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Enhancing Analytical Reading and Writing Skills in Vocational Education: The Role of Collaborative and Task-Based Learning

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of combining Collaborative Learning (CL) and Task-Based Learning Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing vocational students' analytical reading ability and writing skills. Method: Conducted at a vocational college in southern China, the study involved 192 students divided into an experiment group (n=25) receiving the blended approach and a control group (n=27) following traditional methods. The intervention lasted four weeks, with pre-tests and post-tests administered using the Analytical Reading Ability Test (ARAT) and Writing Skill Assessment Scale (WSAS). Data were analyzed using ANOVA and t-tests. Results: The findings indicated that the blended approach significantly improved the students' skills. The experiment group showed substantial improvements, with post-test scores in analytical reading ability (35.28±1.54) and writing skills (25.20±1.56) significantly higher than pre-test scores (29.48±2.37; 20.24±2.13). Moreover, the experiment group outperformed the control group at the 0.05 significance level in both areas. Conclusions: Integrating Collaborative Learning with Task-Based Learning Teaching significantly enhances vocational students' analytical reading and writing skills. This approach offers a valuable instructional strategy for vocational education, preparing students for the demands of a globalized job market.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning (CL), Task-Based Learning Teaching (TBLT), analytical reading ability, writing skills, vocational education

1. Introduction

The vocational education system has increasingly shifted its focus towards developing students' competencies in China, with one of its core objectives being enhancing students' language abilities, particularly analytical reading and writing skills. More and more scholars are paying attention to how to cultivate these two abilities in students effectively. Analytical reading ability is the capacity to deeply understand complex texts, identify key points, engage in logical reasoning, and draw reasonable conclusions. In contrast, writing skills require students to organize clear structures, select appropriate language styles and expressions, and robustly support their arguments with relevant examples and evidence.

Analytical reading and writing skills hold a significant position in the modern educational system and professional development. These two skills are crucial in various competitive examinations, as they enable candidates to accurately interpret questions, construct coherent answers, and demonstrate their analytical thinking ability (Liu et al., 2014). Meanwhile, employers also place a high value on job seekers' reading and writing skills during the recruitment process, as these skills are indispensable for core tasks such as report writing, conducting research, and solving complex problems. Carnevale (1990) found that a significant portion of job seekers had deficiencies in reading skills. Furthermore, Sukert et al. (2020) indicated that innovative teaching strategies, such as flipped classrooms, can effectively improve students' analytical reading ability and writing skills, helping them succeed tremendously in their academic and professional careers.

English is indispensable in international communication and cooperation as a global lingua franca. Mastering English enables vocational students to better participate in international projects, communicate, and learn advanced technologies and concepts globally. Many international enterprises use English as their working language; thus, possessing good English proficiency can enhance vocational students' competitiveness in the job market, offering them more career development opportunities (Kankaanranta et al., 2018). Learning English also helps vocational students acquire more professional knowledge and the latest information, promoting continuous progress in their professional fields and further enhancing their core competitiveness.

Collaborative learning (CL) is a student-centered instructional method that promotes deep understanding and improved learning outcomes through student cooperation and interaction. This method emphasizes mutual support, active participation, and shared responsibility, whereby students help each other, share knowledge, and provide feedback to improve understanding and skills. Laal and Laal (2012) noted that CL enhances students' academic performance and fosters their teamwork and communication skills. However, the effective implementation of CL requires an appropriate teaching environment and support, such as technological aids (e.g., online platforms and virtual reality), which can further enhance interaction and participation in the learning process (Monahan et al., 2008).

Task-based learning (TBL) is a method that emphasizes practical application and the use of authentic language. Sholeh et al. (2020) argued that through the design of meaningful tasks, TBL enables students to learn the target language while completing tasks, thereby improving their language proficiency. The core of TBL lies in motivating students and fostering creativity through completing actual tasks, making language learning more enjoyable and interactive. This method focuses on language skills and emphasizes students' communication and problem-solving abilities in real-life contexts, promoting effective communication in practical situations.

Although CL and TBL differ in their instructional methods, they share a high degree of consistency in their educational objectives. Both emphasize active student participation, practical application, and teamwork, aiming to enhance learning outcomes through actual tasks and cooperative learning. This alignment allows for the integration of both methods. Teachers must provide students with a comprehensive and efficient teaching environment or model to promote deep understanding, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Marzano, 2007). Therefore, the study combines these two learning methods, which are task-oriented and encourage students to solve problems through team collaboration. Students become the main actors in the learning activities, and under the guidance of teachers, they collaboratively analyze problems, design solutions, implement plans, and evaluate results with their team members.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Analytical Reading and Writing Skills

Analytical reading and writing skills are critical in competitive examinations, education, and professional careers. These skills enable individuals to deeply comprehend complex texts, accurately capture critical ideas, and articulate their viewpoints in a clear and logically coherent written manner. According to Kanodia et al. (2021), English language tests often focus on a comprehensive assessment of candidates' reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and writing skills in competitive exams. Therefore, these skills are essential for accurately interpreting exam questions, constructing coherent answers, and demonstrating analytical thinking. Employers also place a high value on analytical reading ability and writing skills in the professional realm, as they are indispensable for core tasks such as writing reports, conducting research, and solving complex problems.

Consequently, the cultivation of these skills is highly emphasized from the educational stage, with numerous schools and universities across various disciplines highlighting the importance of reading and writing. Atancuri-Quizhpe et al. (2023) utilized innovative teaching strategies, such as flipped classrooms, to enable students to actively engage in creative and in-depth learning experiences actively, enhancing their analytical reading and writing skills. Practical analytical reading requires readers to deeply understand the structure and purpose of texts, accurately identify critical arguments and supporting evidence, and form logically sound conclusions based on this understanding (Esterhuizen, 2004). Readers need to recognize the author's cohesive devices throughout this process, make reasonable inferences, and monitor their comprehension levels. Similarly, analytical writing necessitates that authors possess organizational solid thinking skills, select appropriate language styles and forms of expression, and robustly support their arguments by incorporating relevant examples and evidence (Rizakhodjayeva & Abdulamit, 2021).

2.2 What is Collaborative Learning (CL)?

Collaborative Learning (CL) is a student-centered instructional approach that enhances understanding and learning outcomes by encouraging students to work together towards shared goals. Key features of this method include mutual support, active participation, and shared responsibility (Rodríguez-Vizzuett et al., 2015; Fang et al., 2022). Mutual support is demonstrated as students help each other, share knowledge, and provide feedback to improve their understanding and skills. Active participation requires learners to engage actively in discussions and share their perspectives during learning, enriching the learning experience. Additionally, CL emphasizes the collective responsibility of students in achieving learning objectives, fostering team spirit and a sense of collective ownership. Zheng et al. (2021) also highlight the significant role of technology in facilitating CL. Technologies such as online platforms, virtual reality, and augmented reality further enhance interaction and engagement in the learning process.

Research on CL has been conducted across various fields, including mathematics education, cognitive psychology, and learning sciences. Ballantine and McCourt Larres (2007) found that CL can significantly improve students' practical skills, scientific teamwork abilities, and learning outcomes. However, more research is needed on the conditions that promote CL and the relationship between collaboration and knowledge acquisition. In contrast, while cooperative learning emphasizes cooperation and mutual support, it focuses more on individual learning outcomes and may not necessarily involve shared responsibility or active participation (Panitz, 1996).

2.3 What is Task-Based Learning (TBL)?

Task-based Learning (TBL) is an innovative approach to foreign language teaching that emphasizes using authentic language and meaningful tasks. Originating from communicative language teaching, it focuses on establishing genuine language use goals and creating natural language acquisition environments (Yao et al., 2024). In a TBL setting, students learn the target language more effectively by performing tasks designed to engage them in the learning process, motivate them, and enhance their imagination (Sholeh, 2020; Sholeh et al., 2021). Sholeh et al. (2020) argue that TBL emphasizes authentic language use, helping learners develop practical language skills and enabling effective communication in real-life situations. TBL encourages students to participate actively in the learning process, motivating them and enhancing their imagination, making language learning more enjoyable and interactive (Sholeh et al., 2021). Moreover, TBL promotes skills-based teaching and learning, focusing on developing specific language skills such as speaking, listening, analytical reading ability, and writing skills. TBL fosters second language vocabulary acquisition by encouraging learners to use target vocabulary in context, enhancing memory and recall (Lee, 2014). Additionally, TBL is a student-centered approach that fosters active participation, encourages learners to take ownership of their learning, and develops essential 21st-century skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Munteanu et al., 2023). TBL helps learners develop language skills in context, crucial for effective communication and practical language use.

2.4 Relationship Between CL and TBL

CL and TBL aim to achieve the same educational objectives, emphasizing active student participation and prioritizing real-world applications, communication, and teamwork. According to Jaswal and Behera (2024), teachers must create a comprehensive and efficient learning environment that fosters deep understanding, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. CL and TBL Teaching focus on enhancing student learning outcomes by stimulating active engagement, addressing real-world problems, and promoting critical thinking processes. These approaches deepen students' insights into the learning subjects through practical experiences. Both strategies emphasize active student participation, positing that students are more likely to engage and take responsibility for their learning when collaborating on tasks. TBL Teaching typically involves real-world contexts or tasks that align with the principles of CL. This practical application helps students recognize the relevance of their studies to real life and apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios. CL highlights the importance of effective communication, active listening, and teamwork, while TBL Teaching similarly requires students to collaborate, share perspectives, and coordinate to complete tasks. The intersection of these methods underscores the central role of communication and teamwork in the educational process. CL and TBL Teaching encourage students to reflect on their learning processes and seek feedback from peers and teachers. This feedback mechanism aids students in refining their understanding, identifying areas for improvement, and cultivating a growth mindset. Lertcharoenrit (2020) suggests that CL and TBL Teaching can be broadly applied across various disciplines, including language learning, STEM fields, and the humanities. This interdisciplinary application demonstrates the versatility of these teaching methods and their significant potential to enhance student learning outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants were drawn from two randomly selected classes at a vocational college in southern China during the 2023 academic year. 192 vocational students (across 8 classes) were recruited for the study. The research sample was randomly cluster-sampled from these 8 classes and divided into two groups: the experiment group with 25 students and the control group with 27 students. The average age of the control group was 17.8 years, while the average age of the experiment group was 17.2 years. All participants had consistent academic backgrounds and were enrolled in the same major. School administrators were contacted, and the study's objectives, methods, and expected outcomes were thoroughly explained.

3.2 Research Variables

This study investigates the impact of different teaching methods on vocational students' analytical reading ability and writing skills. The independent variable in the study is the teaching method: the experiment group employs a

blended approach of CL and TBL, while the control group uses traditional teaching methods. The dependent variables are analytical reading ability and writing skills.

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1 Analytical Reading Ability Test

The Analytical Reading Ability Test (ARAT) is designed to evaluate students' comprehension and analytical skills across various texts. It consists of eight topics, each with questions challenging the student's ability to understand and interpret passages ranging from scientific research to historical accounts. This comprehensive coverage ensures a thorough assessment of reading abilities across diverse subjects. The test emphasizes critical thinking, requiring students to analyze arguments, identify main ideas, and draw conclusions based on evidence. Additionally, it enhances inferential skills by asking questions that necessitate reading between the lines to grasp implicit meanings. The ARAT also measures textual understanding, from recognizing key details to discerning the author's tone and purpose. It assesses knowledge application and comprehension by addressing subjects pertinent to real-world situations, helping students make connections between the text and more extensive settings. The ARAT consisted of 40 questions out of a possible 40 points and was reviewed by five experts who agreed it had good validity.

3.3.2 Writing Skill Assessment Scale

The Writing Skill Assessment Scale (WSAS) is a comprehensive tool designed to evaluate and enhance writing proficiency across various dimensions. It encompasses six key areas: Organization and Structure, Content and Development, Grammar and Syntax, Reading and Citation, Analysis and Critical Thinking, and Expression and Style. Each dimension assesses different aspects of effective writing, from the coherence and flow of the essay to the richness of content and grammatical accuracy. The WSAS also evaluates the writer's engagement with external sources, analytical reasoning depth, and expression clarity. This holistic approach ensures a thorough assessment of writing skills, guiding writers towards improvement and excellence. The WSAS is scored out of 30 points and has been reviewed by five experts who confirmed its validity.

3.4 Intervention

The experiment group adopted a blended teaching approach combining CL and TBL, while the control group followed traditional teaching methods. Before the course commenced, the primary researcher explained the intervention's objectives, required roles, and intervention duration. A school-based project was designed based on the blended approach of CL and TBL. Students in the experiment group were randomly assigned to groups of at least seven members each. Eight groups were formed, each assigned a unique pre-class or in-class task related to the course material. Students needed to collaborate to acquire the knowledge or skills relevant to their assigned tasks and present their findings to the class during the week.

In contrast, the control group did not receive learning tasks, and the teacher served as the primary source of information. The traditional teaching model was based on a standard curriculum developed by the teacher and utilized lecture methods with strict limitations on CL and TBL. Trained classroom teachers conducted these lessons during regular class hours. The interventions for the experimental and control groups lasted four weeks, with sessions held five times weekly, each lasting 45 minutes.

The 25 students in the experiment group and the 27 in the control group underwent pre-tests (ARAT and WSAS) before the intervention to assess their analytical reading ability and writing skills. After the intervention, all participants took post-tests to evaluate the impact of the different teaching methods on the dependent variables.

3.5 Research Hypotheses

H1: The blended teaching approach combining CL and TBL improves vocational students' analytical reading ability and writing skills compared to the control group.

H2: The blended teaching approach combining CL and TBL improves vocational students' analytical reading ability and writing skills compared to pre-intervention levels.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study used SPSS statistical analysis software to analyze the ARAT and WSAS scores. The collected data were subjected to variance analysis (ANOVA) and t-tests to compare 1) differences between pre-intervention and post-intervention results and 2) differences between the experimental and control groups. The significance level was set at $p<0.05$, with Cohen's d values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 representing small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

3.7 Ethical Approval

This study received formal approval from the Ethics Review Committee of the vocational college, where the participants were enrolled before its commencement. Before agreeing to participate, we ensured that all participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, methods, potential risks, and their rights and obligations. Informed consent was obtained voluntarily from all participants. Throughout the study, we adhered strictly to relevant ethical standards and guidelines.

4. Result

Before experimenting, the experimental and control groups' scores were analyzed using an independent samples t-test to determine if there were significant variations between the groups. Before starting a study, assessing the equivalence of the groups or conditions being compared is crucial to ensure that any observed differences are due to the intervention or treatment being studied and not due to pre-existing differences between the groups (Thyer, 2010; Yao et al., 2023). Table 1 describes the means (M), standard deviations (SD), and p-values (P) greater than 0.05 between the pretest variables.

The control group scored slightly higher (M=29.93) than the experiment group (M=29.48)or analytical reading ability. The t-test results (t=0.68, p>0.05) and a Cohen's d effect size of 0.189 indicates that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant. Similarly, the control group had a mean score of 20.48, while the experiment group scored 20.24. The t-test results (t=0.41, p>0.05) and a Cohen's d effect size of 0.114 also show no significant difference between the groups in writing skills.

Although the control group had marginally higher scores in both analytical reading ability and writing skills, these differences were not significant, and the raw values for both groups were broadly similar. The effect sizes of 0.189 and 0.114 indicate that the differences between the groups in the pretests were modest, ensuring a fair baseline for evaluating the effects of the educational intervention.

Table 1. Comparison of pre-test results between experimental and control groups

Variable	N	M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Analytical Reading Ability						
Control Group	25	29.93	2.35	0.68	0.50	0.189
Experiment Group	27	29.48	2.37			
Writing Skills						
Control Group	25	20.48	2.12	0.41	0.68	0.114
Experiment Group	27	20.24	2.11			

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test comparison in the experiment group

Variable	N	M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Analytical Reading Ability						
pre-test	25	29.48	2.37	10.27	0.000*	2.905
post-test	25	35.28	1.54			
Writing Skill						
pre-test	25	20.24	2.13	9.41	0.000*	2.663
post-test	25	25.20	1.56			

Note. *p<0.05.

Table 2 describes the pre-test and post-test results of the experiment group to determine the impact of the intervention on analytical reading ability and writing skills—the experiment group's pre-test M=29.48, which significantly increased to 35.28 in the post-test. The t-test results (t=10.27, p<0.05) and a Cohen's d effect size of 2.905 indicates a statistically significant difference between the two measurements in analytical reading ability—similarly, the experiment group's pre-test M=20.24, which significantly increased to 25.20 in the post-test. The t-test results (t=9.41, p<0.05) and a Cohen's d effect size of 2.663 also indicate a statistically significant difference between the two measurements for writing skills.

The results of Tables 1 and 2 suggest that the experimental group's analytical reading ability and writing skills improved significantly after the collaborative and TBL methods intervention. The significant differences in pre-test and post-test scores and the high effect sizes further confirm the effectiveness of this teaching method in enhancing students' abilities. Thus, hypothesis 1 can be accepted.

Table 3. Post-test comparison between experimental and control groups

Variable	N	M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Analytical Reading Ability						
Control Group	25	30.96	2.23	8.06	0.000*	2.238
Experiment Group	27	35.28	1.54			
Writing Skill						
Control Group	25	21.26	1.79	8.45	0.000*	2.345
Experiment Group	27	25.20	1.56			

Note. *p<0.05.

Table 3 describes the post-test results of the experiment group and the control group to determine the impact of the intervention. The control group's post-test was M=30.96 for analytical reading ability, while the experiment group's was significantly higher (M=35.28). The t-test results (t=8.06, p<0.05) and a Cohen's d effect size of 2.238 indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups in analytical reading ability. The control group's post-test M=21.26 for writing skills, compared to the experiment group's significantly higher M=25.20. The t-test results (t=8.45, p<0.05) and a Cohen's d effect size of 2.345 also indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups for writing skills. These results suggest that the experiment group, which received the collaborative and TBL intervention, showed significantly higher scores in analytical reading ability and writing skills than the control group. The significant differences in post-test scores and the large effect sizes further confirm the effectiveness of this instructional approach in enhancing students' abilities. Thus, hypothesis 2 can be accepted.

5. Discussion

The results of this study highlight the effectiveness of combining CL and TBL in enhancing vocational students' analytical reading ability and writing skills. This approach significantly outperforms traditional teaching methods, emphasizing the value of active participation and practical application in educational settings. Yu et al. (2024) suggest innovative teaching strategies or models can provide more profound learning experiences and improve academic skills. The limitations of traditional teaching methods necessitate reevaluating and integrating more interactive and student-centered approaches to better meet the needs of contemporary learners (Wu, 2023).

The improvement in analytical reading ability in the experiment group can be attributed to the interactive nature of CL and TBL. These methods encourage students to participate in discussions, collaborate on tasks, and critically analyze texts. A study on online collaborative learning (OCL) showed a significant improvement in university students' critical reading skills. Qualitative feedback from participants also highlighted their positive perceptions of OCL, emphasizing its effectiveness in enhancing reading ability (Koşar, 2023). Another study found that students taught through CL and TBL methods performed better in understanding English texts than those taught by traditional methods, with improved vocabulary recognition and ability to complete reading tasks more effectively (Motlagh et al., 2023).

Similarly, the experiment group showed significant progress in writing skills, particularly in organization, content development, and grammatical accuracy. Stempel (2010) emphasized the importance of organizational solid thinking and the ability to incorporate relevant examples and evidence in analytical writing. Mulyadi et al. (2024) and Indrianti (2015) pointed out that structured interactions and targeted tasks can significantly enhance students' writing skills. The collaborative tasks in TBL provide students with opportunities to practice these skills in real-world contexts, enhancing their ability to produce coherent and well-structured written work.

The comparison between the experimental and control groups highlights the limitations of traditional teaching methods, which often need more opportunities for active participation and practical application. Traditional lecture-based teaching tends to promote passive learning, which can hinder the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This approach has been shown to foster surface learning, with students focusing on memorization rather than deep understanding. It is exam-centric, often prioritizing rote learning over critical engagement with the content (Nepal, 2013). In contrast, CL and TBL emphasize real-world applications and teamwork, deepening students' understanding of the material and better preparing them for professional challenges.

These findings have significant implications for educational practice, particularly in vocational education. Integrating CL and TBL into the curriculum can substantially enhance students' cognitive abilities, making them more adept at handling real-world problems. Educators should adopt these methods to create more interactive and engaging learning environments. Additionally, ongoing teacher training and professional development are crucial to equip educators with the necessary skills to implement these innovative teaching strategies effectively. Future

research should explore the long-term impacts of CL and TBL on student learning outcomes and the integration of advanced technologies to enhance these educational methods further.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that integrating CL and TBL significantly enhances vocational students' analytical reading ability and writing skills. The empirical evidence from this research underscores the effectiveness of these innovative teaching methods in fostering more profound understanding, critical thinking, and practical application of language skills. The positive impact on student performance highlights the importance of adopting blended instructional approaches in vocational education. These findings contribute valuable insights into educational practice, advocating for the broader implementation of such methods to cultivate essential cognitive and linguistic competencies in students, preparing them for academic and professional success.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Chen Xuyang and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nirat Jantharajit were responsible for the study design and revisions. Asst. Prof. Dr. Phichittra Thongpanit handled data collection. All authors contributed equally to the study, read, and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interests

All authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

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Data availability statement

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

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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