

# The effective of task based language teaching on reading for advanced learners in Cyprus

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December 05, 2018

## Abstract

Quantitative and qualitative data were employed to determine whether the task-based teaching method increased participants' English language reading comprehension. Three instruments were used to collect the data for this study. At the beginning and end of the course, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) on reading was administered to the control group. The experimental group, which was taught reading only using the technology-based teaching method, was assessed using the IELTS. The second instrument was a checklist observation. The researcher visited the classes of the experimental group at the beginning of the semester before the treatment was implemented and administered the IELTS. Then, the instructors applied the task-based method. The second instrument involves observations checklist of three instructors in class to determine which teaching method and mode is widely used by teachers to deliver their lecture. The last part involves questionnaires to determine if there are any similarities between task-based and the traditional methods of teaching reading English. The treatment of this study lasted for one hour per week for one semester (12 weeks).

## The effective of task-based language teaching method on reading for advanced language learners in Cyprus

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## Abstract

Improving learners' reading skills is an essential factor that must be considered in language learning. This study examines the effectiveness of Task-based Language Teaching Method on Reading for Advanced Language Learners. The Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a method of teaching which encourages the involvement of the learner through series of activities/tasks in the language classroom. The participants are 50 advanced EFL learners from two universities in North Cyprus. These participants were grouped into two; 25 learners which form the experimental group from Cyprus International University and the other 25 learners as the control group from Akdeniz Kerkaz University. The two groups were pre-tested, received instruction and then post-tested. The experimental group was made to undergo a one-hour of Task-based instruction for 12 weeks while the control group received their instruction through the conventional teaching method within the same period. At the end of the semester, the two groups were tested using the same reading test; both groups were compared, and the results show that the experimental group performed better than the control group in reading comprehension tests. With its focus on what the learner does in the target language, this study assumes the viewpoint that TBLT is more effective than other teaching methods and should be encouraged among language teachers and educators.

## Keywords

## ***Introduction***

Becoming competent in the use of a language requires mastery of the four skills; reading and writing, listening and speaking. These skills cannot be learnt in isolation, but reading is effective at improving the learners' independence in the target language. This is because reading is a personal activity unlike other skills. Besides, it improves the writing skills, exposes the learner to the richness of the language through its vocabulary, use of words etc. This implies that the learner is able to achieve competence in the shortest time possible though exposure to reading in the target language. It is believed that both academic and intellectual life of learners can be satisfied through reading (Lap & Trang, 2017). It therefore necessary that learners develop their reading skills.

## **Literature review**

Task-based Language Teaching is an approach that has attracted the interest of many scholars ( Rezaei 2017). It was developed as a communicative approach to the teaching of English. The goal of language teaching is for learners to be able to use language in real life communicative contexts and this is what makes Task-Based approach to be acceptable because it helps learners to acquire the required competence in target language. Reading done with tasks is said to be more promising for EFL learners because it is integrated into the classroom (Rezaei 2017).

In the light of language teaching, Bowen (2004) states that teachers can use their skills through tasks learning process because the approach is said to make students effective in communication. Therefore, Anthony (1963) proposes that Task-based Approach is the nature of the subject that should be taught. English teachers must make their classroom busy through communication and interaction between groups because it focuses on understanding the meaning of words using tasks.

According to (Ellis, 2004), this method is a plan of the capabilities & knowledge through a second language acquisition. He also asserted that a task is a practice that's based on meaning during interaction.

A task can be exercised of communication from others Long (1992). Thus, exercise of a task includes filling out a form, borrowing a book, typing a letter as an example. In other words, a task is many things that people can do in real situation. Richards (2014) argued that a task is an action in which use through communication and carried out the process of language. They also stated that tasks may or may not include language production. It requires the teacher to limit what will need to specify the task. Ellis (2004) all definitions proposed for task have some features in common. He argued that another feature of task is "an outcome, a goal or an objective" which can be achieved by the task completion.

Doyle (1983) has drawn on work that cognitive operations includes different academic tasks such as procedural or routine tasks, memory tasks, and understanding and comprehension tasks, opinion tasks. Mohan (1986) stated that analysis of tasks in language teaching employs a cognitive process.

Nunan (2004) also recognized that tasks can also focus on both meaning & form. He provided critical features to assess the task activity. The basic technique is to develop students use their ideas, expressions, own words in the reading. Dividing students into small group and give them time to decide what they understand from the text and participating with another group enables students to learn better and faster. EFL learners, in effect, do exercises together based on their performance knowledge, working with group task discussions, expressing their own similar ideas related to the text with the teacher, self-assessment and feeling confident to correct each other groups.

According to Ellis 2004, Nunan 2004, TBLT is compatible with a learner-centered educational philosophy, which encourages minimal teacher input during the tasks. It comprises particular components such as goal or specific outcome in order to signify the successful completion of the task. It focuses on meanings rather than linguistic forms to promote natural communicative competence among learners. It enables learners to learn through communication and engagement.

Nazenin Ruso (2013) applied to East Mediterranean University, 55 EFL students a traditional classrooms, Turkish instructors who participated in her. He investigated through using different data such as: diaries, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire. He has found in her findings that TBL approach in EFL students was improvement and tasks encouraged students regarding their performance.

Hamid Marashi (2012) his study about the impact of task-based writing on EFL Iranian students. He collected data 56. Regarding his results, the treatment for both groups PET and the ACT were administered and the results were benefited significantly through task-based writing.

Hersong Tang, Jer-Shiou Chiou & Oliver Jarsaillon (2015) their study was to investigated task-based learning TBL in Chinese learners of English by two quantitative and qualitative analyses. They applied on intermediate level, 67 EFL learners. Their findings was effective influence and accuracy. They administrated a test of English proficiency. The results showed that students made significant improvement in reading comprehension after teaching through task-based approach. TBL was more motivation and effects. It was useful for EFL learners who desire to acquire a second language.

## Research Questions

1. What are the mostly used teaching methods in developing reading comprehension at proficiency level of university students?
2. Is Task-Based Language Teaching method widely used at high level of university students?
3. Are there any similarities between Task-Based Language Teaching method and conventional teaching method on reading comprehension of proficiency level of university students?
4. Are there any significant differences between Task-Based Language Teaching method and conventional teaching method on reading comprehension of proficiency level of university students in implementing reading skills i) at pre-reading phase? ii) on reading phase? iii) at post-reading phase?

## Assumptions of the Study

The study assumed the limitation of the students in EFL classes was more successful than overcrowded classroom. EFL instructors expressed their knowledge of methodology sincerely and correctly. The researcher used non- parametric statistical because of limited numbers. The researcher used SPSS to measure Cronbach' alpha that we're required for a pilot test before the researcher used the instrument to continue with this research. Reliability tests was conducted for the test scores results and results are shown in tables. The reliability estimate is close to 0.6 that the variables shows a reliable explanations of the effects of TBLT on reading comprehension for foreign proficient leaners.

## Materials and methods

This study concerned reading comprehension that is important for learners and proficiency learners. Learners needed to understand when they read texts in different field. This study will investigate how foreign learners understand texts in English language courses. Also how methods and approaches have been used in the class? Is there any effectiveness? The main core in this study is to investigate if task-based can be effected to the reading comprehension of foreign learners.

The study used an experimental design to obtain data on English language learners at two universities. Test scores were obtained from an experimental group and a control group, which were analyzed and compared.

The testing comprised two stages, a pre-test and a post-test, on both groups of participants. The test was administered to the control group and the experimental group at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. The differences in test scores between the beginning and of the semester were tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical tests and the groups' pre-tests and post-tests were compared. The study used task-based interviews and checklist observations to assess the ways that the instructors delivered lectures to determine whether the technology-based approach motivated and had a positive influence on the participants.

## Population and sample

The participants were 50 English language learners; 25 advanced English-language learners at the first university were randomly selected into the experimental group and 25 advanced English-language learners were selected from the second university as the control group. There were three instructors; two were at the first university and one was at the second university.

## Data sources

Quantitative and qualitative data were employed to determine whether the task-based teaching method increased participants' English language reading comprehension. Three instruments were used to collect the data for this study. At the beginning and end of the course, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) on reading was administered to the control group. The experimental group, which was taught reading only using the technology-based teaching method, was assessed using the IELTS. The second instrument was a checklist observation. The researcher visited the classes of the experimental group at the beginning of the semester before the treatment was implemented and administered the IELTS. Then, the instructors applied the task-based method. The second instrument involves observations checklist of three instructors in class to determine which teaching method and mode is widely used by teachers to deliver their lecture. The last part involves questionnaires to determine if there are any similarities between task-based and the traditional methods of teaching reading English. The treatment of this study lasted for one hour per week for one semester (12 weeks).

## Data analysis

First, the researcher obtained permission from the instructors to observe their classes and to help them to manage their time during the pre-treatment, treatment, and post-treatment stages. The researcher taught the instructors how to develop task-based activities using technologies, such as the Internet, maps, pictures, charts, and so on. The researcher met the instructors and asked them some questions about the methods, types of techniques they use in the classroom. The instructors answered 10 questions about technology-based learning and their methods of delivering lectures. Then, the three instructors voluntarily participated in face-to-face interviews. ANOVA and linear correlation analysis of the test scores and the group comparisons were performed using the SPSS statistical package.

## Results

ANOVA tests and linear correlation coefficients (Pearson) were generated to assess the extent of the correlations in test scores between the control and experimental groups. Regarding the control group, the pre-test positively correlated with the post-test ( $r = .423$ ), and the pre-test and post-test values of the experimental group were  $r = .213$  and  $r = .017$ , respectively (see Table 1), suggesting similarities or a relationship between conventional and task-based methods for teaching English. This explains why we have some students passing the test even after conventional method of teaching are used although students pass greatly exceptional after task-based method was employed on learners.

[Table 1 near here]

Consequently, it is noted that post-test control group scores is also positively related to pre-test control group scores at .423 and post-test experimental at 09 but negatively correlated with pre-test experimental with correlation values of -.092. Pre-test scores of the experimental group positively related to the pre-test scores of the control group ( $r = .213$ ) and post-test experimental group at .167. The statistical significance was  $p < .01$ , suggesting a difference in the effects of the teaching methods.

Correlations were performed on the test scores to assess cross-correlations among the variables. Cross-correlations of the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group that were not statistically significant, the coefficients were negative or positive at different lags.

The cross-correlations between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group were not statistically significant. The lag before technology assisted shows a small negative coefficient while the lag after the new method of language teaching shows improved positive coefficient of about 0.4. Therefore, for every 1% increase in technology-based learning, reading comprehension scores increased by 0.40 units. This finding is significant because it implies that task-based learning is an important method of teaching English comprehension (see Figs. 1 and 2).

[Figures 1 and 2 near here]

The goal of this study was to assess whether task-based teaching methods influenced learners' behaviors and attitudes toward learning English compared to conventional teaching methods. As shown in the Table 2 below, the experimental group scored significantly higher after the treatment than before it on the IELTS ( $t = -5.808$ ,  $df = 19$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, reading comprehension under the task-based teaching method significantly improved after the treatment. The mean test score was about 4.5 before and 8.5 after the treatment. Tasks had a substantially positive effect on reading comprehension. However, the results found that the control group scored significantly lower in the post-test compared to the pre-test ( $t = 3.243$ ,  $df = 19$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ), indicating that conventional teaching methods were not effective for improving English reading comprehension as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

[Tables 2 and 3 near here]

Pre-test differences between the experimental and control groups

A one-way ANOVA test was performed on the pre-test scores between the groups of learners. The experimental group improved more than the control group based on the means and compared to the results. The post-test mean between groups was high for the experimental group (12.814) compared to the control group's mean between groups of 2.936 ( $F = 4.516$ ,  $df = 7/12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding indicates that English language reading comprehension improved significantly more under the treatment condition than under conventional teaching methods. In fact, the control group's test scores were higher before (mean = 5.9) than after (mean = 4.5) the course, implying the ineffectiveness of conventional teaching methods for English reading comprehension (Table 4).

[Table 4 near here]

T-tests were performed to compare pre-test and post-test scores for both groups. Table 5 presents the results. The results were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) for both groups, which might relate to the fact that the participants were given time to prepare for the test both times they took it, the number of participants in each group was 25, and the scores of the experimental group improved after the treatment. Only three participants in the control group had higher scores after than before the course, and the others' scores were lower, whereas 19 of the participants in the experimental group had higher scores.

[Table 5 near here]

## Instructor assessments

Three instructors were observed during class presentations and the observation results were used to identify similarities and differences in the teaching methods used in the technology-based and conventional classrooms. A checklist of ten items was used to indicate whether a method was observed or not observed during class presentations and the results were analyzed. The means and standard deviations of the observed methods for the three instructors ranged from 1.00- and 0.000–.577, respectively.

The first observation was: “Does the teacher have a well-designed lesson plan?” Two instructors had well-designed lesson plans and one did not. Thus, 66.7% of the instructors had well-designed lesson plans. The mean was 1.33 and the standard deviation was .577, indicating that the instructors mostly planned their lessons before class (Table 6).

[Table 6 near here]

## Interview data analysis

The instructors’ responses to the interview questions focused on the objectives of the study. The three open-ended interview questions encouraged the instructors to freely share their opinions. The responses to Question 1 revealed similarities in the teaching methods for delivering the lessons in class. The two instructors who used the task-based method (experimental group) both were unsure about the most effective teaching method and, at the time of the interviews, they did not fully understand, experience, and or know how to integrate the method in their lesson plans. All of the instructors used personal communication methods, although that did not improve English reading skills. Two of the instructors used the grammar translation approach to teaching and the third one used the direct method, suggesting variations and differences in the teaching methods among the three instructors.

The responses to the question about motivation suggested that the instructors used different methods to motivate their students to be efficient and engaged in learning to read English. One of the instructors used pictures and videos to attract learners to the subject matter. The same instructor used text scanning and direct questions to verify that the students understood the lessons. The other two instructors used similar methods to motivate their students, which were question-and-answer student participation and encouraging students to always speak English during class to improve their comfort levels with the language. Therefore, there were important differences in the ways the instructors motivated their students to be active participants in class.

The responses to the question on the teaching activities used in the classroom are illustrated in Table 2. The instructors used SMART board and two of them used whiteboard. One of the instructors used a textbook, but the others used television programs, group work, and illustrations. Thus, teaching activities had similarities and differences.

## Discussion

### Effects of TBLT on Reading Comprehension

Learners improved their reading comprehension in English as a foreign language after the Task Based language teaching method and they showed a slightly decrease in performance after the conventional method of English teaching at Cyprus International University and Akdeniz University

Under the conventional methods of teaching English learners performance decreased at a small decreasing rate while under the TBLT method learners improved performance significantly great.

Under the TBLT 95% of the foreign EFL proficient learners performance on ILETS version tests increased after post-tests.

## **Variances on Methods used in Teaching English**

There are considerable differences between methods used in teaching English comprehension to foreign proficient learners. Instructors do sometime use TBLT but they have no proper knowledge on doing so. There are significant similarities between methods used in teaching reading comprehension to foreign learners. The differences in methods used can be reduced by encouraging and teaching instructors on how to use TBLT method to improve learners performance of reading comprehension.

## **Behaviour and Attitude to Learning**

Learners changed their attitude greatly to learning English proficiency after Task Based Language teaching as it was interactive. Learners improved their behaviour expressively under the TBLT than the conventional teaching methods. Task Based language teaching method is very important in improving English proficient learners reading comprehension as well as attitude and behaviour of learners to learning. The next chapter discussed conclusions and recommendations and suggestions for further reading.

## **Conclusion**

Task- based language teaching method can be very helpful. The findings this research emphasized on the TBLT which is the newest version of Methodology. TBLT has emerged in the late 1990s and the early 2000s (Ellis,2000; Richards and Rodgers, 2002). Based on recent studies, TBLT is more effective than previous traditional methodologies and the eclectic ones.

This study seemed to be clear that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is more effective than Conventional method in teaching reading comprehension in general and in EFL reading in particular. In fact, teaching EFL learners through task-based method has advantages of the process approach to reading. The processes in the reading involved the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading phases. It adds more peculiar aspects to the top-down theory of reading by its complete the task cycle. It fully helps learners how to generate more ideas, activates their schemata and background knowledge, motivates students and encourages them to read fluently without need to concern on linguistic features. Furthermore, this method has a completed task cycle which covers nearly all of the processes. It adopts view toward the act of reading and all of those changing factors and processes which happened when comprehending a text. It seems that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is very effective in teaching reading comprehension to the high-level.

Task-based seems to be the best methodology for teaching cooperative learning and collaborative learning because it follows the principles of cooperative learning. Both cooperative and collaborative learning are part of the task-based language teaching that can be guided learners toward more meaningful and interactive use of language in a real world context.

Task-based method emphasizes that the teacher should integrate reading comprehension with other skills such as writing, listening and speaking. Reading cannot be taught separately from the other language skills. Teachers must be used task-based method for all language skills.

Regarding syllabus design and instructional material, the findings of this study offer that each instructional situation is a unique one and it demands its own syllabus and material. This study recommended that we should do a needs analysis in order to examine what the learners should know, what they should learn, what are the available facilities, time etc. . . It emphasizes that if the researcher cannot do a thorough needs analysis, she or he should consider all different aspects of the teaching situation and the subjects as much as he or she can. So task-based language teaching develops its own task syllabus based on both needs analysis and situation analysis.

Task-based syllabus uses tasks as the class activities for designing classroom learning experiences. This study leaned teachers how to select tasks for their own teaching situation. However, the teachers cannot use a set of fixed tasks for all learners in all situations because they have to analyse the situation completely and consider all aspects in order to teach real world and authentic language. And then they should see which resources are available in developing tasks and instructional activities. Task-based approach does not neglect

any need to develop course books, it recommended that teachers should not limit their task resources only books. Teachers should use a range of various real world and pedagogical. They should use a range of various real world tasks.

**Note: The oral consent from the university and participants was approved for publishing**

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## Table Captions

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Statistics

Table 2. Experimental Pre- and Post-Group Test

Table 3. ANOVA Test Results of Change in Reading Comprehension Scores of the Control Group

Table 4. ANOVA Pre- and Post-Test Differences between Groups

Table 5. Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test Scores between Groups

Table 6. Checklist Observation Results



## Figure Captions

Figure 1. Cross Correlations between Pre- and Post-Experimental Groups

Figure 2. Cross Correlations between Pre- and Post-Test Conventional Methods

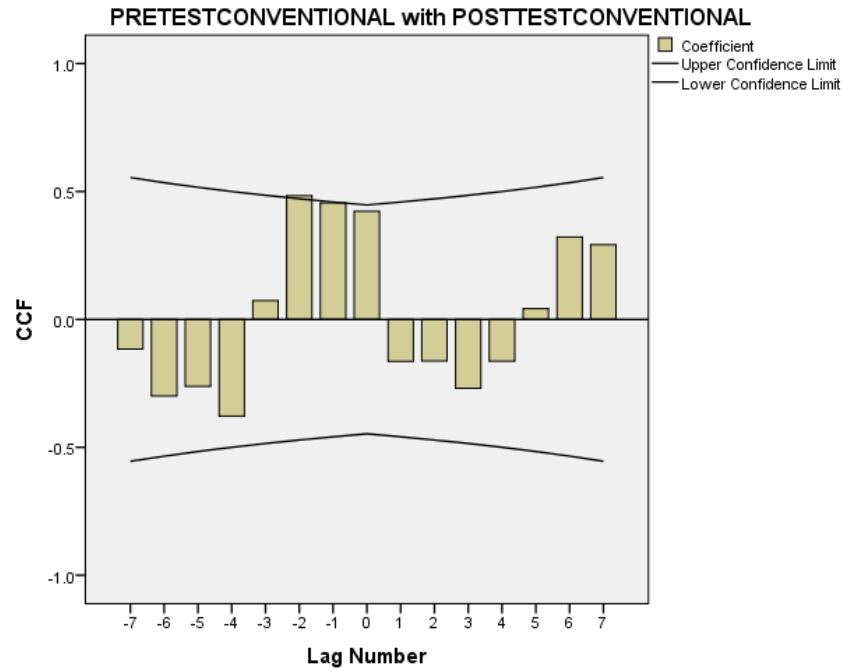
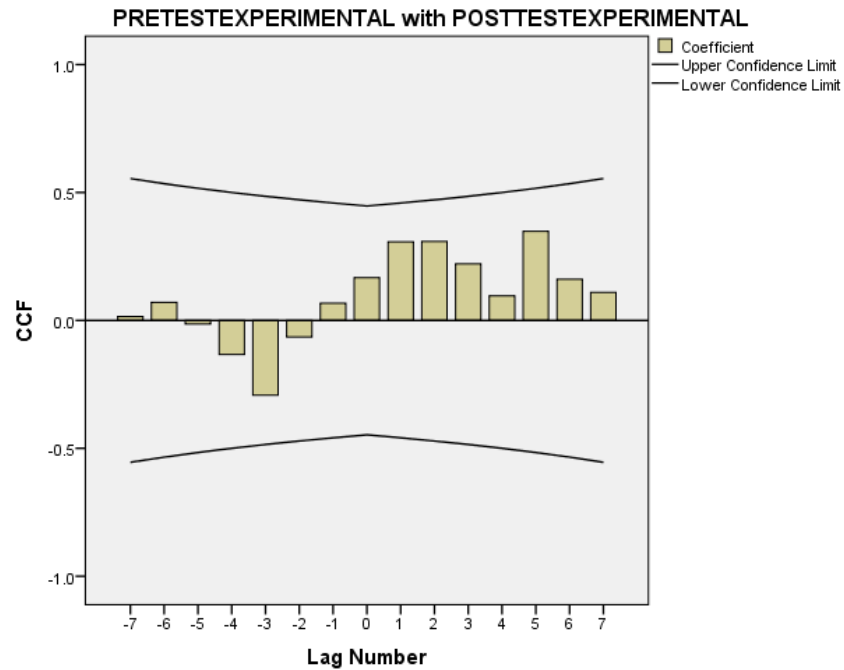


Figure 1



**Figure 2**

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Statistics

		PRETESTCONVENTIONAL	POSTTESTCONVENTIONAL
Pre-test conventional methods	Pearson Correlation	1	.423
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.063
	N	25	25
Post-test conventional methods	Pearson Correlation	.423	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063	
	N	25	25
Pre-test experimental methods	Pearson Correlation	.213	-.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.367	.699
	N	25	25
Post-test experimental-methods	Pearson Correlation	.017	.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.945	.706
	N	25	25

Table 2. Experimental Pre- and Post-Group Test

Experimental group	Pre-test	Post-test
N	25	25
	4.55	8.25
SD	1.76	2.55
SE		0.39
0.571		

Notes: N= No of observations; = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; SE= Standard error .

Table 3. ANOVA Test Results of Change in Reading Comprehension Scores of the Control Group

Control group	Pre-test	Post-test
N	25	25
		5.70
4.30		
SD		1.867
1.720		
SE		0.417
0.385		

Notes : N= No of observations; = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; SE= Standard error

Table 4. ANOVA Pre- and Post-Test Differences between Groups

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Post-test conventional	Between Groups	20.550	7	2.936	.988	.483
	Within Groups	35.650	12			
	Total	56.200	19			
Post-test Experimental	Between Groups	89.700	7	12.814	4.516	.011
	Within Groups	34.050	12	2.838		
	Total	123.750	19			

Table 5. Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test Scores between Groups

Variable	Experimental group	Control group	t-value (df)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Pre-test	4.16 (1.76)	5.70 (1.87)*	2.29 (19)
Post-test	8.25 (2.55)***	4.30 (1.70)	-5.99 (19)

\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , two-tailed tests of significance

Table 6. Checklist Observation Results

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The teacher provides positive reinforcement	3	1	1	1.00	.0000
The teacher uses task-based method	3	2	2	2.00	.0000
The teacher uses tasks based on technology activities	3	2	2	2.00	.0000
The teacher uses traditional method in the class	3	2	2	2.00	.0000
The teacher has well designed lesson plan	3	1	1	1.33	.577
The teacher motivates learners to use reading skills	3	1	2	1.00	.000
The teacher encourages learners to participate	3	1	2	1.67	.577
The teacher encourages learners to involve in lesson	3	1	2	1.67	.577
The teacher provides teaching aid	3	1	2	1.33	.577

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The teacher uses effective reading	3	1	2	1.33	.577