Task-based language teaching for low-proficiency middle school learners: Designing gamified scenarios to motivate oral participation

Shisen Yang[1] (iD)
Xiaoyu Ma[2] ✉ (iD)
Na Qin[3] (iD)
Juan Xu[4] (iD)

(✉ Corresponding Author)

[1,2,3,4]*Qujing Medical College, China.*
[1]*Email: funboy00100@2925.com*
[2]*Email: birdysen@foxmail.com*
[3]*Email: 837970418@qq.com*
[4]*Email: 2573586405@qq.com*

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of task-based language teaching integrated with gamified scenario design on enhancing oral English participation and learning motivation among low-proficiency junior high school students. Data were collected through classroom observations, student interviews, and questionnaires administered before and after the intervention. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were thematically analyzed, while quantitative data from questionnaires were statistically examined to assess changes in motivation and participation. The integration of task-based language teaching with gamified scenario design significantly increased students' motivation for oral participation. Learners demonstrated greater engagement, a higher willingness to speak, and improved confidence in using English. Qualitative feedback highlighted specific gamified elements (e.g., points, narratives, challenges) as key contributors to this enhanced motivation and active learning. Gamified task-based scenarios are an effective pedagogical strategy for fostering oral participation and learning motivation in low-proficiency junior high English learners. This approach creates an interactive and supportive environment conducive to language practice and skill development. Educators can utilize the principles and strategies of gamified scenario design within TBLT to develop more targeted and engaging tasks. This study offers practical insights for creating activities aligned with students' real-world needs, emphasizing the importance of timely feedback and rewards to ultimately enhance oral proficiency and sustained learner interest.

Keywords: Gamified scenario design, Inspire learning motivation, Junior high school English oral teaching, Low level students, Task-based teaching method.

Contents

Contribution of this paper to the literature
This study uniquely designs and investigates gamified TBLT scenarios specifically tailored to motivate oral participation in low-proficiency middle school learners. This addresses an under-explored pedagogical niche focusing on the practical application of gamification within TBLT for this specific demographic and learning outcome.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) provides a clear option: by using a learner-centered approach to the development of oral communication, real communication provides more opportunities for development through completing an intentional and purposeful task. TBLT in junior high speaking instruction provides the opportunity to use task-based language teaching to provide meaningful speaking practice contexts. Educators are free to develop tasks that are relevant to context, curricular objectives, and real-world needs of the students. This means that students are equipped to develop organically the speaking skills of practice through the development of tasks.

The use of gamified scenarios is at the heart of this pedagogical model. The use of game mechanics—role play and progress rewards-allows the teacher to create learning environments with low anxiousness while also having students be intrinsically motivated to participate. This approach, blending multiple focuses to achieve aims, makes language practice fun and reinforces accuracy through repetitive practice that relates explicitly to its context.

1.2. Current Research Status at Home and Abroad

In the field of task-based language teaching, researchers from universities throughout the world have amassed a tremendous amount of research findings. In general, they have studied the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of task-based instruction and its effects on students' speaking ability, that is, speaking complexity, accuracy, and fluency. As a method of teaching language, task-based instruction is growing in popularity and success as a method of instruction, particularly outside of Canada. Foreign researchers have been researching task-based instruction since its inception and have a strong theoretical basis in task-based instruction. Various task activities in the task-based teaching method are conducive to achieving the educational concept that "students are the main body". The mutual learning in cooperative learning also conforms to the interactivity principle of the task-based teaching method (Nong, 2024).

There have been many empirical studies that show great benefits of task-based language instruction to improve students' speaking complexity, accuracy, and fluency when speaking. The studies regularly interpret and analyse how effective tasks are designed that seem to result in the focus on speaking coming up as students work on the task. The studies also provide evidence of how task-based language instruction could be employed in conjunction with other teaching methods for maximum effectiveness of the benefits. China started its research on task-based language teaching TBLT undercover from every other country; however, it has progressed very quickly.

Particular strategies to increase motivation to learn, as well as approaches for delivery and teaching, were offered as a general concept of goal orientation in Task-Based Language Teaching TBLT (Zhang, 2011). Chinese scholars and educators are primarily focused on the practical implications of applying TBLT in China's educational reality, seeking to find how existing TBLT theories can be deployed in the local environment to meet the developing learning needs and characteristics of Chinese students. The overwhelming amount of domestic research seeks to show ways in which TBLT could be applied more practically using activities such as role plays, group discussions, and interviews aimed at improving the practical use of spoken language for Chinese students.

1.3. Research Methods and Innovations

This research paper takes a comprehensive approach when discussing task-based teaching approaches in the oral English teaching of low-level junior high school students to fully and deeply understand how task-based teaching approaches can be combined design of gamified contexts to energize learning motivation. The study will combine quantitative and qualitative research to demonstrate the positive impact this new teaching approach can have properly. In order to uncover the range in evidence for its quantitative study, the study devised an original questionnaire. The questionnaire targets the lowest-level junior high school English students. It sought information about the students' motivation to study spoken English, their acceptance of task-based learning approaches, and their experiences with gamified contexts of learning. When this data is quantified through statistical analysis, it will reveal more about the learning conditions of the students under this new approach and to what extent, if any, they were stimulated or motivated to study. This design used a survey questionnaire and interviews in order to gather richer qualitative data. By meeting with some teachers and students face-to-face, we hoped to elicit more information and perspectives that the survey questionnaire may have missed. The primary topics of the interview were students' perceptions of the gamified context design and teachers' experience of challenges implementing the gamified contextual learning activity. The study design also included observations of classrooms to allow us to more naturally the effects of the practical application of a new method in real classrooms. By examining how students learn, engage with their classmates, and complete tasks in a gamified learning environment, as well as how teachers facilitate, it is possible to examine the viability and efficacy of this method in a more complete way. Improving learning efficiency depends on learning motivation, the internal driving force pushing students in their learning endeavors (Yang, 2022). The study is unique in that it incorporates gamified scenario design in task-based learning. While many aspects of traditional task-based teaching recognize and afford great value to active engagement and practice in language, there is no ceiling on providing inspiration for students to learn. This project approaches teaching differently than traditional task-based methods through the integration of gamified elements such as competition and role-playing with point incentives. This modification gives the learning environment a stronger immediate feel to get students involved. As such, student motivation and interest and overall output often will increase as a result.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Task-Based Language Teaching

2.1. Core Concepts of Task-Based Language Teaching

The main purpose of task-based language instruction is to complete tasks. Task-based language instruction stresses that second language learning takes place by completing tasks in communication situations in the real world or in simulated communication situations.

This approach focuses more on the use of the language and the practical use of the language as much as the structure of the language. Learning occurs when language is used to perform some action, and the student is the actor who performs the action or is engaged with the task, and "learner-centered" should be fundamental.

"Learning by doing" and "learner-centered" foundations involve students participating in assignments where the students are using the language to create a task in powerful and real-life situations and help students use the language to complete tasks and solve problems. Task-based language instruction also has another element whereby the role of the teacher also shifts.

2.2. Characteristics of Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-based language teaching possesses distinct advantages over more traditional language teaching. TBLT influences how students participate in their education. Students move from being passive consumers of knowledge to meaningful participants with more motivation to actually learn and also gain experience using the language in practice. Another unique quality of task-based language teaching is the attention to the role of the learner—they are not passive receivers of information leading to a deduction of meanings through use of explanation and factors of contextual, situational, and personal forms. They could be considered active participants and can be seen as investigators. Contrast this with being satisfied with published information in a textbook. TBLT allows students to choose and undertake assignments associated with tasks relevant to their interests and capabilities while still participating with the teacher. TBLT considers the communicative and authentic aspect of language as critical— traditional practices are usually content to convey particular parts of a language for conventional structure and have little reference to language through daily events. When designing classroom tasks, adhering to the principles of authenticity, interest, learning by doing, and form-function can more effectively promote the implementation of the task - based teaching method (Bai, 2025).

In contrast to traditional classroom environments, task-based language instruction simulates real-life settings and provides opportunities for students to apply what they know regarding language. In these settings, learners must use the knowledge of the language they've acquired to accomplish the assignments and solve real-world problems. Task completion and the assessment of outcomes are key components of task-based language instruction, while task-based language learning uses the task as the basic instructional tool of learning and instruction. Teachers create a series of specific and manageable assignments based on their language-focused learning objective and the reality of their students' setting or circumstance. Through the completion of these assignments, students both obtain language knowledge and develop language skills.

Task-based language training emphasizes the assessment of students' completion of tasks. This assessment is meant to assess students' completed work, but it also informs and motivates the students' learning process.

2.3. Steps for Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching

The process of implementing task-based language learning typically consists of three interconnected components: preparation for the task, implementation of the task, and reflection on the task. The three components consist of the full task-based language learning process.In the pre-task preparation stage, teachers need to plan tasks, set tasks that will enhance students' interest in learning. Teachers will need to concurrently provide linguistic input for students that will include pertinent vocabulary, phrases, and sentence conventions to allow them to develop the language that they will need to successfully complete the activities. Task execution is a key stage in task-based language instruction. In this stage, students must complete tasks together in groups while conversing and communicating with each other.The role of task-based teaching method in high school English teaching, that is, to cultivate students' pragmatic skills, cultural awareness and emotional motivation (Yan, 2025).

Forming groups may help promote competition and cooperation, which encourages students to potentially be more interested in learning. While working on tasks, students must use the language skills that they have already learned, which may include expressing their opinions orally or in writing. These types of authentic language communication tasks serve to improve students' speaking skills, raise the cognitive level of students, and encourage collaboration.

Evaluating and summing up the task outcomes is what happens in the post-task reflection phase, and this step is vital to successful task-based language education. Children with weak language skills often struggle on verbal working memory tests, which could be connected to the limitation of working memory capacity compromising the growth of the language system (Mainela-Arnold, 2012). In the post-task phase, teachers and learners evaluate the task results together. Evaluation can take many forms and is primarily concerned with uncovering the problems and deficiencies that learners experienced during the task. The need for task-based language education is especially essential with students achieving an oral English competence as opposed to junior high students. Perceptive task-based language education and learning motivation strategies, gamified situational success designs, are exceptionally well suited to improve students' speaking competencies and learning interest, or specifically, gamification can greatly motivate students' learning interest. As closely as possible, teachers can plan tasks, provide students with the proper language input and contextual background, assign tasks to groups to promote interactive communication, and lastly, assess and summarize the task outcomes.

3. Stimulating Learning Motivation

3.1. The Theoretical Foundations of Learning Motivation

Theoretical constructs for learning motivation are vast and include subject and discipline areas across education and psychology. Learning motivation represents the essential internal force that drives students to

undertake prescribed educational practices consistently. Many studies and researchers have stated that high learning motivation will impact learning positively by maintaining the student's hope for the future despite the obstacles and failures around them. One well-known theoretical construct of learning motivation is self-determination theory. Self-determination theory, developed by Deci and Ryan, maintains that intrinsic motivation to learn is a major contributor to learning behavior. Intrinsic motivation starts with the learner's involvement and enjoyment of the learning task, which is distinct from external pressures and incentives. Students will be more enthusiastic about learning and achieve much better learning outcomes when they genuinely enjoy the material they are studying and derive a feeling of accomplishment and fulfillment from it. Children with poor language abilities tend to perform poorly on verbal working memory tasks, which may be related to the restriction of working memory capacity interfering with the development of the language system (Mainela-Arnold, 2012). Self-determination theory posits that the fulfillment of a student's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is critical for supporting intrinsic motivation. Consequently, educators should seek to create a safe and supportive learning environment in which students can freely explore, acquire skills, and feel at home.

3.2. Strategies for Stimulating Learning Motivation

To successfully motivate low-level students to learn, the teacher must plan a variety of task-based language instruction. First, the planned strategies must excite or stimulate the enthusiasm of the students; second, they must attract the attention of students in order to involve them in speaking practice. A good strategy is to make projects interesting. Any opportunity that integrates learning assignments with middle school students' interests and hobbies will likely increase their motivation for learning because they are already interested in learning new things. One example of the latter can be found in speaking assignments that are based on "My Favorite Movie." By assigning each student a category, groups can role play scenes from the movie, and the students can practice not only academic language but also communication. Projects are simply fun assignments and create a safe and environment in which to practice speaking. One of the two strategies that can help increase learning motivation are to make it more interesting assignments for the students; the other strategy is to provide positive and constructive feedback and rewards.

3.3. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Learning Motivation Activation

To determine whether the incentive for learning had been ignited, measurements, from several angles, are needed. Not only would this aid in understanding the student's learning situation, but it would also provide solid data support for modifications in their teaching method. As an essential means of communication, spoken English is becoming increasingly important. Cultivating talents who can speak English fluently and communicate effectively in the international community is one of the urgent requirements for the strong development of China's economy and society (Zhang, 2020).

Using student performance when completing tasks as a measurement of how effective the stimulation of incentive was is also critical. When students have enthusiasm for the task, engage fully, and show interest in a function of silly exploring, the researcher is often sure that student incentive for learning has been evoked. Teachers can qualitatively observe the classroom and keep records of students' reactions, engagement, and problem-solving actions while they are completing their tasks to simply assess how motivated by the completion of the task and to examine the present levels of incentive stimulation. Performance measures in the absence of student consultation may not be as valuable as obtaining student feedback and student learning outcomes; hence, gaining feedback to determine the effectiveness of the stimulation of incentive. The task-based teaching method is a language teaching approach that emphasizes creating real-life contexts and learning by doing. Students learn the language by completing various task activities designed by the teacher (Guo, 2020).

As indicators of both efficaciousness and student effort, the learning outcomes provide evidence. In order to accurately describe how the motivation to learn was stimulated, it is imperative that students' feedback provide affective and cognitive indicators at the same time to assess both their feelings towards the task and their evaluations of the task they were engaged in. Teachers can use surveys, interviews, and methods that collect students' honest opinions in order to measure more accurately the stimulation of learning motivation and the impact of motivation.

4. Empirical Research

4.1. Research Methods and Data Collection

The aim of this study is to delve into how junior high students with oral English language difficulties can learn the language through task-based learning strategies and gamified situational design, and how this can enhance their motivation to learn. In order to ensure the study is comprehensive and in-depth, we took care to use a sound research methodology woven together by quantitative and qualitative research methods. The participants in the study were selected from a junior high school class of students with poor oral English. The intention in adopting the student group taken from a real-life, more targeted and practical study, was to yield quality results for the study. The study used a variety of research techniques made possible due to the access the researchers had to the students including the widest breadth of data collection possible. The ideological and political teaching model of reading courses based on TBLT can enhance students' reading interest (Liu, 2023).

The research techniques used include survey, interview, and go in the classroom to observe the students. The questionnaire, used for quantitative research, was our primary research tool that could collect data on the level of motivation in learners and reveal speaking abilities thoroughly, which provides meaningful data description and solid base for further analysis.

4.2. Data Analysis and Results Presentation

This research study utilized the SPSS statistics software during the analysis of data stage to assist in processing and analyzing the data collected in the questionnaire/survey. The descriptive statistical analysis presented an overall view regarding the speaking ability, learning motivation, and acceptance of the gamified

design, as well as allowing for a full understanding of the students. Task-based teaching method provides students with various forms of task activities by creating a real language environment, and encourages students to actively participate in classroom activities to enhance their oral expression ability.

Task-based teaching method provides students with various forms of task activities by creating a real language environment, and encourages students to actively participate in classroom activities to enhance their oral expression ability (Zhang, 2025).

Through correlational analysis, we were able to see intrinsic and relatedness among speaking ability, learning motivation, and the connection of the gamified situational design, while also providing confirmatory evidence for the teaching actions to come. We also performed a variance analysis to see the effects of different teaching on the students' learning.

References

Bai, S. H. (2025). *A study on the effectiveness of task-based teaching method on the oral English ability of non-English major college students.* Master's Thesis, Southwest Petroleum University. CNKI.

Guo, Y. W. (2020). *A research on the application of task-based teaching method in alleviating oral English anxiety of junior high school students.* Master's Thesis, Shanghai Normal University. CNKI.

Liu, J. Y. (2023). *Research on ideological and political teaching in junior high school English reading classes based on task-based teaching method.* Master's Thesis, Shandong Normal University. CNKI.

Mainela-Arnold, E. (2012). Investigating sentence processing and language segmentation in explaining children's performance on a sentence-span task. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 47*(2), 123–134.

Nong, J. J. (2024). *An experimental study on cooperative learning based on task-based teaching method in junior high school English reading teaching.* Master's Thesis, Guangxi Normal University. CNKI.

Yan, L. Y. (2025). A study on the application strategies of task-based teaching method in senior high school English teaching. *English Teachers, 25*(6), 59–61.

Yang, G. F. (2022). How to stimulate and cultivate students' learning motivation in teaching. *Read Write Calculate: Journal of Educational Guide, 2022*(1), 1–10.

Zhang, J. M. (2011). An exploration of learning motivation and teaching methods for professional english in the grassland science undergraduate major. *Journal of Grassland Science, 34*(3), 32.

Zhang, K. K. (2025). *A research on the application of task-based teaching method in oral English teaching in rural junior high schools.* Master's Thesis, Jiangxi Science and Technology Normal University. CNKI.

Zhang, X. (2020). *A research on the application of task-based teaching method in spoken English teaching in vocational colleges.* Master's Thesis, Shandong Normal University. CNKI.