

Research on Major-orientated Task-based Learning Approach in College English Listening Class for Students of Art Institutes

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Abstract

Most students in art institutes with poor English proficiency struggle with learning the language. Traditional teaching strategies and textbooks often fail to spark their interest in English. How to stimulate students' interest in learning English and improve their English skills has become the most pressing issue for college English teachers at art institutes. When adopting such an approach in a college English class, there are some principles we should follow, including making tasks enjoyable, motivating, and challenging, and encouraging students to collaborate more with others. Therefore, the tasks for the experimental group included making a video or short movie, doing voice acting for a movie, acting out a skit, creating a presentation, participating in a group debate or discussion, as well as completing fill-in-the-blank exercises, answering questions, and multiple-choice activities. This paper mainly focuses on adopting a task-based learning approach oriented towards majors in listening classes for students at art institutes. The aim is to inspire their interest in learning English and enhance their academic performance in listening assessments.

Keywords

Major-orientated, task-based learning, college English, art institutes

1. Introduction

In contrast with students from other colleges or institutions, most students in art institutions struggle with English learning. In general, most of them are with poor English proficiency as they spent a lot of time preparing their major-related subjects such as anchoring, photographing, painting, and acting etc. in junior high school. Traditional teaching strategies and textbooks that are designed for general students fail to stimulate their interest in English learning. It is also difficult for college English teachers to engage students effectively in class and achieve satisfactory teaching effects in art institutes. How to stimulate the students' interest in English learning and improve their English skills has become the most concerning issue for college English teachers of art institutes.

Although these students are not interested in English learning, they are passionate about their majors. Therefore, if teaching materials are related to students' major, they may be able to attract students' attention and improve students' interest in English learning.

2. Task-based Learning Approach

Emerging in the 1980s, Task-based Learning stems from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), aiming to make

classrooms more student-centered, communicative, and collaborative by incorporating more interactive tasks. It mainly focuses on the completion of meaningful tasks including creating a poster, producing a newsletter, video, or pamphlet, etc. The task-based learning approach is one of many modern ESL teaching methods and always follows three main steps to accomplish the task: pre-task, task, and post-task.

As the core of the TBL, how to design the tasks for the classroom is crucial. Many scholars advocating TBL believe that effective language learning is not impartial, but experiential. Richards (1994) proposed that the following principles that should be adhered to in the design of teaching tasks: 1) Response demands. The so-called response principle means that the task should include the knowledge and skills required to process information; 2) Communicating demands, which should provide more opportunities to boost student-student and teacher-student communications; 3) Challenging demands. The task needs to be challenging in order to maintain students' interest and focus on the completion of the task and the expression of meaning. In the implementation of the teaching task, Willis (1996) proposed the following principles for teachers or instructors: firstly, teachers or instructors shall provide valuable and authentic language learning material; secondly, students shall have enough opportunities to use the target language; thirdly, the tasks shall encourage students to use the target language; fourthly, emphasis shall be put onto certain forms of language.

With regard to the TBL approach, the role of teachers or instructors is of great importance as well. The teacher or instructor should be a mentor throughout the whole learning process, who is responsible for the design of teaching tasks and selection of teaching materials, controlling how learning takes place, supervising the learning process, and evaluating the completion of tasks.

3. The Application of Major-orientated Task-based Learning Approach in College English Listening Class

English listening is one of the weakest parts for students in art institutes. Therefore, the author of the paper decided to apply a task-based learning approach in college English listening classes. Two classes of the same grade and major were selected as the research objects. One class was taken as an experimental group and a major-orientated task-based learning approach was applied to them in English listening class. The other one, as the control group, was still taught by the traditional listening teaching approach. Before the start of the experiment, the author of the paper conducted a test in the two classes to evaluate their English listening proficiency. The test questions were selected from section A and section B of the Listening Comprehension of CET-4 test conducted in June 2021, with a total score of 15 points. There were 36 students in the experimental group, who got an average score of 6.5 points on the test, with an average score rate of 43.3%, while there were 38 students in the control group, who got an average score of 6.6 points, and an average score rate of 44%. The specific test results of the two groups are shown in Table 1.

As is demonstrated in the table below, it can be concluded that the students from the two groups had similar English listening proficiency before the start of the experiment

Table 1. Results of the First Listening Test

	Number of students taking the test	Average score /score rate	Percentage of students whose scores were more than 12 points (12 points included)	Percentage of students whose scores were between 9 and 12 (9 points included)	Percentage of students whose scores were below 9
Experimental group	36	6.5/43.3%	2.7%	16.6%	80.7%
Control group	38	6.6/44%	0	18.4%	81.6%

3.1 Major-orientated Teaching Design in College English Listening Class

Although students in art institutes have something in common, there are also differences among them regarding their different majors. Most of the students majoring in broadcasting and anchoring as well in acting are extroverted, willing to communicate with others, good at expressing themselves, and like to participate in in-class activities, while the students majoring in choreography and art design are relatively introverted and do not like to participate in-class activities. This requires teachers to make the teaching design according to the main characteristics of students in different majors.

The students from both the experimental group and control group are first-year students majoring in broadcasting and anchoring in 2023. They are supposed to have the ability to engage in radio and television broadcasting programs in radio

and television stations after their graduation. Taking the academic requirements of the students into account, the author of the paper made specialized teaching designs for the experimental group, including setting up specific teaching objectives, selecting major-related teaching materials, and designing specialized tasks.

3.1.1 Teaching Objectives

The teaching objectives of the English listening class for the experimental group are that after receiving systematic training, students shall be able to understand daily life conversations and apply them in daily life; understand regular English news and broadcast simple English news; understand the main ideas of an English movie, TV series and songs at a normal speed and do voice acting for simple English movies and TV series.

3.1.2 Teaching Materials

The selected listening materials can be divided into four categories. The first category is textbook. The textbook used is *College English Listening and Speaking Book 1* published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. The second one is English songs. English songs are deeply loved by a large number of students, many of whom can hum or even fully perform certain classic songs. Therefore, using it as listening material can fully stimulate students' learning interest and enthusiasm. The third type is English news, mainly sourced from VOA. The author of the paper used VOA special English at the beginning of the semester, then gradually added VOA English. The fourth category is English movies. English movies are also deeply loved by students. However, there is a wide variety of English movies with varying themes and topics, so it is necessary to carefully choose movies with healthy and positive themes based on specific teaching objectives.

3.1.3 Teaching Tasks

As is stated in the previous paragraphs, students majoring in extroverted, willing to communicate with others, good at expressing themselves, and like to participate in in-class activities. Therefore, the tasks for the experimental group included making a video or short movie, doing voice acting for a movie, acting out a skit, creating a presentation, group debate or discussion in addition to filling in the blanks, answering the questions, and multiple choices (Richards, J. & T. Rodgers, 2019).

3.2 Implementation of Task-based Learning Approach in College English Listening Class

Task-based learning formula consists of three stages: pre-task, task, and post-task.

3.2.1 Pre-task

During this phase, the teacher always introduces the topic and gives students clear instructions and guidelines on what they will be doing during the three-part task cycle, therefore the students can have a clear understanding of what will be expected of them. Teachers also need to include any important knowledge or details they need to know. And it can be done both before class and in class.

For example, before class, the author of the paper always provided students with new words and expressions related to the listening materials and the background information they needed to know. Students were asked to become familiar with the new words and background information. While in class, teachers can get students ready for the task by presenting an example of the task or introducing a picture, audio, or video which will be useful in completing the task.

Taking *Unit 3 Heroes Around Us* as an example, the pre-task of this unit before class included asking students to be familiar with the new words and expressions related to the topic and looking up the definition of heroes online or in dictionaries. In class, the author of paper gave an example of introducing them some of the famous heroes and why they were considered as heroes and told them that the task of the unit was to give a speech on *Our Hero*.

3.2.2 Task

During this phase, students need to get ready to do the task. The students are given whatever they need to complete the task. They are assigned to work in pairs or small groups while the teacher monitors and offers help when necessary. The teacher's role is typically limited to one of a coach, guide, and facilitator (Deng Ji & Deng Yingling, 2020).

Still, take *Heroes Around Us* as an example. During the task phase, the author of the paper asked the students to do the exercises in the text book including news, conversations, and passages which would inform them of different types of heroes, and facilitate them with the use of the related words and expressions. Besides, the author of the paper also presented them some movies related to the theme like *Brave Heart*, *300*, *Spider Man* and asked students to watch them after class. Then students were assigned to small groups to discuss who they would like to introduce in their speech and the reasons why they chose him/her as their hero.

When they were ready, the representatives of each group presented their ideas to the class in the form of a speech. The

rest of the class listened to the speeches. They also needed to write down feedback to the presenters after all reports have been heard. The class could also ask questions or provide some quick oral feedback after each presentation. The author of the paper also gave feedback to every speech as well. Finally, all the students voted on the best speech. And the winner and his/her partners will get an award (Qin Xiugui & Qi Zhenhai, 2019).

There are several ways for teachers to give students feedback including two positive things about the presentation and one suggestion, or two suggestions, and one question. Feedback can be given based on things like the content of the presentation, use of visuals, eye contact, etc.

3.2.3 Post-task

Listening practices cannot be limited to classroom teaching since after-class practices are also crucial for the improvement of listening skills. Even though students have finish the tasks, it is of great importance to assign related assignments to students after class. There are various forms of after-school exercises, including watching movies, listening to English songs, listening to English news, and doing regular exercises.

4. Teaching Effect

After adopting a task-based learning approach in the English listening class for the experimental group for one semester, the author of the paper conducted the second test. The test questions were selected from section A and section B of the Listening Comprehension of CET-4 test conducted in December 2022, with a total score of 15 points. The 36 students in the experimental group, got an average score of 10.08 points on the test, with an average score rate of 67.2%, while the 38 students in the control group got an average score of 7.62 points, and an average score rate of 50.8%. The detailed results of the second test of the two groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Second Listening Test

	Number of students taking the test	Average score /score rate	Percentage of students whose scores were more than 12 points (12 points included)	Percentage of students whose scores were between 9 and 12 (9 points included)	Percentage of students whose scores were below 9
Experimental group	36	10.08/67.2%	11.1%	69.5%	19.4%
Control group	38	7.62/50.8%	0	36.8%	63.2%

Comparing the results of the two tests, it can be easily seen that after the application of a major-orientated task-based learning approach for one semester, the test results of the experimental group have been significantly improved compared to the control class.

5. Conclusion

As one of many modern learning strategies, the task-based learning approach is widely used in ESL learning. Focusing on providing learners with meaningful tasks that come from real-life situations, it enables them to engage with language in a purposeful and authentic context. The application of a major-oriented task-based learning approach in college English listening class can stimulate students' interest in learning English, engage them more in in-class activities, and improve their English listening skills since it is students-center and students are working on something that is personal and relevant to them. There are some principles we should follow when adopting such an approach in college English class including making tasks enjoyable, motivating, and challenging, and encouraging students to collaborate more with others.

Besides, we should be aware that the teaching of English listening does not exist alone. It actually goes hand in hand with the teaching of English speaking and reading. And after-class practices are important as well. Teachers should also communicate and exchange with students more after class to find out their ideas and interests so as to make the selected teaching materials and tasks attractive and suitable for them.

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