

The Role of Task-Based Teaching Method in Improving College students' English Proficiency

Wenpu Wang

Chengdu Technological University Chengdu, Sichuan 611730, China

ABSTRACT. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a language teaching method proposed at the end of the 12th century. With the new round of college English teaching reform, English teaching methods are drawing renewed attention. However, for some reasons, TBLT is not ideally implemented in college English classrooms. Based on an overview of the theoretical basis of TBLT, this paper analyzes the application principles of TBLT, and puts forward the implementation strategies for implementing TBLT in colleges and universities, so as to shed some light on how to improve college students' English proficiency in the new era.

KEYWORDS: College students, Task-based teaching, English proficiency

1. An overview of TBLT method

1.1 Theoretical Basis of Task-Based Teaching

As for the definition of task, previous studies provide us with different understandings. Willis [1] believes that TBLT is learners' daily communication using related language. Skehan [2] believes that a task is an activity to solve communication problems, with the meaning of the activity coming first. It has a certain connection with the real-life activity and produces a task outcome for the evaluation of the task effect.

Hunan [3] summarized the characteristics of task-based teaching as follows:

Task-based language teaching

- (1) emphasizes language acquisition through real language communication;
- (2) creates a real language learning environment and introduces related language;
- (3) provides opportunities for learners to pay attention not only to the language, but also to the learning process itself;
- (4) enhances learners' personal experience as an important factor to promote classroom learning; and
- (5) commits to the activation and integration of classroom language learning and extracurricular language communication.

These five characteristics fundamentally reflect the essence of task-based teaching and the shift of emphasis in foreign language teaching from the previous focus on teachers' teaching to focus on students' learning, and from teacher-dominated classrooms to student-centered ones. English teaching is carried out in the process of real interpersonal communication between teachers and students, which integrates classroom language learning with extracurricular language communication.

1.2 Problems of Implementing Task-Based Teaching in College English Classrooms

For all its theoretical possibility, in real college English classrooms, task-based teaching has not been ideally implemented. The problems can be listed as follows: first, there are often no clear guiding principles, so that there has been a lack of momentum to implement TBLT. Second, the teaching mode is monotonous [4]. Teaching methods used by English teachers are traditional, which are centered on teaching, with the participation of students ignored. As a result, students lose the opportunity to work autonomously. Thirdly, students' pre-college English foundation is uneven, and their majors vary. Given the different background of students, the one-pot teaching method used in classroom teaching often does not meet the needs of each student, which affects the

teaching results.

2. Guiding Principles of Task-Based Teaching

2.1 Application-Oriented

Task-based teaching is a way to optimize students' learning results. In teacher-centered teaching, a more traditional teaching mode where the teacher dominates the classroom, students become muted and do not have the chance to use English. In contrast, task-based teaching is application-oriented, where students become active and independent participants of the classrooms, rather than just passive to accept knowledge. With this method, language acquisition is realized and students' ability to apply the language is developed [5].

2.2 Students-Centered

The teaching content of task-based teaching is designed with reasonable consideration of students' needs and ability levels and with students as the center. Students are expected to complete tasks of different difficult levels that suit their language proficiency, which may increase in accordance with their language development. During the process of completing the tasks, both newly learned and known knowledge of students is activated, their motivation is enhanced, and they learn to collaborate with each other as a team. To complete a task, they negotiate with each other, during which real interactions occur, which is the prerequisite of language acquisition.

2.3 Interest Teaching

In the current teaching methods, fun teaching has always been taken as the principle, which is also a prominent feature of task-based language teaching. Through interesting classroom interaction and communication, students' interest in learning is stimulated and favorable teaching results are achieved. Task-based language teaching activates students' intrinsic motivation of learning.

3. Implementing Tblt in College English Classrooms

3.1 Teacher's Role

In task-based learning, the teacher acts as the facilitator for students' knowledge acquisition, scaffolding the students during the whole process. The teacher designs tasks based on the text and the profile of the students [6] and may introduce tasks through questions, videos, interviews and other forms. For example, when playing a video of the workplace scene, the teacher may ask students to tell their career plans and expectations about their future career [7]. The teacher may ask "What kind of job do you want to apply for after you graduate?" In this process, the teacher should make students understand the course objectives and have the task goal in mind, such as to make a career plan of their own. The teacher can scaffold the students in completing the task by providing them with keywords, giving them sample answers, and help them generate ideas. The most important thing is to combine students' learning with their real-life experience, so that they can have a better understanding of English knowledge and are able to apply English skills to real-life situations.

The teacher also acts as task participant and task evaluator. The teacher walks among groups of students, joining their discussion, asking questions and providing comments, acting as another team member sharing equal status with the students. In the same process, the teacher observes the students, evaluating task performance of each group member, including the task outcome, their participation, their problem-solving skills, English skills, negotiation skills, collaboration capacity, and so on. Based on the observation, on-site feedback or delayed feedback of students' classroom performance can be provided to help students improve their learning.

3.2 Students' Role

Students are supposed to develop into autonomous learners. The process of task execution is a process in which they constantly explore language and world knowledge. Take the task of making future career plan as an example, first of all, students need to have a clear understanding of themselves. Then, they need to understand the significance of making a career plan. They are constantly reminded that English is an essential

communicative skill in today's globalized community and that they need to complete the task in English language. To fulfill the task, they may need to search sample career plans online to get familiar with the genre of career plans, or to conduct dictionary in order to get access of new language resources. During this process, language and world knowledge is acquired in an autonomous method, and combined together, they are used to solve real-life problems.

Meanwhile, their awareness and ability of collaboration and problem-solving is enhanced. Groupwork is encouraged in task-based learning. The students are task performers as well as group members. They are encouraged to collaborate with each other, working as a team to negotiate roles and work out solutions. In this way they not only acquire knowledge through real-life tasks but become wonderful team members and problem-solvers.

3.3 Task Expansion

Task expansion means implementing follow-up tasks based on classroom activities, which are intended to help students consolidate knowledge and skills acquired in previous tasks [8]. Task expansion is the sublimation of task-based teaching.

It can be realized by asking the students to produce a varied form of task outcome different from that are performed in classroom activities. For example, after performing the task of discussing and drafting a career plan, students are asked to write an English composition after class detailing their career plan or to make it into PowerPoint slides or to record a video telling about their career plan.

Task expansion can also be achieved by asking the students to perform a different follow-up task much related to the in-class one. For instance, a written or spoken self-introduction or a cover letter can follow the career plan task. With knowledge and skills accumulated through previous tasks, students may be able to complete the follow-up task with much ease. Moreover, such task is quite authentic, which allows the students better understand the real-life problems.

Expanded tasks, for one thing, enhances the quality of the task outcome, and for the other, consolidates and expands the knowledge acquired [8].

4. Conclusion

With an emphasis on students' language acquisition through their completion of real-life tasks, TBLT has been recognized as an effective teaching method. However, it is not ideally implemented in Chinese college English classrooms. So, there is a need to call for awareness of the guiding principles of TBLT, i.e., application-oriented, students-centered and interest teaching. The role of the teacher needs to be shifted from classroom dominator to task facilitator, participant and evaluator. The students are supposed to become autonomous learners, good team players and problem solvers. Classroom tasks can be further expanded into follow-up tasks either requiring a different outcome or demanding a post-task performance. In this way, language acquisition by the students can be consolidated.

References

- [1] Willis J (1996). A framework for task-based learning [M]. Harlow: Longman.
- [2] Skehan P (2003). Task-based instruction [J]. Language teaching, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 1-14.
- [3] Liu-Kun H U (2018). A Probe into the Graded Teaching of Task-Based College English Listening & Spoken Courses Based on CAI [J]. Theory and Practice of Education, vol. 23, no.2, pp. 251-256.
- [4] DU Guang-cai (2019). A Tentative Probe into the Design and Practice of Task-based College English Teaching for Students in Non-key Universities [J]. Journal of Dongguan University of Technology, vol. 36, no.4, pp. 364-366.
- [5] Ju Qing-hua (2019). A Probe into Task-Based Language Teaching of Integrated English in a Large Class [J]. Journal of qiongzhou university, vol.18, no.4, pp. 1052-1060.
- [6] LI Hai-xia, Yuncheng University (2016). A Probe into College English Teaching under the Guidance of the Constructivism [J]. Journal of Yuncheng University, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 527-529.
- [7] Yalin L (2018). Probe into Task-based English Teaching Model for Foreign Secretary Major [J]. Journal of guilin normal college, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 477-480.
- [8] GAN Yang (2018). Task-Based Teaching of the English Subjunctive Mood to EFL Learners in China [J].

