

Study on the Application of Task-Based Language Teaching in Middle School English Reading

Hongbin Li

Taishan University, Taian 271000, China

Abstract: Against the backdrop of a new round of curriculum reform of basic education, the English teachers in middle school should pay attention to studying the student-centered teaching method in order to help students to acquire English knowledge in a deeper way, to develop students' core competences and to lay a solid foundation for students' future English learning. This thesis introduces the Task-based Language Teaching method and represents its practical use in English reading class. In doing so, it aims to find out the teaching methods suitable for students in middle school class so as to steadily improve the teaching quality.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching; Reading Teaching; Senior English; Teaching Design.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In recent years, the Core Competencies have turned into a hot topic in the basic education and changes in course teaching have been brought about by the change of the teaching goal of subject curriculum education [1]. In terms of the English subject, educational objectives include both basic knowledge and the cultivation of the Core Competencies of the four disciplines. According to the English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School (2022 edition), students are required to establish their approach to thinking, cultivate the quality of thinking and form their own understanding of culture when they analyze and solve problems of all kinds. Finally, they can learn how to learn and enjoy learning.

For China's students in middle school, English is a compulsory subject. For teachers in middle school, English reading is an important part in English teaching. The cultivation of students' language ability really matters as a result of the close relationship between enhancing students' ability and cultivating the Core Competencies. Nowadays, a growing number of teachers have employed Task-based Teaching in English reading class. The current situation of cultivation of English reading class is how reading teaching method is applied, what problems remain to exist in reality and how to improve the problems, etc. [1]. Given these questions, this paper aims to introduce the Task-based Teaching method applied in English reading class.

1.2. The Significance of the Study

According to the Core Competencies in English subject from English Curriculum Standards (2022 edition), this thesis aims to introduce the Task-based Teaching method, find out the existing problems and enrich reading teaching methods. In doing so, it aims to make the English reading teaching more effective. Based on this thesis, the teacher can have a clearer understanding of the Tasked-based teaching method. Therefore, this thesis can not only upgrade English teachers' teaching methods, but can also enhance their teaching ability.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Problem of Traditional English Teaching

Each language has its unique background and its development is closely linked to its specific social background, traditions, cultures and the political situation. English learning is a kind of cross-cultural learning, and many students have difficulty in comprehending the reading text as a lack of related cultural background and vocabulary. As a result of the differences between Eastern culture and Western culture, students are prone to have prejudice when comprehending the passage. The traditional reading methods stress rote learning instead of flexible reading methods and critical thinking. Therefore, students can't comprehend the passage or the knowledge well. Also, the traditional approach can not meet the desired teaching results. Here are some problems with traditional English teaching in practical use.

(1) Students can not well find the difference and connection between the words or phrases with similar structure.

(2) Students have insufficient understanding of logical relations in passages. For example, some prepositions are used to connect paragraphs and some prepositions are used to represent causal relations, transitional phrases or other logical relationships between sentences and paragraphs.

(3) Students are poor in mastering the strategies for reasoning and understanding the central idea. The central idea of an article is closely related to the general idea of each paragraph and can also be identified through the most frequently used words or phrases.

(4) Students lack the behaviour of predicting and validating the text in context. This kind of ability is closely linked to students' life experiences and background knowledge, and the lack of the ability is related to the inability to correctly understand and summarize the meaning of the context [4].

The traditional teaching method is a teacher-centered, grammar-based approach that analyses the text word by word. This kind of method demonstrates the Humpty Dumpty Effect, which means the teacher divides the passage into several parts and analyses the grammar points and sentence structure as the first step. However, the divided passage cannot be restored [4]. Also, the traditional teaching methods stress the application

of the Grammar Translation Method, In reading class, this kind of teaching method only emphasizes teaching language knowledge and ignores the cultivation of students' interactive ability. It only puts the emphasis on the translation of the English context but ignores the practical language communication. In addition, this traditional method only cares about the accuracy of the translation instead of the fluency of the language use.

2.2. The Definition of the Task-Based Teaching

Nunan (1989) believes that as a teaching method, TBLT has a structure, which contains goals, input, activity, teachers' and students' roles, teaching environment and other elements [2]. TBLT is, in essence, a further development of Communicative Language Teaching. It emphasizes the communication of information between teachers and students in teaching activities. These activities are closely linked to students' real life. In the process of engaging in conversational interaction, students can generate language acquisition. Therefore, TBLT is quite different from the traditional teaching method.

To put it simply, learn for the sake of use, learn from use, and then use [2]. It is a student-centered, task-oriented method and teachers design various teaching activities from the perspective of students "learning". Tasks are activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve a language acquisition. When students complete the tasks, they can learn how to use the language in a gradual way. To put it another way, with tasks as carrier and to finish the task as the power, students can integrate and use knowledge and skill by the tasks of listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to the TBLT method, both the cultivation of students' communicative ability and their comprehensive use of language knowledge are equally important. Therefore, teachers should design tasks to emphasize more on students' real language application ability rather than just mechanical exercises.

3. Instructional Design

3.1. Analysis of Teaching Material

This article is excerpted from Unit 1 of the Compulsory Book 4 of People's Education Press High School English. The theme of that passage is about "man and society" and the topic is about an outstanding woman, Jane Goodall. The passage makes an introduction about her lifelong research about chimps in East Africa as seen in her research methods, research findings and achievements. In doing so, it aims to show her diligence, perseverance, kindness and courage and shows the great achievements of women.

This is a narrative essay. The article consists of four paragraphs, introducing Jane Goodall's achievement in studying the chimps. The combination of the text and the pictures in the book helps students to have a better understanding of Jane's daily work.

Through the description of Jane's contribution, the author aims to show that Jane's great achievement in studying animals and contribution to human's impression on chimps her perseverance and responsibility in her pursuit.

3.2. Analysis of Students

There are 30 students in my class. Most of the them in Grade 9 have previewed the words in the last class, so it is not difficult for them to know the meaning of the words. However, for a small number of students, their language foundation is

poor and they need to practice more.

In this class, most of them have learned the basic reading skills such as skimming and scanning. However, they read very slowly and it is difficult for them to guess the meaning of a new word.

As most students know little about the chimps before, with the introduction of this passage, students can change their impression on chimps, which helps them to understand the way of critical thinking.

As they know little about the life direction, the introduction of Jane's contribution may help to establish a model of their life and help students to appreciate the spirit of perseverance and responsibility in studying.

3.3. Teaching Objectives

1) Master the meaning and usage of the words and phrases including observe, record, respect, move off, lead a...life, have... in common;

2) Use skimming and scanning to get the main idea and the detailed information respectively;

3) Work and learn with other partners in a cooperative way to talk about Jane's achievements and her qualities.

4) Regard Jane as a model, and know that every one has equal rights to achieve one's dream in life with perseverance and a responsible attitude no matter one is female or male.

3.4. Teaching Procedures

(1) Warming up:

Task 1: Watch Pictures:

Watch some pictures of women who have great achievements such as Wu Zetian, Hua Mulan, Tu Youyou, wife of Sun Yat-sen and Yang Jiang.

Task 2: Free talk: Talk about their common ground.

(Design Purpose: Lead students to the topic that woman can make great achievements.)

(2) Pre-reading

Task 3: Play a video about Jane's communication with the chimps and then guide students to predict the content by observing the picture in the passage.

(Design Purpose: By watching relevant videos about the communication between Jane and animals students can guess the main idea of the passage. Also, it can foster their ability to guess the main idea of a passage before reading.)

(3) While-reading

Task 4: Skim the passage and get the main idea of the passage.

(Design Purpose: Use the skimming method to guide students to have a comprehensive understanding of the passage. The ability to get the main idea of the passage is a foundation of students' reading ability. Also, that can provide a clear structure for the following class activities.)

Task 5:

Intensive reading

Read paragraph 1 carefully and find out what they did throughout the day then fill in the blank in the mind map, including the time, location, purpose, development and result.

Read paragraph 2 and find out Jane's three discoveries about chimps, then finish the mind map.

Read paragraph 3 carefully and identify Jane's attitude towards wildlife protection and her achievements.

(Design Purpose: Teacher guides students to read paragraph by paragraph and designs different reading tasks after every paragraph. The tasks become more difficult one by one. In resolving the tasks, students can deepen their

understanding of the passage and enhance their capacity for intensive reading.)

Post-reading

Task 6: Pick out some useful expressions and important language points such as observe, record, respect, move off, lead a...life, have... in common. Then guide students to guess the meaning according to the context.

(Design Purpose: By picking out the important words and phrases, students can know the meaning of some important words.)

Task 7: Pair work:

Suppose you are a reporter interviewing Jane Goodall about her thoughts and discoveries about chimps and her achievements

(Design Purpose: Work and learn with other partners in a cooperative way to talk about Jane's achievements and her qualities.)

Task 8: Thinking and Talking:

Discuss what quality you can learn from Jane. More importantly, talk about how these good qualities guide you in your career.

(Design Purpose: By group talking, students can have an emotional sublimation. In doing so, it aims to deepen students' understanding that everyone can make achievements like Jane.)

Summary:

Guide the students to review the key words in the text.

Freely discuss what we have learned from Jane after learning this passage.

(Design Purpose: By group talking, students can have an emotional sublimation. In doing so, it aims to deepen students' understanding of the achievements of Jane and helps to form their own life value and gender value.)

Homework:

Compulsory:

Write a passage about the life of Jane Goodall (at least 80 words)

Optional:

Find more information about other women's contributions to society and make a presentation in the next class.

(Design Purpose: By completing the compulsory homework students can consolidate the language knowledge learned in this class and put the knowledge into effective use.

By completing the optional homework students can learn more that even anyone no matter men or women has equal rights to make their dreams come true as long as they work hard like Jane.)

Table 1. Checklist:

| Things I can do | Self-assessment | Peer-Assessment | Teacher-Assessment |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| I have mastered the meaning and usage of the words and phrases. | | | |
| I can use skimming and scanning to get the main idea and the detailed information respectively. | | | |
| I can work and learn with other partners in a cooperative way to talk about Jane's achievements and her qualities. | | | |
| I have regarded Jane as a model, and know that everyone has equal rights to achieve his or her dream in life with perseverance and a responsible attitude no matter one is female or male. | | | |

4. Teaching Reflection

Shining Points:

1) The Integration of Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

This lesson not only includes "teaching", "learning", but also includes evaluation, which is conducive to timely evaluate students' learning situation. This assessment adopts a checklist format, which can make an evaluation from three perspectives, including self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation. The assessment is also associated with learning objectives and core competencies of this lesson. It can be described as comprehensive, multi-level, and clear and easy to understand.

2) The Variety of Class Tasks.

Ranging from the introduction of pre-reading video clips, free talk discussions, to group work and role-play, all these activities reflect a variety of classroom teaching activities, which are conducive to improving the classroom atmosphere and cultivating students' listening and speaking abilities.

3) The Close Connection Between Teaching Objectives and Checklist and Teaching Procedures.

The objectives are clear, and the evaluation criteria are closely aligned with both the teaching procedures and teaching objectives.

(2) Shortcomings:

1) The hierarchy and diversity of the questions set in reading need to be improved.

Ninth grade students should mainly cultivate two reading

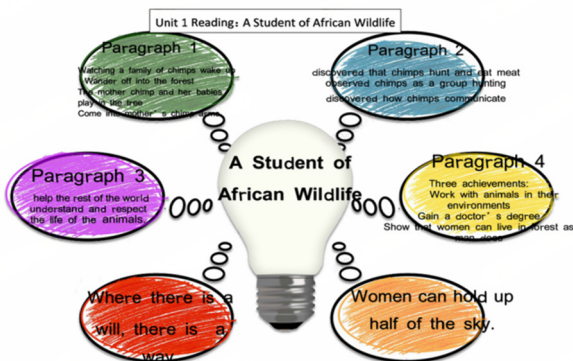


Fig 1. Blackboard Design

skills: scanning and skimming. Although the guidance and question are in line with the actual situation of students, it is worth noting that reading comprehension questions are generally divided into three levels: literal comprehension level questions, explanatory level questions, and critical or creative questions. In view of this, I should design questions that are thought-provoking and comprehensive. The forms should be diverse, such as table format, fill-in-the-blank, and question-and-answer format.

Improvement measures:

Redesign the multiple questions originally set in scanning into two tasks. The first task is a table format question and the second task is a connected question, which not only reflects the hierarchical nature of the questions but also conforms to the characteristics of diversity. The plan is as follows:

Table 2. A: Read paragraph 1 and fill in the blanks.

| time | location | characters |
|------|----------|------------|
| | | |

B: What is the purpose and result of the group travel with Jane?

2) The design of teaching tasks is not progressive enough.

The purpose of a pre-reading task "Guess the main idea of this passage according to the pictures" is to encourage students to use guessing strategies to infer the main idea of the article. However, while this strategy is not a problem, the issue lies in its implementation. It is too difficult to guess the main idea based only on a video clip and one picture. It is also not in line with the "step-by-step" principle of task design.

Improvement measures:

This task should be divided into two steps. First, ask students to read the beginnings of each paragraph and the end of the last paragraph. Then, let students guess the main idea of the article. This will not go against the original intention of

the task and will greatly reduce its difficulty.

5. Conclusion

With the development of society and the improvement of international exchange, there is an increasing need for the application of English among the public. Reading is one of the most important approaches to cultivate English skills. In teaching English reading, the task-based teaching method can effectively combine language knowledge with interactive abilities. The questions and tasks designed by teachers can stimulate students' motivation and initiative. Also, TBLT method can promote mutual learning among students. Moreover, students can comprehend the meaning of the context in a deeper way, master the main idea of the passage and gradually develop their sound reading habits. Finally, students can improve their ability to update their knowledge and enhance their reading proficiency.

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