

# A Review of Comparative Studies on the Similarities and Differences between Situational Teaching Method and Task-Based Teaching Method

Xi Li\*, Xiangyi Ci

Jilin International Studies University, Changchun 130000, Jilin, China

\*Corresponding author: Xi Li, 2938998948@qq.com

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**Abstract:** Both situational language teaching and task-based language teaching occupy important positions in modern education. Situational language teaching relies on creating realistic scenarios to evoke emotional resonance among students and drive the internalization of knowledge. Task-based language teaching, on the other hand, is guided by clear tasks, urging students to master knowledge and skills in the process of completing tasks. Although these two teaching methods share similarities in terms of goal orientation, student autonomy, and practicality, they each have their own focus. This article summarizes relevant literature, outlining the theoretical foundations, practical applications, and effects of the two teaching methods. It explores their potential future developments in English education, aiming to provide theoretical guidance and practical reference for English educators and to promote the optimization and innovation of English teaching methods.

**Keywords:** Situational language teaching; Task-based language teaching; Constructivist theory; Development trend

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background overview

With the rapid innovation of educational philosophy and increasingly frequent international exchanges, English teaching methods have also evolved and been enriched. From the audio-lingual method emphasizing sentence pattern drills, to the communicative approach focusing on real-context communication, and now to the diverse teaching methods, the underlying trend is an increasing emphasis on student autonomy, language practice, and cross-cultural literacy cultivation. The Ministry of Education issued the “Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards” in 2022, implementing stricter standards for English teaching. The new

curriculum reform focuses on the cultivation of core literacy, emphasizing students' comprehensive growth. It not only comprehensively regulates teaching objectives, content, and methods to improve the quality and effectiveness of English teaching, but also underscores the importance of cultivating core literacy and valuing students' comprehensive development <sup>[1]</sup>. These new requirements have driven the renewal of English teaching philosophy and provided a broad space for the innovation of teaching methods. It is in this context that situational language teaching and task-based language teaching have become the focus of daily English teaching practice.

## **1.2. Research significance**

The significance of conducting a literature review on the similarities and differences between English situational language teaching and task-based language teaching lies in several aspects. Firstly, systematically sorting out the theoretical frameworks of the two methods can deeply explore the underlying theoretical support, allowing educators to understand the original design intentions of the teaching methods rather than mechanically applying them. Secondly, integrating practical application cases and effectiveness evaluation results can create a detailed "teaching map," helping frontline English teachers accurately select appropriate teaching methods based on academic conditions and teaching objectives, avoid teaching misconceptions, optimize classroom efficiency, and improve teaching quality. Furthermore, reviewing research from different perspectives can also provide inspiration for the integration and innovation of subsequent teaching methods, motivating teachers to explore new methods adapted to English teaching in the new era.

## **1.3. Scope of literature**

The literature for this study primarily comes from professional books and academic journals authored by prominent educational scholars both domestically and internationally, who provide comprehensive and systematic interpretations of teaching methods. It also includes papers from important international and domestic educational conferences, which capture cutting-edge developments and vivid teaching examples in a timely manner. The aim is to gather a wealth of first-hand research materials to present a panoramic view of the similarities and differences between situational language teaching and task-based language teaching.

# **2. Overview of major schools of thought**

## **2.1. Constructivism theory**

Constructivism, originating in the 1960s, was first proposed by psychologist J. Piaget. Piaget suggested that cognition is an active construction based on the subject's existing knowledge and experience. He emphasized that children do not passively receive external information but actively construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through their own experiences, reflections, and interactions <sup>[2]</sup>. The founders of social constructivism, such as Vygotsky, emphasized the importance of the learner's socio-cultural and historical background and introduced the core concept of the "zone of proximal development" <sup>[3]</sup>. Wittrock proposed a generative model of learning, while Jonassen and others introduced the concept of an unstructured experiential background <sup>[4]</sup>. These theoretical viewpoints have greatly enriched and deepened constructivism, providing a solid foundation for its application in teaching practice.

## **2.2. Constructivist view of teaching and learning**

### **2.2.1. Constructivist view of learning**

Constructivism believes that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge, rather than passively receiving information. Based on their existing knowledge and experience, learners continuously construct new understandings and meanings through interaction with the environment. The core viewpoints of the constructivist learning view include <sup>[5]</sup>: (1) Learning is not simply about absorbing external information but rather about learners actively combining new information with their existing knowledge and experience to construct meaning. Each learner interprets and understands new knowledge individually based on their unique knowledge background <sup>[6]</sup>. (2) Learning occurs within a certain socio-cultural environment, where learners share resources, collaborate to solve problems, and promote knowledge construction through communication and interaction with others. This social interaction is not limited to teachers and students but also includes interactions among students. (3) Knowledge is closely related to specific contexts, and learning should take place in real or simulated situations, allowing learners to understand and master knowledge through practical applications. Contextual teaching helps enhance the relevance and practicality of learning.

### **2.2.2. Constructivist view of teaching**

The constructivist view of teaching emphasizes a student-centered approach, focusing on teaching in real-life situations and promoting collaborative learning and self-exploration. Its core viewpoints include: (1) Teaching is student-centered, designing courses based on students' needs, interests, and existing knowledge and experience. It encourages students to actively engage in learning activities, making them the leaders in constructing knowledge. (2) Teachers create situations related to the learning topic, allowing students to learn in an almost real-life context, thus enabling them to grasp and apply knowledge more profoundly <sup>[7]</sup>. (3) It encourages cooperation and communication among learners, promoting knowledge sharing and construction through activities like group discussions and role-playing. Collaborative learning helps cultivate students' teamwork and communication skills <sup>[8]</sup>. (4) It encourages independent learning and self-exploration. Teachers should provide rich learning resources and guidance, enabling learners to continuously improve their knowledge system through practice, reflection, and summation. From the perspective of constructivism theory, Situational language teaching and task-based language teaching share the same theoretical foundation. Both teaching methods emphasize students' subjectivity and practicality, promoting language learning through real or simulated situations and tasks. Therefore, constructivism theory provides a solid theoretical support for situational language teaching and task-based language teaching, facilitating innovation and progress in foreign language teaching methods.

## **3. Theoretical characteristics of the school**

### **3.1. Situational language teaching and task-based language**

Teaching situational language teaching originated in the 1930s in Britain. Its core concept is to learn language in simulated or real language situations, emphasizing practical language use and the cultivation of communication skills. Constructivism theory, which views learning as an active process of knowledge construction and situations as important carriers of knowledge construction, provides a significant theoretical foundation for situational language teaching <sup>[9]</sup>. Task-based language teaching (TBLT), which emerged in the 1980s during the communicative language teaching movement and was influenced by functional

linguistics and cognitive psychology, is a teaching method with tasks as its core. It emphasizes promoting language acquisition through task completion, focusing on practical language use and the development of communication skills. TBLT considers language learning as a process of learning by doing, where tasks serve as an important pathway to language acquisition <sup>[10]</sup>.

## **3.2. In-depth analysis**

### **3.2.1. Understanding of language essence**

Situational language teaching views language as a tool for communication and expression, deeply embedded in specific life and social contexts. The meaning of language relies on specific situations to be fully presented. Without context, language is just isolated and abstract symbols. Task-based language teaching sees language essentially as a means to accomplish various real-world tasks and achieve specific goals. Language learning serves task resolution, focusing on how to accurately and appropriately use language to communicate, coordinate, obtain, or transmit information during task completion <sup>[11]</sup>.

### **3.2.2. Learning objective setting**

Situational language teaching emphasizes cultivating students' language comprehension and application abilities in specific contexts, while also stimulating emotional attitudes and cultural awareness. The goal is not only to acquire knowledge and skills but also to immerse students in situations, comprehend humanistic connotations, and enhance cross-cultural communication sensitivity <sup>[12]</sup>.

Task-based language teaching focuses on improving students' practical skills in independently completing tasks using language, emphasizing problem-solving abilities, independent learning abilities, and team collaboration skills. The set tasks have a clear outcome orientation, enabling students to ultimately produce a complete and usable strategic text <sup>[13]</sup>.

### **3.2.3. Teaching content selection**

Situational language teaching revolves around elements needed to create situations, often drawn from real-life fragments, stories, or film and television scenes.

Task-based language teaching selects content based on task themes and goals, prioritizing real task cases and project documents to ensure authenticity and task logic alignment.

### **3.2.4. Teaching activity organization**

Situational language teaching begins with situation creation, followed by diverse activities like explanations, discussions, and role-playing. The activity pace flexibly adapts to the situation's progression, emphasizing on-site atmosphere rendering and guiding students' emotional involvement <sup>[14]</sup>.

Task-based language teaching is strictly organized according to the task process, typically involving task assignment, planning, execution, outcome presentation, and evaluation. The steps are compact, well-organized, and closely centered around task completion, with group collaboration throughout.

### **3.2.5. Teacher role positioning**

In situational language teaching, the teacher is the creator and guide of situations, responsible for providing language input and feedback to guide students' language learning and practice.

In task-based language teaching, the teacher is the task designer and mentor, responsible for providing

task guidance and feedback to facilitate task completion and language acquisition.

### **3.2.6. Student subject role**

In situational language teaching, students participate in situations with emotional experiences, actively explore knowledge, and attempt to express and communicate within the situation's influence, deepening their understanding and perception of knowledge from a participant's perspective.

In task-based language teaching, students become task leaders, wielding greater autonomous decision-making power from planning task solutions to coordinating divisions of labor and executing operations. The entire process is self-driven, achieving knowledge and skill internalization and ability growth while tackling task challenges.

## **4. Comparative analysis**

### **4.1. Differences**

#### **4.1.1. Teaching focus**

Situational language teaching emphasizes helping students understand and apply knowledge through creating specific situations, where situation setting is key. Task-based language teaching focuses on achieving learning objectives through completing specific tasks, with task design as the teaching core.

#### **4.1.2. Implementation method**

Situational language teaching allows students to experience and practice knowledge in situations through simulations or real-life contexts, such as role-playing, simulated dialogues, and group discussions. In task-based language teaching, teachers typically design a series of specific tasks for students, enabling them to learn and master knowledge through task design, implementation, and feedback <sup>[15]</sup>.

#### **4.1.3. Evaluation method**

In situational language teaching, evaluation may focus more on students' performance in situations, such as situational adaptability and problem-solving abilities. In task-based language teaching, evaluation is usually based on task completion quality and efficiency.

### **4.2. Similarities**

#### **4.2.1. Student-centered**

Both situational language teaching and task-based language teaching emphasize students' central role in learning. Situational language teaching focuses on students experiencing and practicing knowledge in specific contexts, while task-based language teaching emphasizes students' active learning and exploration during task completion.

#### **4.2.2. Practical application**

Situational language teaching enables students to apply knowledge in simulated or real situations, enhancing practical abilities. Task-based language teaching cultivates students' ability to apply knowledge through completing practical tasks.

### **4.2.3. Cultivating students' comprehensive abilities**

Situational language teaching fosters problem-solving, innovation, and team collaboration skills through situation simulations. In task-based language teaching, students' thinking, problem-solving, and other comprehensive abilities are enhanced during task completion.

In practical teaching, teachers can reasonably apply these two teaching methods based on teaching content and students' actual situations. For example, in teaching English oral communication, Situational language teaching and task-based language teaching can be combined. Oral communication tasks can be designed through creating specific situations, allowing students to complete tasks in simulated contexts and improve their oral expression abilities<sup>[16]</sup>. Simultaneously, teachers can continuously adjust and optimize teaching methods based on students' learning feedback and effectiveness to better achieve teaching goals. In summary, Task-based language teaching and situational language teaching have unique characteristics and can complement and cooperate with each other in practical teaching to achieve better teaching effects.

## **5. Practical application of teaching methods**

### **5.1. Case studies**

#### **5.1.1. Contextual teaching method case**

Taking a high school English class as an example, the teacher adopts the contextual teaching method for reading instruction. The teacher first creates a travel-related context, guiding students to imagine they are planning a trip. Then, an article about travel destinations is provided for students to read and understand within the context. During the reading process, the teacher leads discussions on travel plans, attraction selections, and encourages students to express and communicate using the language they have learned. Finally, a role-playing activity is organized to simulate conversations and exchanges during travel, further reinforcing and improving students' language proficiency<sup>[17]</sup>.

#### **5.1.2. Task-based learning case**

In a university English major class, the teacher employs a task-based approach for oral English instruction. Initially, a task involving ordering in a restaurant is designed, requiring students to role-play in groups and complete the task. During task execution, students engage in communicative activities such as ordering, inquiring about dish information, and expressing personal preferences using the language they have acquired. The teacher provides feedback and guidance based on students' performance, assisting them in correcting language errors and enhancing their oral expression skills. Through task completion, students not only master relevant language knowledge and skills but also improve their communication and self-learning abilities<sup>[18]</sup>.

### **5.2. Implementation effects**

In practical teaching, the contextual teaching method successfully ignites students' enthusiasm for reading materials by constructing travel scenes closely related to their daily lives, making reading more vivid and interesting. Reading articles in such contexts enables students to understand the content more deeply and actively use the language they have learned in communication and role-playing, thereby enhancing their language application skills. Simultaneously, this approach encourages students to actively explore, discover, and construct knowledge, promoting their autonomous learning and team collaboration skills.

The task-based teaching method helps students clearly recognize the purpose of learning by assigning



specific learning tasks, enhancing the pertinence and efficiency of learning. In the process of completing tasks, students must communicate using the language they have learned, significantly improving their oral expression and communication skills. Additionally, the task-based approach encourages students to learn and master knowledge through task completion, further cultivating their autonomous learning and problem-solving abilities. By designing authentic tasks and guiding students to complete them, the task-based teaching method not only enhances students' autonomous learning and collaborative learning abilities but also elevates their language proficiency and communication skills.

However, according to relevant literature, both teaching methods have certain challenges and limitations. The contextual teaching method requires teachers to possess high context creation and guidance abilities, while students need a certain language foundation and communication skills. The task-based teaching method demands careful task design from teachers, ensuring task feasibility and effectiveness, and students must have strong autonomous learning and collaborative learning abilities. These pose high demands on teachers' teaching abilities and students' learning capabilities.

## **6. Analysis of current research status**

### **6.1. Research hotspots**

Based on a comprehensive review of relevant studies, the application of contextual and task-based teaching methods in English instruction has emerged as a focal point in current educational research, presenting multiple hotspots.

#### **6.1.1. Student-centered approach**

Both methods emphasize a student-centered teaching philosophy in practical instruction. The contextual teaching method creates vivid contexts related to English learning content, making abstract language knowledge concrete and stimulating students' interest and participation. The task-driven approach motivates students to actively apply English knowledge for communication and expression while completing tasks, cultivating their self-learning abilities and team collaboration awareness.

#### **6.1.2. Integration of modern educational technology**

The integration of English teaching methods with modern educational technology has garnered significant attention. With the rapid development of information technology, resources such as multimedia and the internet are widely used in these teaching methods.

#### **6.1.3. Cultivation of cross-cultural communication abilities**

Additionally, the cultivation of students' comprehensive language skills and cross-cultural communication abilities has become an important goal. The contextual teaching method creates cross-cultural contexts, allowing students to experience cultural differences and enhance their cross-cultural communication awareness. The task-based teaching method designs tasks involving cross-cultural communication content, training students to effectively communicate in English across different cultural backgrounds and comprehensively developing their language skills, cultural understanding, and communication abilities.

## **6.2. Research gaps**

Despite achieving certain results in the application research of contextual and task-based teaching methods in English instruction, there are still research gaps.

Firstly, there are deficiencies in the teaching evaluation system. The current evaluation of these teaching methods primarily focuses on students' learning outcomes, such as mastery of language knowledge and task completion. However, there is a lack of comprehensive and systematic evaluation indicators for students' emotional attitudes, cognitive development, and cultural accomplishment enhancement during contextual experiences and task execution<sup>[19]</sup>.

Moreover, there is a scarcity of personalized teaching strategy research tailored to students with varying English proficiency levels and learning styles. Contextual and task-based teaching methods often adopt a unified approach in practical applications, inadequately considering individual differences in students' English foundations, learning abilities, and preferences.

Lastly, there are deficiencies in teacher training and professional development. These teaching methods demand high professional qualities and teaching abilities from teachers, such as context creation and task design, and management skills. Nevertheless, the current training system for teachers on effectively utilizing these teaching methods is insufficient, lacking continuous and targeted training content and modes. Teachers may have a limited understanding and improper application of contextual and task-based teaching methods in practical instruction, affecting the full exploitation of their advantages in English teaching.

## **7. Discussion on development trends**

### **7.1. Trend predictions**

#### **7.1.1. Deepening technological integration**

In the future, cutting-edge technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) will be more tightly integrated with these two teaching methods. For example, VR technology can create a highly realistic English language environment, allowing students to experience the culture and lifestyle of English-speaking countries immersively, thereby effectively improving their language proficiency. AI technology can intelligently adjust contextual content or task difficulty based on students' learning progress and performance, achieving personalized teaching.

#### **7.1.2. Evident trend of interdisciplinary integration**

English teaching will no longer be isolated but will have more cross-integration with other subjects such as history, culture, and art. The contextual teaching method can create interdisciplinary contexts, while the task-based teaching method can also design tasks involving multidisciplinary knowledge, which helps broaden students' knowledge and cultivate comprehensive literacy.

#### **7.1.3. Cultivation of intercultural communication skills**

The development of globalization will prompt these two teaching methods to focus more on cultivating students' intercultural communication skills. The design of contexts and tasks will revolve more around communication, understanding, and cooperation between different cultures, enabling students to better adapt to the demands of multicultural communication in the context of globalization.



## 7.2. Strategic suggestions

Regarding the contextual teaching method, teachers should focus on the authenticity and diversity of contexts. On the one hand, they should deeply explore the content of textbooks, combine them with students' real-life situations, and create realistic contexts, such as simulating business negotiations or international travel scenes, allowing students to feel the practical application value of English in real life. On the other hand, various resources, including network resources and multimedia materials, should be utilized to enrich the contextual representations and increase student engagement. Simultaneously, it is essential to strengthen the evaluation of the effectiveness of contextual teaching and establish a diversified evaluation system that not only focuses on students' mastery of language knowledge but also emphasizes their emotional experiences and cooperation abilities in the context <sup>[20]</sup>.

For the task-based teaching method, task design is crucial. Tasks should have clear goals, reasonable difficulty gradients, and operability. Teachers should design a chain of tasks from simple to complex based on students' English proficiency and learning abilities, such as progressing from word spelling tasks to short essay writing tasks. Additionally, students should be encouraged to explore independently and collaborate during task execution. Teachers can guide students to choose their own task completion methods and organize group collaborations to complete comprehensive tasks, cultivating students' teamwork spirit and autonomous learning abilities. In the teaching process, teacher training should also be strengthened to improve their understanding and application abilities of these two teaching methods. Regular teaching seminars can be organized to share successful teaching experiences and jointly explore teaching modes suitable for different student groups.

In the future, the contextual teaching method and task-based teaching method will play a greater role in intelligent and digital teaching. The application of virtual reality technology and artificial intelligence will further enrich teaching contexts and task designs.

## 8. Conclusion and prospects

Based on constructivist learning theory, this paper compares and analyzes the contextual teaching method and task-based teaching method, clarifying the differences, advantages, and disadvantages of these two teaching methods. The contextual teaching method focuses on learning language in simulated or real-life contexts, emphasizing practical language application and the improvement of communication skills. The task-based teaching method centers on tasks, promoting language learning through task completion. These two teaching methods have their own characteristics and should be appropriately selected and applied in teaching practice based on teaching content, goals, and student needs to stimulate students' interest and enhance teaching effectiveness. In summary, middle school English teachers should flexibly use these two teaching strategies, deeply study related teaching books and papers, and further integrate and improve these two teaching methods based on classroom reality and student abilities to cultivate students' English learning skills and enhance their English language proficiency.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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