

The Effect of Task-based Language Teaching on Senior High School Students' English Learning Motivation

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Abstract: With the promulgation of the English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools (2017 Edition Revised in 2020), the creation and application of authentic situations is highly valued. Task-based language teaching is student-oriented, task-driven, meaning-centered, and emphasizes “learning by doing”, which provides a platform for students to learn in authentic contexts, promotes students’ use of what they have learned to solve real problems and improves their motivation to learn English. This paper discusses the concepts of task and task-based language teaching, and the research related to task-based language teaching on students’ motivation to learn English. Finally, it proposes the strategies to improve students’ motivation to learn English by using task-based language teaching, so as to fit the concept of the English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools and to cultivate students’ English core literacy.

Key words: task-based language teaching; learning motivation; senior high school English teaching

1. Introduction

The English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools (2017 Edition Revised in 2020) mentions that during language practice activities, teachers should choose themes that are both meaningful and close to students’ life experiences, create rich and various contexts and stimulate students’ interest in participating in learning and experiencing language. However, in the past, the traditional teaching model was commonly used in senior high school English classrooms, where the use of various language skills was separated from each other, and the process of language learning was detached from the students’ life experiences, so that the students lacked participation and interest in language learning, and had low motivation to learn English, which did not lead to a good learning effect.

The strength of students’ motivation to learn English is closely related to their success. Adopting task-based language teaching in senior high school English classrooms, using tasks to drive students to actively participate in classroom activities, and paying attention to students’ motivation to learn English can really increase students’ interest and enthusiasm in learning English, which are of great help to the improvement of students’ language knowledge and skills.

2. Task and Task-based Language Teaching

David Nunan (2010) makes a distinction between real-world or target tasks and pedagogical tasks. A pedagogical task provides students a chance to comprehend, manipulate, produce and interact while using the target language in the classroom. In addition, Nunan also emphasizes that it focuses on meaning while using the target language instead of grammatical forms. Breen (1987) defines tasks as workplans that aim to promote students’ ability of language learning from simple tasks to more complicated tasks, and all of the tasks are in the service of language learning of students. Ellis (2003) gives the definition that a task is a workplan demands students to pay attention to the meaning and take advantage of their own knowledge so that it is convenient to evaluate whether the students convey the information they are expected to. In summary, a task is an activity that allows students to communicate with others in order to enable students to use the language while completing the tasks and internalize the knowledge they have learned according to certain learning objectives.

Task-based language teaching, extending on the basis of communicative language teaching, is a task-driven, meaning-centered approach of language teaching, emphasizing “learning by doing”. The model of task-based language teaching is generally developed in Willis's model, a three-stage model which is composed of pre-task, task cycle and language focus. As for teaching activities, in order to learn and master the target language, it is significant for teachers to design specific and practical tasks centered on communicative and linguistic programs and students complete the tasks through various forms of language activities such as expression, communication, explanation and questioning.

3. Studies of the Effect of Task-based Language Teaching on Students' Learning Motivation

Relevant studies in China started with different language skills respectively. In terms of writing motivation, Fu Junhui (2009) compares the writing motivation of senior high school students in the control group adopting traditional teaching approach and the experimental group adopting task-based language teaching, and the writing motivation of the students in the experimental group is significantly enhanced. In terms of listening motivation, Qin Qiufang (2014) adopts traditional listening teaching approach and task-based language teaching for English majors respectively, and the motivation of the class adopting task-based language teaching in listening learning is significantly enhanced. In terms of reading motivation, Chen Jing (2018) compares the control group of traditional teaching with the experimental group of task-based language teaching and finds that the reading motivation of junior high school students in the experimental group is significantly improved. In general, there are few studies on task-based language teaching on the English learning motivation of high school students in China, and the way of research is also relatively single, and it is common to adopt the method of experimental research for control analysis to carry out. The selection of research subjects is still limited, focusing on senior high school and college students, while the research on junior high school students is still lacking.

Overseas studies are richer than domestic studies. NamazianDost et al. (2017) in their study compare a control group with a control group to measure Iranian junior high school students' grammar scores as well as learning motivation, and the study finds that the students in the experimental group who use task-based language teaching have greater improvement in their grammar scores and increased motivation to learn. Yahya (2019) finds that that task-based language teaching helps students improve their overall vocabulary and second language memory and is more significant in developing students' complex and fluent language. Despite the differences in the grade level stages of the research participants or the differences in the research methods and perspectives, it is proved that task-based language teaching plays a positive role in the students' motivation to learn English. In terms of the measurement of students' English proficiency as well as the measurement of learning motivation, it is of significance to the related studies in China.

4. Strategies for Increasing Students' Learning Motivation by Task-based Language Teaching

4.1 Returning the classroom to students and highlighting student's main position

Task-based language teaching is student-centered which different tasks are used to drive students to carry out learning activities. The classroom is the main platform for students to use English, and diversified and vivid tasks are the best way to increase students' motivation. Teachers and students are co-participants in the classroom, and in order to make the classroom lively, it is indispensable for teachers to teach and students to learn. In the process of teaching and learning, there is a kind of multi-directional interaction between teachers and students and students and students. When implementing task-based language teaching, teachers should create a relaxing and free environment for students, encourage students to dare to express their ideas, support students to question boldly in the process of completing tasks, and provide students with an environment suitable for communication. In this environment, teachers should use the target language as much as possible to guide students to enter into the situation quickly, prompt students to think positively by restoring the real situation, and increase students' motivation to actively participate in the classroom. Besides, teachers should also design learning tasks that match students' learning progress and level, so as to avoid students' fear that the tasks will not achieve the expected teaching effect. Tasks must also be able to inspire students to think independently, prompting students to flexibly apply what they have learnt to solve problems, leaving space for students to imagine and play freely, and improving students' capacity for independent learning.

For example, teachers can set up a "jigsaw" task in the task cycle stage, that is, let the students complete the task assigned to their own group in group cooperation, through each member of the group to different groups to explain their own tasks, to improve students' understanding of knowledge and test the degree of mastery of the knowledge of the students; through the creation of the situation that the school holds activities, earthquake survival and other situations to guide students to use their knowledge to design posters, escape routes or choose to carry the necessary supplies, providing a stage for students to express their views freely and apply what they have learnt. By designing diversified tasks that are closely related to students' lives, students become the masters of the classroom and learn to do things in English under the guidance of the classroom, learn to solve practical problems in English, and help improve students' English core literacy.

4.2 Integrating of the concept of stratified teaching and mobilizing the enthusiasm of the whole staff

The concept of stratified teaching refers to the fact that teachers adopt different levels of teaching methods and assign different levels of tasks according to each student's level of knowledge, learning situation, personality differences, etc., so that each student can actively participate in the classroom and improve themselves at their original level. Incorporating the concept of stratified teaching in task-based language teaching means that teachers need to design tasks suitable for students at different levels according to their levels and differences, so as to ensure that every student can really integrate into the classroom learning.

Teachers need to deeply understand the actual situation and differences of each student, according to the different situations divided into levels, they generally can be divided into three levels. For different levels of students, teachers need to set different teaching goals, through the goal of stratification to achieve the stratification of teaching. Students at the first level have a weak foundation and lack learning ability; students at the second level have a good foundation and are at the bottleneck of self-improvement, making it difficult for them to break through it; students at the third level have a solid foundation, and are quick-thinking and are capable of independent thinking. When students are asked to complete a certain writing task, teachers need to assist and guide Level 1 students to learn how to build a writing framework, give them appropriate writing prompts, and complete the writing task according to the structure; for Level 2 students, teachers need to encourage them to learn how to add good words and good phrases or flexibly use different sentence styles to enrich the article on the basis of their original writing, and to present their writing logically and clearly; for Level 3 students, while praising their good performance, teachers should assign some difficult questions for them to think about, to challenge themselves, asking themselves whether they can adequately argue their points in writing, whether they can support their arguments with examples or famous quotes, etc., so as to make their writings more in-depth and to achieve thought-provoking effects.

All in all, under the background of the new curriculum reform, task-based language teaching should be implemented by integrating new concepts and ideas, so that students can be driven by task-based language teaching, boldly integrate into classroom learning, have the courage to express themselves, learn to think and solve problems in English, and increase their interest and motivation in learning English. Therefore, how teachers can improve the effect of task-based language teaching and develop students' English core literacy in the context of the new curriculum reform requires teachers to practice and learn new knowledge continuously and explore further in their future teaching.

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Jilin International Studies University 2023 Student Research Project "The Effect of Task-based Language Teaching on Senior High School Students' English Learning Motivation", Item Number: JWXSXY2023B191