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The Application of Task-based Language Teaching Method in English Reading Teaching

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Abstract

With the advancement of educational reform, the task-based language teaching, as an innovative teaching method, is attracting the attention of more and more educators. It enables students to carry out English reading learning with high quality under the guidance of clear tasks and helps to improve students' reading efficiency. In this paper, we will discuss connotation of the task-based teaching method and its importance, application strategies and limitations in English reading teaching.

Keywords

English Reading Teaching; Task-Based Teaching; Application Strategies

1. Introduction

Under the background of the new curriculum reform, the traditional English teaching methods can no longer meet the needs of students' development. Facing such limitations, teachers need to reform and optimize their teaching according to the requirements of the new curriculum. As far as English reading teaching is concerned, it is facing unprecedented opportunities and challenges. The task-based teaching method, with its unique charm and effectiveness, has gradually become an important force leading the innovation of English reading teaching. Now, many teachers are focused on how to effectively use this method when teaching English reading.

2. The Connotation of Task-based Language Teaching Method

The concept of task-based teaching was formally proposed by Prabhu in 1983. It emphasizes that students should focus on the performance of a task and language learning always occurs along with a task. Prabhu (1987) defined a task as “an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and

regulate that process". In other words, students can learn knowledge by doing things. Actually, language acquisition is a long and complicated process because learners need to be exposed to different language contexts, and receive extensive language input repeatedly so as to gradually build up internal language competence. The theoretical grounding of task-based language teaching is rooted in cognitive and second language acquisition theory. As Ahmadian and Long (2021) explain, TBLT methodology is "theoretically and empirically motivated" and is able to create "a psycho-linguistically optimal environment for second language learning" by taking into account the main factors that contribute to the language learning process. This psycho-linguistic rationale reinforces the view that meaning-focused task performance, rather than isolated grammar instruction, facilitates natural language acquisition.

The General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition 2020 Revision) advocates the use of task-based teaching method in the classroom because it helps to implement the advised teaching concepts, improve students' ability to use language comprehensively and overcome the drawbacks of traditional teaching methods. The most distinctive feature of this method is that tasks is the core of teaching. Teachers design a series of specific tasks according to the teaching objectives, so that students can naturally master new knowledge and skills in the process of completing the tasks. These tasks are usually of practical significance and can arouse students' interest and motivate them to learn actively. According to Nunan (1999), task-oriented teaching involves learners in the classroom to comprehend, manipulate, produce or interact in the target language, but the focus is on the meaning rather than the form. At the same time, authentic learning environments as well as natural social communication scenarios are necessary conditions for this teaching method. Students' tasks are usually things they do in their daily routines. The closer these things are to their life experiences, the more they will activate students.

In task-based language teaching, the role of the teacher is also transformed. They are no longer just knowledge transmitters, but guides and facilitators. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), task-based instruction is an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. In the teaching process, teachers need to give students sufficient space and time for their independent learning and give full play to students' initiative. The task itself serves as "the primary mechanism through which classroom interactions occur" in TBLT. Within this interactive framework, "interaction is the means through which learners of an additional language can be provided with scaffolding, feedback, and instruction". This underscores the teacher's facilitating role in designing and sequencing tasks that maximize opportunities for meaningful learner interaction.

3. The Importance of Task-based Teaching Method in English Reading Teaching

Firstly, the task-based teaching method plays an important role in English reading teaching, which can effectively stimulate students' interest in learning. Willis (1996) claimed that her framework provides exposure, use, and motivation as three basic components for language learning. Students can improve their related knowledge and skills by completing well-designed tasks which are usually some interesting and close-to-life reading tasks. For example, after reading an article about food, teachers can assign a task for students to introduce their favorite food in English and share the production process. This kind of task, which is closely related to students 'life experiences, can attract students' attention and make them participate in the following reading activities more actively. At the same time, the task-based teaching method can also enable students to gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction in the process of completing the task, thus further enhancing their learning motivation. When students successfully complete a reading task and are recognized by the teacher and their classmates, they will be proud of their progress, and this positive emotional experience can also motivate them to continue to study hard. This teaching method not only makes the reading process more interesting and interactive, but more importantly, it helps to cultivate students' good reading habits, so that they gradually fall in love with reading, and then regard English learning as a kind of enjoyment rather than a burden. Empirical research has confirmed the positive effects of task-based instruction on reading engagement. Nga (2022) found that task-based instruction "positively influenced learners' reading performances," with post-test scores showing significant improvement over pre-test scores among secondary EFL students. Similarly, Izzah (2024) documented that students became "more responsive and have an interest in reading and develop various ideas in their thinking" when task-based strategies were implemented in reading classes. These findings corroborate the motivational benefits of task-based reading activities discussed above.

Secondly, the use of the task-based teaching method can enhance students' independent learning ability. This method stresses learner-centered education, which enables students to learn and explore actively in the process of completing tasks by breaking down specific teaching objectives into a series of tasks. Therefore, students' internal drive can be stimulated and they can be more purposeful and motivated when reading. For example, teachers can design some questions or tasks related to the content of the article, such as summarizing the main idea, identifying arguments to support a point of view and so on. In the process of completing these tasks, students not only have the opportunities to learn how to accurately capture and analyze the key information, but also cultivate the habit of independent learning, so as to raise their awareness of lifelong learning.

Finally, it cultivates students' spirit of cooperation and sense of innovation. Proponents of task based approaches do subscribe to both the ideas of learner-centered education and learning by doing. Learning the language via

task-based practice clearly involves learning by doing as students are engaged in activities that resemble what they do in real life using the language. In task-based teaching, students usually need to work together in groups to complete tasks. For instance, after reading an article about environmental protection, teachers can organize students to discuss in groups how to practice environmental protection in their daily lives and design an environmental protection initiative. This kind of cooperative learning can promote communication and cooperation among students and cultivate their teamwork spirit. Meanwhile, students need to keep thinking, exploring and innovating in order to find the best way to solve the problem. To be specific, after reading an article about science and technology innovation, teachers can encourage students to come up with their own innovative ideas and design a simple innovative project.

4. Strategies for Applying Task-based Teaching Method in Teaching Reading

4.1. Set up pre-study tasks before class

This kind of task can stimulate students' interest in reading and lay the foundation for the improvement of the efficiency and optimization of the quality of reading teaching. Therefore, English teachers should comprehensively interpret the reading text and understand students 'learning habits, life experience and interests when preparing lessons. Ellis (2003) concluded that the pre-task stage aims to prepare students to perform the task that facilitates language acquisition. In that case, they can design targeted preview tasks to meet students' learning needs as much as possible. For instance, when learning FLTRP Senior English Compulsory Book 2 Unit 1 "A child of two cuisines", many students are not familiar with the table cultures of other countries in the world, so they are interested in exploring the culture. Based on this, when designing the preview tasks before class, teachers can assign students the task of watching and reading short English videos, newspapers and magazines related to diversified food cultures and healthy eating habits. And then, students can learn new vocabulary and phrases appearing in the reading text through the Internet or checking dictionaries so that they can master the content of the text smoothly. Moreover, teachers can also design some less difficult questions for students to ensure that most of them can answer them with a little thought and gain a sense of achievement and the pleasure of English reading. The purpose of assigning reflection questions is not only to familiarize students with the content in advance, and more importantly, to prepare students for the discussion in class. When students enter the classroom with their own thoughts and questions, they will participate more actively in the discussion. Under that situation, they can share their views with their classmates and get insights from exchanges.

4.2. Create an effective context in learning tasks

There are many ways in which teachers can choose to provide a meaningful context for students to engage in learning tasks. Multimedia teaching is a common teaching method. The integration of TBLT and authentic texts proved effective in promoting communicative competence, cultural awareness, and learner autonomy. Authentic materials can create meaningful, real-world learning experiences when guided through task-based instruction. Appropriate use of multimedia in English classes provides teachers with colorful images and vivid language which can be integrated into their teaching. Students will become interested in the learning process and actively participate in learning activities, thus gradually developing a wider range of skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, using real objects to create contexts is more relevant to students' lives and allows them to quickly enter the language environment and actively participate in the tasks set by the teacher. Teachers should make good use of intuitive teaching aids to guide students to participate in the classroom with their minds, which can not only increase students' interest in learning English but also enhance their ability to use the language to think. Finally, teachers can use games. If the task-based teaching method is used in the senior high school English classroom, teachers need to have a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and needs of students at this age. We will find that these students are generally under greater pressure to learn. Most of the time, a single classroom teaching is too boring, students in the learning process are easy to lose patience, and therefore, their classroom participation is not very high. In that case, interesting game tasks can stimulate students' initiative, make students actively participate in the task, and relieve their learning pressure. And during the process of playing game, teachers can better understand the learning situation of students, providing reference for teachers' subsequent design of tasks. The success of task-based reading instruction often depends on the teacher’ s ability to design engaging tasks and dynamic learning platforms. Nurhadi et al. (2025) demonstrated that task-oriented reading instruction enabled students to enhance their academic reading skills, including “identifying research issues, analyzing previous research, finding research gaps”. These findings suggest that well-designed contextual tasks can significantly deepen students’ reading comprehension and analytical abilities.

4.3. Assign after-class tasks for students

In order to consolidate and expand students' reading comprehension, teachers can assign relevant tasks after class to give them chance to solve practical problems. These tasks may include in-depth reading of the text, real-life case studies, conducting oral expression or writing exercises on related topics, and so on. By completing these tasks, students can further deepen their understanding and memory of the text. Ellis (2003) identified three major pedagogic goals in the post-task stage: (1) to provide an opportunity for performance repetition, (2) to

encourage reflection on how the task is performed, and (3) to draw attention to problematic language features. At the same time, teachers can also set some open questions or challenging after-class tasks to encourage students to explore and deal with problems on their own, and to cultivate their independent learning ability and innovative spirit. In the FLTRP Senior English Compulsory Book 1 Unit 3 "Like Father, Like Son" reading lesson, the teacher can ask students to design and perform a play after class about different real-life family conflicts presented in this reading lesson. This kind of oral expression task on a related topic allows students to try to solve real-life problems in an immersive way, and likewise allows them to show their creativity and imagination, keeping the five elements of play in mind during their performance.

5. Limitations of Task-based Teaching Method in Teaching Reading

For the application of English reading teaching in real classroom, teachers may find that the task-based language teaching method can indeed arouse students' enthusiasm for learning, and the overall learning effect has also been improved to a certain extent. However, there are still some details that need to be further improved and optimized.

First of all, in reading process, teachers need to keep the concept of the learner centered in mind. While task-based instruction is widely accepted as an effective teaching method, as it helps improve communicative competence via meaningful tasks, teachers may find it challenging to implement all components of the task framework within the constraints of limited classroom time. More importantly, teachers should be aware of cultivating students' thinking capacity from completing problem-oriented tasks. Teachers should design these tasks carefully before the class so as to help students gradually develop overall competences.

Additionally, in terms of classroom management, some teachers probably find it difficult to complete the previously designed tasks in a limited time, often 40 minutes. If there are too many tasks, teachers may spend a lot of time explaining the process of each task to the students, which then will not leave as much time as originally planned for the students to complete the tasks on their own. Therefore, there is still some room for optimization of the overall teaching process, and classroom management needs to be further strengthened. The implementation challenges of TBLT are well documented in EFL contexts. Díaz-Iturriaga (2025) found that despite TBLT being mandated in national curricula, teachers believe "effective implementation is hindered by systemic challenges, including large class sizes, grammar-based textbooks, and socioeconomic disparities". Moreover, a comprehensive review of TBLT in EFL classrooms identified persistent obstacles such as "teacher preparedness, curriculum integration, and assessment complexities". These challenges resonate with the practical difficulties observed in

40-minute reading lessons, highlighting the need for streamlined task design and enhanced teacher training.

Reading is an important part in improving students' comprehension ability. Therefore, the reasonable application of task-based teaching method in English reading teaching can fully stimulate students' learning interest and help to improve their English reading comprehension and English learning ability. Teachers should adopt specific and feasible teaching strategies when applying the task-based teaching method, so that students can form good reading habits under the guidance of the task, and develop students' independent learning and problem-solving skills.

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