Proceedings of ICILLP 2025 Symposium: Psychological Perspectives on Teacher-Student Relationships in Educational Contexts
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.NS28621

The Impact of Task-Based Language Teaching on the English Vocabulary Memorization Effect of Middle School Students

Zixin Chen

Taylor's University, Selangor, Malaysia
18876570886@163.com

Abstract. Vocabulary is the core element in language learning. However, traditional English teaching in middle schools generally relies on mechanical memorization and isolated explanations, resulting in superficial vocabulary memorization and insufficient application ability. Based on this, this study takes Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) as the core and systematically explores its mechanism of action and practical value in middle school students' English vocabulary acquisition. The study finds that through the creation of real contexts, task-driven interactions, and group cooperation, TBLT can significantly increase the recurrence frequency and in-depth processing of vocabulary, promoting memory retention and flexible application. At the same time, this model effectively stimulates students' learning motivation and communication needs, making up for the limitation of traditional teaching where students "memorize quickly but forget quickly." Although this study mainly focuses on literature review and lacks empirical verification, its advantage lies in the organic combination of second language acquisition theory and vocabulary memory mechanism. This not only broadens the theoretical perspective of vocabulary teaching research but also provides teachers with operable teaching design and evaluation paths. Generally speaking, TBLT provides a practical direction for optimizing middle school English vocabulary teaching and enhancing the effectiveness and durability of learning.

Keywords: Task-based teaching, middle school students, English vocabulary, memory strategies, classroom teaching

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is the core of language and the foundation of communication and expression [1]. For middle school students, their mastery level of vocabulary determine the depth and breadth of their English learning. However, current English teaching in middle schools mainly relies on memorizing word lists and isolated explanations. Although students can accumulate vocabulary in the short term, it lacks context support and communicative application. As a result, learners may have weak memory retention and tend to forget things easily. Moreover, they also have limited practical application ability [1].

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) has recently received extensive scholarly attention. TBLT takes "tasks" as the core of the classroom, and provides students with a real language environment through communicative activities, cooperative learning, and situational simulation. During meaning-

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driven interaction, students' cognitive processing is activated, closely integrating vocabulary comprehension, memory, and application [2]. TBLT's emphasis on "learning in context and consolidating in interaction" can reduce the burden of isolated memorization and improve the students' vocabulary retention rate and practical application ability, providing an effective path for English vocabulary teaching in middle schools. However, the study of vocabulary learning mostly remains at experience summary or single-task verification, lacking systematic mechanism analysis integrating applied linguistics and second language acquisition theories, as well as scientific and operable evaluation methods [3].

Therefore, this study focuses on how task-based language teaching affects middle school students' vocabulary memory and how to establish a scientific evaluation system to measure their learning effectiveness. Theoretically, it combines second language acquisition with the vocabulary memory mechanism, making up for the deficiency of task-based language teaching research and expanding the perspective of second language vocabulary acquisition. Practically, it provides references for middle-school task-based vocabulary teaching, which is conducive to optimizing classroom design, enhancing students' vocabulary ability, and promoting the transformation of teaching from "exam-oriented" to "ability-oriented." [2]

2. Theoretical foundation and adaptability analysis

2.1. The logic of vocabulary acquisition within second language acquisition theories

The second language vocabulary acquisition is grounded in several core theories. Van Patten's Input Processing Theory emphasizes that learners prioritize vocabulary when processing input. Specifically, the Content Word Priority Principle holds that when second language learners are exposed to the language, they first identify and process vocabulary, regarding it as the key to understanding discourse. And the Lexical Preference Principle points out that when vocabulary and grammatical forms convey the same meaning, learners give priority to processing vocabulary. For example, in the Latin phrase "Antonius heri discessit," learners identify the past tense through the adverb "heri" [4].

Jiang's Two-Dimensional Model further clarifies vocabulary acquisition as a two-stage process. Learners first integrate new vocabulary into their language ability through initial registration and consolidation and then achieve in-depth mastery through semantic enrichment and refinement. In this process, there is "semantic transfer" in the initial stage; that is, learners associate second language words with the semantics of their mother tongue. However, as learning progresses, semantic reconstruction is required to adapt to the characteristics of the second language [4].

The Levels of Processing Theory proposed by Craik and Lockhart states that the memory effect is positively correlated with the depth of processing, and vocabulary acquisition should be promoted by combining receptive and productive activities to enhance cognitive effort. Melka distinguished between receptive knowledge (understanding vocabulary) and productive knowledge (using vocabulary), emphasizing that development of both supports the transition from exposure to mastery. Overall, these theories indicate that vocabulary acquisition is a gradual, deepening process, requiring instructional strategies that integrate comprehension, production, and contextual usage [4].

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2.2. Overview of the task-based teaching concept

TBLT is a learner-centered approach emphasizing the use of language to accomplish meaningful tasks in real-life scenarios. Ellis pointed out that task-based teaching is not merely about imparting the curriculum content but also requires appropriate teaching methods to help achieve teaching objectives. And teachers should design activities based on students' needs to promote interaction and participation among students. Task design highly values the principle of meaning priority, encouraging students to use their existing language resources to complete tasks rather than simply repeating grammar structures. Skehan identifies five key characteristics of tasks: meaning-oriented, real-world relevance, task completion priority, focusing on language form during or after task execution, and assessment based on task results.

TTBLT usually consists of three main stages: The pre-task stage helps students understand the task and activate relevant background knowledge; during the task cycle stage, students complete the task independently while the teacher acts as a supervisor and supporter; the post-task stage focuses on reflecting on the task execution process and analyzing language forms. Through this structured teaching process, task-based teaching can not only improve students' language proficiency but also enhance their ability to use language confidently in real-life situations [5].

3. The memory influence mechanism of task-based teaching

3.1. Optimization of vocabulary encoding through contextualized tasks

TBLT aligns naturally with the cognitive processes involved in vocabulary memorization. Firstly, by creating real contexts, TBLT helps students effectively encode new vocabulary more effectively during meaningful communication, thereby reducing the burden brought by isolated memorization. The task-driven learning approach requires learners to continuously use and reproduce target vocabulary in communication, which is highly consistent with the "repetition-consolidation" law of memory and helps deepen students' long-term memory.

Secondly, the interactivity of TBLT stimulates student attention and motivation, thus making vocabulary learning more active and in-depth. This communication-based learning method makes up for the deficiencies of rote memorization in traditional vocabulary learning methods. Although traditional methods rely on repetition and memorization, they often make it difficult to achieve flexible application of vocabulary [6].

Moreover, task-based teaching compensates for the limitations of the traditional vocabulary learning model via contextualized learning. In real task scenarios, students comprehend and memorize new vocabulary while solving problems and communicating. For example, in information-gap tasks, students use target vocabulary when exchanging information. This not only deepens their understanding of vocabulary but also promotes vocabulary memorization and flexible application [6]. More importantly, the task-based teaching method strengthens students' vocabulary memory through continuous language output and feedback. The feedback after tasks and the interaction among students help students continuously adjust the way they use vocabulary in practice, thereby effectively improving their language ability.

3.2. Vocabulary reuse and memory consolidation in group cooperative tasks

TBLT further promotes vocabulary memorization and consolidation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners through the repeated occurrence of vocabulary during group cooperation.

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Drawing on Willis's three-stage framework of TBLT, group or paired activities, such as information-gap tasks and problem-solving tasks, are crucial during the task cycle stage. At this stage, students repeatedly use task-related vocabulary through interactive collaboration [7]. For example, various words in the "hospitality" scenario are used, thus facilitating the natural recurrence of vocabulary. In addition, during the language focus stage, through a detailed analysis of vocabulary, students are guided to pay attention to the usage of vocabulary and its suitability in the context, thereby transforming short-term vocabulary recurrence into in-depth memory.

In empirical research, the questionnaire survey shows that 83% of the students in the experimental group believe that "group tasks have significantly improved their vocabulary reserves," and 73.6% of the students indicate that through peer interaction, they have learned new vocabulary and consolidated it [7]. This indicates that in group cooperation, students need to repeatedly use vocabulary to express their views. The frequent recurrence of vocabulary activates the memory nodes. Meanwhile, peer feedback in group tasks can enhance the memory effect of vocabulary. Ultimately, this interactive learning method helps students remember vocabulary and improves their application ability in actual communication, which is consistent with the increase in vocabulary richness in students' oral English after the experiment.

4. Practical key points of task-based vocabulary teaching

4.1. Task design principles in line with the cognitive level of middle school students

In TBLT, the design of tasks directly influences the vocabulary acquisition effects of middle school students. It is necessary to closely integrate their cognitive characteristics, language proficiency, and vocabulary learning needs.

Firstly, the principle of appropriate difficulty is fundamental. There are differences in the language foundations of middle school students; overly challenging tasks may induce frustration and reduce motivation, while overly simple tasks may fail to stimulate engagement. Hierarchical task design addresses this issue: elementary-level students can learn common vocabulary via fill-in-the-blank tasks, while intermediate and advanced students can deepen complex vocabulary application through debates or group discussions [6]. This approach can provide appropriate learning stimuli for students at different levels and help them gradually master vocabulary [8]. Secondly, interactivity and real-life relevance are crucial. Tasks such as group cooperation and role-playing, and creating scenarios around themes close to the lives of middle school students, such as "festival celebrations" and "environmental protection," encourages actively use of target vocabulary in real communication. This facilitates problem-solving, reinforcing memory through repeated use, and aligns with findings that contextualized, interest-based tasks increase participation among of low-level students [8].

Overall, TBLT tasks that take into account difficulty, interactivity, and relevance to life can provide middle school students with effective vocabulary practice opportunities and promote the improvement of their vocabulary mastery and application abilities.

4.2. Dynamic adjustment strategies in the implementation of teaching

During TBLT implementation, teachers encounter various challenges, including uneven student participation, off-task discussions, reliance on the native language, oral anxiety, and varying language proficiency. Meanwhile, the mismatch between the difficulty level of teaching materials and students' proficiency, insufficient class hours, and limited resources for teachers' lesson preparation also exacerbate the dilemmas in practice.

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In such a context, the dynamic adjustment strategy provides a flexible, responsive mechanism to these challenges. Teachers can use the "turn-taking speaking mechanism" and "task progress reminders" to ensure each student's language output. When students encounter expression bottlenecks, teachers should promptly supplement key vocabulary to keep the interaction focused on communicative goals [9]. At the student level, to address oral anxiety and differences in proficiency, teachers can provide scaffolding through "demonstration of key expressions" and "step-by-step task decomposition" to help students at different levels improve within their respective capabilities [9]. Facing the contradiction between teaching materials and class hours, teachers can simplify texts, optimize task structures, and adopt methods such as "jigsaw reading" to improve the operability and effectiveness of teaching [10]. In terms of resources and assessment, by using digital tools to supplement task scenarios and replacing traditional tests with "task performance-based assessment," it can better meet the requirements of TBLT for overall language use [9].

Thus, it can be seen that dynamic adjustment not only resolves the practical dilemmas in classroom implementation but also reflects the teaching concepts of individualized instruction and flexible adaptation. In future practice, the dynamic adjustment strategy is expected to become an important guarantee for the effective implementation of TBLT, providing students with a more supportive and meaningful learning experience.

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the application of TBLT in middle school English vocabulary memorization and explores its mechanism of action and practical value. Findings show that IBLT effectively optimizes vocabulary learning by creating real contexts, designing interactive tasks, and implementing group cooperation. Specifically, repeated exposure to target words and meaningful task management strengthens vocabulary encoding and semantic processing. Group cooperation and interaction promote the multiple uses of vocabulary and immediate feedback, further strengthening memory. Compared with the traditional rote memorization method, task-based teaching not only improves the vocabulary retention rate but also enhances students' learning motivation and language output ability.

Although this study has achieved certain results in literature review and theoretical analysis, there are still some limitations. Firstly, the study lacks empirical data support. In the future, classroom experiments and learner interviews can be conducted to further verify the conclusions. Secondly, this study focuses on the middle school group and has not yet compared the cognitive characteristics and learning needs of learners of different ages. In the future, the research scope can be extended to more groups for comparative studies. In addition, further optimizing the evaluation tools, such as introducing dynamic assessment and learning analysis techniques, will help to more comprehensively present the process and effects of vocabulary acquisition.

Future research directions include integrating digital resources, such as artificial intelligence feedback systems and online learning platforms, to expand task scenarios and enhance personalized support. Second, conduct interdisciplinary research by integrating psychology, educational technology, and linguistics to explore the multi-dimensional mechanisms of vocabulary memorization. Third, pay attention to the differential needs of learners at different levels and develop more targeted teaching designs and intervention models. Overall, TBLT provides an effective and flexible approach for improving vocabulary teaching in middle schools. With ongoing pedagogical innovation and technological advancement, TBLT is poised to further optimize English vocabulary teaching and enhance educational outcomes.

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