

# A Discussion on the Application of Task-based Teaching Method in High School English Reading Teaching

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## Abstract

Task-based teaching method is more and more widely used in high school English reading teaching, and teachers should pay attention to its application principles and strategies when using this teaching method. In this paper, for example, Unit 2 Healthy Eating, a compulsory part of the Humanistic Version, is divided into three parts: pre-reading, reading and post-reading, and tasks are set in each part. The tasks in the pre-reading section are to allow students to have a brief review of the content of the previous lesson and to introduce the reading topic of this lesson; the tasks in the reading section are to allow students to understand and analyze the structure and content of the text in depth, and the importance of the activities in the reading section can be appreciated from the number of tasks designed; and the tasks in the post-reading section are to allow students to produce an effective output of the learning in this lesson. Task-based teaching can break down the difficulty of junior high school students' English reading learning, let students experience the fun of collaboration with group cooperation, enliven the classroom atmosphere, and make the classroom sessions closely connected.

## Keywords

Task-based Teaching Method; High School English Teaching.

## 1. Introduction

Traditional university English reading teaching in China places greater emphasis on the role of personal thoughts and experiences in extracting information from reading, rather than on obtaining information about problems from real society, real purposes, and real interactions. Limited to the cognitive analysis of the written language, reading is described as a bottom-up operation in which the reader progressively parses the author's intended message through the language language platform, and reading is referred to as a decoding process that reconstructs the author's ideas, whereas dyslexia is considered to be a literal decoding disorder, an impairment of the acquisition of meaning from the printed symbols. Traditional reading instruction is usually based on a grammar-translation approach and tends to follow the following pattern: students are asked to prepare for a new lesson by looking up words and listening to a tape recording of the text; students are asked to read the text in order to check for phonological intonation and to check for comprehension by asking questions; the teacher explains the vocabulary and the required grammatical content in detail, with examples, and the teaching of phonetics, translations, synonym identification, and linguistic phenomena is accompanied by drills and exercises; and there are after-lesson exercises, summaries and overviews, retelling of the text, etc. (Shen Jinsheng, 2004). text content, etc. (Shen Jinkun, 2005). This kind of reading teaching method has many disadvantages: students are always in a relatively passive situation, becoming passive recipients of language knowledge, lacking the space for practicing, and it is difficult to cultivate language communicative competence (Guo Yanzhi & Guo Ruizhi, 2007). At the same time, students do not experience the learning process as enjoyable, but rather as a stressful and burdensome one; there is no clear purpose for pre-study, which is limited to looking up words in the dictionary and creating a vocabulary; there

is no background knowledge without the participation of the students; the explanation of difficult points in the language hinders an overall understanding of the text; and reading comprehension exercises neglect the development of reading skills.

## 2. Task-based Pedagogy and its Theoretical Underpinnings

Task-based teaching method pays attention to the mutual communication of information between teachers and students and between students and students in activities, and the activities carried out are related to the students' life reality and have authenticity. In English classroom teaching, teachers design tasks according to the principle of versatility and interaction. The students fulfill the teacher's tasks by cooperating and communicating with each other, and acquire language in this process of mutual cooperation and communication.

### 2.1. Definition of Task

What is a task? The language teaching literature offers a variety of definitions and interpretations of the item "task". The following are some of the definitions that have been offered by researchers over the years.

David Nunan (1989) sees a task as a classroom endeavor that involves learners understanding, manipulating, producing, or interacting with language while their attention is focused primarily on meaning rather than form. Jane Willis (1996) sees a task as an activity in which learners use the target language for communicative purposes in order to achieve a certain outcome. Skehan (1998) argues that there are four defining criteria that can help distinguish tasks from exercises: (1) meaning is primary; (2) there is a goal that needs to be worked towards; (3) the activity is evaluated in terms of an outcome; and (4) there is a real-world relationship. Long and Crooks (1991) discuss another characteristic of tasks: that they are related to real-world linguistic needs have a clear pedagogical relationship. They argue that a needs analysis should be carried out to identify the target use of the language in order to design tasks for the classroom that make sense in relation to that use of the language. In this way, the tasks themselves have pedagogical value.

### 2.2. Definition of Task-based Pedagogy

Task-based teaching is a task-centred approach to teaching and learning, in which tasks are performed in a participatory, experiential, interactive, communicative and cooperative learning style, giving full play to learners' own cognitive abilities. It is a teaching and learning activity that gives full play to the learners' own cognitive abilities, mobilizes their existing resources of the target language, and enables them to perceive and understand the application of the target language in practice through a collaborative learning style of "participation", "experience", "interaction" and "communication". It is an effective method of teaching foreign languages that emphasizes "learning through dry learning" and "learning by using" (Li, 2011). This method requires the teacher to design specific, actionable tasks around specific communicative and language items, and the students to communicate, negotiate, explain, inquire, and communicate through the use of words and phrases, such as "communicate", "negotiate", "explain", and "inquire". Students complete the tasks by expressing "communicating", "negotiating", "explaining", "inquiring" and other forms of language activities in order to achieve the goal of learning and mastering the language.

According to Shen Jinkun (2005), task-based pedagogy refers to the natural learning of a language, the expansion of communicative vocabulary and the promotion of progress in foreign language learning through students and teachers working together to accomplish certain tasks in classroom teaching. Task-based pedagogy describes, rather than prescribes, ways of doing things, teaches students how to use their communicative competence in accomplishing a series of tasks, and guides them on the way to reach their goals. Students focus on exploring the

functions of knowledge and knowledge systems themselves, especially how to learn and apply them. On the one hand, the task-based approach focuses on teaching students how to improve their communicative competence in accomplishing a series of tasks and guiding them to achieve their communicative goals, and on the other hand, it focuses on exploring the function of knowledge and the knowledge system itself, especially on exploring the way to learn and use the language.

In China, linguists believe that task-based language teaching is a new development of the communicative method rather than an alternative method, so the aim of teaching is to cultivate students' communicative competence in English and to develop their comprehensive language ability; task-based teaching emphasizes that we should take real-life tasks as the center of teaching activities. They fix the problem that we lack authenticity in function-based teaching activities.

Task-based teaching emphasizes the teaching process; task-based teaching requires that teaching activities should help students learn language knowledge and language skills so as to improve their practical ability to use the language, that is to say, task-based teaching is not opposed to the teaching of language knowledge, but advocates the teaching of language for the purpose of using the language (Lu Li, 2002). Gong Yafu (2003) also discusses the characteristics of task-based teaching from both positive and negative aspects. First, the so-called task is firstly concerned not with the form of the language but with the meaning of the language. Second, task-based teaching requires students to be able to imitate real-life situations. Third, the concern is that students are able to accomplish the tasks. Fourthly, checking how well a task is accomplished depends on whether or not one thing is accomplished.

Therefore, we should not use the task-based teaching model in our teaching in a static way, but should use it appropriately and develop measures according to local conditions.

### **2.3. Theoretical Foundations of Task-based Pedagogy**

The study of task-based language teaching began in the 1980s with rabhu's 1979 experiment with a strong communicative approach in Bangalore, South India. This experiment was the first attempt to use tasks as a unit of classroom design and drew the attention of the language teaching community to the fact that many language scholars were involved in this research, using the task as the centerpiece of their studies, and as the research progressed, task-based language teaching matured into a theoretical reality in the 1990s (Weihong Yin, 2005), with a number of researchers and researchers working on task-based language teaching and learning.

#### **2.3.1. Psychological Theory**

Piaget applied his theories to the classroom, and most of the following recommendations were made by other researchers based on Piaget's principles.

Since Piaget emphasized the individual child's self-construction of his or her cognitive development, education should be student-centered and accomplished through active discovery learning.

Vygotsky's (1962) psycholinguistic sociolinguistic theory argues that a human being is a social being from the beginning, involved in a social order of things. Therefore, society and communicative behavior is not composed of socialized individuals, those who gather and share information verbally; rather, it is a society composed of individuals who have developed from being individuals like everyone else.

#### **2.3.2. Learner Output and Second Language Acquisition**

Krashen (1989) claimed that output has no direct effect on SLA and only functions as a source of input for learners. In contrast, Swain (1985) proposes the comprehensible output hypothesis and argues that learners need opportunities to use their linguistic resources in a meaningful way to achieve grammatical competence. However, a large number of speaking opportunities

does not in itself guarantee acquisition. Therefore, learners need to be pushed to improve the accuracy of their output in order for them to be understood. This pushed comprehensible output will improve performance over time (Nobuyoshi and Ellis, 1993). Thus, language acquisition will be aided by production.

According to Swain (1985), in addition to improving fluency, output should have three functions in language acquisition. First, "output promotes attention". That is, learners can notice the gap between "what they want to say" and "what they can say" when they produce output in the target language. As a result, learners can recognize their language problems. The second function of output is its hypothesis-testing role, specifically, "producing output is a way of testing hypotheses about comprehensibility or the goodness of linguistic form". In other words, learners can use their output to try out new linguistic forms and structures to meet their communicative needs. Finally, output as a metalinguistic function enables learners to "control and internalize linguistic knowledge". In general, the language classroom can provide opportunities for learners to produce output mainly in an interactive form.

### **3. The Implementation of Task-based Teaching Method in High School English Reading Teaching**

Jane Willis, a British linguist, divided the implementation of communicative classroom tasks into three stages in her monograph *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*: 1) Preparation stage. It mainly serves as a warm-up to mobilize students' attention and motivation. 2) Task implementation stage. Different modes of interaction are adopted among students and between teachers and students, each playing a different role. This stage is further composed of three parts: task, design, and debriefing. 3) Language Focus. The language focus includes language analysis and language practice, and the focus of the activity will shift from language meaning to language form.

Task-based reading activities provide students with a clear reading purpose and a scene conducive to the unfolding of the reading process, so that students can build up self-confidence, develop good reading habits, and form effective reading skills and strategies by completing specific reading task activities. In the next article, the author combines teaching practice and experience to take the example of Unit 2 Healthy Eating, the compulsory third of the Humanistic Version, to specifically illustrate the use of task-based teaching method in high school English reading teaching.

#### **(i) Pre-reading stage**

The pre-reading stage is the shortest stage given to the task-based reading learning process, which can continue for 2-20 minutes depending on the learning tasks to be carried out by the students and the familiarity of the topics involved. In this stage, it may take longer if the teacher uses multimedia devices or student activities to design the teaching situation. The main purpose of the pre-reading stage is to stimulate students' curiosity, activate relevant background knowledge and introduce the topic.

#### **(ii) Middle Reading Stage**

This stage is mainly designed to let students understand the general idea of the article and grasp the chapter structure and specific content through tasks. At the same time, students are trained to develop relevant reading strategies and exercise their reading skills. For example, the author designed the reading tasks for the article "Healthy Eating" as follows:

Task 1: Skim the text, summarize the main idea of the article, exercise students' fast reading ability and generalization ability.

Task 2: Divide the article into 3 parts and summarize the main content of each part.

Task 3: Read the text carefully to get more information. In order to help students understand more information and construct a more detailed semantic image, the author designs different forms of tasks, so that students can have a deeper understanding of the article one by one with the following reading tasks. Students work in groups to find out the differences between the two restaurants in the article in the four aspects of "characteristics of the food, advantages and disadvantages of the food, and price".

Task 4: Looking back at the main idea of the article summarized by the students in Task 2 and focusing on the verb phrase "Wang Peng did some research and win his customers back", let the students continue to read the second part of the article and find out what kind of research Wang Peng did and how he attracted his customers back. research and how he attracted his customers back, and then have a group discussion afterwards.

Task 5: Study the text and be inspired by it. On the basis of skimming and intensive reading, guide students to read the text again to help them have a deeper understanding of the article. In fact, these two restaurants each have their own merits, but customers repeatedly appear to be on one side or the other. In order to make both restaurants have a satisfactory flow of customers, the author puts forward the following questions: Can you offer suggestions to Wang Peng and Yong Hui to help them meet a satisfactory ending? The author puts forward the following question: Can you offer suggestions to Wang Peng and Yong Hui to help them meet a satisfactory ending? Firstly, we will focus on individual activities and think alone, and then we will have a preliminary exchange in the group to exchange information, and then we will organize the information and form a consensus in the group.

(iii) Post-reading stage

In the author's opinion, there are two main tasks in this stage. First, helping students consolidate and express what they read. Second, language analysis and language practice. The task-based teaching method advocates that the focus in the middle reading stage should be on the comprehension of language and the expression of linguistic meaning, while in the later stage, its focus should be on linguistic form. For this reason, the author designed the following tasks.

Task 1: Retell the text.

In this part, the author shows the general idea of the passage summarized by the students themselves on the projector, so that the students can combine the content of the text with the relevant information in their memory and retell the text.

Task 2: Complete the exercises at the end of the book.

To sum up, in task-based reading teaching, we should be based on different teaching objectives and requirements, from the perspective of student learning to carefully design, organize a series of classroom teaching tasks with a clear purpose, as real as possible, with varying degrees of difficulty, students in the process of completing a variety of forms of learning tasks, comprehension and understanding, to play a creative exchange, and constantly acquire knowledge or draw conclusions, so as to cultivate the ability to use language In the process of completing the tasks, students will understand and comprehend, communicate with each other, and continuously acquire knowledge or draw conclusions, so as to develop the ability to use the language, not only the ready knowledge. With the deepening of the tasks, the whole language learning process will become more and more automatic and autonomous.

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