

Teaching Strategies in Action: Task-Based vs. Text-Based Approaches for Grammar Mastery and Motivation

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Abstract

This study examined the comparative effectiveness of task-based and text-based teaching strategies in improving English grammar mastery and learner motivation among first-year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students. A comparative intervention design was employed involving sixty participants divided into two groups: one exposed to text-based instruction and the other to task-based instruction over a six-week period. Grammar mastery was measured using a modified grammar test, while motivation was assessed using an adapted Flow State Scale. Results revealed that both instructional approaches significantly improved students' grammar mastery from pre-test to post-test. However, task-based instruction produced significantly higher post-test gains and demonstrated a larger effect size. Both strategies generated high levels of motivation, with no statistically significant difference between them. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between grammar mastery and motivation under either approach. The findings suggest that while both strategies are pedagogically effective, task-based instruction yields stronger gains in grammar mastery in tertiary English education contexts.

Keywords: Task-based teaching, Text-based teaching, Grammar mastery, Motivation, Flow theory

1. Introduction

English grammar proficiency continues to present a significant challenge among tertiary learners despite prolonged exposure to English as a medium of instruction in the Philippines. Although English is widely used in academic, professional, and governmental contexts, many college students struggle with complex grammatical structures, particularly those requiring syntactic transformation and precise rule application. The multilingual context of the Philippines, characterized by the coexistence of more than 180 indigenous languages, contributes to grammatical interference and structural inconsistencies in English usage (Abella et al., 2024). Learners frequently transfer grammatical patterns from their first languages into English, resulting in errors in tense usage, sentence structure, and clause formation.

Empirical evidence suggests that even students enrolled in English major programs demonstrate persistent grammatical deficiencies. Bulilan (2024) reported noticeable gaps in the use of conditionals, reported speech, and negation forms among tertiary English learners. These grammatical features require not only memorization of rules but also the ability to manipulate sentence structures cognitively. Such findings imply that prolonged exposure to English does not automatically translate to mastery of complex grammar forms, thereby necessitating more effective instructional strategies.

To address these challenges, educators have increasingly examined alternative pedagogical approaches beyond traditional lecture-based grammar teaching. Among the most prominent instructional models are text-based teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Text-based teaching emphasizes structured exposure to authentic texts, explicit explanation of grammatical rules, guided analysis, and contextualized practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2022). In this approach, grammar is embedded within meaningful discourse, enabling learners to analyze linguistic patterns before practicing them in controlled exercises.

Conversely, Task-Based Language Teaching prioritizes meaningful communication as the central mechanism for language acquisition. Rather than focusing primarily on rule explanation, TBLT requires learners to complete communicative tasks that simulate authentic real-world situations (Ellis et al., 2019; Van den Branden, 2022). Grammar is treated as a functional resource necessary for completing tasks such as problem-solving, interviewing, role-playing, or collaborative discussions. Through repeated exposure to contextualized language use, learners are expected to internalize grammatical patterns more naturally. The theoretical grounding of these instructional strategies lies in Constructivist Theory and Flow Theory of Motivation. Constructivism posits that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction, reflection, and engagement rather than passively received (Devi, 2024; Piaget, 1980). Both text-based and task-based approaches align with constructivist principles, although they differ in the nature of learner engagement. Text-based instruction provides structured cognitive scaffolding, whereas task-based instruction emphasizes experiential and communicative learning.

Flow Theory further explains the motivational dimension of instructional effectiveness. According to Csikszentmihalyi et al. (2018), optimal learning occurs when learners experience deep engagement characterized by a balance between challenge and skill, clear goals, and immediate feedback. Nakamura (2022) highlights that such flow experiences foster intrinsic motivation and sustained attention. Task-based activities are often argued to naturally generate flow conditions due to their interactive and goal-driven structure. However, structured text-based instruction may also sustain motivation when tasks are meaningful and appropriately challenging.

Despite substantial literature supporting both approaches, limited empirical studies directly compare text-based and task-based teaching strategies within the same tertiary English major context while simultaneously examining grammar mastery and learner motivation. Many studies focus solely on achievement outcomes, while others emphasize affective variables without measuring measurable linguistic gains. Furthermore, the relationship between grammar mastery and motivation remains underexplored in structured classroom interventions.

This gap is particularly significant in teacher education programs, where future educators must develop both grammatical competence and pedagogical awareness. Identifying which instructional strategy yields stronger grammar mastery while maintaining high motivation has important implications for curriculum design and classroom practice.

Therefore, this study aimed to compare the effectiveness of text-based and task-based teaching strategies in improving grammar mastery and influencing learner motivation among first-year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students. By examining both achievement and motivational variables concurrently, a more comprehensive evaluation of instructional impact was pursued.

Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the level of students' grammar mastery before and after the implementation of text-based and task-based teaching strategies?

2. What is the level of students' motivation under each instructional strategy?
3. Is there a significant difference in grammar mastery between pre-test and post-test scores within each strategy?
4. Is there a significant difference in grammar mastery between the two strategies?
5. Is there a significant difference in motivation between the two strategies?
6. Is there a significant relationship between grammar mastery and motivation?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

A comparative intervention research design was adopted in order to determine and compare the effects of two instructional approaches, text-based teaching and task-based teaching, on students' grammar mastery and motivation. This design was appropriate because it allowed the measurement of changes within each group over time and the comparison of outcomes between groups after exposure to different teaching strategies.

Two class sections were involved in this study, one section was assigned to receive text-based instruction and the other section was assigned to receive task-based instruction. The intervention lasted six consecutive weeks.

A pre-test and post-test structure was employed. The pre-test established baseline equivalence between groups before the intervention, while the post-test measured learning gains after the six-week instructional period. This design strengthened the validity of the findings by allowing both within-group and between-group comparisons.

2.2 Participants

The participants consisted of sixty first-year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students enrolled during the second semester of Academic Year 2024–2025 at Bohol Island State University. Thirty students were assigned to the text-based group and thirty to the task-based group. All participants had relatively similar academic backgrounds, as they were enrolled in the same year level and program.

Prior to data collection, students were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that participation would not affect their academic grades. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were observed.

2.3 Intervention

The instructional intervention was implemented over a six-week period, with one-hour face-to-face sessions conducted weekly. The lessons focused on three major grammar topics that are commonly reported as difficult for tertiary learners:

- Conditionals
- Questions and negation forms
- Reported speech

These topics were selected because they require syntactic transformation, rule application, and contextual accuracy.

2.3.1 Text-Based Instruction

The text-based group received structured grammar instruction anchored on authentic reading passages and contextualized texts. Each lesson followed a structured sequence:

1. Presentation of an authentic text containing the target grammar structure

2. Guided identification and analysis of grammatical patterns
3. Explicit explanation of rules and forms
4. Controlled practice exercises
5. Short contextualized written applications

This approach emphasized clarity, rule awareness, and gradual scaffolding. Students were guided step-by-step from recognition of forms to structured practice.

2.3.1 Task-Based Instruction

The task-based group engaged in communicative tasks designed to require the use of target grammar structures for meaningful communication. Each lesson followed a task cycle:

1. Pre-task introduction of context and objective
2. Completion of communicative tasks such as role-playing, interviews, collaborative problem-solving, or scenario simulations
3. Group discussion and reporting
4. Focus on form and feedback

In this approach, grammar was treated as a tool for accomplishing communicative goals rather than as an isolated subject of explanation. Students were encouraged to interact, negotiate meaning, and apply grammar naturally within tasks.

Both groups covered identical grammar content and received equal instructional time to ensure fairness and comparability.

2.4 Instruments

Two primary instruments were used to measure the dependent variables.

2.4.1 Grammar Mastery Test

Grammar mastery was assessed using a modified version of the *Oxford Practice Grammar Tests for Intermediate Learners* (Eastwood, 2020). The test contained items targeting conditionals, question formation, negation, and reported speech. The same test format was administered as both pre-test and post-test to measure improvement.

The test included multiple-choice and sentence transformation items to evaluate both recognition and production skills. Scores were computed as percentage correct and interpreted using descriptive levels.

2.4.1 Motivation Questionnaire

Learner motivation was measured using an adapted version of the Flow State Scale (Nakamura, 2022). The questionnaire assessed five dimensions:

- Complete absorption
- Intrinsic motivation
- Challenge-skill balance
- Clear goals
- Immediate feedback

Students responded using a Likert-type scale. Composite means were computed for each dimension and overall motivation.

Pilot testing was conducted prior to full implementation. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.8955, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

2.5 Statistical Treatment

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive statistics included:

- Frequency and percentage to describe participant distribution
 - Mean and standard deviation to determine central tendency and variability
- Inferential statistics included:
- Paired t-test to determine significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores within each group
 - Independent t-test to compare post-test performance and motivation levels between the two instructional groups
 - Spearman Rank Correlation to determine the relationship between grammar mastery and motivation
 - Cohen's d to measure effect size and determine the magnitude of instructional impact

The level of significance was set at 0.05. Effect sizes were interpreted using standard benchmarks to determine whether observed differences were small, moderate, or large in practical terms.

3. Results

The findings revealed that both instructional strategies, text-based and task-based, resulted in significant improvements in students' grammar mastery. Within-group analysis showed that post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores in both groups, indicating that structured grammar instruction, regardless of format, positively influenced learning outcomes.

However, when post-test scores were compared between the two groups, task-based instruction demonstrated significantly stronger gains. The task-based group not only achieved higher mean post-test scores but also showed a larger effect size, indicating a stronger practical impact. This suggests that engaging learners in communicative tasks that require the active use of grammar may promote deeper processing and retention of grammatical structures compared to structured text analysis alone.

With regard to motivation, both groups reported high levels across all Flow Theory dimensions, including absorption, intrinsic interest, clarity of goals, perceived challenge, and feedback. Although the task-based group recorded slightly higher mean scores in several motivational indicators, the difference between the two instructional strategies was not statistically significant. This indicates that both teaching approaches were equally capable of sustaining high levels of learner engagement.

Furthermore, correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between grammar mastery and motivation in either group. This suggests that while students may feel motivated and engaged during instruction, such motivation does not automatically translate into measurable gains in grammatical accuracy. Instructional structure and practice design may therefore play a more direct role in grammar improvement than motivational intensity alone.

4. Discussion

The results confirm that both text-based and task-based teaching strategies are effective in improving grammar mastery. This supports previous findings that explicit grammar instruction and communicative approaches both contribute positively to grammatical development (Nazari, 2013; Mai, 2025). The improvement observed in both groups indicates that structured instructional design, clear objectives, and systematic practice remain essential components of successful grammar teaching.

However, the stronger gains demonstrated by the task-based group suggest that meaningful communication and contextualized application may enhance grammar acquisition more effectively. When learners use grammar as a functional tool to accomplish communicative tasks, they are required to process language at a deeper cognitive level. This aligns with studies emphasizing the benefits of authentic language use and interaction in promoting language acquisition (Bukar et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2021). The task cycle—comprising preparation, task performance, and feedback—may have provided repeated opportunities for meaningful form–meaning connections, thereby strengthening grammatical retention. In terms of motivation, the high levels observed in both groups indicate that effective classroom structure—whether text-based or task-based—can foster strong learner engagement. Although task-based instruction produced slightly higher motivational scores, the absence of statistical significance suggests that well-organized text-based instruction may be equally motivating when lessons are clear, purposeful, and interactive. This supports research suggesting that clarity of instruction and perceived competence play central roles in sustaining motivation (Albert, 2022; Pawlak, 2012).

The lack of significant correlation between grammar mastery and motivation highlights an important insight. While motivation is often viewed as a key predictor of academic success, it may not directly determine grammatical accuracy. Grammar mastery requires repeated practice, structured feedback, and cognitive restructuring of language patterns. Therefore, motivation may facilitate participation, but measurable improvement may depend more heavily on the quality and intensity of instructional design. This finding aligns with research suggesting that motivation alone does not guarantee linguistic advancement (Tran, 2025).

Overall, the study suggests that both instructional strategies are pedagogically sound, yet task-based instruction may offer stronger advantages in enhancing grammar mastery without compromising learner motivation.

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