

The Impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on Senior High School Students' English Learning Engagement

Yujie Zhang

Abstract:

This study focuses on the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on senior high school students' English learning engagement, aiming to provide evidence-based optimization strategies for senior high school English teaching. Against the backdrop of deepening basic education curriculum reform in China, and targeting the limitations of traditional teaching models, this study explores the mechanism by which TBLT affects students' behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and motivational engagement. It designs multi-dimensional questionnaires and classroom observation scales, selects samples from high schools of different levels to investigate the current status of learning engagement, analyzes elements such as TBLT task design and implementation processes, constructs theoretical models, and verifies them through experimental methods. By comparing the effects of traditional teaching and TBLT, combined with interviews to explore influencing factors, this study can enrich theoretical discussions in this field, provide optimization strategies for teachers, and contribute to improving teaching quality and implementing the goal of cultivating core competencies.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, senior high school students, English learning engagement, learning motivation, classroom participation

1.Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

1.1.1 Current Status of Senior High School English Teaching

From the perspective of educational philosophy, the

core ideas of the new curriculum reform have not been fully understood by many teachers, who still prefer teacher-centered teaching methods. In such classrooms, knowledge transmission has become the primary task of teachers, while the dominant role of students in learning and the cultivation of their autonomous learning abilities are neglected. Teachers fully control the rhythm and content of teaching activities,

and most students can only engage in passive knowledge absorption, rarely having the opportunity for active exploration and independent thinking, which leads to insufficient learning engagement in English learning. This is obviously contrary to the core concepts advocated by TBLT, which emphasize highlighting students' subjectivity and focusing on ability cultivation. Although modern teaching models such as TBLT have been integrated into senior high school English teaching, some teachers have failed to grasp their essence in practice, resulting in these advanced teaching methods failing to achieve the expected effects in classroom implementation.^{[4][19]}

1.1.2 Application Value of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

The core essence of TBLT lies in placing "tasks" rather than isolated language knowledge points at the center of teaching design. It carefully creates language use scenarios that simulate real-world needs, forcing learners to mobilize all cognitive resources and achieve practically meaningful communicative goals through a series of complex cognitive operations and meaning negotiation processes such as understanding, negotiating, reasoning, and decision-making.^[8] This learning process naturally requires a high degree of attention focus, continuous emotional involvement, and active strategy application, and its essence is an immersive cognitive and social practice. In TBLT practice, teachers need to achieve five transformations: 1. Abandon cramming teaching and integrate multi-source teaching resources; 2. Promote interaction with teaching materials and create a relaxed classroom environment; 3. Use techniques such as situational creation to cultivate students' awareness of independent exploration; 4. Develop personalized plans based on students' characteristics; 5. Highlight students' subjectivity through student feedback.^{[3][17]}

1.1.3 Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research

This study can not only enrich theoretical discussions on TBLT in the field of senior high school students' English learning engagement and provide new empirical evidence for teaching methodology theories, but more importantly, its practical value lies in providing scientific basis and operable strategies for senior high school English teachers in China to optimize teaching design, enhance classroom attractiveness, and promote students' active learning. Ultimately, it serves to improve English teaching quality, implement the goal of cultivating core competencies, and promote the effective transformation of senior high school English teaching from "teaching-centered" to "learning-centered".^[8]

1.2 Review of Domestic and Foreign Research

Status

However, there are still some deficiencies in current research on the impact of TBLT on senior high school students' English learning engagement. Most studies focus on theoretical discussions and demonstrations of teaching practice cases, lacking in-depth research on the specific mechanisms and paths through which TBLT affects senior high school students' English learning engagement. There are few studies on the impact of TBLT on senior high school students' English learning engagement in different learning contexts (such as online-offline blended learning). Moreover, the scope of research objects is relatively narrow, and targeted research on senior high school students with different proficiency levels and learning styles needs to be strengthened. This study can be carried out in the following directions: in-depth exploration of the internal mechanism by which TBLT affects senior high school students' English learning engagement, such as revealing the relationship between task design, student participation, teacher guidance and other factors and various dimensions of learning engagement through empirical research; conducting comparative studies on the impact of TBLT on senior high school students' English learning engagement in different learning contexts to provide more targeted guidance for teaching practice; expanding the scope of research objects, focusing on senior high school students with different proficiency levels and learning styles, and designing personalized TBLT programs to improve teaching effects.^{[5][9]}

1.3 Research Objectives and Contents

1.3.1 Overall Research Objective

This study aims to deeply explore the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on senior high school students' English learning engagement, provide evidence-based optimization strategies for senior high school English teaching practice, improve teaching effects, and promote students' enthusiasm and initiative in English learning.

1.3.2 Sub-objectives

Analyze the current status of senior high school students' English learning engagement: comprehensively understand the specific performance and levels of senior high school students in various dimensions such as behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and motivational engagement in the process of English learning, and clarify the overall situation and existing problems of current students' learning engagement.^[16]

Explore the mechanism by which TBLT affects senior high school students' English learning engagement: reveal

the ways and means through which TBLT affects students' learning engagement, and analyze the internal relationship between task design, implementation process, teacher-student interaction and other elements and various dimensions of students' learning engagement.^{[10][14]}

Evaluate the application effect of TBLT in senior high school English teaching: measure the changes in students' English learning engagement before and after the adoption of TBLT through comparative experiments and other methods, as well as the actual impact of this teaching method on students' English academic performance, learning interest, autonomous learning ability, etc.

1.3.3 Research Contents

Content 1: Investigation on the current status of senior high school students' English learning engagement

Design comprehensive measurement tools: draw on mature scales at home and abroad, combine the characteristics of senior high school students' English learning, and compile questionnaires covering dimensions such as behavioral engagement (e.g., classroom participation, homework completion), emotional engagement (e.g., interest in English learning, attitude), cognitive engagement (e.g., use of learning strategies, depth of thinking), and motivational engagement (e.g., intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation). At the same time, design classroom observation scales to observe students' real-time performance in English classes.^{[18][20]}

Select representative samples: randomly select a certain number of classes from high schools of different levels (key senior high schools, ordinary senior high schools) and regions as research samples to ensure that the samples are widely representative and cover students with different learning backgrounds and proficiency levels. - Data collection and analysis: collect data through various methods such as questionnaires, classroom observations, and student interviews. Use statistical analysis software to conduct descriptive statistics and correlation analysis on the data to understand the average level, distribution, and correlation between different dimensions of senior high school students' English learning engagement, thereby comprehensively presenting the current status of senior high school students' English learning engagement.

Content 2: Research on the mechanism by which TBLT affects senior high school students' English learning engagement

Analysis of key elements of TBLT: conduct detailed analysis of key elements in TBLT such as task design (task objectives, content, difficulty, authenticity, etc.), task implementation process (pre-task introduction, in-task group collaboration and teacher guidance, post-task summary and feedback), and teacher-student interaction models (teacher guidance methods, student participation, frequen-

cy and quality of student-student interaction).^[12]

Theoretical model construction: based on educational and psychological theories such as constructivist learning theory and motivation theory, construct a theoretical model of how TBLT affects senior high school students' English learning engagement, and hypothesize the action paths between various key elements and various dimensions of learning engagement. - Empirical testing: through classroom experiments, adopt TBLT in the experimental group and traditional teaching methods in the control group. During the experiment, collect data through classroom observations, students' learning logs, teachers' teaching reflections, and interviews, and use structural equation modeling and other methods to verify the theoretical model, clarify the specific mechanism and path by which TBLT affects senior high school students' English learning engagement.

2. Related Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Definitions

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-Based Language Teaching is a language teaching model centered on "tasks", whose core proposition is "learning by doing", emphasizing language acquisition through completing meaningful communicative tasks. A "task" refers to a meaningful language use activity carried out by learners to achieve specific goals (such as collaborative problem-solving, simulating real conversations). Its core characteristics include: student-centered, with teachers as guides; focusing on meaning negotiation, with language forms serving communicative needs; emphasizing process participation rather than single result evaluation.^[2]

The components of TBLT include task objectives, input materials, activity forms, teacher-student roles, and evaluation criteria. Operationally, it follows Willis's three-stage model: Pre-task (teachers introduce the theme and clarify task requirements); During-task (students complete tasks in groups with teachers' guidance); Post-task (achievement display, teachers and students jointly evaluate task completion). The three stages are interlinked, forming a complete learning chain of "preparation-practice-reflection".^[6]

In application, the following principles should be followed: task authenticity (such as simulating airport check-in, English speeches) to be close to real language use scenarios; difficulty appropriateness (adjusting task complexity according to students' proficiency, such as providing vocabulary lists for weak students); interactivity (designing group discussions, information gap activities,

etc. to promote teacher-student and student-student communication).

2.2 Concepts and Dimensions of English Learning Engagement

Scholars such as Fredricks define learning engagement as an integrated state of continuous behavioral participation, positive emotional experience, and in-depth cognitive effort demonstrated by students in the learning process, which is a core indicator of learning quality. It is reflected not only in external classroom participation behaviors but also in internal emotional and cognitive involvement, with the three being interrelated and jointly constituting the complete connotation of learning engagement. - Behavioral engagement: refers to students' specific participation behaviors in English learning, such as speaking in class, completing homework on time, and participating in group tasks, which can be measured by participation frequency and duration. - Emotional engagement: involves emotional experiences in the learning process, including interest in English, learning self-confidence, anxiety caused by setbacks, etc., which directly affect learning initiative. - Cognitive engagement: reflected in the use of learning strategies and depth of thinking, such as actively consulting materials, analyzing problems in English, and making creative expressions, reflecting the state of in-depth learning.^[11]

2.3 Theoretical Relationship between TBLT and English Learning Engagement

TBLT promotes English learning engagement through multiple paths: the interactivity of tasks (such as group collaboration) requires students to participate frequently, directly enhancing behavioral engagement; meaning negotiation in real contexts (such as solving practical problems) makes students feel the value of language, stimulates emotional resonance, and reduces anxiety; cognitive challenges in task completion (such as information integration, strategy adjustment) promote in-depth thinking and enhance cognitive engagement. The three form a linkage, transforming learning engagement from passive requirements to active needs, which is in line with the law of "behavior-emotion-cognition" coordinated development.

3. Research design and methods

3.1 Research Objects

3.1.1 Selection Criteria

Two parallel classes of Grade One students from an ordinary senior high school in a certain city were selected as

research objects. It was ensured that there were no significant differences in English entrance exam scores, gender ratio, and learning styles between the two classes, and both were taught by the same English teacher to control the interference of teacher variables on the experimental results.

3.1.2 Sample Overview

There were 102 students in the two classes, including 51 students in the experimental class (26 boys and 25 girls) and 51 students in the control class (24 boys and 27 girls). The average age of the students was 16, and the average English scores in the entrance exam were 72.3 and 71.8 respectively (out of 100), with overall balanced English proficiency.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Research Type

A quasi-experimental research design was adopted, with an experimental class (using TBLT) and a control class (using traditional lecture-based teaching) set up to analyze the impact of TBLT on students' English learning engagement through pre-test and post-test comparisons.

3.2.2 Data Collection Methods

A mixed research method was adopted: questionnaires were used as the main data source, supplemented by classroom observations to record students' real-time participation behaviors, and combined with teacher-student interviews to supplement in-depth explanations of reasons, realizing the mutual confirmation of quantitative and qualitative data.

3.3 Research Tools

3.3.1 English Learning Engagement Questionnaire

Referencing the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale for Students (UWES-S), the revised version included 4 dimensions: behavioral engagement (e.g., frequency of speaking in class), emotional engagement (e.g., learning interest), cognitive engagement (e.g., strategy application), and motivational engagement, with a total of 17 items, using a 7-point scoring method. The pre-test showed that the scale had good reliability and validity with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.8.^{[18][20]}

3.3.2 Classroom Observation Record Form

A record form containing 12 indicators such as "task participation duration", "number of student-student interactions", and "proportion of target language use" was designed, which was recorded simultaneously by 2 observers, with an inter-observer reliability of over 0.87.

3.3.3 Interview Outlines

Student interviews focused on classroom engagement feelings and task experiences (e.g., “the impact of task difficulty on participation”); teacher interviews focused on the difficulties in TBLT implementation and changes in students’ engagement. The outlines were reviewed by 3 education experts ^[12]

3.4 Research Process

One week before the experiment, a pre-test of English learning engagement was conducted on both classes; the compulsory module “Environmental Protection” was determined as the teaching content; the teacher of the experimental class received 3 TBLT training sessions, focusing on task design and group interaction organization. The experiment lasted for 10 weeks: the experimental class adopted the three-stage teaching of “Pre-task (situational introduction) - During-task (group collaborative research and making English posters) - Post-task (achievement display and mutual evaluation)””; the control class mainly focused on text explanation and exercise training. A post-test of learning engagement was conducted at the end of the 10th week of the experiment; 2 classes were randomly selected for classroom observation every week; after the experiment, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students and the teaching teacher, each lasting about 30 minutes.

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis Methods

SPSS 25.0 software was used to conduct independent samples t-test on the pre-test data of the two classes to verify homogeneity, conduct descriptive statistics and difference analysis on the post-test data, and explore the correlation between engagement dimensions and task elements through correlation analysis. Nvivo12 software was used to code interview transcripts and observation records, extract core themes such as “task interestingness” and “group collaboration satisfaction”, and reveal the deep mechanism by which TBLT affects learning engagement. ^[13]

4. Research Results and Analysis

4.1 Overall Changes in Students’ English Learning Engagement Before and After TBLT Implementation

A pre-test of English learning engagement was conducted on students from both classes before the experiment. The results showed that the average total score of the experimental class was (45.23±6.15), and that of the control class was (44.89±5.92). Independent samples t-test ($t=0.32$, $p=0.75>0.05$) showed that there were no signifi-

cant differences in scores of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and motivational engagement between the two classes, indicating that the initial learning engagement levels were consistent, meeting the homogeneity requirements of experimental research.

Post-test data after 10 weeks of the experiment showed that the average total score of learning engagement in the experimental class was (58.67±7.21), significantly higher than that in the control class (47.32±6.45). Independent samples t-test results ($t=8.96$, $p=0.00<0.01$) indicated that there was an extremely significant difference in overall learning engagement between the two classes, with an effect size of Cohen’s $d=0.62$, suggesting that TBLT had a moderate to high positive impact on improving learning engagement. Paired samples t-test of the experimental class before and after the test showed ($t=-12.35$, $p=0.00<0.01$), the post-test total score increased by 13.44 points compared with the pre-test, with an increase rate of 29.7%; among them, the behavioral engagement dimension increased the most significantly (32.6%), followed by cognitive engagement (27.8%). However, the difference in scores of the control class before and after the test was not significant ($t=-1.52$, $p=0.13>0.05$), further confirming the promoting effect of TBLT on learning engagement.

4.2 The Impact of TBLT on Various Dimensions of English Learning Engagement

Classroom observation data showed that students in the experimental class spoke actively 7.2 times per class on average, an increase of 242.9% compared with the control class (2.1 times); task participation duration accounted for 85.3% of the total class time, significantly higher than 41.6% in the control class. Questionnaire results showed that the scores of behavioral engagement items such as “completing English homework on time” and “participating in group discussions” in the experimental class (6.12±0.87) were significantly higher than those in the control class (4.35±1.02). In interviews, 8 students in the experimental class mentioned that “group tasks require everyone to contribute ideas, so they have to participate actively”, confirming the driving effect of TBLT on behavioral engagement.

Scale data showed that the scores of emotional engagement items such as “being interested in English learning” and “feeling pleasure in learning English” in the experimental class (5.89±0.93) were significantly higher than those in the control class (3.76±1.14), while the score of “English learning makes me anxious” (2.15±0.78) was significantly lower than that in the control class (4.23±0.91). In student interviews, expressions such as “I felt a great sense of accomplishment when making posters and displaying results in English” and “the classroom atmosphere is relaxed, and I am not afraid of speaking

incorrectly” appeared frequently, indicating that TBLT reduced emotional barriers and improved learning pleasure through meaning construction and positive feedback.^[19]

The scores of cognitive engagement items such as “actively consulting extended materials” and “analyzing problems in English” in the experimental class (5.67 ± 0.89) were significantly higher than those in the control class (3.89 ± 1.05). Classroom observations found that students in the experimental class used deep strategies such as “guessing word meanings” and “integrating information” 3.2 times more frequently than those in the control class. The teacher mentioned in the interview that “to complete the ‘environmental protection’ theme task, students would take the initiative to study English literature and even put forward interdisciplinary questions”, indicating that TBLT drove in-depth cognitive participation through real tasks.

4.3 Differences in the Impact of TBLT on Students with Different Characteristics

Students were divided into three proficiency levels (high, medium, low) according to their English entrance scores: low-proficiency students in the experimental class had the largest improvement in learning engagement (38.2% increase in post-test compared with pre-test), especially in behavioral engagement (42.5%) and emotional engagement (39.7%); medium-proficiency students had an increase of 27.6%; high-proficiency students had an increase of 18.9%, mainly in the cognitive engagement dimension. In terms of gender differences, girls scored slightly higher in emotional engagement (6.02 ± 0.78) than boys (5.76 ± 0.83), but the overall difference was not significant ($p=0.12 > 0.05$), indicating that TBLT had a consistent impact on students of different genders.

5. Discussion

5.1 Comparative Analysis of Research Results and Expectations

The research results fully support the research hypothesis: the total score and scores of various dimensions of learning engagement in the experimental class in the post-test were significantly higher than those in the control class, and there were significant differences between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental class itself, confirming that TBLT has a positive effect on improving senior high school students’ English learning engagement, which is consistent with the expectation in the research design that “TBLT can stimulate students’ in-depth participation”. The results of this study are consistent with Meng Doudou’s (2025) conclusion that task-based activities improve classroom participation, both indicating that TBLT enhances students’ initiative through interactive tasks; at

the same time, this study found that low-proficiency students had a more significant improvement in engagement, which is similar to Bao Suyu’s (2024) research conclusion on junior high school students, confirming the adaptability of TBLT to students with different foundations.

5.2 Exploration of the Mechanism by Which TBLT Affects Senior High School Students’ English Learning Engagement

The impact mechanism of TBLT is reflected in three aspects: the authenticity of task design (such as the “environmental protection” theme task being close to life) prompts students to actively mobilize language resources; interactive tasks (such as group collaboration) strengthen classroom participation through student-student discussions and teacher-student feedback; the sense of accomplishment after task completion (such as achievement display) improves self-efficacy, thereby stimulating intrinsic motivation, forming a positive cycle of “task participation-emotional satisfaction-in-depth engagement”.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications of the Research

The contribution of this study lies in refining the correlation path between TBLT and learning engagement, verifying the linkage effect of “behavior-emotion-cognition” three-dimensional engagement in task-based teaching, and providing empirical support for “situated learning” in second language acquisition theory. The research results show that teachers need to consider difficulty gradients when designing tasks (such as providing vocabulary scaffolding for low-proficiency students); increase real communication scenarios (such as simulating English interviews); adopt formative assessment (such as including task participation in grades) and weaken single result evaluation to maintain the continuity of students’ engagement.^[15]

5.4 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

The limitations are that the sample only comes from one high school, and the experimental period is short (10 weeks), which may affect the generalizability of the results. In the future, the sample can be expanded to schools in different regions, the tracking period can be extended, and the differential impact of different types of tasks such as information gap tasks and problem-solving tasks on learning engagement can be explored.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

This study found that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can significantly improve senior high school students’ English learning engagement: overall, the learning engagement level of the experimental class was signifi-

cantly higher than that before the experiment and that of the control class; in terms of dimensions, it most significantly promoted behavioral engagement (such as classroom participation and task completion), while also improving emotional engagement (such as learning interest and reducing anxiety) and cognitive engagement (such as the use of in-depth strategies), and had a more prominent effect on improving the engagement of low-proficiency students, verifying the effectiveness of TBLT in stimulating learning initiative. The sample only comes from high schools in a single region, with a narrow scope; the application differences of TBLT in different learning contexts have not been deeply explored, which limits the generalizability of the research conclusions. Further research needs to expand the sample to high schools of different levels and regions to enhance the representativeness of the results; conduct comparative studies in different learning contexts (such as online-offline blended learning) and refine localized strategies for task design to provide more comprehensive practical references for the wide application of TBLT.

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