

The Influence of Task-Based Language Teaching on Classroom Enjoyment among ESP Students in Tertiary Schools—A Case Study

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Abstract: Amidst a historical focus on anxiety in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, this study explores the intersection of positive psychology and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) in a college setting. Recognizing TBLT's student-centric approach, this research investigates its impact on enjoyment in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms. The 4-week experiment involved two college classes — one with TBLT and the other with traditional methods. Analysis using SPSS24 and an enjoyment questionnaire designed by (Li, Jiang & Dewaele, 2018) revealed significant improvements in students' enjoyment through TBLT. The study highlights factors such as teacher's character, interesting content, meaningful task activity and a relaxed atmosphere as crucial contributors. These findings offer practical insights for enhancing enjoyment and engagement in college English classrooms through TBLT.

1. Introduction

EFL(English as foreign language) learners often experience a spectrum of emotions, both positive and negative, throughout their language learning journey (Dewaele, 2019). Anxiety taking the forefront in second language acquisition (SLA) research since the 1970s, however, there's a recent surge in positive psychology within SLA, recognizing the pivotal role of positive emotions in language learning processes (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Despite the growing importance of positive emotions in language learning, a critical problem persists — teachers often overlook or underestimate the emotional experiences of students. Particularly in the context of tertiary schools, educators may not fully recognize the profound influence their teaching methods can have on students' emotional well-being.[1]

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) stands at the intersection of language education and practical utility, catering to learners with specific professional or academic needs. Many researchers investigate the evolution of teaching methodologies in ESP (Hyland, 2022). TBLT, recognized for its student-centric approach and emphasis on real-context experiences, holds particular relevance in college classrooms (Ellis, 2019). Though mountains of literature have explored the effectiveness of TBLT in English classroom, inadequate attention given to the intricate relationship between teaching methods and students' emotional responses, particularly their enjoyment.

With this backdrop, the primary aim of this research is to rigorously investigate the correlation between Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and students' enjoyment levels in a college English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. By delving into this intricate nexus, the study endeavors to provide nuanced insights into the emotional dynamics of language classrooms. [2]

2. Foreign Language Enjoyment and Task-based Language Learning

The advent of positive psychology, pioneered by Maslow (1954), marked a pivotal shift from the predominant focus on negative psychological aspects. Positive psychology, emerging in the 1970s, advocates a positive orientation in studying human qualities, health, happiness, and harmonious development (Elahi Shirvan, 2020). It underscores the importance of positive emotions, such as enjoyment, to foster meaningful engagement in life activities (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2019).

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) identified two enjoyment dimensions: social (classroom environment) and personal (goal achievement). Positive teachers, emphasizing autonomy and imagination, enhance enjoyment. Teachers, particularly those exhibiting positivity, humor, and proficiency in praise, significantly impact enjoyment (Dewaele & Magdalena, 2019). Subsequent studies showed that native-speaking, English-using teachers create enjoyable atmospheres, emphasizing the significance of teacher variables.

Since the emergence of 1980, Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been gradually posed into the center of the SLA field (Long, 1985; Long & Crookes, 1992). People unanimously believe that the notion of TBLT was inspired by Dewey's "Experience and Education" (1938) which is one of the masterpieces of Education. Dewey believed that practical, hands-on activities made learning by doing possible, and the purpose of education was to prepare students for the workplace. Nowadays, it has been attributed to a superb number of monographs, edited volumes, and literature more than the total amount of any other English teaching methods (Ahmadian & Long, 2022). [3] [4]

TBLT's adaptability to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts is evident in research by Long (2015), aligning language tasks with learners' professional or academic needs. While TBLT's effectiveness is recognized, its impact on emotional dimensions, especially enjoyment, is a recent area of inquiry. Positive emotions are integral to language learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), making the exploration of TBLT's emotional aspects, especially in ESP, a relevant focus. Integrating TBLT into the discourse on positive emotions in language learning, especially in ESP contexts, offers a unique perspective. TBLT's core principle of matching challenging tasks with learners' skills can contribute to a positive emotional climate (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Ellis' theory and practice contribute a lot to the TBLT field. He emphasizes the importance of teachers' involvement in course design for authentic working purposes. His three-step framework does not address the link between task design and needs analysis.[5-8]

3. Research Design

3.1. Research question

This research aims to investigate the level of enjoyment that college students experience in their English classrooms, particularly during task-based language teaching classes. Utilizing the FLE (Foreign Language Enjoyment) questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, data will be collected to explore the various factors associated with classroom enjoyment. The primary focus is to examine the relationship between emotions in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and pedagogical methods, specifically the connection between foreign language enjoyment and task-based language teaching. To achieve this objective, the study will address two research questions:

To what extent does the implementation of a task-based teaching model significantly enhance the

enjoyment experienced by college students in English language classrooms?

If a task-based teaching model proves to significantly elevate the enjoyment levels of college students in English language classrooms, what factors contribute more significantly to students' enjoyment?

3.2. Participants

The study includes 54 sophomore student (29 Males and 25 females) who are randomly selected from the Stomatology technology department at Hainan University of Science and Technology, an occupational school situated in Haikou city. The university boasts a substantial student body, exceeding 30 thousand individuals, where English classes serve as mandatory coursework. These students, freshly admitted through the college entrance examination, exhibit an average English proficiency ranging between C2 and C3 levels.[9-10]

Teacher Liu, 38 years old, brings 10 years of experience to her role as an EFL teacher. Prior to the experiment, she underwent specific training in task-based teaching methodology. The intervention comprised implementing the task-based teaching model for a total of 24 class periods (1.5 hours each for two classes), spanning twelve weeks from September to the end of December. Throughout this period, the students in her class were organized into six learning groups, each consisting of six to seven students, with one assigned as the group leader responsible for overseeing and assisting all classmates in actively participating in completing the classroom tasks.

3.3. Research materials

3.3.1. Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale

This study employed the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale, adapted from the version developed by Li, Jiang, and Dewaele(2018). The original scale, created by Dewaele and Macintyre (2014), consisted of 21 positively framed items. Li, Jiang, and Dewaele (2018) made adaptations to suit Chinese students, resulting in a modified scale with 11 positively framed statements about enjoyment in English learning classrooms. Responses were collected on a Likert five-point scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5) Higher scores indicate stronger feelings of enjoyment. The adaptation was shown to possess good reliability and validity in the research conducted by Li, Jiang, and Dewaele(2018). This study conducted a pilot test with 28 sophomore students major in Healthcare Management at this university. The results indicated a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.758 for the questionnaire. The KMO value was 0.82, surpassing the threshold of 0.6. These data suggest good reliability and validity for the questionnaire. This questionnaire is administered, all presented in Chinese, on the Questionnaire Star platform, and students are required to complete it both before and after the 12 weeks of task-based English teaching.[11]

3.3.2. Student English Classroom Enjoyment Record Form

In order to investigate the factors influencing students' enjoyment in task-based classrooms, the author conducted an open-ended survey form for students to record their emotional experiences in English classes. This form was reviewed by the Foreign Language Teaching Department, and after some minor adjustments were made following discussions, it was distributed to the experimental group students of Class 1, Stomatology technology department (N=37)in the end of the experiment. They were instructed to record brief moments that triggered their enjoyment after each class and provide detailed descriptions of their psychological feelings. After the experiment concluded, 18 valid record forms were collected and categorized.[12]

3.4. Research procedure

First of all, the teaching plan were carefully designed on the criteria of TBLT. In designing the lesson plans for task-based teaching in the experimental class, the researcher followed Rod Ellis's model (2006) (refer to 2.2 for literature review) and used examples from the textbook, aligning with curriculum standards. After Teacher presented the lesson and made modifications, task-based teaching was implemented in the experimental class starting from September 4. Before the experiment, the researcher conducted a pre-test in the classroom and ask the students to recall the feelings about the traditional English class, which is teacher centered lecture, emphasizing basic grammar instruction and requiring the memorization of sentence structures. The researcher distributed the online questionnaires on English classroom enjoyment to the classes, informing students that the questionnaire was for research purposes only, could be answered anonymously. Then Task-based English activities were introduced from Unit1: Hero and Courage to Unit 4: Study Abroad (Published by Fudan University Press) [13]

During the experiment, students were required to record activities and reasons that triggered feelings of enjoyment in the classroom and provide detailed descriptions of their psychological experiences.

Finally, in the end of December, the researcher distributed and collected post-test questionnaires on English classroom enjoyment and the recorded forms of enjoyment activities.

3.5. Data Collection

3.5.1. Quantitative Data Collection

Before the TBLT lesson was delivered, the first round of surveys was distributed, with 54 participants in the experimental group (class 1) received and returned 54 valid survey responses. To ensure that students provided objective responses in a relaxed mindset, the importance of the survey data for the findings of the research was explained, encouraging students to answer seriously. During the 10-minute survey period, students were instructed not to chat with each other to avoid influencing their own judgments. To enhance the authenticity and effectiveness of the survey for future follow-ups, students were required to respond in a personalized and confidential manner. After the 12 weeks teaching, the second round of surveys was distributed to them again. Class 1 returned 53 responses (one student was absent). Through statistical analysis of positive emotions before and after the experiment, we demonstrated the positive impact of task-based teaching methods on the correlation of classroom learning emotions while maintaining the anonymity of the participants.[14]

3.5.2. Qualitative Data Collection

To investigate the factors that contributes to students' Employment emotions in task-based teaching classrooms, each student was requested to complete a post-class enjoyment record log. In this log, students described the reasons that arose them enjoyment. 35 enjoyment logs were collected after the experiment.

3.6. Data Analysis

Regarding research question 1, the first step involved conducting Cronbach's reliability test on the FLE questionnaire with SPSS 24. Subsequently, to determine the differences of enjoyment degree before and after the experiment, author analyzed these two group of statistics with paired samples-tests.

For research question 2, qualitative data analysis was employed. Out of the 54 students, 35 (64%)

submitted English classroom Enjoyment logs. The students described specific reasons that arose their EFL enjoyment. And some of them remarked more hopes about the English class. By organizing and categorizing the material, the author identified and generated categories of factors that triggered students EFL enjoyment.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Findings

Paired-samples T-test to assess the variance between pre-test and post-test scores on the FLE scale within the experimental class.

Table 1: Differences in the pre-test and post-test scores of FLE in TBLT class

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-test	40.8113	53	4.86375	.66809	0.004
	Post-test	44.1698	53	6.04068	.82975	

From Table 1, it can be observed that there is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores within the experimental class ($p=0.04 < 0.05$). By examining the mean values, it is evident that the post-test average in the experimental class is 3.3 points higher than the pre-test average. With $p=.004 < .05$, the difference is statistically significant.

The data trend in the experimental class shows a clear upward trajectory. This indicates that, during the period of task-based teaching in the classroom, learners in the experimental class experienced more positive emotions compared to the control class. The impact of the task-based teaching approach implemented in the experimental class made it easier for students to evoke positive emotions, motivating them to challenge themselves and achieve goals, thus leading to a sense of psychological satisfaction. This addresses the first question posed earlier: there is a significant improvement in students' positive emotions in task-based teaching.

4.2. Qualitative Findings

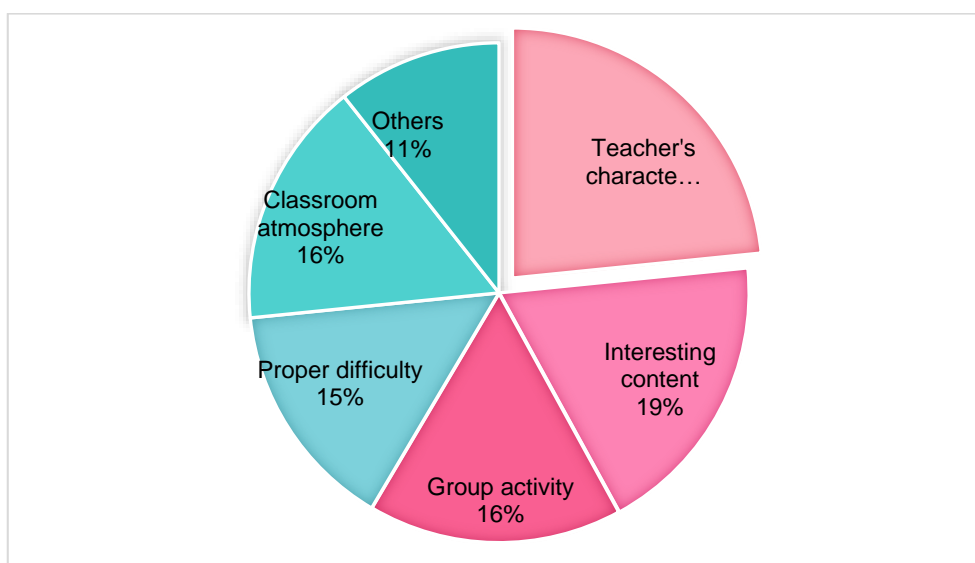


Figure 1: The factors contributes to college students' FLE

By analyzing and categorizing qualitative materials on students' enjoyment in the classroom,

factors that trigger students' positive emotions can be classified into the following categories: the factors students mentioned most are teacher's character, classroom atmosphere, interesting content, proper difficulty, group activity, and others like sense of achievement, novel tasks and so on. It is very clear that the teacher's character is regarded as the most affective factor that would arouse their enjoyment. The portions are in Fig 1.

5. Discussion

5.1. The impact of task-based teaching on students' English learning enjoyment

In the experimental class English classroom was assessed through paired-samples T-tests on pre-test and post-test scores. The results indicate a significant difference in students' English learning enjoyment after the influence of task-based teaching ($p=0.04<0.05$). This outcome confirms that there is a significant improvement in students' classroom enjoyment in task-based teaching. Audrey, Laurence (2018) mentioned that specific teaching methods can influence students' classroom emotions. However, previous research on the relationship between teaching methods and learning emotions has mainly focused on anxiety. This study demonstrate the impact of task-based teaching on college students' positive emotions in the classroom, representing a meaningful discovery.

A crucial factor contributing to the better elicitation of students' English Learning enjoyment in task-based teaching is the unique teaching model it employs (Ellis, 2013). Traditional non-task-based teaching, which is teacher-centered and involves the teacher transmitting language knowledge in a didactic manner, results in passive student engagement without emotional consideration. In contrast, task-based teaching places students at the center, emphasizing their agency and encouraging each student to use the learned language to collaborate on real and meaningful tasks. This approach significantly raises students' awareness of the practical significance of language learning, leading to a sense of satisfaction after task completion.

Moreover, task-based teaching significantly enhances students' enjoyment in the classroom, promoting academic achievement and creating a positive feedback loop. Research by Jin and Zhang (2018) on the relationship between FLE and academic achievement suggests that English learning enjoyment has a significant positive predictive effect on English grades. They further indicate a significant positive correlation between English grades and three dimensions of classroom enjoyment (teacher support, student support, and learning enjoyment). This influence can be explained from motivational, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological perspectives. Enjoyment in foreign language learning signify a strong intrinsic motivation to learn a foreign language. As task-based teaching increases students' enjoyment in English learning, it will stimulate their interest, strengthen their learning motivation, and positively impact their English learning.

5.2. Implications for Teaching Practices

Although an increasing number of scholars are advocating for the importance of positive emotions in students' second language acquisition, it still lacks widespread recognition. Here are some recommendations about how to integrate TBLT into ESP class and improve students' English learning enjoyment.

(1) Task Design: Teachers develop tasks that align with specific language learning objectives and real-world scenarios relevant to the ESP domain. Tailor tasks to cater to the diverse needs and interests of students within the specialized context. Meanwhile, teachers introduce a variety of language learning activities, such as role-plays, simulations, and interactive games, to keep the learning experience dynamic and enjoyable.

(2) Authentic Materials: Task in the TBLT is meaning focused (Ellis, 2006). The teacher

incorporates authentic materials related to the students' field of study to enhance engagement. This could include industry reports, case studies, or relevant articles that mirror the language they will encounter in their professional settings.

(3) Joyful Teacher's Character: As students mentioned most in the survey, teacher's character plays an important role to arise their enjoyment. ESP teachers should cultivate their personal characterized by enthusiasm and passion for language instruction. ESP teachers should cultivate a personality full of enthusiasm and passion for language teaching, allowing students to express true joy in the classroom and creating a positive and dynamic learning atmosphere. At the same time, teachers can use positive reinforcement techniques to recognize students' efforts and achievements, and cultivate a sense of achievement and happiness in the language learning process through active encouragement and feedback. The enthusiasm and accessibility of teachers contribute to a happy and inclusive learning experience (Dewalee & MacIntyre, 2014).

6. Conclusion

In summary, this study, conducted through experimental research at Hainan University of Science and Technology, addresses two key issues. Firstly, compared to non-task-based teaching, task-based teaching proves to be more effective in eliciting students' English learning enjoyment. Secondly, the classroom factors influencing students' classroom include the teacher's enthusiastic personality, the organization of meaningful learning activities, a relaxed classroom atmosphere, interesting learning content, and an appropriate level of difficulty.

Academic emotions are pervasive throughout various aspects of the teaching and learning processes, making it crucial to pay attention to emotions in educational contexts. This research explores the correlation between task-based teaching and students' English classroom enjoyment. The goal of this research is to inspire English teachers and educational researchers to prioritize students' emotions in English language learning, advocating for the implementation of student-centered, humanistic teaching philosophies. Foreign Language Enjoyment have emerged as a burgeoning research topic, yet numerous questions remain to be addressed. What factors of Task based language teaching are associated with it? Does the task complexity relate with the enjoyment lever? Within the framework of task-based teaching, which forms of task activities are most likely to trigger positive emotions in students? Given that the young college students are undergoing a stage characterized by intense and tumultuous emotions, there is a heightened need to delve into research in this domain. A series of questions related to positive emotions in English learning awaits further exploration and investigation.

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