

Application Study of Task-based Approach in Middle School English Writing Teaching

Jiali Li*

School of Public Foreign Language, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

As is known to all, with the further development of economic globalization, foreign language teaching plays an increasingly important role in China's education. In recent years, as a result of China's new curriculum reform, researchers continue to explore the comprehensive learning methods, many new teaching methods with the times came into being. This paper mainly wants to discuss whether Task-based Approach really has practically helped for English writing, whether it can mobilize students' enthusiasm for writing, whether it pays attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive quality, and how to carry out Task-based Approach better and more smoothly in middle schools. In order to better ensure the authenticity of this paper, the author of the paper will use questionnaire survey and experimental methods to demonstrate. Through the research, the author of the paper understands that Task-Based Approach is developed on the basis of communicative teaching method, and its practical application in English classroom provides a good example for us. However, in the past, China's English teaching did not pay attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive ability, but only paid attention to a certain aspect of English learning, and paid less attention to writing. Students are afraid to write English compositions, lack of practical writing materials, unable to mobilize the knowledge learned, write out vividly. After the study of Task-based Approach, students can improve their writing ability and stimulate their interest in writing to some extent. After this study, the author of the paper hopes to give some ideas and inspiration to teachers who want to use Task-based Approach in writing teaching in the future. At the same time, in view of the shortcomings in the research, it is hoped that teachers can continue to reflect and summarize, and continue to conduct in-depth research.

Keywords

Task-based Approach; English Writing Class; Application; Senior High School.

1. Introduction

The new curriculum reform since 2001 has always emphasized the orientation of teacher-student relationship in education and teaching. Teachers' teaching is no longer just about studying for exams. Nowadays, more emphasis is placed on students' quality-oriented education and all-round development, which enables them to use their knowledge to solve practical problems. In the past, the teaching method emphasized more the authority of teachers and ignored the major status of students. English teachers concentrate more notice on improving the ability of listening and reading, and weaken the ability of speaking and writing. Writing teaching is an important part of English teaching, but writing has become the weak rib of middle school students. Therefore, the English Curriculum Standards also clearly put forward the cultivation of students' writing ability. In order to solve this kind of problem, we need to develop students' comprehensive ability and guide them to write effectively.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Task-based Approach (TBA)

In teaching activities, TBA believes that teachers should design specific and operable tasks around specific communication and language projects, and students can complete the tasks through various forms of language activities such as expression, communication, negotiation, explanation and inquiry, so as to achieve the purpose of learning and mastering the language. In order to understand TBA well, we must know some aspects as follow.

2.1.1. Definition of Task

From this title, it is important word, task, and many famous scholars have defined this word. There are some representatives' opinions as follow:

Breen (1987,23)explains that:“‘Task’ is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or stimulation and decision making”. Breen showed us a task would contain a purpose, a process and a result.”

Long (1985,89)said that:A task is a piece of work undertaking for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus ,examples of tasks include painting a fence , dressing a child, filling out a form, buying,a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a cheque, finding a stress destination and helping someone across the road. In other words, by 'task' is mean to the hundred and one things people do in everyday life ,at work, at play, and in between.

Prabhu (1987,24)suggests that: “A task is an activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process.”Nunan (1993,23)suggests that:“ the communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.” Nunan told us a task should regard it as a complete unit and meaning is more important than form.

There are many other definitions of tasks, the author does not have to list them at once. From the above list of definitions of tasks, we can find relevant common ground. First of all, a task may be an activity or a series of activities. By completing the activity, the goal of the task is answered.Secondly, the task does not exist independently, and it needs the related communication and cooperation of the same class, to convey the meaning instead of just focusing on the form.Thirdly, the task should be as close as possible to the actual life of students, in their capacity to carry out activities, mobilize their previous knowledge and experience, better to complete the task.Finally, the completion of the task is a complete process, we need to step by step to achieve the whole process goal. In other words, we can use Wang Qiang's words to summarize the elements of the task: A task must have a purpose which make sure the.students have a reason for undertaking the task. Then it involves a context which can be real, simulated or imaginary, and includes sociolinguistic issues such as the location, the participants and their relationship, the time, and other important factors. What's more, it should be a.process, getting the students to use learning strategies such as problem solving, reasoning, inquiring, conceptualising and communicating. Eventually, a task must show us a product, which can either visible or invisible (Wang Qiang,28).As long as teachers understand tasks well, they can create some contexts where students study target language automatically.

2.1.2. Development Process of TBA

TBA can be traced back to the late 1970s and the early 1980s in Bangalore, India, under the guidance of Prahua's communicative teaching experiment. Since the mid-1980s, with the development of psycholinguistics and then related theories of language acquisition, TBLT has been continuously enriched with its development, evolution and connotation. (Yin Xiaohong, 2007) This teaching model is a further development of communicative language teaching. The application of basic concepts into a practical meaning of classroom teaching methods, embodies the educational concept of taking students as the center and students' development as the foundation. TBA has been developing for over 20 years in foreign countries, but the research of TBA in China is still in the exploratory stage. In the earliest task-based teaching model is Professor Wu Xudong of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, followed by this model has attracted more and more attention from domestic researchers and foreign language teachers. Ministry of Education issued in 2001 "full-time compulsory education general senior middle school English curriculum. The standard (experimental draft) clearly advocates the approach of task-based teaching, later it has aroused a research upsurge again and again in China.

3. Research Design

3.1. Aims of the Research

In view of the current situation of high school English writing teaching, the author tries to apply TBA to the teaching of high school writing class, hoping to get the answers to the following questions.

- (1) whether Task-based Approach really has practically helped for English writing.
- (2) whether it can mobilize students' enthusiasm for writing.
- (3) whether it pays attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive quality, and how to carry out Task-based Approach better and more smoothly in middle schools.

3.2. Research Instruments and Objects

The author chooses two research instruments. One is a questionnaire survey, the other is a test. In addition, three writing training exercises, deriving from students' real life, are prepared carefully for the students of the experimental class to practice task-based writing.

Questionnaire survey is used to examine students' attitudes and opinions on English writing in high school before and after the experiment. The test is designed to measure students' proficiency in English writing today before and after the experiment.

The experimental subjects are students from Class 6 (50) and Class 7 (50), Grade 2, No.2 Middle School of Xuzhou District, Yibin City, Sichuan Province. They are the students of the key classes, and the students of the two classes have the same English foundation. The experimental class (Class 6) is taught writing by TBA. The control class (Class 7) adopts the traditional teaching method in the writing class.

3.3. Procedures of the Research

3.3.1. Survey Stage

In order to better carry out the experimental work, the author needs to do some preparatory work before the experiment. The author does a pre-questionnaire and a pre-test.

This questionnaire is used to test students' attitudes and opinions about English writing in high school. There are 12 questions (Qs) in the questionnaire. From Qs1 to Qs6, they are some habits and methods of students writing, and the rest questions are their attitudes toward previous writing. It consists of 12 statements for which three answers (from (a) agree, (b) neither agree nor disagree, (c) disagree) are provided them with choosing. They have to choose the answer

that is most close to them according to their actual situation. In this way, these data can reflect their real attitudes and opinions, so as to ensure the validity and reliability of the experiment.

The test is designed to measure students' proficiency in English writing. There are two tests organized by English teacher. One is pre-test instructed before the experiment, the other is post-test taken after the TBA training in the experimental class. The total score for both tests is 35, with a passing mark of 21. After the test, the computer marks the students' scores for a clear analysis of the two classes later.

3.3.2. Experimental Stage

The author conducted the study for three months, from November 2020 to January 2021, and selected two classes with the same number of students and comparable grades. Before the experiment, the author observed the writing ability of the two classes, which is roughly the same. After completing the pre-questionnaire and test, the author began the formal experiment. The author adopts the TBA for the experimental class for three months, and chooses the traditional writing teaching method for the control class. Both classes are given once a week for writing classes.

3.3.3. Post-experiment Stage

After a three-month experiment, the author takes the composition of the final English exam in high school as a post-test. It is organized at the end of this semester on January 25, 2021. Students in both classes are randomly assigned to seats by computer, and teachers monitor students' test status on video. At the end of the exam, all the students' answer sheets are collected, scanned and stored in the computer for marking. Papers whose scores vary widely will be taken out and re-marked to ensure fairness.

A post-questionnaire is also conducted to the experimental class, compared with the pre-questionnaire, because the author wants to verify whether students change their attitudes and motivation before and after the TBA training.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Data Analysis and Discussion of Questionnaires

Before the experiment, the author asked the experimental class and the control class to fill in the questionnaire. After the experiment, the author gave another questionnaire to the children in the two classes to fill in. In this part, the author will carefully analyze the results of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire.

In the pre-questionnaire, there are 12 questions, and some are students' attitudes towards English writing, others are some opinions of teachers' teaching approach. The author collects quantitative data to carefully analyze whether the students' views and feelings towards English writing class have changed after three months of TBA teaching.

From the first and second questions, we can learn that most of the students do not like writing and are not interested in the topics raised by the teacher. Only 10% of the students like writing. Looking at the third question, we don't know whether the students have too high requirements on their writing or some other reason. 75% of the students are not satisfied with their writing. When looking at the fourth question, the author makes a bold guess, which may be students fulling of fear for writing. As can be seen from the table, 77% of the students feel discouraged when facing with writing. From the fifth question, the author finds another difficult problem in students' writing. They have no inspiration to write, in short, they just don't know what to write. Of course, writing problems are not only connected with students, but also the teachers. From the answer to the seventh question in the table above, the author learns that 77% of the students hold that the teacher's teaching method affects their writing. According to these

data, the author has been confident to do this experiment to check the effect of task-based approach.

At the end of the three-month experiment, the author asks the students to fill in another questionnaire.

For the students who have been taught writing by TBA, the author can get relatively reliable answers from the questionnaire, and their attitudes and opinions towards English writing have greatly changed.

Before TBA class, students don't like topics chosen by teachers, but now teachers try to connect students' daily life, which greatly help them write. We can draw the conclusion in NO.4 question. When we look at the ninth question, 89 percent of the students think that TBA improves their writing ability, which is a very direct data, proving that TBA does have an effect. From the results of the above two questionnaires, the author can know that the students' enthusiasm, motivation, interest and attitude towards writing have really changed greatly.

4.2. Data Collection and Analysis of Test

During this experiment, the author adopts TBA in experimental class, while traditional writing approach is used by control class. Before the TBA teaching, the students are given one test, and at the end of three months, another test is given, and the scores of both tests are recorded. By analyzing the data, we can draw conclusions below:

First, there is not much differences between the mean of the experimental class and the control class, which is very close. The mean of the experimental class is 19.6, while the mean of the control class is 20.1.

Second, the number and ratio of each score line in the two classes are very close.

Pre-test results show that there is no significant difference in writing ability between the two classes. The mean of composition obtained by the author in the experiment is reliable, and the results of the experiment are valid.

However, after three months of experiment, we can see that the average of the experimental class is slightly higher than that of the control class. The mean of the experimental class is 21.96 and that of the control class is 20.71.

Second, in the experimental class, the number of students with grades 29-35 and 22-28 increases to a certain extent, while the number of students with grades in the control class decreases on the contrary.

The experimental results of the post-test show that the writing ability of the students in the experimental class has been improved after TBA teaching. However, the writing ability of the students in the control class with the traditional teaching method has no obvious changes.

From the analysis above, the author finds that task-based Approach really has practically helped for English writing, because it make students in experimental class enhance their English writing proficiency. It can also mobilize students' enthusiasm and motivation for writing, and it pays attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive quality. Not only is it related to their own knowledge and daily life for writing, but also improve the students' ability to collect materials for writing.

5. Conclusion

In this part, the author will make a corresponding conclusion according to her experimental results. Important research findings will be presented truthfully. Due to the limitation of the author's own ability and the interference of subjective and objective factors, there will be some deficiencies in this study. The author will also list the problems and difficulties existing in the study, and provide some constructive suggestions for the future research.

Based on a three-month experiment of experimental class and control class, the author draw a reliable conclusion, which teaching method is a kind of better than the traditional writing teaching method, because it really improves the students' writing proficiency, enhances the students' motivation to participate in the writing class and enthusiasm, also cultivates the students' comprehensive quality. TBA teaching approach makes students realize that the writing process is fun and gives students the confidence to face writing. By connecting with the reality of students' lives, students have something to say, and the whole writing class is no longer dull but becomes more lively. What's more, through the whole experiment process, it also shows many English teachers how to better carry out the TBA teaching process.

Although the author has made some achievements with the help of her tutor and other teachers, there are still limitations in this study. Specific as follows:

First of all, the selected experimental subjects are not objective enough to present the specific writing situation of the whole high school students. Because the author chooses the students in the key class of the second year of high school. Students in key classes must have a better English foundation than those in ordinary classes. Therefore, it is not objective enough to select only the students of key classes as experimental subjects. Secondly, the study lasts only three months, which is too short to ensure the difference between the two writing teaching methods. The contingency of the experimental results still exists. As is known to all, language learning is a long road. From this research, the author draws some beneficial implications for the application of TBA teaching method in high school writing classes.

In a word, high school English teachers should know more about the theory of task-based teaching. Only after the theoretical foundation is established, can they operate in the market. Compared with the traditional writing teaching method, task-based teaching method can better mobilize students' writing enthusiasm and innovative consciousness. Teachers are good at using the theoretical knowledge they have learned, integrating theory with practice, and giving full play to the educational synergy.

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