

Perception: Rifkin [20] assures that the way learners perceive their learning process is "of critical importance to the success or failure of any student's efforts to master a foreign language" (p. 394). Nunan [5] inserts that "no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account" (p. 177). According to Puchta [20], beliefs can function as the guidelines for learners' behavior and perceptual filters. Stevick [21] even presents his idea about success which does not depend much on materials and techniques but is what is really inside each learner.

Motivation: Many researchers have pointed out the important role of motivation in learning and previous studies have revealed that a meaningful relationship exists between motivation and students' performance. With regard to the status of language teaching, Juvonen and Wentzel [22] add that there is evidence showing social motivations influence their academic performance. Some researchers have studied the influence of students' motivation on their performance in learning different parts of the language. Schmidt [23] states that students who are less motivated pay less attention to the language input compared to the more motivated ones. Moreover, Tateyama [24] asserts that highly motivated learners demonstrate better performance in role plays.

Teacher-related factors

Teachers' language proficiency: According to Bachman and Palmer [25], there are six qualities categorized under the language proficiency term, namely organizational knowledge, grammatical knowledge, textual knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, functional knowledge, and socio-linguistic knowledge. On the other hand, Richards and Rodgers [8] describe teachers' language proficiency as a synthesis knowledge as follows: (1) second language acquisition theory, (2) pedagogical knowledge, (3) curricular and syllabus knowledge, and (4) cultural knowledge. Without the shadow of a doubt, teachers' language proficiency has an enormous impact on the learning engagement for TBLL. When teachers acquire a high level of target language proficiency, they can easily attain better results in language teaching. Hence, this brings better knowledge taken in by students.

Teachers' emotion: The motivation to become a teacher is related to professionalism and commitment [26], [27]. Many researchers have been paying attention to the motivation of teachers to become teachers**.** The common finding is the importance of intrinsic motivation and altruism of teachers. Brookhart [28] even highlights that altruistic motivates and the desire to

work with children is the main reasons for choosing a teaching profession when assessing teacher motivation

Teachers' methods: In terms of teaching methods, Schoenfeld [29] emphasizes the teaching style which is one of the most significant factors in maintaining students' beliefs. Offering a further explanation. More specifically, Zhang [30] highlights that to fulfill the aim of language teaching, which can surely improve learning engagement for TBLL, three needed aspects, namely sufficient intercultural knowledge, specific abilities, and emotional qualities, are required. Among the specific abilities which Zhang mentions, the ability to use multiple teaching methods and approaches is highlighted.

The learning context-related factors

Facilities and Materials: To what Goodenow [31] concerns, belonging is the feeling that students feel embraced, supported, and engaged in by students, teachers, facilities, materials, and so on in the learning environment of the university. Social learning space, the university environment, and social dimensions in integration help to contribute to the development of belonging, learning, and student engagement.

Peers: According to Manouchehri [32], the use of peer collaboration and mirroring collaboration may promote the development of student teachers. In the same vein, Korthagen et al. [33] pinpoint that it "will help to bridge the gap between what is done in teacher education and what those learning to teach need in their future practice" (p. 1034).

2.2. Methods and results

2.2.1 Methods

This study was conducted at a university located in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province, and it involved 200 non-English major students in answering the questionnaires. The percentages of males and females are 41.5% and 58.5%, respectively. Nearly 100% of the participants were aged from 19 to 20 years old and have learned English at least for seven years. The questionnaire was employed for data collection. It was designed based on the views of Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris [10] for learning engagement, Goodenow [31] for learning context-related factors, Linnenbrink and Pintrich [34] for teachers' related factors, and Krause and Coates [35] for learner-related factors. The closed-ended questionnaire consists of 58 closed-ended items using a 5-point scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*).

Regarding data collection, 220 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the non-English-major students; however, 200 copies of the questionnaire were returned. Before answering the questionnaire, students were explained if necessary. Each student spent at least fifteen minutes completing the questionnaire. Concerning the data analysis, the data were analyzed by SPSS software in terms of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), and the meaning of the interval mean scores are interpreted as 1-1.80: strongly disagree; 1.81-2.60: disagree; 2.61-3.40: neutral; 3.41- 4.20: agree; 4.21 – 5.00: strongly agree.

2.2.2 Results

2.2.2.1 Non-English major students' learning engagement in TBLL

In learning engagement in TBLL, three components were established including cognitive dimension, behavioral dimension, and emotional dimension. Table 1 indicates that the average mean score of non-English major students' learning engagement in TBLL is 3.70 (SD=.64). Specifically, the mean score of emotional dimension (M=3.77; SD=.52) is at the highest level, followed by that of Behavioral dimension (M=3.67; SD=.68) and Cognitive dimension (M=3.65; SD=.72). It means that research participants had a high level of learning engagement in TBLL, and they tended to get involved in TBLL emotionally more than cognitively and behaviorally.

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Table 1. Learning engagement for TBLL

No.	Learning engagement for TBLL	N = 200	
		M	SD
1	Cognitive dimension	3.65	.72
2	Behavioral dimension	3.67	.68
3	Emotional dimension	3.77	52
	Average	3.70	.64

2.2.2.2 Factors affecting non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL

Learner-related factors

The results in Table 2 show that the average mean score for learner-related factors is 3.67 (SD = .59). This group factor encompasses perception engagement, language proficiency engagement, and motivational engagement with mean scores 3.70 (SD =.57), 3.60 (SD=.63), and 3.69 (SD=.56), respectively. This can be understood that the learner-related factors affected students' learning engagement in TBLL positively. Among three sub-groups, participants believed that their perception engagement in TBLL was slightly more influential than the other two sub-groups.

Table 2. Factors affecting non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL in terms of learner-related factors

No.	Learner-related factors	N = 200	
		M	SD
1	Perception engagement	3.70	.57
2	Language proficiency engagement	3.63	.63
3	Motivational engagement	3.69	.56
	Average	3.67	.59

Teacher-related factors

The findings in Table 3 show that the average mean score of teacher-related factors is 3.86 (SD=.49). The mean scores for sub-groups are 3.89 (SD=.46) for teachers' language proficiency, 3.86 (SD=.56) for teachers' method engagement, and 3.84 (SD=.46) for teachers' motivational engagement. This means that teacher-related factors had positive impacts on students' learning engagement in TBLL, and teachers' language proficiency engagement was believed to be the most influential sub-group in teacher-related factors.

Table 3. Factors affecting non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL in terms of teacher-related factors

No.	Teacher-related factors	N = 200	
		M	SD
1	Teachers' language proficiency engagement	3.89	.46
2	Teachers' method engagement	3.86	.56
3	Teachers' motivational engagement	3.84	.46
	Average	3.86	.49

Learning context-related factors

As seen in Table 4, the average mean score of learning context-related factors is 3.85 (SD=.48), and the mean scores for three sub-groups are 3.90 (SD=.48) for facility engagement, 3.95 (SD=.49) for material engagement, and 3.75 (SD = .47) for peer engagement. This can be interpreted that participants' learning engagement in TBLL was positively affected by learning context-related factors, and the material engagement tended to have the most positive impacts on students' learning engagement in TBLL.

Table 4. Factors affecting non-English-major students' learning engagement
in TBLL in terms of learning context-related factors

No.	Learning context-related factors	N = 200	
		M	*SD*
1	Facility engagement	**3.90**	**.48**
2	Material engagement	**3.95**	**.49**
3	Peer engagement	**3.75**	**.47**
	Average	**3.86**	**.48**

2.2.2.3. The correlation between non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL with the factors affecting their learning engagement in TBLL

The results in Table 5 show that the learning engagement has positive correlations with all three-factor groups, namely learner-related factors (r= .119), learning context-related factors (r=.244), and teacher-related factors (r=.242). Particularly, learning context-related factors had the strongest correlation with the students' learning engagement in TBLL. This means that the more students got engaged in TBLL, the more their learning engagement in TBLL was affected by the three named factor groups.

Table 5. Correlations correlation between non-English-major students' learning engagement
in TBLL with the factors affecting their learning engagement in TBLL

		Learning engagement
Learner-related factors	Pearson Correlation	.119[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	200
Learning context-related factors	Pearson Correlation	.244[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	200
Teacher-related factors	Pearson Correlation	.242[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	200

2.3. Discussions

This study revealed that some significant findings. Firstly, it was found out that research participants in this study self-reported that they got engaged in TBLL at a high level. It seems that the teaching techniques and activities used in TBLL could be effective enough to attract non-English major students' engagement. In this research context, the TBLL classes included various speaking activities, exercises, and instructions which focused on the process rather than the product. The TBLL activities are purposeful, and the tasks emphasize communication and

meaning for students to get involved in TBLL [3]. Among three components of engagement, and non-English major students' emotional engagement in TBLL was higher than their cognitive and behavioral engagement. This can be that research participants were emotionally motivated to take part in TBLL activities as their emotional engagement can play a positive role to leverage their cognitive and behavioral engagement [14].

The second major finding is that research participants' learning engagement in TBLL was positively affected by three groups of factors, namely learner-related factors, teacher-related factors, and learning context-related factors. Regarding the learner-related factors, non-English major students supposed that their perception engagement, language proficiency engagement, and motivational engagement had positive impacts on their TBLL engagement. This finding is supported by researchers [1], [2], [5] [36] who emphasized the role of TBLL in students' learning engagement and noted that while performing the tasks, learners engage in certain types of language use and mental processing that are useful for acquisition. The teacher-related factors were seen to play an important role in developing the students' speaking skills. Willis [2] underscores the role of the teachers in promoting students' learning through TBLL. The teachers in the classroom act as monitors or facilitators, and encourage their students to perform the activities. Teachers' language proficiency is also very important to engage students' learning English better. It is agreed that there is a relationship between teachers' language proficiency and how they use the target language in the classroom to engage learners in the learning process. Larsen-Freeman [3] points out teacher language proficiency not as general language proficiency but as a specialized subset of language skills required to prepare and teach the lesson. In that sense, teachers' language proficiency is anchored in particular uses of specific content, which are situated in both interaction and context in the classroom. The finding also revealed that learning context-related factors affected positively students' TBLL engagement. Dorman, Aldridge, and Fraser [37] assert that a good learning classroom helps students feel a sense of belonging, trust others, and feel respected, encouraged to tackle challenges, take risks, and ask questions. Also, a good classroom provides students relevant content, clear learning goals and feedback, opportunities to build social skills, and strategies to help students succeed [38].

Another finding is that there was a positive correlation between non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL and the factors affecting their learning engagement for TBLL. This indicates that the higher students' learning engagement in TBLL was, the more their learning engagement in TBLL was positively affected by learner-related factors, learning context-related factors, and teacher-related factors. Nonetheless, it seems that non-English-major students' learning engagement in TBLL was positively affected by learning context-related factors more than learner-related factors and teacher-related factors, which can infer that the facility, learning materials, and peers in the classroom could leverage students' TBLL engagement.

3. Conclusions

The results of this study highlighted the roles of TBLL in boosting students' learning engagement and factors affecting their TBLL engagement. Teacher-related, learning context-related and learner-related factors have positive impacts on learning engagement for TBLL; however, the learning context-related factors proved to be the most crucial one in TBLL classes. In terms of teacher-related factors, the results prove that they also play an indispensable role in helping students improve speaking competency. Meanwhile, learner-related factors serve as vital features which enhance students' speaking skills and as well as motivate them to speak in English.

Some pedagogical implications can be withdrawn. Firstly, as TBLL can affect students' learning engagement, it is advisory for teachers to implement TBLL in English language teaching in this research context and other similar ones. It is obvious that students are beneficial when TBLL is carried out during classes. It is believed that thanks to real-life situations and other TBLL types of tasks, teachers can encourage students to become more independent, promote their creativity and critical thinking. Furthermore, it is vital that when students perform tasks in TBLL, there should be specific criteria to assess how effective their work is. It is considered as an encouragement for them to perform better in their learning environment. Secondly, to apply TBLL successfully, it is of importance for the students to be equipped with essential skills to shift into the new ways to learn. When students are provided good preparation to operate projects with high determination to gain good results, they will be in an attempt to fulfill their shortcomings. Both teachers and students should be willing to change their roles in the classroom. Additionally, it is of importance that teachers, whose new roles are instructor, facilitator, supervisor, and monitor, should be supplied with appropriate training. Besides, being equipped with adequate skills, teachers should also be supplied with the process of project implementation as well as the ways to evaluate students. When they have sufficient skills they may train, instruct and help their students if necessary. Teachers should have the comprehension of students' basic knowledge and facilitate students learning process by helping them to combine their basic knowledge and the new one to solve complicated tasks in real life. Last but not least, it is necessary to engage the stakeholders to involve in the PBL implementation. Along with the efforts of teachers and students, the stakeholders play an important role to encourage teachers and students to apply TBLL into language teaching. It is suggested that they should update and supply information for the students and teachers through various sources. Moreover, some project exhibitions in the cities or the provinces should be organized so that teachers, as well as students, have opportunities to display and share their products. It is also imperative to invite some experienced teachers who have operated TBLL successfully to share their experience so that its use can become more and more effective.

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