Using Task-Based Blended Learning Model to Develop Reading Comprehension among Preparatory Stage Pupils

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استخدام نموذج التعلم المدمج القائم على المهام لتنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي لدى تلاميذ المرحلة الاعدادية

المستخلص:

هدفت الدراسة الحالية الى تحديد مدى فاعلية التعلم المدمج القائم على المهام لتنمية مهارات الفهم القرائى لدي طلاب الصف الثانى من المرحلة الاعدادية. وقد كانت عينة الدراسة 80 طالبًا من طلاب الصف الثاني الإعدادي من مدرسة الصديق الإعدادية، محافظة الوادي الجديد. تم اختيار العينة عشوائيًا وتقسيمها إلى مجموعتين متجانستين: المجموعة التجريبية (40) تم تعليمها باستخدام التعلم المدمج القائم على المهام، بينما تم تعليم المجموعة الضابطة (40) من خلال التعلم بالاساليب المعتادة. صمم الباحث واختبر وأجرى اختبار فهم القراءة القبلي والبعدي. تم إجراء اختبار القراءة القبلي والبعدى لكلا المجموعتين لتقييم تطور فهم القراءة لدى الطلاب قبل وبعد الدراسة. أشارت النتائج إلى وجود فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين المتوسطات الحسابية لدرجات الطلاب في المجموعة الضابطة والمجموعة التجريبية بعد إجراء الاختبار، حيث كانت النتائج لصالح المجموعة التجريبية. وبناءً علي ذلك ، تم الاستنتاج أن التعلم المدمج القائم على المهام كان فعالاً في تطوير فهم الطلاب للقراءة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم المدمج القائم على المهام، مهارات الفهم القرائى.

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Abstract:

The current study investigated the effectiveness of task-based blended learning to develop reading comprehension of second-year preparatory school pupils. The study sample was 80 second-year preparatory stage students from El-Sedeeq Preparatory School, New Valley Governorate. The sample was randomly chosen and divided into two homogeneous groups: the treatment group (N=40) was taught using task-based blended learning whereas the control group (N=40) was taught through regular instruction. The researcher designed, validated, and conducted a pre-post reading comprehension test. The pre-posttest was administered to both groups to assess the development of students' reading comprehension before and after the treatment. Results indicated a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of students in the control group and those in the treatment group in the post-administration of the test, favoring the treatment group. Accordingly, it was concluded that task-based blended learning effectively developed students' reading comprehension.

***Keywords*:** task-based blended learning, reading comprehension skills.

Introduction:

English language proficiency encompasses four essential skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which are fundamental for students learning English. The primary objective of teaching these skills is to equip students with the ability to communicate effectively with both native and non-native English speakers across various social and academic contexts. Among these skills, reading holds particular significance in foreign language acquisition. Reading allows students to understand foreign language symbols, signs, structures, patterns, literature, and history. Students who interact with written materials have greater comprehension of the language's cultural context in addition to being exposed to its linguistic components.

Moreover, cultivating a habit of reading enhances learners' capacity to decipher unfamiliar words and phrases encountered in everyday conversations, expanding their vocabulary and comprehension skills. In essence, reading plays a pivotal role in the holistic development of language proficiency, serving as a bridge between language acquisition and cultural immersion (Safaeia and Bulca, 2013). Reading is crucial since it is a tool for expanding one's linguistic expertise and obtaining information (Mohibu and Ismail, 2021). Further, Al Odwan (2012) emphasizes that reading skills are essential for academic success and achievement. De La Paz (2014) asserts that reading represents a fundamental part of the construction of knowledge. Therefore, reading is considered an essential component in learning a foreign language.

According to Grabe (2009), reading involves processing a text and fully comprehending its meaning in addition to being able to read it. It is the process of integrating text input, cognition, and previously acquired knowledge. Furthermore, Murphy (2002) views reading comprehension as a sophisticated interpretation process that may be impacted by the reader's capacity to complete the assigned reading activities. The process by which a reader derives meaning from textual information is known as reading comprehension. Lovett, Frijters, Steinbach, Sevcik, and Morris (2021) state that the integration of numerous verbal, cognitive, emotive, analytical, and interpretative processes is necessary for pupils to comprehend the text.

Teachers play a significant role in enhancing their pupils' reading comprehension skills. For example, teachers could offer incentives to help pupils reach their reading objectives (Sponaugle, 2023). Besides, they could engage pupils with their reading to understand the reading text., For instance, they can help pupils comprehend a text as a whole and identify supporting information to the main idea of the text and the meanings of new words. This, in turn, will make pupils ready for the next grades in the middle and high schools (Wanzek, Otaiba, Schatschneider, Donegan, Rivas, Jones, and Petscher (2020)). Consequently, as suggested by Toole (2023), teachers should be trained to use suitable methods and techniques in teaching reading to improve their pupils' reading fluency and comprehension. They also need to identify practical strategies that pupils can use in the reading classroom.

Various studies such as El-Ebeedy (2012); EL Dahrawy (2016), and Shaarawy (2014), Barakat (2017) showed that there are many problems EFL students face in reading comprehension. Besides, they indicated that these reading difficulties could be traced back to the methods employed in teaching them. However, the field of language teaching has evolved, embracing new methods that aim to address these shortcomings. One such approach is task-based learning has gained traction in recent years. Unlike traditional methods, task-based learning emphasizes real-life language use and provides learners with purposeful contexts for language study by focusing on authentic material and meaningful tasks (Waer 2009).

By promoting active participation and authentic practice in the target language, task-based learning offers a more effective alternative to traditional teaching methods. It provides opportunities to experience listening, spoken, reading, and written language through meaningful class assignments that involve learners in the practical and functional use of language. It promotes and stimulates the integration of skills through completing daily life activities and offers learners the possibility of practising the target language (Córdoba Zúñiga, 2016)

Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2005) demonstrated the significance of task-based language learning by pointing out that it offers a setting that stimulates the learning process and encourages L2 acquisition. Additionally, task-based language learning shows the teacher's respect for each student as a person and desire for their success. Teachers can also encourage a student-centered language learning environment by using TBLL. Further, it gives students the chance to learn in a facilitative way. Additionally, it recognizes students' beliefs, motivation, attitudes toward learning, and preferred learning methods. Similarly, TBL promotes meaningful, content-oriented actions above language forms (Beglar and Hunt, 2002; Carless, 2002; Littlewood, 2004).

Task-based learning is a learning method built on different tasks for learners to perform in pairs or groups through interaction in the target language (Cutting and Fordyce, 2020, 256). A task-based approach is a student-centered approach that views language as a communicative tool that presents opportunities for learners to master language skills via activities designed to engage learners in the natural, practical, and functional use of language for meaningful purposes.

Technology is considered one of the most effective techniques nowadays. It can overcome some of the obstacles that impede EFL instruction. The current methods of EFL reading instruction could be improved through using technologies. Currently, with technology such as mobile devices, to support language learning, language teachers may implement methodological models that include face-to-face instruction and technology-mediated tasks (Ferreira, Salinas, and Morales, 2015). It is necessary to create an equilibrium between e-learning and face-to-face learning to utilize their benefits (Tosun, 2015). To make task-based learning more effective and valuable in the teaching and learning of EFL, a new educational trend has appeared recently, which integrates technology with TBL and constitutes the new concept of task-based blended learning.

Blended learning includes the benefits of e-learning, including time efficiency, location convenience, and cost reductions for learners, as well as the personal understanding and motivation that can be achieved through face-to-face instruction (Maritz, Brown, and Chich Jen, 2010). According to (Ololube, 2013) this approach, which combines online and face-to-face instruction, fosters greater face-to-face involvement and enables students to maintain connections with their peers and teachers. It also extends the accessibility of online learning to learners worldwide, while granting instructors the flexibility to tailor online content to suit students' preferences and learning objectives.

To meet the academic needs of their students, teachers in blended learning continue to integrate technology into their lessons and increase its use (Xu, Liu, and Ye, 2020). According to Yang and Bai (2020), the advantages of implementing online learning in the classroom may increase the effectiveness of online learning. Additionally, integrating technology into the classroom gives teachers the chance to offer flexibility for each student and offers flexibility in the way that they teach.

Blended learning has different models or structures such as the rotation model**,** Flex model**,** a la carte model**,** and enriched virtual model. According to Divayana (2019), the rotation model's influence develops from its capacity to facilitate classroom instruction that is practical, clear-cut, flexible, and independent. Under the rotation model, students adhere to a set timetable that switches between in-person and online learning. The present study adopted the rotation model as it is simpler to use by the sample of the present study. The nature of studying at the Egyptian prep. All lessons are studied in the classroom. They are not used to studying online. Thus, using this model could help students acquire the required skills and practice more in online activities.

In sum, EFL students have different problems and difficulties that hinder their ability to read well. These constraints need more investigation and solutions. As different methods were used to help EFL learners in reading comprehension and different studies recommended TBL, this study attempted to fill in this gap and enhance students' reading comprehension skills. Consequently, this study attempted to contribute to this problem by using task-based blended learning.

Context of the Problem:

The researcher noticed while teaching preparatory school students that the second-year preparatory stage seemed to be bored and unexcited during English lessons; they appeared to have less enthusiasm. To shed light on the actual methods employed when instructing second-year preparatory school students in EFL classrooms which may hinder learners 'reading comprehension. The researcher designed a questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview applied to EFL teachers and a sample of second-year preparatory school pupils in El-Sedeeq Preparatory School, El-Dakhla City, New Valley Governorate. Forty pupils were involved 20 boys and 20 girls. The questionnaire and the interviews aimed to recognize:

- Actual practices used in teaching EFL courses.

- Problems encountered by students while studying lessons.
- Type of activities used in the instruction.
- Online practices used in EFL classrooms (if they existed).

Results of the questionnaire and semi-structured interview revealed that:

1. Based on the pupils' responses, it is clear that teachers use conventional methods of teaching EFL skills that rely heavily on reading a written text, and then responding to numerous questions without involving their students in real interaction with the text.
2. It was noticed that classroom instruction emphasizes practising translation into Arabic, grammar, and reading aloud over comprehension, as teachers did not use strategies or ask questions that help pupils develop their thinking skills, which led to more involvement and participation.
3. Most of the students complained that teachers of English used to stress primarily the importance of memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules.
4. Most of the students mentioned that teachers did not use varied means of technology while teaching.

Based on the literature review and related studies, and the researcher's observation, it was clear that second-year preparatory stage pupils seemed to be less involved in learning activities, they could feel bored and less motivated. They might need a new method that may result in attracting their interest and increasing their engagement. Therefore, the present study investigated the effectiveness of using task-based blended learning in developing second-year preparatory stage pupils' reading comprehension.

Statement of the problem:

Based on the literature review and related studies and the results of the pilot study, it was clear that second-year preparatory stage pupils seem to have low levels of reading comprehension skills. They might need a new method that may result in enhancing their level of reading comprehension. Therefore, the present study investigated the effectiveness of using task-based blended learning activities in developing second-year preparatory stage pupils' reading comprehension skills.

Questions of the Study:

The current study sought to answer the following main question:

What is the effectiveness of using task-based blended learning in enhancing pupils' reading comprehension?

Objectives of the Study:

The current study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using task-based blended learning in developing second-year preparatory school pupils' reading comprehension skills.

Hypotheses of the Study:

- There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment and the control group pupils in the post-assessment of their reading comprehension, favoring the treatment group pupils.

- There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group pupils in the pre-post assessment of their reading comprehension, favoring post-assessment results.

Significance of the Study:

This study was supposed to be significant for:

1. Instructors, as it may improve teaching methodology. It may also develop their awareness of the benefits of task-based learning and technology as a supporting tool in improving their language skills.
2. Decision-makers in the education field: may pay attention to designing valuable language tasks in a blended learning environment, which can promote positive perceptions and attitudes toward EFL learning.
3. Researchers: It may contribute to modifying and strengthening theories that focus on blended learning and its advantages in EFL classrooms. It may also serve as a supporting document for further study in EFL research.

Delimitations of the Study:

The study was limited to:

- A sample of EFL second-year preparatory school stage pupils at El-Sedeeq Preparatory School, El-Dakhla City, New Valley Governorate, as second-year preparatory school pupils represent an important transitional phase in language acquisition. At this stage, pupils are expected to move from basic linguistic structures to more complex EFL skills, making them suitable for interventions targeting language proficiency.
- A task-based blended learning instructional unit that combines task-based learning (TBL) principles with blended learning (BL) approaches to create a dynamic and involving educational experience. This unit is designed to enhance learners' English language proficiency by integrating real-life tasks, interactive digital tools, and face-to-face sessions.
- Second semester of the academic year 2023-2024.

Procedures of the study:

The study proceeded according to the following steps:

1. Reviewing literature and previous studies related to the field of using blended learning to develop reading comprehension skills.
2. Reviewing related literature and previous studies to identify the different reading comprehension skills and preparing a list of reading comprehension skills that should be mastered by second-year preparatory stage pupils.
3. Validating the list by Presenting the list to a group of EFL professors, advisors, and supervisors.
4. Designing both the pre-post reading comprehension test and the proposed task-based blended learning tasks of reading comprehension skills and validating them.
5. Refining the test and the program in their final form according to jurors' recommendations.

6. Selecting the participants of the study and dividing them into treatment and control groups and then administering the pre-test of the study to the groups of the study at the beginning of the treatment. (pre-administration).
7. Teaching program to the treatment group through task-based blended learning activities, while the control group was trained through the regular ways of teaching reading skills.
8. Administering the test of the study at the end of the term. (post-administration).
9. Collecting data and analyzing them statistically using suitable statistical methods.
10. Discussing results, concluding, and presenting recommendations.

Review of Literature:

Task-based blended learning:

As a result of the increased advancement in the field of information technology and communication and the benefits of using blended learning, a new modification in the structure of task-based learning has been added. According to Seedhouse (2017), because computers have connected people from all walks of life, the dominance of many old teaching approaches is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the new generations. Eventually, task-based blended learning is a learning model where the teacher integrates technology in terms of giving a group of tasks assisted with online environment practices. It is a combination of traditional learning and online learning to provide learning tasks in the ordinary phases which consist of pre-task, during the task, and post-task cycles. Integrating task-based learning with technology is a solution to the weaknesses of both traditional task and online learning when giving tasks to learners.

TBL integrated with technology has attracted many scholars to investigate language learning. They confirm that technology-mediated TBLT can help students improve their language proficiency. Adams and Alwi, (2014) revealed the positive effect of task-based language teaching assisted with technology on learners' EFL writing skills. More recently, Tusino, Faridi, Saleh, and Fitriati (2019) indicated that blended task-based language teaching and critical thinking have a significant effect on learners' EFL writing performance. Other research focused on how incorporating hybrid task-based learning affected students' EFL reading comprehension skills (Elahi and Heidar, 2021). The findings demonstrated that students in the treatment groups outperformed the two control groups in this study and obtained noticeably higher scores than those in the control groups.

Based on the previous studies, it is observed that task-based learning is useful when integrated with a blended learning approach, The use of the BL technique is essential to converting the classroom into an exciting and creative space for learning. Additionally, BL changes the focus of education from teacher-centered to student-centered and from teaching to learning. It enhances communication between students and teachers and helps students develop their skills. So, the present study attempts to make use of task-based learning and blended learning practices in developing an important aspect of language skills which is reading comprehension.

Reading Comprehension:

Reading comprehension is the capacity to decipher written material so that readers can infer meaning from the words until they fully understand the paragraph, according to Paulsen and the IRIS Center (2004). Block, Gambrell, and Pressley, (2002:3) offer an additional definition, stating that reading comprehension is the thinking process used to make meaning of what a person reads. Furthermore, the process of concurrently deriving and creating meaning through interaction and involvement with written language is known as comprehension, according to Cotter (2011).

Based on the review of the literature (Silva and Araujo (2016), Willis and Adie (2014), Wright and Brown (2006) and Alderson, Haapakangas, Huhta, Nieminen, and Ullakonoja (2014)), the most common skills in reading comprehension are literal, inferential, and evaluative. These main skills include skimming, scanning, understanding the author's use of language, locating and recalling information, finding main ideas, drawing conclusions, making generalizations, sequencing events, distinguishing fact from opinion, determining the author's purpose, relating the text to personal experience, developing awareness about synonyms and antonyms, distinguishing between cause and effect, drawing conclusions from the information given in the text, making predictions and finding meanings of new vocabulary in contexts. In the present study, the researcher focuses on some selected skills which would be studied in this research. These skills are literal, inferential, and evaluative skills. These main skills were chosen by the researcher because they are suitable for the syllabus of the participants.

Related Studies to Task-Based Blended Learning & Reading Comprehension Skills:

Several studies show the impact of using Task-Based Blended Learning on developing reading skills (Bersamin, Ulla, Saripa, Suebsom, and Lemana II, (2024), Rahimzadeh and Gilakjani, (2022), Patra, Hashim Alghazali, Sokolova, Prasad, Pallathadka, Hussein and Ghaneiarani, (2022), Yudhana, (2021), Elahi and Mashhadi Heidar, (2021), Al Roomy and Althewini, (2019), Djiwandono, (2018), Sari, (2017), Siregar, (2017) and Maghawry, (2017)).

Bersamin, et al. (2024) aimed to evaluate how blended learning affected students' reading comprehension skills in English. Using the Community of Inquiry approach, it also looked at how satisfied these students were with their blended learning experience. The study involved thirty pupils. Nine lesson plans, English reading comprehension assessments, and online satisfaction tasks made up the BL program. The mean, standard deviations, and paired sample t-tests were used in the data analysis. The results showed that the post-test scores for English reading comprehension were significantly greater than the pretest values. Additionally, following their enhanced English reading comprehension assessments, students expressed a high mean score of 4.73 (extremely satisfied) with their blended learning experience.

Rahimzadeh and Gilakjani (2022) explored the impact of a blended learning model that combines both online and face-to-face teaching modes. This study aimed to

investigate the impact of blended learning on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' reading proficiency. Sixty EFL learners were chosen. The treatment group received reading materials through blending learning techniques and the control group traditionally received training. The results showed that the treatment group outperformed the control group in the post-test of reading comprehension and the intra-group progress was higher for the treatment group than the control group.

Patra, et al (2022) investigated how e-learning affected the reading motivation and comprehension of Iranian EFL students. The study's participants were split into two groups at random: a control group (CG) with 30 participants and an experimental group (EG) with 30 participants. Following pretesting, e-learning was used to treat the treatment group participants. The experimental participants received instruction in eight lessons via the Internet. Conversely, the control group participants received traditional instruction in a face-to-face setting. The results of the independent-samples t-test showed that on the posttests, the treatment group outperformed the control group.

Yudhana (2021) examined the effects of a blended learning approach to develop undergraduate students' reading skills. The participants were 60 Thai students who were divided into treatment and control groups. The post-test of each group was used as the main method of gathering the data, and the *t*-test was used to examine the differences between the post-test scores. The results also demonstrated that the implementation of blended learning can greatly enhance English reading skills in undergraduate EFL students.

Elahi and Heidar (2021) explored the impact of combining blended language learning with task-based language learning on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability. The participants of the study were 80 Iranian EFL intermediate learners (43 females and 37 males) studying at a private language institute divided into four groups including two treatment groups and two control groups. The results showed that learners in the treatment groups achieved significantly higher scores than those in the control groups and outperformed the two control groups of this study.

In addition, Al Roomy and Althewini (2019) examined the impact of an extensive reading online program implemented in a blended learning format to increase students' reading comprehension. The participants of the study were 41 students divided into two groups of students: treatment (N =20) and control (N =21). The instruments of the study were a pre-and post-test and an open-ended questionnaire. The results showed students' significant progress in reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge in the post-test stage. Also, students had positive attitudes and understandings after the intervention toward learning reading.

In another study, Djiwandono (2018) aimed to determine the impact of blended learning on reading comprehension skills, vocabulary mastery, and collaboration among learners. The participants of the study were 48 students divided into two groups. The treatment group was taught with Blended Learning, while a control group was taught with traditional methods. A pre-assessment and an open-ended questionnaire served as

the study's instruments. The results showed that the group who was taught with blended learning had significant improvements in their reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery and outperformed the other group.

Similarly, Sari (2017) examined the effect of teaching TBL on students' reading comprehension. The objective was to find out the significant effect of teaching TBL on the student's achievement in reading comprehension. The research was conducted by experimental design. The population of this research was the ten Grade students for the 2016/2017 academic years. Based on the data analysis, it was found that teaching the TBL method had a significant effect on students' achievement in reading comprehension.

Siregar**,** (2017) also investigated the effect of the Task-Based Learning (TBL) method on the student's achievement in reading comprehension. The population of this research was the tenth grade which was distributed into three classes with a total of 120 students. By using the cluster random sampling technique two classes were taken as samples. The finding showed that the students who taught by using the method got a higher score than those who taught by using the lecturing method. The result showed that there was a significant effect of using the TBL method on the student's achievement in reading comprehension.

Maghawry (2017) investigated the effectiveness of using task-based mobile learning to develop EFL reading skills for secondary-stage students. The participants of the study were two classes of second-year female students at Emam Nasef secondary school divided into two groups. One experimental and one control. The study tools were a questionnaire and an android mobile learning pre-post reading test. The experimental group was taught based on the proposed task-based mobile learning and the control group didn't receive such treatment. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. This showed that task-based mobile learning had a positive effect on developing reading skills.

Method:

Design of the Study:

This study adopted the quasi-experimental design. Two groups of EFL second-year preparatory stage; a treatment and a control group were chosen to participate in the study. The participants of the treatment group were instructed through a task-based blended learning material developed by the researcher aiming to promote second-year preparatory school students' reading comprehension. The control group was instructed to use the regular method of teaching.

Sample of the Study:

The participants of this study were second-year preparatory stage students in EL-sedeeq Preparatory School, El-Dakhla City, New Valley Governorate. Two classes were chosen to take part in this study. Each class consisted of forty pupils around the age of fourteen years old and the total number of participants was eighty pupils (N=80).

Instrument of the Study:

A pre-post reading comprehension test:

This test was used before and after the experiment with the control and treatment groups.

1. Purpose of the test:

At the beginning of the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024, a reading comprehension pre-post-test was designed by the researcher to measure the reading comprehension skills of the second–year preparatory stage pupils. To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, the test was administered twice; before the treatment and after it to both treatment and control groups.

2. Procedures for designing the test:

Designing reading comprehension checklist: A checklist was prepared (based on the literature) to determine the most important reading comprehension skills that were suitable for preparatory-stage pupils. These skills were included in the program and the pre-post–test as well.

To confirm its face validity, the checklist was presented to a group of jury members specialized in EFL instruction who were requested to determine the degree of importance of each sub-skill ranging from (very- suitable to not-suitable), modify, omit, or add to the reading comprehension skills, they consider important. The jury members suggested some modifications and recommendations.

3. Test Content:

A pre-post reading comprehension skills test was designed to evaluate the reading comprehension performance of the pupils in their course content. Before constructing the test, a table of specifications was developed to specify the content and the number of items included to assurance that the intended learning outcomes were measured and that the number and type of items were suitable for assessing all the learning outcomes. The test was of multiple-choice items. The test consisted of four reading passages and 4o questions; each question assesses one skill of the reading comprehension skills. Students were requested to read the passages in the test and choose the correct answer.

4. The time frame of the test:

To determine the time required for the test, the researcher administered the test to 30 pupils who were not included in the sample of the study. The researcher determined the time needed for the test by adding the time that the 30 pupils spent answering the test questions (1365 minutes) and dividing them by the total number of the pupils (30 pupils). Hence, the suitable time assigned to the reading comprehension test was about 45 minutes according to the following formula:

$$\text{Test time} = \frac{1356\ m}{30\ n} = 45.2 \text{ minutes}$$

4. Scoring the test:

The total number of test questions was 40 questions. Each question weighs (1) mark, so the total mark was (40) mark.

5. **Test Instructions**:

The instructions for the test were written in English. They were brief, simple to understand, and free from any possible ambiguities. They include information about the objectives of the test and the time allowed to complete the test**.**

6. **Piloting the test**:

Piloting the test was conducted before the administration of the test. Thirty students were chosen from second-year prep school students to participate in this application. Those students were excluded from participating in the treatment. The aims of the piloting test were:

- Ensure the clarity of instructions.
- Suitability of the linguistic level of the sample.
- Determine the validity, reliability, and duration of the test.

In the light of the pilot study, the following was estimated:

- **Test Construct Validity:**

To establish the validity of the test, the researcher showed the test in its first form to a group of EFL specialists and professors (N= 6) to evaluate it according to the criteria presented in the questionnaire. According to the jury members' responses, the test was valid. They suggested some modifications to the linguistic style and vocabulary use.

- **Internal consistency coefficient:**

It was calculated through correlation coefficients between the total score of the test and each dimension of the test. Table (1) shows these coefficients:

Table (1)

Correlation coefficients between each dimension of the test and the total score

The Dimension	Correlation coefficient
Literal	0.858**
Inferential	0.708**
Evaluative	0.642**

** Correlation is significant at (0.01) level.

- **Test Reliability:**

The test reliability coefficient was calculated using the Cronbach- Alpha Formula. The following table indicates the value of the reliability coefficient:

Table (2)

Results of estimating the reliability coefficient(a) of the reading comprehension test

Reliability co.		N	Question items	Value of alpha Co. (a)
Alpha co.(a)	Literal	30	16	0.895
	Inferential		14	0.853
	Evaluative		10	0.737
	Total		40	0.844

As shown in Table (1), the coefficient reliability of the Cronbach Alpha for the sub-skills and the total reading comprehension test between (0.737,0.895) and all those values

were significant at the 0.01 level. This indicated that test reliability was proved and consequently, the test could be administered.

Item analysis:

After correcting the test of the pilot study, questions analysis was done to determine:

A. Difficulty of the test:

An analysis of students' responses to individual questions was conducted to determine the question's difficulty index of this test. The value of difficulty ranges from (0.33 to 0.70). Thus, these values are very suitable and within an acceptable level.

Table (3): Table of difficulty indices

No	Difficulty indices	No	Difficulty indices
(1)	0.333	(11)	0.633
(2)	0.667	(12)	0.333
(3)	0.467	(13)	0.366
(4)	0.70	(14)	0.333
(5)	0.467	(15)	0.333
(6)	0.60	(16)	0.433
(7)	0.367	(17)	0.333
(8)	0.467	(18)	53.33
(9)	0.467	(19)	0.633
(10)	0.40	(20)	0.533

B. Discrimination power of the test:

An analysis of students' responses was done to determine how well each item discriminates between high- and low-level achievers. The discrimination coefficients for the test items were calculated by using Kelly who relies on the following steps:

- Order the scores of the students in descending order.
- Separate 27% of the scores of the sample, which is in the upper part and got the highest grades.
- Separate 27% of the scores of the sample, which is in the lower part and got the lowest grades.

Using Equation Discrimination Coefficients for the test items ranged between (0.53 to 0.93), which is considered high discrimination coefficients. The discrimination indices are very suitable and within an acceptable level.

Table (4): Table of discrimination indices

No	Discrimination indices	No	discrimination indices
(1	0.66	11	0.667
(2)	0.6	(12)	0.867

(3)	0.67	(13)	0.667
(4)	0.53	(14)	0.533
(5)	0.6	(15)	0.933
(6)	0.6	(16)	0.87
(7)	0.667	(17)	0.8
(8)	0.667	(18)	0.8
(9)	0.53	(19)	0.93
(10)	0.6	(20)	0.6

6. Administration of the pre-test:

A pre-reading test was administered to the study participants to check the level of the treatment group and that of the control group in their reading comprehension skills before the experiment.

The following table describes the means and the standard deviation of the scores of both groups on the pre-reading comprehension test according to the sub-skills and the total score.

Table (5)

T-test results of pre-test between the experimental group and control group.

Domains	Group	No	Mean	SD	T-	Sig. value	Sig. Level
Literal	Control	40	7.3250	1.68534	1.23	0.219	Not sig
	treatment	40	7.6000	1.17233			
inferential	Control	40	5.9750	1.29075	1.143	0.256	
	treatment	40	5.6500	1.25167			
evaluative	Control	40	2.9750	.99968	1.491	0.140	
	treatment	40	2.6250	.83781			
Total	Control	40	16.2750	2.72677	0.481	0.632	
	treatment	40	15.8750	1.78581			

Table (5) indicates that the t-value was not significant in the three parts and the total score of the reading comprehension test; this proved that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the control and treatment groups on the pre-test. In other words, this means that at the beginning of the treatment, the two groups were homogeneous in their EFL reading comprehension skills concerning the three sub-skills (literal- inferential-evaluative) and in the total score before conducting the experimental treatment. Thus, homogeneity between groups was established.

The task-based blended learning instructional material:

1. Description:

The task-based blended learning unit was implemented for the treatment group who were 40 second-year preparatory stage pupils. The study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024; from 11th February 2024 to 2nd May 2024. It lasted for three months. The researcher met the students according to their English lesson timetable. The content of the unit consisted of ten lessons based on the textbook's second-term units. To teach the training program, twelve sessions were organized for the experimental group to practice different exercises about the textbook units via task-based blended learning. The lessons were planned according to the following steps:

-Objectives
-Revision
-Warm-up
-Pre-task
-Task
-Post-task
-Evaluation
-Feedback

- The lessons were independent of each other concerning the theme. Each lesson is expected to be covered in 80 minutes.
- The online tasks were practiced online in the form of links and websites or Google forms uploaded on *WhatsApp* group, students were requested to click on the website, read and answer the questions, and then receive feedback from the teacher.
- The training techniques used in the unit were brainstorming, discussing, reading authentic texts, drawing conclusions, filling gaps, thinking pairs, and sharing.
- Each lesson began with a pre-task and a pre-reading task which included brainstorming discussing pictures involved in the text, and predicting. Then students were exposed to reading tasks of online passages and answering comprehension questions. Reading tasks of various online texts were designed.
- Activities included individual work, group work, and note-taking.

Results and Interpretation:

1- The First Hypothesis:

The first hypothesis indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of scores obtained by the participants of the treatment group and that of the control group on the post-test of reading comprehension (in favor of the experimental group). To test this hypothesis, the results of the test were recorded and statistically analyzed by using "t-test" (as shown in Table 6).

Table (6)

T-test results of pretest between the treatment group and control group.

Variable	Group	Mean	Std.	Df	T	Sig.	$^2\eta$
Literal	Control	8.5250	2.06295	78	21.562	0.01	.856
	treatment	15.725	.4522				
Inferential	Control	7.2750	1.53569		24.207	0.01	.883
	Treatment	13.6250	.62788				
Evaluative	Control	3.7500	.83972		25.633	0.01	.894
	treatment	8.5750	.84391				
Total	Control	19.5500	2.99530		36.167	0.01	.944
	Treatment	37.9250	1.16327				

Table (6) indicates that the "t" computed value of the whole test is 33.959 and it is significant at 0.01 and the "t" tabulated is 2.70. This means that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the treatment group and that of the control one in the reading comprehension test in favor of the e-treatment group due to using task-based blended learning. The result analysis of the first hypothesis shows that there are statistically significant differences at $\alpha \leq 0.01$ in developing reading comprehension between the mean scores of students who learn by task-based blended learning (treatment group) and those who learn through regular method (control group). The table shows that the effect size"η2" is .944. This shows that task-based blended learning seems to have a large effect on developing reading comprehension.

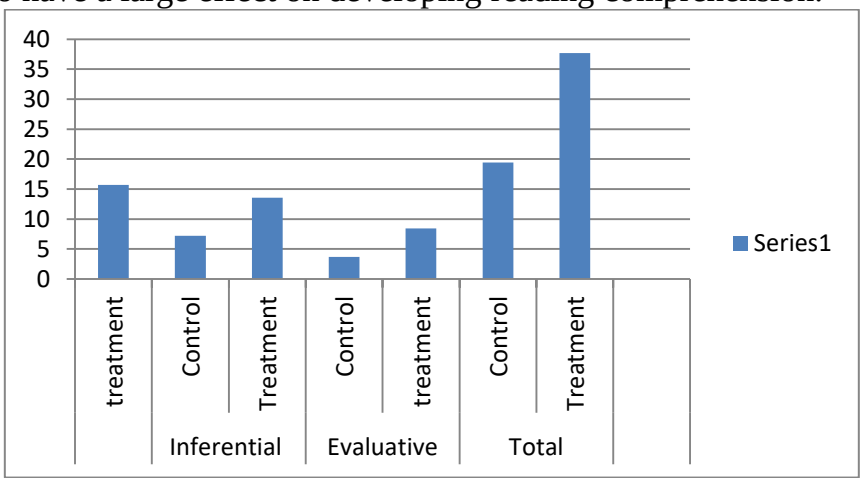


Figure (1): Differences in Means

The Second Hypothesis:

The second hypothesis predicted that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of scores obtained by the participants of the treatment group on the pre and post-test of the reading comprehension skills (in favor of the post-test), favoring post-testing. To test this hypothesis, the results of the treatment group in the pre -post-test were computed. T-test Paired Samples statistics was used to analyze the data statistically

and the effect size of task-based blended learning was calculated by using (Blake's ratio). The results are shown in table (7):

Table (7)

Analysis of the Mean scores of the treatment group in the pre-post reading comprehension test

Level	Treatment	Mean	SD.	Df	T	Sig.	Blake
Literal reading	Pre	7.6000	1.17233	39	40.896	0.01	1.48
	post	15.7250	.45220				
Inferential	Pre	5.6500	1.25167		36.019	0.01	1.5
	post	13.6250	0.62788				
Evaluative	Pre	2.6250	0.83781		31.645	0.01	1.39
	post	8.5750	0.84391				
Total	Pre	15.8750	1.78581		65.434	0.01	1.46
	Post	37.9250	1.16327				

Table (7) indicates that the total "t" computed value is 65.434 and it is significant at 0.01. This means that there are statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the result of the pre-test and the result of the post-test of the treatment group in favor of the post-administration of the reading comprehension test due to using task-based blended learning. Table (10) shows that the effectiveness size "Blake ratio" is 1.46. This means that task-based blended learning is effective in developing reading comprehension skills.

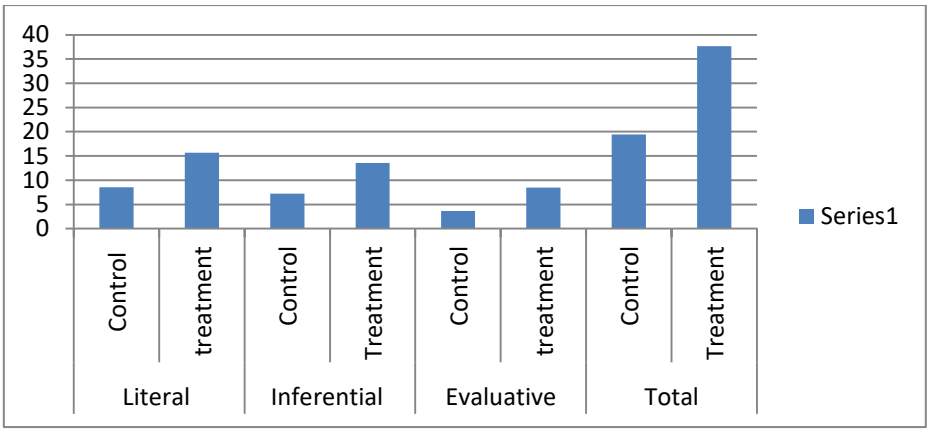


Figure (2): Differences in Means

Discussion:

The present study investigated the effectiveness of task-based blended learning in developing second-year preparatory school students' reading comprehension.

The results of the pre-post reading comprehension test indicated that the participants of the treatment group achieved significant improvements in the post-test after being instructed through task-based blended learning. The results could be due to many reasons. One of these reasons was that task-based blended learning material was considered an integration between task-based learning and blended learning. Accordingly, students performed some learning activities in an E-learning environment along with classroom activities. The use of E-learning activities was often promoted as an exciting new

educational medium that attracted the students' interest to get involved and participate in the tasks of the lesson; one piece of evidence was the whole group's participation in answering the reading comprehension questions and performing the online activities.

Secondly, using task-based learning seemed to be another contribution to the improvement of the student's reading comprehension skills, as task-based learning helps involve learners in authentic learning activities that stimulate them to read deeply and analyze the text. It is a constructivist educational application that encourages students' participation and involvement in the learning process as learning is achieved when students perform and do language tasks, evaluate their performance, and seek better outcomes. Additionally, the learning tasks could be performed through group and pair interaction in a collaborative work where students should learn and help each other to accomplish the assigned tasks.

In addition, in the present study, there was a clear difference between the reading comprehension tasks of the control group and that of the treatment group. Some reading tasks for the treatment group were online, which might help students show more interest, and better participation and involvement. In the control group, learners read silently and respond to teachers' explicit questions from the text. Using task-based blended learning encourages students to analyze, interpret, and practice various levels of reading comprehension, literal, inferential, and evaluative.

The activities used in instructional material participate in improving the participants' target skills. The students could be involved in various activities in each lesson such as describing, brainstorming, discussing and thinking, and sharing ideas. Furthermore, the participants were asked to work individually, in pairs, and in groups to achieve the stated objectives of each lesson.

The evaluation and feedback techniques are beneficial for the improvement of the student's performance. After each reading comprehension task either, the participants were given immediate feedback explaining the errors involved and correction. This directed feedback seems to be remarkably effective in improving the participants' reading comprehension skills.

To conclude, using task-based blended learning enhances second-year preparatory school students' reading comprehension. The results of the present study go in line with the results of Elahi and Heidar, (2021) and Djiwandono, (2018) which revealed that task-based learning integrated with blended learning has a positive effect on learner's achievement, learning, and success.

The results of the study are compatible with the results of the studies of Yudhana (2021), Patra et al., (2022), Rahimzadeh and Gilakjani, (2022), Bersamin et al., (2024), Ferreira, (2015), Elahi and Mashhadi Heidar, (2021), Jha, (2021), Surya, (2017), Abdel-Fattah, (2020), Al Roomy and Althewini, (2019), Hawara et al., (2019), Viriya, (2018), Djiwandono, (2018), Maghawry, (2017), Sari, (2017), Siregar**,** (2017), Kim, (2014) showed that task-based learning integrated with online activities was effective in

developing various language skills (reading, writing, listening, and vocabulary acquisition).

The present study shows the effectiveness of task-based blended learning in developing reading comprehension, as the participants of the treatment group were more likely to be involved in the tasks and activities and they achieved a great improvement in the target skills.

The present study investigates whether using task-based blended learning activities is effective in developing reading comprehension for second-year preparatory stage pupils or not. Designing tasks in which students would interact with each other for real purposes on the internet could be a solution by making English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom more authentic, interactive, actual, and functional.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research:

Based on the results, the following recommendations are suggested:

1) EFL teachers can make use of task-based blended learning and other technological tools inside the classroom to create an enjoyable environment for learning.

2) EFL teachers could not only depend on traditional methods of teaching like teachers' guides and textbook activities but also, they can implement new updated methods and trends that use technology to motivate pupils and meet their needs and interests.

3) School stakeholders need to equip their school organizations with up-to-date strategies like blended learning to help teachers and pupils in their teaching-learning cycle.

Suggestions for Further Research:

The present study suggests the following:

- Investigating the effectiveness of using task-based blended learning in EFL classes to develop other language skills such as listening and writing.
- Developing reading skills through modern trends of technology and other applications where students can share their knowledge with native speakers to practice EFL effectively.
- Conducting some comparative studies among different samples to compare how can blended learning be effective in teaching EFL skills among different samples.

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