

Discussion on the Applicability of Task-Based Language Teaching in Online English teaching

Jingyi Wan

China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, China

Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education put forward the policy of "Keep Learning amid Class Suspension", so online teaching has become the main way for schools at all levels to carry out teaching activities. As one of the mainstream teaching methods in China, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been closely concerned by researchers and widely used by front-line teachers in the past 20 years. As a teaching method, TBLT has also been applied in online English teaching. Therefore, what is the applicability of TBLT in online English teaching? This article will discuss it by analyzing the advantages and challenges faced by TBLT in online English teaching.

Keywords

Task-Based Language Teaching, Online English teaching.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

At present, China is in the era of educational informationization with the rapid development of big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, and online teaching has been paid more and more attention in recent years. *Senior High School English Curriculum Standard 2017 Edition Revised in 2020* emphasizes that senior high school English curriculum should pay attention to the reform of teaching mode and learning mode under the background of modern information technology, and make full use of information technology to promote the deep integration of information technology and subject teaching. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education put forward the policy of "Keep Learning amid Class Suspension", and online teaching has become the main way for schools at all levels to carry out teaching activities. Within a short period of time, online teaching spread all over the country and the whole education system showed a new education ecology, which is both a challenge and an opportunity for online English teaching.

As one of the mainstream teaching methods in China, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been closely concerned by researchers and widely used by front-line teachers in the past 20 years. However, in the process of practical application of task-based teaching methods, some front-line teachers still have four common problems: unclear understanding of tasks and traditional practice activities are also labeled as TBLT; cutting tasks into parts and over-emphasizing the input of language forms; unclear role and orientation of teachers, either completely learner-centered or completely teacher-centered; lack of support system and evaluation system for implementing TBLT. (Chenwei,2022) She emphasized that teachers should grasp the relationship between meaning and form, knowledge input and context creation, improve the evaluation and support system, use educational technology to assist teaching, and build a good ecology of English task-based teaching methods. Is the TBLT applicable to online teaching? This article will figure it out by analyzing the advantages and challenges faced by TBLT in online English teaching.

1.2. Concept definition

1.2.1. Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT is a further development of Communicative Language Teaching. It shares the same beliefs, as language should be learned as close as possible to how it is used in real life. It has stressed the importance to combine form-focused teaching with communication-focused teaching. (Wangqiang,2006)

According to different perspectives, the definition of the task is also varied in different ways. Tasks are activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. (Willis,1996) The tasks were those language use activities in which learners can convey meaning and develop language use ability. (Ellis,2003) Through the scholars' definitions of tasks, we can also conclude that tasks focus on language meaning. To accomplish the task requires communication, and in the process of communication and exchange both students and teachers need to focus on the meaning of language rather than the form of language.

1.2.2. Online Teaching

There is no detailed definition for online teaching. Researchers mostly equate online teaching with online education, distance education or online learning. Specifically speaking, online teaching refers to a teaching form that transfers traditional classrooms to online classrooms for teaching. It refers to the teaching work carried out in the form of 'Recording + Online Q&A' based on a certain platform (such as WeChat, Tencent meetings, Dingding, etc.).

The online teaching mode under the epidemic situation is characterized by the synchronization of teachers and students in different places, that is, teachers and students are separated in space, but they are in the same time — teachers and students carry out on-site teaching, self-study and rest at the same time.

2. Challenges Faced By TBLT in Online English Teaching

2.1. Challenges in designing TBLT Syllabus

Balancing the role of the textbook and the TBLT Syllabus is a delicate issue in the online context. Long and Crookes (1985) proposed that a TBLT Syllabus should start with needs analysis. This is relatively easy to achieve in most offline foreign language classes where interaction with students is the core. In online teaching that lacks interaction with students, textbooks are the main source of TBLT Syllabus. Because our students may spend a lot of time learning textbooks independently in some online teaching, when designing task-based syllabus, we need to realize that textbooks must specify the design of TBLT Syllabus. It is a huge challenge to combine TBLT Syllabus with textbooks and help students see the connection between the two.

2.2. Challenges in carrying out Collaborative Tasks

Collaborative task is an important task form to stimulate students' interest in learning and improve students' vitality. It is also a common teaching method in TBLT. The inflexibility of classroom arrangement made it hard to promote positive group dynamics, which makes the classroom dull. In the offline classroom, teachers can overcome the inflexibility of classroom arrangement through moving the chairs around or moving the students around, which can help teachers create conditions for collaborative tasks. However, in online teaching, students are in the same cyberspace. Although teachers can group students, how students can carry out collaborative tasks after grouping, how to promote the tasks and how efficiently they carry out the tasks are all worth thinking about.

2.3. Challenges posed by Network Latency

TBLT requires teachers to play a facilitative role and to trust students to engage in interaction while working on communicative tasks. Thus, the teacher needs to be tolerant of silence and give students time to sort out things among themselves. However, the delay of sound transmission on the Internet gave the teachers a hard time in intervening at the right moment. (Lai C, Zhao Y, Wang J, 2011) Teachers tended to be less tolerant of silence because of the lack of direct sound feedback perception, which may affect the process of students carrying out tasks. The time wasted due to the lack of feedback and the delay in sound transmission makes teachers worried about the efficiency of teaching. They need to constantly restrain themselves and avoid excessive interruption and guidance.

2.4. Challenges in Teaching in English

In online teaching, it is difficult to maintain extensive use of the target language. In fact, most front-line teachers are fully capable of carrying out all English lessons. They are under little pressure to use as much target language as possible, but the extensive use of target language often frustrate students and is not conducive to building rapport with students. In online teaching, due to the poor quality of sound transmission and the delay of sound transmission, the classroom anxiety brought to students by English teaching will be amplified. Therefore, teachers need to seriously consider the necessity of carrying out all English lessons, and try to use visual materials to assist their English teaching.

3. Advantages of TBLT in online English Teaching

3.1. Online teaching facilitates personalized teaching

Online teaching can provide a more convenient place for student-centered and personalized teaching. When students carry out input tasks, teachers can give them the role of presenters and require them to highlight the problems they have in completing tasks. In this way, teachers can deeply observe the students' learning process and understand the problems encountered by students at various stages of carrying out tasks. According to different problems, teachers can provide personalized guidance to each student, so as to better promote the development of students. In addition, in online teaching, students can send messages to teachers at any time through chat boxes. Teachers can learn about students' real-time learning through their messages, and can provide personalized guidance according to the messages sent by students.

3.2. Online teaching can help reduce students' anxiety in collaborative tasks

On the one hand, in online teaching, students do not face each other directly when communicating. During the task presentation stage, students will not directly face teachers and classmates, which can reduce the anxiety caused by other people's attention. At the same time, the anonymous function provided by the online environment can improve students' enthusiasm in collaborative tasks, and allow some students to boldly put forward opinions and suggestions about tasks. On the other hand, the unclear task instructions often brings anxiety to students. In online teaching, teachers can display task requirements to students in the form of text while providing oral instructions, which is conducive to students to better understand task requirements and reduce task anxiety.

3.3. Online teaching facilitates Learning Resource Sharing

Resource sharing is one of the characteristics of the Internet. Teachers often provide students with various resources in the process of task-based teaching. In the online environment, it is very convenient to share various resources. Teachers can take advantage of the convenience to provide different forms of learning resources before, during and after the task. At the same time, the online environment can also facilitate the display and sharing of students' task results, and

facilitate mutual evaluation among students, so as to better promote the common development of students.

4. Conclusion

This article mainly discusses the challenges faced by task-based teaching methods in online teaching and its advantages. Specifically speaking the challenges mainly include designing TBLT Syllabus, carrying out Collaborative Tasks, Network Latency and exclusive use of Target Language. The advantages of TBLT in online English teaching mainly include that it can facilitate personalized teaching, help reduce students' anxiety in collaborative tasks and facilitate learning resource sharing. Through the discussion of challenges and advantages, we can find that TBLT is applicable in online English teaching, but it puts forward some requirements for students and teachers as well as the teaching environment. In short, it puts forward higher requirements for teachers in terms of teaching design, teaching management, teaching beliefs and computer using skills, etc.; it puts forward higher requirements for students in terms of learning consciousness and learning strategies; and puts forward more requirements for the teaching environment in terms of teaching equipment and the stability of network.

References

- [1] Howatt, A. P. R. 1984. *A History of English Language Teaching* [M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [2] Willis, J. (1996). *A Framework for Task-based Learning* Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- [3] Ellis, R. 2003. *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching* [M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [4] Nunan, D. 2002. The impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region [J]. *TESOL Quarterly* 37: 589-613.
- [5] Lai C, Zhao Y, Wang J. Task-based language teaching in online foreign language classrooms[J]. *The Modern Language Journal*, 2011, 95: 81-103.
- [6] Long, M., & Crookes, G. (1985). Three approaches to task-based syllabus design. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26, 27-56.
- [7] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. *English Curriculum Standard for General High Schools (2017 Edition Revised in 2020)* [S]. Beijing: People's Education Publishing House, 2020.
- [8] Xing Wei. The bias and innovation of task-based teaching method--Taking English teaching as an example [J]. *SH Research*.2022(04):48-53.DOI:10.16194/j.cnki.31-1059/g4.2022.04.008.
- [9] Wang Q. *English Teaching Methodology Tutorial* [M]. Beijing:Higher Education Press,2006.
- [10] Tang Meihua. Comparison of "output-oriented method" and "task-based teaching method": a case study of unit teaching design of English intensive reading course[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching*.2020,41(01):65-69.DOI:10.16362/j.cnki.cn61-1023/h.2020.01.013.
- [11] Zhu Yan, Shu Dingfang. A study of teacher beliefs and teacher-dominant discourse in task-based language teaching[J]. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2017,40(01):125-136+147.
- [12] Wu Wen, Pan Kangming. Research on task-based language teaching in Asian context[J]. *Modern Foreign Languages*.2012,35(03):312-318+330.
- [13] Guan Yuhua ,Zheng Jiamao. Teacher Behavior in Multimedia Network Teaching Environment[J]. *China Higher Education*,2002(24):30-31.

- [14] Wang Pan. An investigation of the impact of online teaching on high school English teachers' beliefs [D]. Hebei Normal University,2021.DOI:10.27110/d.cnki.ghsfu.2021.000279.
- [15] Xiang Weiwei. A Study on the Experience and Implications of Online Teaching of Civics and Politics Classes in Secondary Schools during the Epidemic [D]. Central China Normal University,2021.
- [16] Dong Yutong. A Study on the Application of Task-based Teaching Method in Teaching English Tenses to Elementary School Students [D]. Shanghai International Studies University, 2021. DOI:10.27316/d.cnki.gswyu.2021.000624.