

Exploratory Study on the Application of Task-Based Language Teaching to Junior High School English Reading Instruction

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Abstract

Driven by the concepts of core competencies and the new curriculum standards, junior high school English reading instruction is undergoing a transformation from traditional knowledge transmission to a balanced emphasis on competence development and practical application. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasises the use of authentic, meaning-oriented tasks to guide students in learning through practice, with a focus on enhancing their comprehensive language ability and autonomous learning capacity. This paper reviews the theoretical foundations of TBLT, analyses its practical advantages and real-world challenges in junior high school English reading teaching, and proposes targeted optimisation strategies and pathways based on theoretical discussion. The paper also presents a concrete teaching design to illustrate how the theory can be applied in instructional settings. The study indicates that scientifically sound task design, teacher professional development, differentiated grouping, and diversified assessment mechanisms are important guarantees for improving the effectiveness of junior high school English reading instruction and promoting the overall development of students' core competencies.

Keywords

Task-Based Language Teaching; Junior High School English; Reading Instruction; Core Competencies.

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the current basic education curriculum reform, English reading instruction has increasingly become a core component of junior high school English classrooms. How to improve students' reading comprehension ability while at the same time fostering their practical language application skills within limited class time has become a focal concern for English teachers and educational researchers alike. Traditional reading teaching approaches tend to focus on vocabulary and grammar explanation, neglecting students' ability to use language in authentic contexts and their capacity for cooperative inquiry, which often leads to low learning interest and insufficient classroom participation.

With the introduction of the core competencies concept, English teaching is expected not only to attend to language knowledge itself but also to pay attention to the all-round development of students' thinking quality, learning ability, and cultural awareness. It is against this background that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gradually gained attention and recognition. This approach emphasises driving student learning through authentic, meaningful tasks, using tasks as vehicles to enable students to "learn by doing" and "practise by using," thus better achieving the internalisation of knowledge and skills.

In recent years, a growing body of teaching practice has shown that TBLT can not only effectively enhance students' English reading comprehension but also stimulate their learning initiative, cooperative spirit, and creative thinking. Compared with traditional teaching models,

TBLT places greater emphasis on classroom interactivity and real-life relevance, stresses the practical value of language use, and is well aligned with the cognitive developmental characteristics and interest needs of junior high school students. For example, Unit 4 Section B “Improve Your Eating Habits” from the People’s Education Press (PEP) Grade 7 (Volume 2)^[5] textbook focuses on the theme of healthy eating, which is close to students’ daily lives and provides ideal material for implementing TBLT.

This paper takes Unit 4 Section B “Improve Your Eating Habits” from the PEP Grade 7 textbook as an example. Based on an overall discussion of the theory and application of TBLT, Section 5 uses a case analysis method to specifically examine the task-based teaching design for this unit, serving as a concrete illustration of the integration of theory and practice. Through a combination of theoretical elaboration, advantage analysis, problem exploration, and case interpretation, this paper aims to provide junior high school English teachers with practical and pedagogically relevant teaching references.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Task-Based Language Teaching

2.1. Theoretical Origins and Development

Task-Based Language Teaching is a foreign language teaching methodology that emphasises “learning by using” the language. It advocates a student-centred approach, using purposeful, life-related tasks to drive the learning process, so that students naturally acquire the language while solving practical problems. This approach is deeply influenced by communicative language teaching and constructivist learning theory, highlighting the authenticity and meaningfulness of learning activities, and requiring learners to actively participate in language practice in real or simulated contexts.

2.2. Core Concepts of Task-Based Language Teaching

The core of TBLT lies in the authenticity and meaningfulness of tasks. Classroom tasks are typically organised around daily life, social phenomena, or subject knowledge, requiring students to achieve common goals through communication, cooperation, and expression. Teaching activities are no longer confined to knowledge explanation and mechanical drills; instead, they involve group investigations, role-plays, project presentations, and other forms, enabling students to “learn by doing” and actively construct and internalise what they have learned.

TBLT emphasises students as the main agents and teachers as facilitators, and advocates for fostering students’ independent inquiry and collaborative problem-solving abilities during task implementation (Yin Qinghua, 2025)^[9]. In actual practice, TBLT can enhance students’ sense of participation and learning motivation, stimulate their learning potential, and provide broader space for language practice (Zheng Lijun, 2024)^[12].

2.3. Teaching Procedure and Organisational Structure

The foreign scholar Willis divided task-based teaching into three stages: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. The pre-task stage focuses on task introduction: the teacher first clarifies the task objectives, content, and operational methods, then activates students’ background knowledge through pictures, videos, stories, etc., and naturally introduces the learning task. At this stage, the teacher should also help students prepare by clarifying the language knowledge involved in the task, thus facilitating successful task completion. The task cycle stage mainly consists of three parts: carrying out the task, planning the report, and delivering the report. This is the most important stage in TBLT. At this stage, students participate in multiple learning activities in groups to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher. During cooperative learning, each member actively expresses personal views, and the group leader summarises them,

reports to the whole class on the group's task completion process, presents the group's outcomes, and forms a final report (Wang Xichun, 2024)^[8].

2.4. Student Agency and the Changing Role of the Teacher

In TBLT, students change from passive recipients to active participants in the classroom. The teacher's role also shifts from that of a traditional knowledge transmitter to an organiser and facilitator of the learning process. Through differentiated grouping and tiered task design, students of different proficiency levels and personalities can all achieve progress from their respective starting points. Group cooperation, project inquiry, and outcome presentation not only exercise students' teamwork spirit but also promote the enhancement of their practical application abilities.

2.5. Points of Alignment with Junior High School English Reading Instruction

Junior high school English reading lessons are not only a platform for language knowledge input but also an important arena for developing comprehensive abilities. TBLT transforms reading content into meaningful practical tasks-such as information screening, theme discussion, opinion expression, and real-world problem solving-so that students understand and apply what they have learned in authentic language situations(Wang Qiang 2018)^[7]. For example, in a unit on "healthy eating," teachers can design a continuous task sequence such as "survey classmates' eating habits → draw up a personal improvement plan → present and discuss in groups," guiding students to connect reading content with real life and enhancing their analytical, expressive, and innovative abilities.

3. Practical Advantages of Task-Based Language Teaching in English Instruction

3.1. Stimulating Learning Interest and Classroom Participation

TBLT can stimulate students' learning interest and classroom participation. Under traditional teaching models, students often adopt a passive learning state, lacking initiative and enthusiasm. In contrast, TBLT introduces authentic task situations and problems, allowing students to gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction through problem solving. By setting challenging and interesting tasks, students are encouraged to actively participate and think critically, thereby stimulating learning interest and improving learning initiative and motivation (Zheng Lijun, 2024)^[12].

3.2. Optimising Reading Approaches and Enhancing Comprehensive Abilities

In the TBLT process, students usually need to consult materials, integrate information, engage in cooperative discussion, and express their views in English. Through various task-based activities, students can better understand textual content and improve their information processing and summarisation skills. At the same time, TBLT combines learning tasks with practical problems, requiring students to apply learned knowledge to solve problems, which can stimulate their thinking and innovation abilities. In the process of completing tasks, students exercise language skills, reasoning ability, and critical thinking, thereby to a certain extent promoting the overall enhancement of comprehensive abilities (Zheng Lijun, 2024)^[12].

3.3. Fostering Teamwork and Independent Inquiry Abilities

The new curriculum standards place new demands on cultivating students' cooperative inquiry abilities. In teaching, teachers can assign group cooperative tasks and provide platforms for interactive communication, thus effectively improving students' cooperative learning skills. It should be noted, however, that teachers should not simply assign tasks and then step back; they must also assume the roles of guide and monitor, offering timely support when appropriate. In

reading instruction, when encountering difficult knowledge points, teachers can adopt group cooperative learning, guiding students to explore within their groups and learn collaboratively. Group members each express their opinions, play to their strengths, and divide labour. Some students are responsible for searching for and accumulating unfamiliar words, others for analysing challenging sentence patterns, and others for summarising the meaning of each paragraph. In this way, students can digest difficult knowledge points more easily (Li Xiuhua, 2024)^[3]. Group cooperative learning helps students master key and difficult points efficiently (Song Yuning & Zhou Qilin, 2023)^[6]. At the same time, in the process of solving tasks, students need to actively search for information, pose questions, and seek answers, gradually developing habits of autonomous learning and inquiry.

3.4. Enhancing Innovative Thinking and Higher-Order Cognition

Under the guidance of TBLT, teachers often set open-ended tasks that lead students to analyse real problems and propose original views. In the process of selecting, judging, and integrating information, students are required to think from multiple perspectives, gradually forming critical thinking and innovative abilities. This not only helps improve their English learning level but also contributes to the overall improvement of their thinking quality.

3.5. Task Authenticity and Relevance to Life

TBLT emphasises the authenticity and life-related nature of task content. When designing tasks, teachers can create reading tasks that are close to students' daily lives, thereby enhancing students' interest in reading (Lü Hongyuan, 2024)^[1]. When faced with such tasks, students feel relaxed and familiar, and thus can more quickly engage with the English context and show stronger initiative in reading learning. When designing reading tasks, teachers should also consider students' English proficiency levels and reasonably control the difficulty, so that the tasks can meet students' reading learning needs without causing them to feel intimidated. Teachers can design reading tasks progressively, incorporating students' interests and hobbies, to stimulate greater interest in reading and enhance students' sense of participation and experience (Yin Qinghua, 2025)^[9].

3.6. Optimising Classroom Ecology and Promoting Individual Development

Through TBLT, teacher-student interaction becomes more frequent, and the classroom atmosphere becomes more equal and harmonious. Teachers can design tasks at different levels according to students' abilities, allowing learners of all foundations and capabilities to participate and promoting the common growth of all students. This teaching model helps to stimulate students' initiative and creativity, fostering the development of individual strengths and comprehensive literacy.

4. Practical Difficulties and Challenges of Task-Based Language Teaching

4.1. Teachers' Professional Competence and Conceptual Limitations

Although TBLT has notable advantages, its successful implementation depends on teachers' professional expertise and updated pedagogical beliefs. Some teachers do not yet have a sufficiently deep understanding of TBLT and often equate it simplistically with mere classroom activities, neglecting the hierarchical structure and practical significance of tasks. As a result, some task-based lessons remain superficial and lack genuine inquiry and effectiveness. Therefore, teachers need to continuously improve their abilities in task design, classroom organisation, and feedback evaluation, and actively engage in professional development and school-based research.

4.2. Difficulties in Task Design and Implementation

TBLT places high demands on teachers' task design capabilities. In actual practice, some teachers design tasks that are disconnected from students' real lives, have unclear objectives, or are poorly organised. Although some tasks are novel in form, they have little connection to students' life experiences, leading to low participation and thus affecting teaching effectiveness. In addition, some teachers have difficulty gauging task difficulty appropriately, which may affect the quality of task completion and students' learning experiences.

4.3. Class Differences and Student Participation

In large-class teaching contexts, students' English foundations and participation motivation vary greatly. TBLT emphasises cooperation and full participation, but in practice, weaker students tend to be passive participants, while stronger students take on more of the workload, resulting in an imbalance in group division of labour. Some students are accustomed to passively receiving knowledge and lack confidence and motivation for task-driven independent inquiry and cooperative communication, which undermines the actual effectiveness of task activities.

4.4. Class Time and Teaching Resources

TBLT activities require considerable time for organisation and feedback, but due to limited class hours and teaching resources, teachers often find it difficult to fully implement all stages. Moreover, some schools have inadequate physical facilities-insufficient space for group work and a lack of necessary multimedia and supplementary materials-which also creates practical difficulties for the effective implementation of TBLT.

4.5. Assessment Methods and Learning Feedback

At present, the secondary school English assessment system remains predominantly examination-based, lacking a scientific evaluation framework for students' practical application abilities and task performance. TBLT advocates formative, diversified assessment, but in practice, evaluation criteria have not yet been fully developed, and teachers lack systematic tools, making it difficult to comprehensively reflect students' abilities and growth, thus hindering the sustainable development of TBLT.

5. Optimisation Strategies and Improvement Pathways for Task-Based Language Teaching

5.1. Principles for Optimising Task Design

For TBLT to truly play its role, it first requires scientifically sound task design. When designing tasks, teachers should fully consider textbook content, student interests, and cognitive levels, ensuring that tasks possess authenticity, situational context, and clear learning objectives^[11]. The difficulty of tasks should be moderate-enough to stimulate students' desire for challenge, but not so high or low as to affect motivation. At the same time, task design should reflect gradation and progression, so that students of different foundations can all make progress through participation. Teachers should also pay attention to the practicality and interest of tasks, avoiding superficiality and ensuring that each task promotes students' practical language use and cognitive development (Lian Qiuxiang, 2020)^[2].

5.2. Strengthening Teacher Professional Development

The effective implementation of TBLT relies on teachers' continuous professional growth. Schools and teaching research groups should provide teachers with diverse training opportunities-such as lesson observation, peer coaching, and school-based research-to help them deeply understand the concepts and methods of TBLT(Zhang Huimin,2025)^[10]. In

addition, teachers themselves should keep learning from exemplary teaching cases and research findings, actively reflect on their own teaching practices, and explore TBLT models suitable for their own classes. In daily teaching, teachers should also be willing to experiment with innovations, summarise experiences in a timely manner, enhance their comprehensive abilities in task design, classroom management, and process evaluation, and gradually develop their own distinctive teaching styles (Lu Yaoyang, 2025)^[4].

5.3. Differentiated Grouping and Full Participation

In class teaching, students' foundational levels vary considerably. Teachers should respect individual differences and recognise that applying a uniform reading goal to all students will inevitably fail to meet everyone's English learning needs. Some students may find reading tasks too easy and not challenging enough, while others with weaker English foundations may struggle and thus lose confidence and interest. Therefore, teachers can incorporate differentiated instruction into TBLT by designing tiered reading tasks that suit students with varying English abilities, so that all students can progress together under the guidance of graded tasks, build reading confidence, and become more proficient in reading learning (Yin Qinghua, 2025)^[9].

5.4. Improving the Assessment System and Feedback Mechanisms

Traditional assessment methods predominantly rely on test scores, which cannot comprehensively reflect students' English proficiency and overall competence. Therefore, in implementing TBLT, assessment should cover multiple aspects such as participation, cooperation, and innovative thinking. In addition to observing students' classroom performance, teachers can also check their learning notes and evaluate their project outcomes to gain a holistic understanding of their learning. Furthermore, assessment should focus on process rather than product. TBLT emphasises students' involvement and experience in the task process; hence, assessment should also emphasise the effort, progress, and experience gained during task completion. Such assessment helps students recognise their own shortcomings and thus stimulates further inquiry and learning motivation (Zheng Lijun, 2024)^[12].

5.5. Case Analysis--Taking Unit 4 Section B "Improve Your Eating Habits" from PEP Grade 7 as an Example

5.5.1. Case Background and Teaching Objectives

This case is based on Unit 4 Section B "Improve Your Eating Habits" from the PEP Grade 7 textbook, centred on the theme of "healthy eating," and designs a task-based teaching plan. The content of this unit is closely related to junior high school students' daily lives, guiding them to pay attention to health, cultivate scientific eating habits, and providing an authentic context for improving comprehensive English ability.

Based on the core concepts of TBLT, the teaching objectives of this lesson are threefold: first, to enable students to accurately identify and use key vocabulary and expressions related to healthy eating, and to understand and summarise the main healthy eating suggestions in the text; second, to guide students through group surveys, information organisation, discussion, and outcome presentation, thereby enhancing their information integration and teamwork skills; and third, to help students establish a scientific concept of healthy eating and strengthen their ability to clearly express personal attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle and dietary plans in English.

5.5.2. Teaching Procedure Design

Pre-task stage: The teacher first poses questions such as "What did you have for breakfast today? Do you think it is healthy?" to stimulate students' thinking about healthy eating. Then, using

textbook illustrations, the teacher reviews vocabulary related to food and encourages students to list familiar healthy and unhealthy foods, thus activating background knowledge and creating an authentic context. Subsequently, the teacher clarifies the main learning task of the lesson: through group cooperation, investigate and analyse classmates' eating habits, develop a healthy eating improvement plan, and present and exchange ideas in English.

Task cycle stage: Students interview group members about their weekly eating habits, using a survey form to collect information. Each student truthfully describes their own eating habits and practises using the relevant English sentence patterns. Then, each group organises and summarises the survey results, discusses the strengths and weaknesses of their eating habits in light of the healthy eating suggestions in the textbook, and the teacher provides appropriate linguistic support and strategic guidance during the discussion. Based on the group analysis, each student then draws up a personal healthy eating improvement plan for the following week, describes it briefly in English, and strives for authenticity and linguistic accuracy. Finally, group representatives report their group's findings and improvement plans to the whole class in English, optionally using simple posters or PowerPoint presentations. During the presentations, other group members and the teacher jointly ask questions, add comments, and provide feedback, encouraging creative thinking and active expression, thereby fostering a positive interactive atmosphere.

Post-task stage: The teacher organises students to reflect on the task process, share difficulties encountered and gains made during the survey, as well as new insights into healthy eating. To consolidate learning outcomes, the teacher assigns an extended task after class: students are asked to write a short paragraph in English titled "My Healthy Eating Plan" describing their dietary arrangements for the coming week and the reasons behind them, and are encouraged to share their plan with family members or classmates to promote awareness of healthy eating.

5.5.3. Key Points of Classroom Implementation and Teacher-Student Interaction

Throughout the whole classroom process, the teacher consistently acts as a guide and facilitator, encouraging students to express themselves actively and engage in cooperative inquiry. For weaker students, the teacher provides simplified survey forms and expression templates so that they can participate smoothly; for more capable students, the teacher encourages them to take on key roles such as group reporting and to enrich their expression content. During group work, emphasis is placed on peer assistance; the teacher intervenes in a timely manner to help students with difficulties in expression and information organisation, ensuring that every student can contribute to the team and gain a sense of achievement. During classroom management, the teacher also pays attention to the progress of each group's discussion, prevents students from withdrawing due to lack of confidence, and strives to make activities fair and efficient.

6. Conclusion

As an important direction in current English teaching reform, Task-Based Language Teaching, with its core philosophy of "learning by using, using to learn," emphasises student agency, practical language application, and the overall enhancement of comprehensive literacy. Through a systematic review of its theoretical foundations, practical advantages, and real-world challenges, this paper has pointed out that TBLT can not only stimulate students' learning interest and improve comprehensive abilities but also promote teamwork, innovative thinking, and individual development. However, its practical application still faces multiple challenges concerning teachers' professional competence, task design, classroom management, and the assessment system. In response to these problems, the paper has proposed specific pathways including optimising task design, strengthening teacher training, promoting differentiated grouping, and improving assessment mechanisms, and has illustrated the

feasibility and operability of integrating theory and practice using Unit 4 Section B “Improve Your Eating Habits” from PEP Grade 7 as an example.

Overall, the effective promotion of TBLT requires concerted efforts in theoretical innovation, teacher development, and institutional support. In future teaching practice, more adaptive optimisation measures-such as tiered tasks, diversified assessment, and home-school collaboration-should be further explored to promote the deep integration and continuous innovation of TBLT in junior high school English classrooms.

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