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Integrating Task-Based Language Teaching with Guided Discovery: An Intervention Study on Chinese Non-English-Major College Students' Speaking Accuracy

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Abstract

This study investigated the potential of integrating Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with Guided Discovery (GD) to enhance the speaking accuracy of Chinese non-English-major college students. Motivated by the persistent imbalance between fluency and accuracy in Chinese EFL classrooms, the study adopted a collaborative action research design implemented over four iterative cycles in an authentic university speaking course. Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention speaking assessments, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of lesson plans. Quantitative results showed notable improvements in grammatical accuracy, lexical appropriateness, and overall speaking performance, while fluency- and pronunciation-related gains were comparatively moderate. Qualitative findings indicated that the integration of TBLT and GD supported learners' noticing of linguistic forms, increased engagement, and facilitated a shift toward more student-centered interaction. Teachers perceived the approach as pedagogically valuable, though challenges related to time management, cognitive load, and learner differences were noted. Given the absence of a control group and the limited context, the findings should be interpreted as developmental patterns rather than causal evidence. Nevertheless, the study provides contextually relevant insights into how an integrated TBLT–GD model may support accuracy-focused oral instruction in Chinese tertiary EFL settings.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Guided Discovery (GD), Speaking Accuracy, Grammar Accuracy, Action Research

Introduction

Speaking proficiency in English has long been a central goal of College English education in China, yet a persistent gap remains between students' fluency and accuracy, particularly among non-English majors. Although recent curricular reforms have promoted communicicatively oriented pedagogies such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), evidence suggests that students often achieve greater gains in fluency than in accuracy (Long, 2015; Lu et al., 2023). Speaking accuracy—comprising grammatical precision, lexical appropriateness, and pragmatic suitability—remains underdeveloped, raising concerns about the long-term development of functional communicative competence (Li & Ren, 2023).

TBLT provides opportunities for meaningful communication and has been shown to increase engagement and fluency. However, its meaning-focused orientation may lead learners to prioritize message conveyance at the expense of linguistic form (Azizifard, 2024; Milon et al., 2023). To address this imbalance, researchers have proposed supplementing TBLT with techniques that draw learners' attention to language form without interrupting communication. Guided Discovery (GD), an inductive, scaffolded approach that helps learners consciously analyze and articulate language rules, has shown promise in supporting accuracy development (Thornbury, 2020; Wu, 2023). Although international work has explored form-focused interventions within task-based environments (Majeed & Memon, 2022; Udin & Syamsia, 2022), empirical evidence from Chinese tertiary contexts remains limited, especially regarding how a systematic integration of TBLT and GD may influence speaking accuracy.

Grounded in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Constructivism (Piaget, 1954), this study examines whether the integration of TBLT and GD can support the speaking accuracy of Chinese non-English-major college students. Using a collaborative action research approach, the study implemented four iterative cycles of the integrated methodology in an authentic classroom setting.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

QR1:What challenges related to speaking accuracy (grammar, vocabulary, language appropriateness) do Chinese non-English-major college students face?

QR2:How does the integration of TBLT and GD influence students' speaking accuracy during the intervention?

QR3:How do teachers perceive the impact, opportunities, and challenges associated with implementing this integrated approach?

This study aims to contribute contextually grounded evidence to the expanding body of TBLT research and provide practical insights for improving accuracy-focused pedagogy in Chinese EFL classrooms.

Literature Review

Speaking Accuracy Challenges in the Chinese EFL Context

Although communicative competence is increasingly emphasized in China, speaking accuracy remains a key area of difficulty for non-English-major learners. Research indicates that learners struggle with grammatical accuracy, lexical selection, and pragmatic appropriateness in spontaneous speech (Li & Ren, 2023). These challenges are compounded by traditional teaching approaches, large class sizes, exam-oriented pressures, and limited opportunities for guided communicative practice (Liu, 2024; Liang et al., 2025). As a result,

many students develop fluency-oriented strategies that prioritize message delivery while overlooking linguistic precision.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT emphasizes meaning-focused communication through task completion, typically structured in pre-task, task, and post-task phases (Ellis, 2003). Evidence consistently shows that TBLT enhances motivation, engagement, and fluency (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; Ellis, 2020). However, its focus on meaning may limit opportunities for learners to attend to language form, contributing to the fluency–accuracy gap documented in Chinese and international classrooms (Ahmadian & Long, 2021; Li & Thomas, 2023). Although post-task reflection can address linguistic features, teachers often lack time or training to implement systematic form-focused work within TBLT (Gao, 2023).

Guided Discovery (GD)

Guided Discovery is an inductive instructional approach in which learners analyze carefully selected examples and respond to guiding questions to discover linguistic rules (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; Thornbury, 2020). GD fosters deeper noticing, hypothesis testing, and learner autonomy, all of which are associated with durable language development (Masaryk, 2024; Chong, 2022). Studies in Chinese classrooms indicate that GD can improve grammatical awareness, encourage independent analysis, and increase engagement (Wu, 2023). Yet GD alone may not provide sufficient communicative practice for learners to proceduralize newly acquired forms.

Integrating TBLT and GD

Recent studies indicate that integrating TBLT with form-focused techniques can enhance both fluency and accuracy (Soali, 2023; Rashid, 2025). In particular, GD offers a structured means of preparing learners for linguistically demanding tasks and of guiding post-task reflection on errors (Azkarai, Oliver, & Gil-Berrio, 2022). International research (e.g., Majeed & Memon, 2022; Udin & Syamsia, 2022) suggests that TBLT enhanced by GD can improve grammatical precision while retaining communicative authenticity.

In China, however, empirical work on integrated models remains scarce. While GD has been applied in grammar and writing instruction (Wu, 2023; Guo, 2021) and TBLT has been used to develop oral fluency (Hu, 2024), few studies have systematically combined these methods to examine their effect on speaking accuracy at the tertiary level.

Theoretical Framework

The integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Guided Discovery (GD) can be conceptually grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Constructivism. From an SCT perspective, language development is fundamentally mediated through social interaction, with learning occurring within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where learners rely on scaffolded support to accomplish tasks that exceed their independent capabilities (Vygotsky, 1978). In a communicative task environment, such as the TBLT phase of the instructional cycle, interactional demands expose gaps in learners' linguistic knowledge and create opportunities for scaffolded assistance from peers or the teacher. These conditions operationalize SCT principles by situating learning

within meaningful social activity and by making linguistic needs visible through task performance.

Constructivism complements this perspective by emphasizing that knowledge is actively constructed as learners engage with linguistic input, test hypotheses, and refine their understanding through reflection (Piaget, 1954; Bruner, 1961). GD aligns closely with this orientation: by guiding learners to analyze linguistic patterns, articulate rules, and evaluate their own output, GD fosters deeper cognitive engagement and autonomy in meaning–form mapping. Rather than supplying explicit rules, GD prompts learners to infer underlying regularities, thereby strengthening the internalization of linguistic structures that emerge during communicative tasks.

Together, the two theories provide a coherent rationale for integrating TBLT and GD within a unified pedagogical model. TBLT's communicative tasks generate authentic contexts in which linguistic gaps become salient, while GD provides structured opportunities for learners to analyze and consolidate the forms needed to address those gaps. This reciprocal relationship allows form-focused discovery to arise from meaningful communication, and communication to be enhanced by improved awareness of linguistic form. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, the integration operationalizes SCT's emphasis on socially mediated scaffolding and Constructivism's emphasis on learner-driven knowledge construction, ultimately supporting the development of speaking accuracy in communicative contexts.

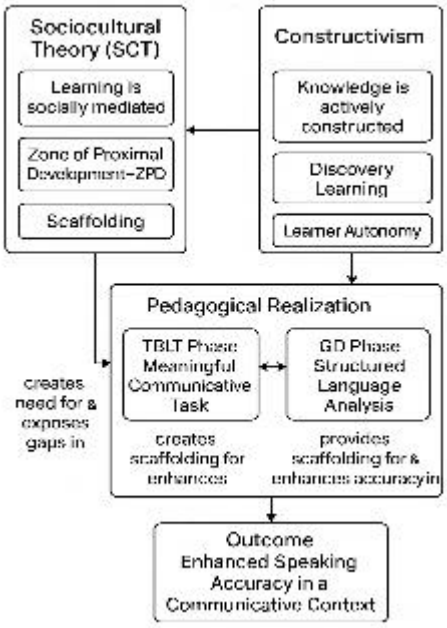

Figure 1.3 Conceptual Framework with Theoretical Basis

Research Gap

Although theory strongly supports the integration of TBLT and GD, and emerging evidence points to their complementary potential, there is limited empirical investigation of such an integrated model in Chinese tertiary EFL classrooms, particularly regarding its specific effects on grammar accuracy, lexical precision, and language appropriateness. This gap provides the rationale for the present intervention study.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a Collaborative Action Research (CAR) design to investigate how the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Guided Discovery (GD) may support the development of speaking accuracy among Chinese non-English-major college students. CAR was selected because it enables iterative pedagogical refinement through cycles of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, allowing instructional adjustments to be made in direct response to classroom realities. Over the eight-week intervention, four CAR cycles were implemented, each corresponding to a single instructional unit. In each cycle, the researcher and participating teacher jointly designed a lesson integrating TBLT and GD, the teacher enacted the lesson in her class, the researcher conducted systematic observations, and both parties engaged in reflective discussion to evaluate outcomes and determine modifications for the subsequent cycle. This iterative structure provided a dynamic mechanism for examining the pedagogical feasibility and situated impact of the integrated approach.

Participants and Context

The study was conducted at Guangzhou Xinhua University. Three English teachers were initially recruited through purposive sampling to participate in interviews aimed at identifying the challenges students commonly experience in speaking accuracy, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatic appropriateness. Following this exploratory phase, one teacher served as the primary participant for the CAR component. She was a senior lecturer with ten years of teaching experience and ongoing doctoral training in TESOL, which positioned her well to implement the integrated TBLT–GD pedagogy. The intervention took place in her intact class of 32 first-year non-English-major students, all approximately 18 years old and assessed at the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Because the class formed part of a compulsory Practical Speaking Course, it provided a suitable instructional context for combining communicative tasks with accuracy-oriented form-focused work.

Data Collection Instruments

Multiple data sources were collected to enable triangulation and build a comprehensive account of the intervention. Pre- and post-intervention speaking assessments were administered in Weeks 1 and 8. These assessments followed the structure of the IELTS Speaking Test and included a personal interview, a descriptive prompt, and a discussion of abstract topics. Student performances were evaluated using a five-point analytic rubric assessing grammatical range and accuracy, lexical resource, fluency and coherence, and pronunciation, allowing for fine-grained examination of learners' oral proficiency development.

Semi-structured interviews captured teachers' perspectives across two stages. In the initial interview phase, the three recruited teachers discussed the difficulties they perceived in students' speaking accuracy. During the intervention, four interviews with the participating teacher documented her reflections on the unfolding implementation of TBLT–GD, her observations of student progress, and the pedagogical challenges encountered in practice.

Classroom observations were conducted during each cycle using an adapted version of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) scheme. The observations examined how tasks were enacted, how learners interacted with one another and the teacher, how GD was facilitated, and how students engaged with both communicative and form-focused activities. These observations provided contextualized insight into the instructional processes underlying the intervention.

Additionally, detailed lesson plans were co-developed for each cycle using a CELTA-style template specifying how GD would be incorporated into the pre-task and post-task phases and how TBLT would structure the main task phase. A pedagogical guideline supported implementation fidelity by outlining the teacher's role as a facilitator and clarifying the operational principles of the integrated model. The sequence and timing of all data collection activities across the four CAR cycles are summarized in Table 1, which illustrates how interviews, lesson planning, classroom observations, oral performance assessments, and pre-/post-tests were organized throughout the eight-week intervention.

Table 1
Timetable for Data Collection

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 3		Cycle 4	
a. Oral English Test (Pre-test) **b.** Interview 1 **c.** Lesson Plan 1 **d.** Guideline	**a.** Classroom Observation 1 **b.** Measuring students' oral Performances **c.** Reflection and Discussion	**a.** Interview 2 **b.** Lesson Plan 2	**a.** Classroom Observation 2 **b.** Measuring students' oral Performances **d.** Reflection and Discussion	**a.** Interview 3 **b.** Lesson Plan 3	**a.** Classroom Observation 3 **b.** Measuring students' oral Performances **c.** Reflection and Discussion	**a.** Interview 4 **b.** Lesson Plan 4	**a.** Classroom Observation 4 **b.** Measuring students' oral Performance **c.** Interview 5 **d.** Oral English Test (Post-test)

Data Analysis

A mixed-methods analytical approach was adopted to address the research questions, integrating qualitative and quantitative procedures to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's effects. The qualitative data, which included interview transcripts, classroom observation notes collected through the adapted COLT scheme, and instructional documents such as lesson plans, were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved iterative reading of the data, the development of initial codes, and the refinement of these codes into broader themes that captured patterns related to learners' speaking accuracy, the pedagogical dynamics of the TBLT–GD integration, and the teacher's evolving perceptions of the

intervention. NVivo software facilitated the organization, coding, and retrieval of qualitative data, ensuring systematic and transparent analytical procedures.

Quantitative data were derived from the pre- and post-intervention speaking assessments as well as rubric-based evaluations conducted during the four CAR cycles. These data were analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics calculated to examine changes in learners' grammatical accuracy, lexical resource, fluency and coherence, pronunciation, and overall speaking performance. Measures such as means, standard deviations, and score distributions provided numerical indicators of learners' development across the intervention period. Together, the qualitative and quantitative analyses enabled a triangulated interpretation of how the integrated TBLT–GD approach functioned in practice and how it corresponded with changes in learners' speaking accuracy.

Findings/Results

This study examined how the integration of TBLT and GD corresponded with changes in students' speaking accuracy. Quantitative results from the pre- and post-tests are presented first, followed by qualitative findings that help explain the observed patterns. Tables 2–5 illustrate key statistical outcomes, error analyses, formative trends, and classroom interaction developments across the four CAR cycles.

Quantitative Results

To assess changes in students' oral performance, pre- and post-tests were administered to 32 participants and evaluated using an analytic rubric adapted from the IELTS speaking descriptors. As shown in Table 2, statistically significant improvements ($p < .001$) were observed across all dimensions. The largest gains were found in grammatical range and accuracy and in lexical resource, both demonstrating strong effect sizes. Fluency, coherence, and pronunciation also improved, though to a comparatively moderate degree.

To further examine the nature of these improvements, error frequencies in pre- and post-test transcripts were analyzed. The results, presented in Table 3, indicate an overall 44.5% reduction in total coded errors. Substantial decreases were observed in tense misuse, article errors, and lexical inaccuracy. An increase in subject–verb agreement errors was noted; however, this appears to reflect learners' attempts to produce more complex sentence structures during the post-test, a pattern common in developmental language acquisition.

Formative assessment data collected during each CAR cycle also supported these trends. As illustrated in Table 4, classroom-based rubric scores showed consistent upward development in grammar accuracy, vocabulary use, and language appropriateness across the four cycles, aligning with the improvements documented in the pre- and post-test scores.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Paired-Sample t-Test Results for Pre- and Post-test Scores (N = 32)

Dimension	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference	Improvement %	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	1.734	2.541	+0.807	46.5%	10.28	< .001	1.45
Lexical Resource	2.038	2.688	+0.650	31.9%	8.24	< .001	1.19
Pronunciation	1.663	2.256	+0.593	35.7%	5.99	< .001	0.87
Fluency & Coherence	1.694	2.213	+0.519	30.6%	6.13	< .001	0.72
Total Score	71.278	96.970	+25.692	36.0%	9.46	< .001	1.09

Note. Total Score converted to a 100-point scale

Table 3
Qualitative Analysis of Error Frequency in Pre- and Post-test Transcripts

Level 1 Coding	Level 2 Coding	Pre-test Frequency	Post-test Frequency	Reduction %
Grammar	Tense Usage	45	10	-77.8%
	Sentence Structure	108	38	-64.8%
	Subject-Verb Agreement	23	31	+34.8%
	Article Usage	13	3	-76.9%
	Grammar Subtotal	189	82	-56.6%
Lexical	Accuracy Problem	44	15	-65.9%
	Appropriateness Problem	36	12	-66.7%
	Diversity Problem	14	5	-64.3%
	Lexical Subtotal	94	32	-66.0%
Fluency & Coherence	Pauses	194	155	-20.1%
	Coherence Problem	78	39	-50.0%
	Fluency Subtotal	272	194	-28.7%

Note. The increase in subject–verb agreement errors appears to reflect learners' attempts to produce more complex sentence structures during the post-test.

Table 4
Results of Classroom Oral Assessment Rubrics (Cycles 1-4)

Assessment Criteria	Rubric1	Rubric2	Rubric3	Rubric4
Grammar Accuracy	3	4	4	4
Vocabulary Use	3	4	4	4
Language Appropriateness	3	4	3	4

Qualitative Results

Qualitative evidence from classroom observations, interviews, and lesson plan analyses provides insight into how instructional processes evolved and why the quantitative improvements may have occurred.

Development of Classroom Interaction Patterns

COLT observations across the four cycles revealed a clear pedagogical shift in classroom dynamics. Table 5 summarizes these changes. During Cycles 1 and 2, interactions were largely teacher-centered, student participation was uneven, and linguistic inaccuracies occurred frequently during task performance. By Cycles 3 and 4, interaction had become predominantly student-centered, with learners demonstrating higher engagement, increased autonomy, and more accurate language use during communicative activities.

The evolution of instructional design played a crucial role in this shift. In Cycle 1, pre-task stages included excessive linguistic input, resulting in cognitive overload and limited opportunities for guided exploration. In Cycle 2, input was streamlined and GD was partially implemented through teacher-led CCQs. Cycles 3 and 4 introduced refined GD worksheets that facilitated structured peer collaboration, enabling students to articulate rules, clarify instructions through ICQs, and internalize language patterns before task performance.

Interview data corroborated these observations. The participating teacher highlighted that GD repositioned learners from “passive receivers of knowledge” to “active explorers of language,” generating a cyclical learning process of discovery, application, and reflection that contributed to more accurate oral production.

Table 5
Evolution of Classroom Dynamics as per COLT Observations

Observation Focus	Cycle 1 & 2 Characteristics	Cycle 3 & 4 Characteristics	Frequency Trend
Classroom Interaction Pattern	Teacher-centered (T-Ss)	Student-centered (S-S dominant)	T-Ss: 2 → S-S: 6
Student Participation	Uneven, with passive students	All students actively participated	Active Participation: 3 Uneven Participation: 7 → 0
Teacher's Role	Information provider	Designer and Facilitator	Designer/Facilitator: 6
Guided Discovery (GD) Facilitation	Teacher posed guided questions	Students explored rules via CCQs, ICQs, Guided Questions and worksheets	Teacher Posed Guided Questions: 5 Use of CCQs: 1
Language Use & Appropriateness	Numerous grammar and pronunciation errors	Language usage basically correct with few errors	Few Errors: 2

Teacher Perceptions

Thematic analysis of teacher interviews further illuminated the mechanisms underlying learner development. Teachers consistently reported notable improvements in students' grammatical and lexical accuracy. One teacher commented that students were increasingly able to infer and apply academic vocabulary such as "expertise" and "endorsement" through GD activities, a pattern supported by the coding category "Boosting Lexical Ability" (frequency = 20).

Teachers also elaborated on why improvements in fluency and pronunciation were comparatively modest. Although GD enhanced learners' metalinguistic awareness, spontaneous communication required learners to prioritize meaning conveyance under cognitive pressure, which sometimes resulted in disrupted rhythm, misplaced stress, or reduced phonological accuracy. This pattern aligned with interview codes such as "Pronunciation Errors" (frequency = 3) and "Anxiety Inhibiting Expression" (frequency = 2).

Implementation-related challenges also emerged. Time management was noted as a persistent difficulty, particularly in balancing GD exploration with task completion. Teachers also highlighted the impact of individual learner differences, noting that weaker students needed additional scaffolding and differentiated tasks to participate effectively. Codes such as "Group Students by Proficiency" (frequency = 6) captured these concerns. Across cycles, the teacher reported refining her practice by simplifying GD activities, increasing pair-work, and adjusting task complexity—modifications that aligned closely with the instructional evolution documented in the lesson plans.

Synthesis of Key Findings

Overall, the triangulated findings indicate that the integration of TBLT and GD was associated with substantial improvements in students' linguistic accuracy, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. The classroom-based evidence further suggests that the pedagogical approach contributed to a meaningful shift toward a more student-centered learning environment, with learners demonstrating increased engagement and autonomy as they participated in structured discovery processes. Although students' fluency and pronunciation also improved, the gains in these areas were more moderate, a pattern that appears to reflect the cognitive demands of spontaneous communication, which may hinder the automatization of newly learned forms. The intervention additionally revealed notable individual differences among learners, highlighting the importance of differentiated scaffolding to support diverse proficiency levels within the same classroom. Throughout the four CAR cycles, iterative refinement played a central role in shaping instructional decision-making, enabling the classroom to gradually move away from teacher-dominated delivery toward a more collaborative, discovery-oriented model of learning that aligned with the developmental patterns observed in the quantitative data.

Discussion

The findings of this intervention study demonstrate that integrating Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with Guided Discovery (GD) can meaningfully enhance the speaking accuracy of Chinese non-English-major college students, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. The quantitative gains and qualitative insights together illuminate the mechanisms that underlie these improvements and situate the pedagogical model within

broader theories of second language acquisition. This discussion synthesizes these observations by examining how the integrated approach functions, how the results relate to previous research, and what theoretical and practical implications arise from the study.

Mechanisms Underlying the Effectiveness of the Integrated Approach

The substantial improvements in grammatical accuracy and vocabulary use can be explained by the complementary strengths of TBLT and GD. TBLT offered learners communicative purposes and meaningful task engagement, allowing them to use language to achieve real-world outcomes. This aligns with the premise that authentic communicative practice supports linguistic development by providing opportunities for meaning negotiation and functional use of language. However, as Skehan (1998) notes, task-based approaches that focus predominantly on meaning may risk insufficient attention to form.

GD addressed this concern by offering structured opportunities for learners to engage with target forms prior to task performance. In the pre-task phase, GD activities guided learners to analyze linguistic patterns, generate hypotheses, and articulate rules through concept-checking questions and scaffolded input. This process encouraged deeper cognitive engagement and supported the noticing and consciousness-raising mechanisms described by Schmidt (1990), enabling learners to convert input into intake. Equipped with this analytic preparation, learners were better positioned to apply target structures accurately during subsequent communicative tasks, narrowing the gap between declarative knowledge and procedural use.

Classroom observations provide further insight into how this mechanism operated in practice. Across the four CAR cycles, the classroom environment evolved from a teacher-dominated pattern to one characterized by learner-centered interaction and collaborative discovery. This transformation reflects Vygotskian sociocultural principles, wherein learning occurs through scaffolded interaction within the learner's zone of proximal development. The teacher's shift from knowledge transmitter to facilitator allowed learners to assume more responsibility for constructing linguistic understanding. The GD framework encouraged learners to adopt an exploratory stance, while the TBLT environment gave purpose and context to this exploration, resulting in increased accuracy, autonomy, and engagement.

Relationship to Existing Research

The findings of this study both support and extend existing literature on TBLT and GD. The observed gains in grammatical accuracy are consistent with earlier work demonstrating the effectiveness of task-based instruction in promoting syntactic development (e.g., Majeed & Memon, 2022). Similarly, the improvements in lexical use align with studies highlighting the positive impact of discovery-based learning on vocabulary acquisition (Gaeini & Soleimani, 2023). These consistencies reinforce the theoretical argument that form-focused cognitive engagement, when combined with meaningful communicative practice, facilitates robust linguistic development.

At the same time, the present study introduces several nuances that challenge assumptions in prior research. Unlike studies reporting balanced gains in fluency and accuracy (e.g., Aliasin et al., 2019), this study found disproportionately strong improvements in accuracy relative to fluency. One plausible explanation lies in the exam-oriented educational

environment in China (Liu et al., 2021), where students often prioritize accuracy and are thus highly receptive to methods that enhance this dimension. This contextual factor may shape the way learners engage with form and meaning during instruction.

The widening standard deviations between pre- and post-test scores also point to differentiated learner trajectories. This pattern suggests that higher-proficiency learners, perhaps possessing greater cognitive resources or prior knowledge, were better able to leverage both GD and TBLT opportunities. This observation resonates with recent findings emphasizing how individual differences mediate the benefits of interaction- and discovery-based pedagogies (Bryfonski, Ku, & Mackey, 2024; Gui & Ismail, 2024).

Finally, the moderate gains in pronunciation and fluency contrast with studies reporting uniform progress across linguistic domains (e.g., Guo, 2021). These findings indicate that skills requiring neuromuscular automatization, such as phonological control and fluent delivery, may demand extended, repetitive practice. L1 phonological influence (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021) likely further constrained learners' development in this area. Thus, a short-term intervention may be insufficient for achieving substantial improvement in skills that depend on proceduralization.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the findings strengthen the case for integrating constructivist and sociocultural learning principles into communicative language pedagogy. The synergy between GD and TBLT exemplifies how guided rule discovery and scaffolded interaction can be combined to support both conceptual understanding and meaningful language use. At the same time, the limited gains in fluency and pronunciation highlight the need to incorporate principles from Skill Acquisition Theory, particularly regarding the proceduralization and automatization of linguistic knowledge (Suzuki, 2024; Nikouee, 2024). The results therefore point toward a multidimensional theoretical framework that combines rule discovery, collaborative interaction, and targeted practice to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Practically, several implications emerge for instructors working in similar EFL contexts. First, the intentional integration of GD prior to task-based performance can enhance accuracy without compromising communicative authenticity. Instructional designers may consider structuring curricula so that discovery-based activities systematically prepare learners for communicative tasks. Second, the widening performance gaps observed in this study underscore the importance of differentiated scaffolding. Teachers should be equipped to provide tiered support and flexible grouping strategies that address varied proficiency levels. Third, to improve fluency and pronunciation, the integrated model should be supplemented with sustained, focused practice targeting the physical and rhythmic aspects of speech production. Finally, the iterative nature of CAR highlighted the importance of teacher reflection and adaptability. Professional development should therefore emphasize reflective practice and the capacity to adjust instruction responsively based on learner needs.

Conclusion

Summary of Main Findings

This study showed that the integration of TBLT and GD is intervention that is a highly effective for improving the speaking accuracy of Chinese non-English-major college EFL learners. The results showed significant statistically and substantial improvements in

grammatical accuracy and vocabulary usage, which puts more emphasis on the synergy between the two teaching methods. Specifically, TBLT provided a meaningful, communicative context for language use, while GD, through structured activities like concept-checking questions (CCQs) and guided questions, successfully guides learners to pay attention to language forms, facilitating the conscious discovery and internalization of language rules. This integration fostered a student-centered learning environment, which increases engagement and shifts the teacher's role from a knowledge transmitter to a facilitator and learning designer. However, the intervention's impact was more moderate on fluency and pronunciation, and a notable widening of performance gaps among students of different proficiency levels was observed, this indicates that the benefits were not uniformly distributed. Lastly, the study highlights the essential role of teacher reflection, as seen in ongoing plan adjustments. Consequently, professional development should focus on fostering the capacity for in-the-moment and in-action decision-making and adaptation.

Limitations of the Study

when interpreting these findings, we should admit that there are several limitations. The design of small scale and single context limit the study's scope, as it included one teacher and a single class of 32 students from one university, so this affects the broader applicability of the findings across various settings of Chinese higher education. Although it was enough to obtain initial effects, the four-week intervention duration was relatively short and not enough to assess the long-term retention of speaking skills or the continued progress of fluency and pronunciation. Methodologically, the lack of a control group makes it hard to say for sure that the improvements were only due to the the integration of TBLT and GD, as other variables such as normal classroom exposure cannot be ruled out.

Directions for Future Research

These limitations point to several promising avenues for future work. First, we need large-scale studies across multiple institutions. Getting a more diverse participant pool would really enhance the generalizability of the findings. Second, let's track learners over a full semester or year. To really see the long-term effects, we need this kind of longitudinal research. It would show us how integrating TBLT and GD impacts speaking skills development, especially speaking accuracy, over time. Third, using experimental designs with control groups and standardized measures is essential. This is the best way to strengthen our causal claims about the intervention's efficacy. Next, teacher-related variables such as their experience, training, and beliefs, should be looked more into, as it would offer critical insights for teacher education to understand how these affect the the implementation and effectiveness of this integrated approach. Lastly, exploring technology-enhanced versions of this model could directly address the time constraints we found.

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