

# Research on the Application of Task-based Language Teaching in University Oral English Teaching

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## Abstract

As a student-centered teaching approach that emphasizes practical application of language and communicative competence, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become an important research direction in the field of foreign language education since its emergence. In university oral English teaching, the introduction of TBLT not only revolutionizes the traditional teaching mode, but also opens up a new path for students to improve their oral ability. By designing a series of specific, clear and close-to-life tasks, the TBLT approach enables students to use language naturally in the process of completing the tasks, thus realizing the organic combination of language knowledge and practical application. This teaching mode not only promotes students' oral expression ability, but also enhances their language perception and cross-cultural communication ability. At the same time, it encourages cooperation and interaction among students, cultivating their teamwork spirit and independent learning ability. This research uses literature analysis approach to systematically review the wide application and far-reaching impact of the TBLT approach in the field of university oral English teaching, points out the challenges and puts forward a number of suggestions and strategies in response to these problems. The application of the TBLT approach in university oral English teaching has achieved remarkable results, but it still needs to be continuously explored and improved. It is hoped that this research can shed light on improving the quality of university oral English teaching and promoting teaching reform and innovation.

## Keywords

Task-based Language Teaching; University Oral English Teaching; Application.

## 1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization and the increasing frequency of international exchanges, English oral ability has become one of the important indicators of the comprehensive quality of university students. However, in the traditional teaching mode, the teaching of oral English often focuses on grammar explanation and vocabulary memorization, neglecting the cultivation of practical application of language and communicative competence, which leads to the difficulty for students to communicate fluently and confidently in the real language environment. Therefore, exploring new teaching approaches to improve students' practical application ability of oral English has become an important direction for the current reform of English teaching in universities. As a new type of language teaching mode, the TBLT approach has gradually received extensive attention from the academic world at home and abroad since its emergence in the 1980s. This teaching approach emphasizes "learning by doing", through the design of specific and actionable tasks, so that in the process of completing the tasks, students can realize the mastery and application of language through various forms of language activities such as expressing, communicating, negotiating, explaining, inquiring, etc. The TBLT

approach not only focuses on the form of language, but also pays more attention to the function of language and the communicative context, so that students can learn and use the language in a real or near-real language environment, thus improving their practical application of oral English.

With the use of literature analysis method, by analyzing and summarizing the relevant theories and specific practices of the application of the TBLT approach in the teaching of oral English in universities, this research points out the problems and puts forward suggestions, with a view to providing useful references for the reform of university oral English teaching.

## **2. Literature Review**

At home and abroad, both theoretical results and empirical researches on the field of the application of the TBLT approach in university oral English teaching have shown rich and deep trends.

### **2.1. Theoretical Researches of TBLT in University Oral Teaching**

At home, many scholars have comprehensively and meticulously analyzed the theoretical basis, teaching mode, significance, problems and strategies of the TBLT approach in the light of the actual situation of oral English teaching in Chinese universities. What's more, at abroad, the research of the TBLT approach started earlier and the theoretical system is more mature, which not only lays a solid foundation for the promotion and application of the TBLT approach in the world, but also provides important reference and inspiration for our scholars' research in this field.

#### **2.1.1. Characteristics**

Different scholars have summarized the diverse Characteristics of TBLT when discussing it. Some scholars emphasize that it is student-centered and stimulates students' initiative and participation by designing tasks that are close to students' lives and have practical significance; other scholars highlight its emphasis on the application of language in actual communication, and believe that the TBLT approach effectively promotes students' use of language in real or simulated situations and improves their ability to use language.

According to Chen Yanwen (2010), the TBLT approach has authenticity, skillfulness and fluency. Real materials are used to rehearse for the real world. Skills are needed and can be developed to carry out the activities. Fluency is valued more than accuracy during language practice. Tian Suping (2013) supposed that the so-called TBLT is a model that transforms abstract principles of language use into language training in practical activities. Students use English correctly by practicing, checking and thinking in the process of completing tasks, so as to achieve the teaching objectives, and this teaching mode fully reflects the teaching concept that students are the main body of the classroom. Niu Yan (2019) believes that in the context of TBLT, although students are the center of learning, it does not deny the teaching dominance of teachers. In addition, the TBLT approach pays more attention to practical activities than traditional teaching, actively guiding students to practice communication, task cooperation and solution, analysis and problem solving, and truly realizing the improvement of students' practical ability.

The TBLT approach shows many characteristics in university oral English teaching, which together promote the significant improvement of students' oral ability and inject new vitality into university oral English teaching.

#### **2.1.2. Specific Application**

Many scholars have used different terms to describe the three stages of TBLT, which reflects the in-depth research and multiple understandings of this pedagogical approach in the academic community.

Dong Wei and Sun Tianfeng (2013) elaborated that the pre-task stage is the preparatory stage of TBLT, in which the teacher gives necessary explanations about the background knowledge of the speech topic, speech theories and skills. The task-ring stage is the core of TBLT, which aims to guide students to complete authentic tasks by using the speech skills they have learned and the knowledge they have inputted. The post-task stage is the analysis and drill phase. After the speech, students are asked to evaluate the speech according to the record and then replay the video, commenting on the language details of the speech and providing specific feedback. Liu Qiaomei (2015) shows that the process of TBLT is divided into pre-task stage, task-ring stage and language focus. In the pre-task stage, the teacher should present the task and the topic and prepare some materials about the topic for the students so that they can have a clear understanding of the task. The task-ring stage covers planning, tasks and reports, and the teacher will use about ten minutes for students to analyze and discuss the topic. The language focus stage is divided into practical work and language analysis. The teacher analyzes and evaluates the students' performance of the task. Lily Zhao (2019) proposed that in the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the unit topic and informs students of the unit task chain arrangement so that students can clarify the learning objectives and assign tasks in an output-oriented manner. In the while-task stage, students brainstorm and organize language structures. In the post-task stage, the teacher evaluates the results of the oral presentations and guides the students to evaluate them at the same time.

Although these terms are expressed differently, they are in essence an accurate summary and refined expression of the core content of the three stages of TBLT. Together, they constitute the basic framework of TBLT, which provides strong theoretical support and methodological guidance for teaching practice.

### **2.1.3. Significance**

Scholars hold different views on the importance of TBLT, but generally agree that it can significantly promote students' language learning and development as an effective teaching approach.

Xue Xiaoping (2012) showed that the application of TBLT changes the roles of teachers and students, realizing the real student-centered; by setting a relaxed classroom atmosphere, it can effectively overcome the anxiety of students; and allows students to have the opportunity and conditions to convert knowledge and comprehensively apply their language skills in a more authentic language environment provided by the teacher. Zheng Huijing (2013) suggests that the application of TBLT in teaching oral business English helps to stimulate students' interest in learning, combine language knowledge and language skills, cultivate students' comprehensive literacy, promote students' active participation in language communication activities, inspire imagination and creative thinking, and students learn knowledge in the activities and cultivate interpersonal communication, thinking, decision-making, and resilience. Fan Yingna (2016) pointed out that the introduction and application of TBLT reforms the traditional teaching mode, increases the efficiency of classroom teaching; creates a real communicative environment, which in turn increases the students' language practice ability; and increases the communication between the teacher and the students, which enhances the relationship between teachers and students. Liu Jianhai (2021) believes that the implementation of TBLT in university oral English teaching can increase the degree of student participation and strengthen the interaction between students and teachers. Reasonable use of new media technology can cultivate students' good learning habits and allow them to carry out independent learning when tutoring students.

The importance of TBLT in university oral teaching is self-evident, which provides students with rich language practice opportunities and is one of the key strategies to promote the quality of oral teaching.

#### 2.1.4. Problems and Strategies

In the teaching of oral English at university, although the TBLT approach shows significant advantages, it also faces some challenges and problems. In view of these problems, scholars have put forward a number of targeted strategies and implementation principles.

Su Xuelian (2017) indicated that if the purpose of teaching is oral, it is necessary to emphasize the exercise of students' oral expression ability, and the design of oral tasks should follow the principle of fun, in addition, the difficulty should be moderate, and different levels of difficulty should be designed according to students of different grades. Bi Zheng (2019) stated that TBLT is often realized through explicit or implicit feedback given by teachers or peers during the negotiation of meaning. However, the efficiency of acquiring language forms in this way is relatively low, and in Chinese foreign language learning environments, group activities are mostly conducted among peers, who are at similar levels of proficiency, and it is difficult to obtain effective feedback from peers to facilitate the acquisition of language forms. Guo Haiyan (2020) suggested that based on the task-driven teaching approach, teachers should pay attention to the characteristics of the student body, and make use of layered teaching to improve the application effect of task-driven teaching method. Utilizing multimedia equipment or teaching facilities in universities, teachers should create corresponding teaching situations in line with the teaching theme and develop interconnected learning tasks and design corresponding teaching evaluation criteria. Luo Chenjie (2024) reckons that infiltrating the TBLT approach into listening and speaking learning requires teachers to set up appropriate situations for students and encourage them to create dialogues and role-play. Teachers should guide students to practice their oral expression and language organization skills by completing tasks, as well as set up a reasonable gradient of difficulties so that students can make progress step by step.

With the in-depth research on TBLT, its teaching mode, task design, evaluation system and other aspects will be continuously optimized to better meet the needs of university oral English teaching. Therefore, TBLT will show a broader development prospect and make a greater contribution to the improvement of students' oral ability and comprehensive quality.

### 2.2. Empirical Researches of TBLT in University Oral English Teaching

Scholars at home and abroad have also verified the effectiveness and feasibility of TBLT in university oral teaching through a large number of empirical researches. These researches usually use questionnaires, interviews, teaching experiments, and tests to provide a comprehensive and in-depth assessment of the effectiveness of the application of TBLT. It found that the TBLT approach can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in oral learning and improve students' English oral expression and cooperative learning ability.

#### 2.2.1. Stimulating Interest in Learning

By designing a series of tasks that are close to students' lives, challenging and interesting, the TBLT approach enables students to experience a sense of achievement and satisfaction in the process of completing tasks. This positive learning experience greatly enhances students' learning motivation. Therefore, TBLT is regarded as an effective teaching strategy that can stimulate students' learning interest and promote their continuous progress in oral learning.

Guo Wenqi (2016) used Willis's three stages of TBLT as a basis for combining the actual situation of higher vocational students. The research shows that students' active learning for the task-based learning mode outside the classroom is relatively high. Therefore, in the actual teaching process, we should pay great attention to the extension of classroom time to outside the classroom, and strive to create a diversified TBLT environment to create an atmosphere conducive to students' interest in learning English. Li Kaiyu (2020) analyzed the example of Cambridge Real-life English Teaching and pointed out that the TBLT approach provides more

learning opportunities for learners. Unlike the deductive approach where grammar rules are taught and a lot of exercises are assigned, the TBLT approach can stimulate students' interest and motivation by setting up language situations, designing different types of thematic activities, and letting students take control of the process of language use. Jose Belda-Medina (2023) analyzed student interaction and multimodal communication through TBLT in a Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (SCMC) environment and found that the post-test results evidenced a self-perceived positive attitude toward the integration of TBLT in SCMC among participants. The statistical results scored high on shared enjoyment and relevance, as students enjoyed presenting as much as watching other students' projects.

Under the task-based teaching mode, students are no longer passive receivers of knowledge, but active explorers and problem-solving practitioners. When students successfully complete a task, they feel a great sense of accomplishment, and this positive feedback further enhances their learning motivation. With its unique advantages, the TBLT approach successfully stimulates students' interest in learning and promotes their comprehensive and in-depth learning.

### 2.2.2. Improving Oral Skills

The TBLT approach emphasizes the use of language in authentic language situations, focuses on language accuracy and fluency, and helps students gradually overcome language barriers and improve their confidence and fluency in oral expression through repeated practice and immediate feedback. Therefore, it is regarded as an effective teaching strategy to enhance speaking ability and is widely used in various language teaching environments.

Zhou Zhen (2016) conducted a 16-week task-based oral teaching experiment and concluded that task-based language teaching approach can improve students' oral English performance, correct students' misconceptions, and is a more effective teaching mode than the PPP mode, so the English oral classroom cannot be separated from the task-based language teaching approach. Mohamad Reza Mollahosseiny and Davood Mashhadi Heidar (2019) examined the combined impact of pre-task planning and questioning instruction on the accuracy and complexity of Iranian EFL learners' oral presentation of intermediate learners of English at a private language institute in Mazandaran. It found that the application of TBLT is beneficial in enhancing students' oral abilities by offering an innovative learning experience to students who were able to engage in accomplishing oral narrative tasks via meaningful interaction, and improve in three areas of oral performance including accuracy and lexical, and grammatical complexity. Siamak Rahimi (2022) explored the effects of TBLT on the development of Iranian university students' self-efficacy and willingness to communicate in oral skills. The results showed that students speaking ability enhanced in terms of fluency, discourse, function, cohesion, and strategic options with the application of TBLT. This progress might be ascribed to the online TBLT instruction, supporting the students in the experimental group to gain strategic and interactive knowledge to excel in their

oral skills. Marzieh Souzandehfar and Khaled Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim (2023) investigated the effects of TBLT on academic buoyancy, self-esteem, creativity, and language achievement among

20 Iranian EFL participants. The reported outcomes, ranging from increased confidence and coping strategies to enhanced creative expression and tangible language proficiency improvement, mirror the complex interplay between pedagogy and psychology. The TBLT approach reinforces the significance of a holistic approach to language education that goes beyond traditional methods, catering to learners' cognitive, emotional, and social needs.

At the advanced stage of university study, students have already possessed a certain language foundation, and the TBLT approach can enable students to improve their oral fluency and accuracy by accomplishing diversified oral tasks, and enhance their ability to use language to

communicate effectively in complex contexts. Therefore, the application of the TBLT approach in university oral English teaching is of great significance to the cultivation of students' practical language ability and cross-cultural communication ability.

### **2.2.3. Enhancing Cooperation Ability**

The TBLT approach emphasizes teamwork and collaborative learning, and prompts students to form close cooperative relationships with each other by setting language tasks to be accomplished together. In the process of carrying out the tasks, students need to communicate with each other, coordinate the division of labor, and solve problems together. This series of interactions not only exercises their oral expression and communication skills, but also develops their teamwork, leadership and sense of responsibility.

Through comparative experiments, Xu Bing and Zhu Xiaomei (2011) found that the TBLT approach creates a good environment for students to communicate and cooperate in learning, which makes students feel the fun of cooperative and experiential learning, and also helps to cultivate students' learning strategies and improve their ability to learn independently. Chen Jia and Li Bing (2013) found that the TBL can strengthen motivation, increase interest in learning, develop effective learning strategies, cultivate cooperation, enhance cultural understanding, and facilitate the development of comprehensive qualities such as collaboration and creativity in a three-year nursing English class. He Juan (2014) describes a classroom example of the use of the TBLT approach in university oral English teaching, and points out that TBLT emphasizes "cooperative learning and resource sharing", which creates more opportunities for students to learn and interact, and develops the learners' ability to comprehensively use their language knowledge and the spirit of cooperation and sharing. Zeynep Yaprak and Fatma Kaya (2020) aimed to design and implement a speaking task model following the principles of TBLT and Critical Thinking. Based on the study findings, task-driven collaborative learning yielded positive effects on the students' linguistic, cognitive and personal development. Using intellectual standards for collaborative learning not only enhanced the quality of individual and collective reasoning but also provided participants with a platform on which they could share their knowledge and ideas, which was more conducive to having lifelong learning.

The application of TBLT in university oral English teaching not only promotes the practice and application of students' language skills, but also significantly enhances students' cooperation ability. In the process of accomplishing the tasks, students need to divide the work, plan together, and discuss and feedback with each other. This interactive mode not only deepens their understanding and mastery of language knowledge, but also develops teamwork, communication and coordination skills and problem-solving abilities.

## **3. Principles of Implementation**

The TBLT approach embodies the teaching concept of "learner-centered", which emphasizes that students are enthusiastic and confident in completing tasks in real-life situations and take the initiative to learn knowledge. Therefore, in order to fully demonstrate the characteristics and advantages of TBLT, the university oral English teaching should follow the following three principles.

### **3.1. Context Has Authenticity**

In university oral English teaching, the TBLT approach should pay special attention to the authenticity and interest of the context. Authenticity means that the tasks designed should be close to students' daily life, academic activities or future career scenarios, so that students can complete the tasks as if they were in a real language environment, and thus be able to communicate and express themselves naturally in the language. Interest, on the other hand,

emphasizes the attractiveness and participation of the task content, and stimulates students' interest and motivation in learning through vivid and interesting themes, role-playing, game competitions, etc., so that they can be more actively engaged in oral practice. The combination of authenticity and fun in this context can not only effectively improve students' oral fluency and accuracy, but also enhance their language use and cross-cultural communication skills.

### **3.2. Tasks Embody Hierarchy**

A key element of TBLT in university oral English teaching is to ensure that the tasks are stepped and hierarchical. This means that when designing tasks, teachers need to give full consideration to the differences in students' language levels and abilities, and arrange the tasks in an orderly manner from simple to complex and from basic to advanced. Through the laddering of tasks, students can make steady progress in the gradual increase of difficulty, and will neither lose interest in the tasks because they are too simple, nor feel frustrated because they are too complex. At the same time, the hierarchical task design is also able to meet the needs of students with different learning styles and ability levels, ensuring that each student can get effective practice and improvement in tasks. This hierarchical arrangement of tasks helps students to build up their self-confidence in the process of gradually mastering language skills, and then participate more actively in oral learning.

### **3.3. Group Work is Collaborative**

In the teaching of oral English at university, the TBLT approach pays particular attention to ensuring the collaborative and interactive nature of group work. Collaboration is reflected in the fact that students work closely together and support each other in order to accomplish the task together, utilizing their respective strengths in order to reach the group goal. Such collaboration not only deepens the understanding and trust among members, but also promotes the natural use of language in authentic communication situations. Meanwhile, interactivity is the indispensable soul of group work, which encourages students to actively participate in discussions, express their opinions, and solve problems through effective language communication. In the interaction, students can get immediate feedback and adjust their language expressions, thus improving their oral skills through continuous practice. Therefore, by strengthening the collaborative and interactive nature of group cooperation, the TBLT approach injects new vitality into university oral English teaching and effectively promotes the overall development of students' oral skills.

## **4. Conclusion**

By summarizing the literature at home and abroad, it can be concluded that the application of TBLT in university oral English teaching effectively solves the problem of "emphasizing reading and writing rather than listening and speaking" in traditional English teaching, so that oral teaching is no longer neglected. It not only improves students' English oral expression ability, but also cultivates students' communication strategies and language use ability. In addition, the TBLT approach also promotes the in-depth development of English teaching reform, the innovation of teaching mode and the diversification of teaching approaches. Therefore, the application of TBLT in university oral English teaching has remarkable effects and far-reaching significance. In the future, with the continuous promotion and improvement of the TBLT approach, it is believed that it will play a more important role in the teaching of oral English in universities.

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