

# Study on the Application of Task-Based Language Teaching in Middle School Oral English Teaching in China

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**Abstract.** Speaking is an essential aspect of English learning. It reflects the student's ability to express and comprehensively use the language. In the 21st century, international exchanges have become increasingly frequent. Therefore, English is more important as a tool of international communication. Despite this, under the long-term pressure of examinations, English teaching in our country only focuses on reading, writing, and other content closely related to testing scores, while oral English teaching is easily neglected. Even in the classrooms where oral English teaching is implemented, the teaching activities and methods are relatively monotonous and out of touch with the actual situation, resulting in students' low enthusiasm for oral English and unwillingness to speak English.

In order to solve this problem, this paper studies an effective oral English teaching method --- Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT). This teaching method abandons the disadvantages of the traditional oral English teaching method and better improves students' oral English ability. TBLT is a teaching method that gradually emerged and developed in the 1980s. In language teaching, TBLT requires language teaching based on tasks, and students should learn the language while completing the tasks. TBLT allows students to use English to complete various actual tasks related to life, study, and work, making classroom teaching real and task-oriented and cultivating students' ability to use English in practice.

## 1. Introduction

The essence of language is a communication tool; its primary function is to establish and maintain social relations between people. In an era of economic globalization, people from different countries and speaking different languages need more understanding and cooperation from others. This requires people to use spoken English as a communication tool. Only when students have mastered the oral language skills can they genuinely acquire the language. At the same time, oral English can significantly promote the teaching of English vocabulary, listening, reading, and writing. It plays a significant role in cultivating students' thinking and expressive abilities. In oral practice, by reading the text aloud and reciting the dialogue, the students can overcome the fear of oral English and gradually make themselves from daring to express themselves to being good at expressing themselves. At the same time, through dialogues and exchanges between groups and at the same table, it is possible to broaden horizons and mindsets. After long-term persistence, students can eventually

develop the habit of thinking in English and arouse their perception and imagination.

However, because the current exam only focused on reading, writing, and listening, oral English teaching in middle schools in China was not taken seriously. Even with the current oral test being included in English academic proficiency tests, many oral classroom teaching activities are very simple. Students lack interest and confidence in oral learning, and their verbal ability is generally low. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method believes that language teaching should be based on tasks, and language learners should learn the language in completing tasks. The various tasks and activities teachers design for students should be close to students' lives and conform to students' cognitive characteristics. Students can complete tasks while communicating with group classmates. Unknowingly develop oral and communicative skills to promote students to acquire language better. In this era that requires students to develop in an all-around way, implementing the requirements of curriculum standards and using TBLT can better promote the development of English teaching.

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## 2. Literature Review

Task-based Language method originated in the 1980s and was first proposed by Indian linguist Prahhu from the Bangalore region of India. He also summarized a set of teaching models during his implementation. "Task-based pedagogy emphasizes learning by doing, translating language theory and application ideas into teaching practices in the classroom." Prahhu argues, "When students focus on the task rather than the language they are using, Their learning will be more efficient" [1].

Long (1985) divides tasks into target, teaching, and classroom tasks. The tasks students need to use a foreign language outside the classroom are the target tasks. A series of complex teaching tasks for teachers and students are preparations for students' target tasks [2]. Breen (1987) believed from the perspective of linguistics: Tasks refer to a series of teaching tasks that are planned and aimed at promoting language teaching Activity. Tasks have specific goals, appropriate content, specific learning procedures, and various series of outcomes [3]. Nunan, being one of the representative tasks of task-based teaching, called Long's definition of tasks "real-world tasks" or "target tasks" and introduced "pedagogical tasks" from them. He believes that a series of tasks is the basis of task-based teaching, the use of task-based teaching is to develop language ability. Task-based teaching takes "learning by doing" as its form, focuses on meaning, emphasizes creating real situations, and uses language in real situations [4]. Lee combined task-based teaching with computers for research. Students communicate about life events in an online chat room. Teachers evaluated students' performance against content, structure, language, questions, and appropriateness criteria, and conducted questionnaires and interviews. The study believes combining TBLT and online chat significantly positively impacts English learning [5].

In 1997, Chinese scholar Professor Wu Xudong was the first to research task-based teaching and comprehensively expounded on the design of tasks, the setting of task difficulty, and the principles of task implementation in task-based English teaching [6]. Subsequently, two scholars, Xia Jimei and Kong Xianhui analyzed and introduced the concept of task-based teaching in detail and believed that the authenticity of language teaching and the socialization of classroom situations are the essences of task-based teaching [7]. This has aroused the widespread concern of foreign language teachers and university researchers. Since task-based teaching was written into the new curriculum standard promulgated by the Ministry of Education in 2001, it has been one of the research hotspots of Chinese scholars. Hu Yining made a brief exposition of task-based language teaching, and combined with his experience of participating in the compilation of "Teacher's Book for Comprehensive English Courses," he conducted a practical exploration of designing teaching activities with task-based teaching approaches [8]. Cheng Xiaotang, Lu Ziwen, and Zhong Shumei discussed several issues that should be paid attention to in the implementation of task-based language teaching based on the current understanding and implementation of task-based language

teaching [9]. Ren Ling (2019) believes combining blended and task-based teaching modes can better guide students' learning. She mentioned that teachers should make full use of the Internet to build a learning platform for students and can publish relevant content on the platform in advance so that Students have a basic understanding of the topics and content to be studied before class. In class, we can use the advantages of information technology to create teaching situations for students. After students complete their tasks, we can actively use the advantages of the network to display students' work and communicate with students [10].

To sum up, the domestic research on TBLT is short, but it has attracted a large number of second language teaching experts. However, many theoretical studies, especially the application effect research, still need to be made mature, and there are few related studies. Existing research rarely starts from the perspective of testing the application effect, so this study will focus on this aspect and conduct a more in-depth study on the application effect of TBLT in middle school oral English teaching. Most of the research and exploration of TBLT by Chinese scholars stays in the summary and practice of the existing achievements abroad, and there are few innovations. Therefore, China's research on TBLT needs to be urgently enriched.

## 3. Current Situation of Oral English Teaching in China

In 2011, the Ministry of Education formulated and issued the latest "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards ."It points out that the overall goal of the English curriculum in the compulsory education stage is to enable students to form a preliminary comprehensive language application ability through English teaching, promote mental development, and improve comprehensive humanistic quality. The formation of comprehensive language ability is based on the overall development of language skills, language knowledge, emotional attitudes, learning strategies, and cultural awareness.

Although China's new curriculum standards have put forward clear requirements on the oral English level of middle school students, due to various reasons, in reality, there are many problems in the teaching of oral English in middle schools, and there is still a big gap from the requirements of the new curriculum standards.

Some English teachers realize the importance of spoken English, and consciously strengthen the teaching of spoken English in the classroom, but their teaching methods could be more varied. Generally, teachers read extensively and students follow along. Students' initiative is not fully utilized. At the same time, students' oral learning materials are too single, only dialogues and articles in English textbooks. Students need access to authentic oral materials and extensive oral materials. This has led to a serious shortage of oral practice, and teachers need to give more guidance on oral practice skills and methods. Teachers cannot create vivid and lifelike language situations, and some even confine themselves to

reciting dictionaries and texts in a lifeless manner, resulting in a dull atmosphere in the oral classroom, and students need to be motivated to speak English.

In addition, the oral level of teachers themselves is another factor that affects oral English teaching. In the process of oral English teaching, teachers should not only set a good example for students in oral expression but also communicate with students, act as language learning instructors, and give timely and correct feedback on students' classroom performance. Then the teacher's basic skills must be excellent. There are many excellent English teachers with excellent oral English skills in our country's front line of English teaching. However, it is not ruled out that some teachers have very little chance to contact the English environment after taking part in the work, which may cause the Deterioration of their English-speaking ability.

#### **4.Challenges Facing the Implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching**

In TBLT, the task is the key to implementation, and whether the task design is good can affect the whole class's teaching effect. Teachers should consider the characteristics of students at all levels and design activities that suit the needs of students at different levels and are close to students' learning and actual life. Teachers can use the teaching materials flexibly, give students enough time for preparation and interaction, and avoid the lack of language input in the pre-task stage, which will cause students to feel difficulty when completing tasks in English and unable to speak. At the same time, the teacher should base it on the students in the class. The number and difficulty of the task should be designed according to the actual situation. If the task is simple enough, it will make the students feel uninterested, and if it is too difficult, the students will easily feel frustrated and lose interest. Difficulty should take into account the student's zone of proximal development. Walking in front of the students, the students can complete through hard work, thereby cultivating the students' sense of accomplishment and strengthening the students' learning motivation. The time arrangement of each link is also an issue that needs to be considered when designing the classroom. Although there are many unforeseen situations in the classroom, teachers should grasp the time arrangement of each link. When designing tasks, teachers should consider various situations that may arise during the task implementation process and formulate the game's rules in advance to manage the task implementation process, to avoid losing control or students communicating in Chinese. Finally, try reducing the speaking class size to ensure that every student can participate and have the opportunity to speak English.

Language learning is active. It is meaningful only if there is a natural and rich language environment. If all these want to achieve functional changes, the first thing to bear the brunt is the teacher's teaching concept. Students learn English not to get a high score in this subject but to communicate in English in their future studies and life. Having a rich theoretical system, TBLT can achieve this

by cultivating students' English communication skills. Suppose front-line teachers want to use it better. In that case, they should first change their thinking, pay attention to developing students' oral English ability, cultivate students' comprehensive, pragmatic ability, and learn relevant theoretical knowledge to guide their practice. The teacher's instructions should be clear and precise, which also puts forward requirements for the teacher's oral English. The accent, pronunciation, and intonation should be standard to communicate effectively with the students and set an example for them. When using TBLT, teachers need to manage the classroom well and, at the same time, have good teaching ability to ensure the implementation of task-based teaching. When designing tasks, teachers also need to have relevant professional knowledge. The difficulty is further increased.

#### **5.Conclusion**

Since the 1980s, TBLT has been considered one of the more promising communicative methods and has been widely recognized and supported in foreign language teaching. This paper argues that TBLT is of great significance in developing middle school students English verbal ability, enabling them to become fluent in spoken English through continuous attempts and enabling them to use English in natural environments. Because language is used for communication, speaking English should result from learning English. Students believe TBLT can improve their interest in oral English. They like to complete the tasks in class and show the results with the group classmates, which strengthens the group's cooperation and enhances their self-confidence. Generally speaking, students can speak English more bravely. Therefore, teachers should design as many tasks as possible for students during the teaching process. Assessing students' speaking proficiency by assessing the results of implementing tasks can help develop students' English speaking skills. Many students who practiced traditional grammar could have learned oral English better. TBLT changed this traditional method and provided a new and effective teaching method. Task-based teaching encourages students to try to speak any English they can remember, not to be afraid of failure and correction, and to actively take charge of their learning both in and out of the classroom.

TBLT's effect on oral English teaching in middle schools is remarkable. It can stimulate students' enthusiasm and initiative and significantly improve their oral English performance, making teachers teach and evaluate more efficiently and effectively. Compared with the traditional teaching method, TBLT highlights the central position of the students and can effectively play the leading role of the teachers. In order to improve classroom efficiency, stimulate students' potential, and improve students' oral English scores and levels.

TBLT encountered many difficulties in the process of implementation. For example, the teacher needed help to grasp the task's difficulty accurately, and the task design exceeded the current knowledge level of the students or needed to be more complex to improve students' oral

English ability. Students pursue results too much in the process of carrying out tasks, ignoring the generation of knowledge and the improvement of oral English skills in the process. Teachers still need to learn continuously. The specific content of each part should be determined according to the actual situation of the students and the teaching content.

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