A STUDY OF KUNMING NO.3 MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS ON TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) APPROACH IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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The research investigates how students perceive the effectiveness of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in the English classroom at Kunming No. 3 Middle School in Yunnan, China. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The results show that students at Kunming No. 3 Middle School have a moderate perception of their engagement, performance, and overall experience with the TBLT approach in their English classroom. They recognized the practicality of TBLT and its benefits, such as increased motivation, better communication skills, and improved listening and speaking abilities. Additionally, they appreciated the opportunity to apply what they learned in real-life situations. However, some students mentioned that TBLT could be improved in terms of reading abilities, learning strategies, the time-consuming nature of tasks, difficulties in group work, and the limited focus on grammar. The findings suggest that TBLT can be more effective by implementing specific pedagogical implications, providing students with a comprehensive and valuable language learning experience.

Keywords: Chinese middle school; students’ engagement; students’ performance; students’ perceptions; Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)
Background of the study

With the development of global modernization, the demand for dialogue and communication in the economy, politics, science and technology, culture, education, and other fields is growing among various countries worldwide. Under the circumstances, English plays an increasingly important role in our lives, and more talents with excellent English communication abilities are required. So, it is necessary to teach effectively and improve students’ performance and English communicative competence.

At the beginning of the 21st century, China started a new round of curriculum reform of national compulsory education. As a result, the National English Curriculum Standard was issued by China’s Ministry of Education (Chen, 2016).

The National English Curriculum Standard points out the tasks of English courses in the stage of compulsory education: to stimulate and foster students’ interest and enthusiasm in English learning; help students develop good learning habits and master effective learning strategies; pay attention to students’ dominant position and their actual needs in the learning process; cultivate students’ autonomous learning ability and the spirit of cooperating with others; comprehensively develop students’ listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills and English communicative competence; encourage students to know about the world, broaden their horizons, and form a positive world outlook, outlook on life and values (Huang, 2015).

In addition, the National English Curriculum Standard advocates task-based language teaching in English teaching practice, and many scholars and English teachers in China have started in-depth studies and exploration of task-based language teaching.

Rationale

With the proceeding of curriculum reform in China, English teachers in Chinese middle schools attempted to use task-based language teaching in English teaching according to the National English Curriculum Standard. However, there is still a large gap between the National English Curriculum Standard requirements and the practical application of task-based language teaching in Chinese middle schools (Huang, 2015).

Moreover, as a relatively novel teaching method, many teachers may need some time to study the feasibility and influence of task-based language teaching. So, the researcher conducted a six-week teaching experiment at Kunming No. 3 Middle School in Yunnan, China. An English teacher in the middle school is responsible for teaching two classes, each with about 60 students. The experiment participants were 124 middle school students in Grade 8, aged around 14.

The students were from two classes the researcher taught; one received TBLT instruction (Experimental class), and the other received traditional teaching methods (Controlled class). Based on the experiment, the study intends to investigate students’ perception of their engagement, performance, and overall experience with the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach in the English classroom at Kunming No. 3 Middle School in Yunnan, China.

The researcher wants to study students’ perception of their engagement using the TBLT approach in the English classroom because student engagement is a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of any teaching method. Understanding how students perceive
their engagement can provide valuable insights into the level of interest, motivation, and involvement they experience during TBLT lessons.

Additionally, the researcher wants to study students’ perception of their performance using the TBLT approach in the English classroom because students’ performance assesses the student’s understanding of their progress and achievement in the English classroom. By examining the students’ perception of their performance, the researcher can determine whether the TBLT approach is conducive to effective learning outcomes. The researcher wants to know students’ perceptions of the TBLT approach in the English classroom because students are the center of the class.

English teachers can make teaching more effective, identify any potential strengths or weaknesses of TBLT, and gain insights into areas for improvement only if they know what students think and consider students’ feelings.

Therefore, by studying students’ perception of their engagement, performance, and overall experience with the TBLT approach in the English classroom, the researcher can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of TBLT and make informed recommendations for its implementation in the educational context of Kunming No. 3 Middle School in Yunnan, China.

**Research Questions**

What is the level of Kunming No.3 Chinese Middle School students’ perception of their engagement using the TBLT Approach in the English classroom?

What is the level of Kunming No.3 Chinese Middle School students’ perception of their performance using the TBLT Approach in the English classroom?

What is the Kunming No.3 Chinese Middle School students’ perception of the TBLT Approach in the English classroom?

**Methodology**

**Participants**

This study’s population was 312 Grade 8 middle school students of Kunming No.3 Middle School, aged around 14. Two classes of students in Grade 8 were chosen for the teaching experiment, and the experimental class consisted of 61 students exposed to the TBLT approach.

In contrast, the control class received no intervention and served as a comparison group. Based on the experiment, these 61 students from the experimental class were selected as the sample of this study in order to investigate students’ perception of their engagement, performance, and overall experience with the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach in the English classroom.

**Research instruments**

This study employs quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. To answer research questions 1-3, the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview are used to gather data from the students in the experimental class with the TBLT approach. There are three parts included in the questionnaire survey.
The first part is students’ perception of their engagement using the TBLT approach in the English classroom, which Qin (2021) adopted and consisted of 6 question items. The second part is students’ perception of their performance using the TBLT approach in the English classroom, consisting of 8 question items. The third part is students’ perception of the TBLT approach in the English classroom, which consisted of 9 question items. The second and third parts adopted some items from the “Task-Based Language Teaching Questionnaire” that Zheng & Borg (2014) developed. As for the semi-structured interview, the four interview questions were adopted from Ellis (2021).

Research Findings

Findings on RQ1

Table 1 - The level of students’ perception of engagement using the TBLT Approach in the English classroom (made by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>TBLT motivates me to participate and interact more in English classroom activities.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>TBLT enables me to ask questions more in the classroom without feeling embarrassed.</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>TBLT lets me exchange my ideas with my classmates during group discussions.</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>TBLT improves my communication skills through group discussions and presentations.</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>TBLT builds my confidence to participate actively in and out of the English classroom activities.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>TBLT enables me to develop a resourceful attitude to complete the tasks given by my teacher.</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 1 shows students’ perception of engagement using the TBLT Approach in the English classroom, which includes six items, and the overall mean value was 3.19. The findings suggested that students’ perception of their engagement using the TBLT Approach in the English classroom was moderate.

Most students expressed a positive sentiment regarding their learning engagement after the TBLT instruction of six weeks. It is evident that the items relating to motivation and communication skills have a higher mean value than other items, which indicates that with the TBLT approach, students were incredibly motivated to participate and interact more in the English classroom activities as well as their communication skills were effectively improved through group discussion and presentation.

However, the item relating to exchanging ideas has the lowest mean value, which means there is room for improvement in promoting students’ idea exchange during group discussions.
Findings on RQ2

Table 2 - The level of students’ perception of performance using the TBLT approach in the English classroom
(made by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>TBLT develops my confidence to present in front of teachers and peers because this allows us to express our ideas together.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>TBLT helps me to communicate my ideas in English about the tasks.</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>TBLT helps me to be more focused and improves my listening abilities.</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>TBLT helps me to be more focused and improves my reading abilities.</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>TBLT helps me to be more focused and improves my speaking abilities.</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>TBLT helps me to be more focused and improves my writing abilities.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>TBLT helped me complete the assigned task on time as I focused more on the instruction given by my teacher.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>TBLT encourages me to focus more on my learning ability and improve my classroom performance.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall: 3.27 | 0.63 | Moderate

Tab. 2 shows students’ perception of performance using the TBLT Approach in the English classroom, which includes eight items, and the overall mean value was 3.27. The findings suggested that students’ perception of performance using the TBLT Approach in the English classroom was moderate. Most students expressed a positive sentiment regarding their learning performance after the six-week TBLT instruction.

It is noticeable that the items relating to listening and speaking abilities have a higher mean value than other items, which indicates that with the help of the TBLT approach, students tended to be more focused.

Their listening and speaking abilities were significantly enhanced. However, the item relating to reading abilities has the lowest mean value, which means there is room for improvement in enhancing students’ reading abilities.

Findings on RQ3

Tab. 3 shows students’ perception of the TBLT approach in the English classroom, which includes nine items, and the overall mean value was 3.23. The findings suggested that students’ perception of the TBLT Approach in the English classroom reached a moderate level. Most students expressed a positive sentiment regarding the TBLT approach after the TBLT instruction of six weeks.

The items relating to bold attempts and real-life application have a higher mean value than other items, which indicates that with the TBLT approach, students were effectively encouraged to try and express themselves boldly without being afraid of making mistakes.
while learning as well as their ability to apply what they learned in real-life situations was significantly developed because it focuses on practical tasks.

However, the item relating to learning strategies has the lowest mean value, which means there is room for improvement in supporting students’ use of English learning strategies for a better understanding of the task.

Table 3 - Students’ perception of the TBLT approach in the English Classroom (made by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>TBLT activates my curiosity for learning and becomes aware of my weaknesses.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>TBLT improves my motivation to learn English because the activities are more interesting.</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>TBLT creates a relaxing classroom environment as students complete a particular task together.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>TBLT helps me use English language learning strategies to understand the task better.</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>TBLT develops my interpersonal skills while learning because my teacher, classmates, and I always work on the task together.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>TBLT develops my ability to apply what I learned in real-life situations because it focuses on practical tasks.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The findings revealed that students at Kunming No. 3 Middle School in Yunnan, China, had a moderate perception of their engagement, performance, and overall experience with the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach in their English classroom. These students generally viewed TBLT as a practical approach, and they thought the TBLT approach made their learning process more meaningful and enjoyable.

They recognized its benefits, such as improved learning motivation and communication skills and enhanced English listening and speaking abilities. They also appreciated the opportunity to make bold attempts and apply what they learned in real-life situations. In addition, they mentioned some additional strength regarding the aspects of collaboration and teamwork, personalization and creativity, as well as feedback and reflection.
These findings are consistent with the research conducted by other scholars, such as Smith (2010) and Johnson (2012), who also found that TBLT positively influenced students’ language learning outcomes and motivation.

While acknowledging much strength, students also identified a few areas for improvement of the TBLT approach, particularly regarding the time-consuming nature of tasks, difficulties in group work and time management, the limited focus on grammar, and confusion about language instruction and evaluation.

This finding is also consistent with the research conducted by Johnson (2012) and Brown (2015), who found that students sometimes faced challenges with time management and working collaboratively in TBLT classrooms. Their studies also highlighted the importance of incorporating grammar instruction alongside task-based activities.

In conjunction with previous scholars’ research, these findings align with the principles of learner-centeredness and task authenticity in TBLT. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of considering learners’ needs, interests, and goals when designing language tasks. Through incorporating learner preferences and real-world contexts, TBLT becomes more effective in promoting language learning and application.

Moreover, previous research has emphasized the importance of timely feedback and supportive teachers in implementing TBLT. Feedback helps learners in self-assessment, error correction, and language development. Incorporating feedback mechanisms, such as peer feedback or teacher guidance, can enhance learners’ language accuracy and proficiency. Teachers’ guidance and feedback are valuable contributions to the student’s learning process. This emphasizes the role of educators in facilitating and scaffolding TBLT activities effectively.

Despite these consistencies with prior research, the study has filled a significant gap in the literature. While there are studies about students’ perceptions of TBLT, most focus on junior high school or college students, so there is a limited focus on middle school students and their specific context. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing insights into the perceptions of Chinese middle school students in Kunming No.3 Middle School regarding the TBLT approach.

This fills a gap in the literature and offers valuable information for English teachers and curriculum developers in designing practical language teaching approaches for this specific age group. Thus, teachers should focus on designing interactive, collaborative, and relevant tasks in real-life contexts. By incorporating authentic and meaningful tasks, students can engage actively in language learning and apply their skills in practical situations. In addition, the importance of student engagement and active participation should be emphasized.

Adopting a student-centered approach within TBLT allows students to take ownership of their learning, personalize tasks, and express their creativity. Hence, teachers should encourage students to contribute ideas, make choices, and set goals within the framework of TBLT. Providing guidance and support is essential for successful TBLT implementation. This is when scaffolding instruction is needed, as this helps to provide clear explanations, model task completion, and provide ongoing feedback. This helps students complete the tasks effectively and build their confidence in English.

As for language instructions, integrating them within TBLT tasks is crucial. Teachers should ensure that language forms, functions, and vocabulary relevant to the task are explicitly taught and practiced. This integration helps students develop language proficiency
while engaging in meaningful communicative activities and considering the weaknesses identified with assessment while implementing formative assessment strategies. This way, ongoing and continuous assessment practices provide timely feedback to students, allowing them to monitor their progress, identify areas for improvement, and make necessary adjustments.

Teaching TBLT needs reflective practices to evaluate and refine the TBLT implementation continually. Reflecting on students’ performance, feedback, learning outcomes, and the teaching process can inform instructional decisions, task design modifications, and overall teaching improvements. By providing clear instructions and explanations on using specific learning strategies, such as note-taking, summarizing, skimming, or scanning, teachers can introduce different learning strategies to students and explain how they can be applied in various situations.

Moreover, offering examples of how learning strategies can be utilized in different tasks can encourage students to practice using learning strategies through in-class activities or homework assignments. At the same time, teachers can provide feedback and guidance to help students improve their learning strategies.

However, the study also unveils particular challenges and areas for enhancement. Students express concerns about bolstering reading abilities within the TBLT framework. They advocate for developing and including effective learning strategies to navigate the demands of TBLT, particularly in addressing time-consuming tasks and managing group work dynamics. Additionally, students note a perceived limitation regarding grammar instruction within the TBLT approach.

These findings offer valuable insights for refining TBLT implementation. To harness the benefits of TBLT and address its perceived shortcomings, this research suggests specific pedagogical implications.

**Pedagogical implications**

Few pedagogical implications are suggested. These include a more deliberate integration of reading comprehension components and grammar instruction within the TBLT tasks. Additionally, teachers can focus on nurturing students’ language learning strategies to navigate the complexities of TBLT activities effectively.

Specialized teacher training programs can equip educators with the necessary skills to facilitate TBLT effectively while managing group dynamics. Furthermore, incorporating regular feedback mechanisms that encourage ongoing student input can further enhance the TBLT experience.

In TBLT, teachers are regarded as facilitators; thus, providing students resources, such as handouts or online materials that they can refer to outside class for further support, might encourage students to seek help or guidance when they have questions or concerns during the learning process.

Therefore, monitoring students’ progress by providing constructive feedback is necessary. Students acknowledge the practicality of TBLT as an effective language-learning tool. They attribute increased motivation, enhanced communication skills, and improved listening and speaking abilities to their exposure to TBLT.

Therefore, students should value TBLT’s opportunities for applying their acquired language skills in real-life contexts, emphasizing its relevance in practical language use.
Conclusion

This research delves into the perceptions and effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the English classroom at Kunming No. 3 Middle School in Yunnan, China. Data collection involved a combination of questionnaires and interviews to gain insight into students’ experiences. The study revealed a nuanced perspective among students, reflecting appreciation and room for improvement in their TBLT encounters. The indication is that students at Kunming No. 3 Middle School generally maintain a moderate perception of their engagement, performance, and overall experience with the TBLT approach. Notably, students acknowledge the practicality of TBLT as an effective language-learning tool. They attribute increased motivation, enhanced communication skills, and improved listening and speaking abilities to their exposure to TBLT. Furthermore, they value TBLT’s opportunities for applying their acquired language skills in real-life contexts, emphasizing its relevance in practical language use.

However, the study also unveils particular challenges and areas for enhancement. Students express concerns about bolstering reading abilities within the TBLT framework. They advocate for developing and including effective learning strategies to navigate the demands of TBLT, particularly in addressing time-consuming tasks and managing group work dynamics. Additionally, students note a perceived limitation regarding grammar instruction within the TBLT approach.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of balancing the strengths and areas of improvement associated with TBLT. By addressing these challenges through pedagogical adjustments and teacher training, TBLT can provide students at Kunming No. 3 Middle School with a more comprehensive and enriching language learning experience.

Although this approach has some weaknesses, TBLT fosters collaboration among students, allowing them to work together to accomplish tasks. Thus, providing students opportunities to interact with peers encourages them to exchange ideas and communication and facilitate group work. In the long run, this promotes social interaction, cooperative learning, and the development of interpersonal and communication skills.

References:


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