

Analysis of the Advantages and Challenges Concerning the Implementation of TBLT into EFL Context of China

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Abstract: Task-based language teaching, as one of the four main English teaching methods in China, has its unique advantages. In a task-based teaching, students actually learn language by doing interesting things relevant to their daily life and can hence get them involved physically and emotionally. Which, to some degree, fits the teaching idea of our country that we should enable students to develop their practical ability to use language through task-centered teaching approach especially after the appearance of NECS in 2017. However, there still exists some challenges or problems facing task-based approach and its implementation in a Chinese context where English is treated as a foreign language to learn (EFL). Thus, this paper aims to present these problems at the macro and micro perspectives. Besides, this paper also hopes to offer some pertinent suggestions on how we should respond to task-based method dialectically based on the enlightenment of relevant literature.

Keywords: TBLT; English teaching; Implementation; Benefits; Challenges.

1. Introduction

In the past two decades, task-based language teaching has attracted an increasing amount of interest for educational researchers and relevant practitioners. Task-based language teaching refers to a type of language teaching approach which centers on using various authentic tasks as the main tool in language teaching and emphasizes the use of purposeful and functional language (Ellis 2009). In 2017, the Ministry of Education issued the National English Curriculum Standard for senior high school emphasizing that English classroom should become a place where the students can be guided to cultivate their key competence through a series of English learning activities such as learning comprehension, applied practice and transferring innovation.

In other words, the main focus is to cultivate students' comprehensive language ability to perceive, experience, practice, participate, cooperate with others in various tasks. Which is in line with the core idea of TBLT and favored by many researchers and practitioners. And majority of them has done a lot of work to implement this method into English classroom under Chinese context. Thus there is no doubt that TBLT can be a beneficial teaching method when implemented in a EFL context to some extent such as China. While this method is not that well-implemented in elementary and secondary school practice due to some reasons. Most of the English teachers still adopts the traditional presentation-practice-production method. In the following part, the author will discuss the benefits of TBLT when applied into classroom in China, and also analyze these problems facing the implementation of TBLT at the macro and micro levels.

2. Benefits of the Implementation of TBLT into EFL Classroom

Based on assumptions of TBLT, as teachers, we can specify real and viable tasks to organize students' activities so that they can not only acquire language knowledge, but their communicative ability can also be improved if applied properly.

During TBLT, students are allowed to get to know the goals of the task they need to finish. Which can improve students' learning autonomy in some way. For example, before playing word guessing game, we can tell students that the aim of this task to practice ways of questioning and the detailed content is to guess the answers.

Besides, we can provide students with varied topics and tasks during TBLT. Changes about topic can be made according to various teaching request in the classroom so that students can also feel interested, motivated and engaged in different activities.

Furthermore, TBLT encourages play-acting among groups. Under the premise of clear learning goals, we can encourage students to imagine, exert what they have learned to engage in a real or simulated context without unduly concentrating on how they say it.

In addition, there is a information gap in Task-based language teaching. Students can be given much time to demonstrate their unique personality by sharing their willingness, experience, opinions or hobbies with others in an open-ended task. Such as evaluation for somebody or something, the design of certain plan. And it is worth noting that teachers acting as a facilitator at this moment need to provide some open-ended clues to help students organize their thoughts when confronted with problems.

To sum up, language learning is rooted in language activities. And the design of task is compulsory for students to carry out different activities. Based on the key ideas of TBLT, we can, according to students' language competence, specific task and topic, design a series of tasks to create a authentic environment for interaction so that students can better learn things by doing.

3. Challenges for the Implementation of TBLT into EFL Classroom

TBLT originates from a second language learning context where the key idea is to learn by doing things that occur in daily life (Carless, 2007; Shehadeh & Coombe, 2012), such idea cannot be obtained in a situation where the focus is

language knowledge transmission and accumulation. TBLT emphasizes language communication and the use of language knowledge and skills to achieve communicative functions (Richards & Rodgers, 2008). However, there are some factors that may hinder the implementation of TBLT in Chinese context. And we will discuss them from macro and micro levels.

3.1. Challenges facing the implementation of TBLT into EFL classroom at macro levels

First of all, in terms of the learning culture in Chinese classroom, there is a difference between Chinese classroom and Western classroom. In Western culture, students can use language for genuine communication and the output of language is emphasized in classroom. While in a traditional Chinese classroom, teachers are still the center of the whole class. Students, on the contrary, are asked to memorize things without chances to express what they really want to say, and the preferred ways of learning for Chinese students are rote-learning, memorization and so on. Which leaves students in a very passive condition and they have to receive everything their teachers transmit and can only to answer questions when asked to do so.

Second, language learning context may also be one of the factors that influences the implementation of TBLT (Chunyan LIU & Rui GUO, 2020). In China, English is taught as a foreign language, and the classroom may be the major place for students to learn and encounter various English exposure. However, TBLT originates from a second language context. In second language context, learning is informal without consciously underlying grammatical rules and learning context is not confined in classrooms but in daily communication. Which enables students cultivate their real language use and communicative ability. Thus a huge difference exists between foreign language learning and second language learning in what is learned and how it is learned.

Third, the exam-oriented culture in China may also account for the challenge facing the implementation of TBLT. In our country, many students tend to study under the pressure of various examinations especially College Entrance Examination. In traditional classroom, teachers focus more on how to improve students' test scores so that they can finish their teaching task as required. Besides, as for the TBLT, it mainly focus on improving students' actual ability to use language for daily communication context or solve problem. Which is not easy to assess according to our country's English curriculum. And for the English test, it's more about testing the English knowledge and language skills they have learned from the textbook. Therefore, sometimes, other aspects of language competence such as oral English are usually neglected and thus result in the phenomenon of "dumb English" for many students learning English in China. In this way, it is not hard to see why the implementation of TBLT into Chinese classroom is a big problem.

Forth, in terms of the researches on Task-based language teaching, there is also a gap. Most of the researches mainly concentrate on the introduction of some key theoretical ideas of TBLT. In addition, some researches just imitate the foreign language teaching under the theory of Task-based approach directly without considering the practical education environment in China. As discussed above, the class culture of English learning in China is totally different from that of Western countries. As a consequence, as the researchers and

practitioners in relevant areas may need to improve their awareness to localize Task-based language approach so that it can be better utilized in Chinese classroom.

3.2. Challenges facing the implementation of TBLT at micro levels

The NECS mentions that the implementation and evaluation of senior high school need to design authentic, real-life and task-driven context. While the voice of disapproval still exists in the process of implementing TBLT into English classroom, many front-line teachers may have some misunderstanding of the comprehension and application for Task-based language teaching.

First of all, some of the teachers think TBLT does not put emphasis on syntax structures. The mainstream opinion of English teaching holds that the best way to learn language is the mastery of its forms. And then students can better learn meaning expressed by the language form. While the supporter of TBLT believes that the expression of meaning is much more important than the structure itself. During this process, students can automatically master the structures and rules as long as the goal of authentic communication is achieved. Therefore, some teachers mistakenly think Task-based language approach may not help students to master language patterns and structures effectively. Actually, Task-based language approach pays equal attention to the form and communicative function as well. Language form can also be deemed as meaning to some extent. TBLT should aim to help students perceive the relation between form and meaning through a series of task contexts.

Besides, some teachers hold that Task-based language approach is not that efficient to teach grammar, vocabulary. In our country, the learning of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are significant parts of English learning. Which is also the major content for a series of examinations. On the other hand, Task-based language approach is mainly about communication, activities and tasks. Thus these teachers don't think they have much time for students to participate in communicative practice.

In fact, Task-based language approach includes not only non-focused tasks but also focused ones such as grammar-oriented TBLT syllabus. Language forms can be emphasized through whole task-based teaching procedures. Which can be divided into three stages: pre-task phase, task phase and post-task phase. According to Jia Hongjun(2014), the scholar argues that English vocabulary learning can be segmented into three parts. that is, pre-vocabulary learning stage, while-learning stage and post-learning for consolidation stage. Hence, Task-based language approach surely can focus on certain language knowledge which is in line with the test request.

Additionally, some teachers don't think Task-based approach is as efficient as the traditional approach in language teaching. Although there have been many cases which justified Task-based language approach is superior to traditional teaching methods in language fluency and complexity, accuracy is also an important part students need to focus on in language learning. For those teachers who have get used to presentation-practice-production teaching model, the three teaching stages fits the traditional assessment model of students' language performance. While, Task-based language approach is not at the opposite of the traditional teaching model. Inversely, TBLT centers on the genuineness of language learning and tries to create a learning context

relevant to students' daily life such as through magazine, newspaper or chart instead of taking textbook as the restraint of learning.

The next misunderstanding is that some teachers believe the design of context in TBLT is so simpler that students can hardly acquire the knowledge they really need. In TBLT, it stresses the genuineness and authenticity in terms of context design in task. Many teachers don't think task itself is valuable and they argue that students can only bring with them insufficient language use when participating in tasks as a result of different language proficiency of students. In the end, students can't get as much progress as they think and it's a total waste of time. As for this misunderstanding, Xin Wei(2022) suggests that the design of task-based context is to create a situation where the learners can experience, interact and use various resources at hand to achieve an outcome. Such task can be focused or non-focused. Besides, the design of task also influence the accuracy, fluency, complexity for language use. To sum up, TBLT not only focus on students' ability to interact with others in real task-based context but also focus on the language output. Just because this kind of interaction owns its limitation does not mean it is useless if applied into classroom.

4. Conclusion

Although Task-based language teaching now faces various challenges, it is still feasible in foreign language context of China in some aspects. As foreign language learning owns its unique regularity, TBLT attaches importance to both the accuracy of forms and communicative fluency in daily life context. And therefore, it cannot be seen as a kind of idea to learn or critique in a easy way. Rather, we are supposed to practice and reflect on a regular basis so as improve our language teaching proficiency. In recent years. English teaching researches have centered on "post method" era. That is to say, many scholars or researchers hold the opinion that there does not exist the best teaching method at all. There are actually various teaching methods in addition to TBLT. Each kind of the method share its advantages and disadvantages. In teaching practice, it is advisable that teachers adopt various teaching beliefs or approaches derived from various teaching methodologies.

In addition, when combining these feasible approaches, these teachers also need to consider the key teaching and

learning idea from current National English Curriculum so as to make sure that students' learning occurs. Which is the ultimate goal of a class. Everything teachers have done is for students' learning and they have to play multi-role in the whole teaching process. To conclude, in terms of the TBLT, if applied properly, can contribute to injecting new energy and vitality into traditional English classroom (Liu Xichun,2022). As teachers, we can design all kinds of learning tasks through integrating learning content and choose the topic students are interested in. And then we can guide students to discover and solve problem using language in a process of open-ended communication. Which can be conducive for students' comprehensive language ability and the cultivation of the key competence.

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