Navigating Task-Based Language Teaching: A Review of Global Practices and Technology Integration

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Abstract
This systematic review critically examines peer-reviewed articles and empirical studies to explore the implementation and outcomes of task-based language teaching (TBLT) within various educational settings, particularly focusing on its application in English classrooms. TBLT is an approach to language pedagogy that prioritizes using authentic materials, meaningful communication, and targeted feedback to improve language learning and allow opportunities for practical use of the target language. TBLT benefits students in several ways, including improved student interest and active language utilization, and emphasizes the importance of adjusting instruction based on student level, teacher preparedness, and task sequence structure. In addition, the use of technology within TBLT can provide opportunities to make the learning process more engaging and accessible for learners, although it is also important to acknowledge the challenges associated with this, including the need to ensure equitable access to resources as well as additional scaffolding for students not familiar with using technology effectively. To be effective, tasks need to be something that students will find valuable in their future lives, and teachers must make a real effort to integrate technologies in a thoughtful manner for teaching. This review article, therefore, attempts to shed light on how TBLT can be effectively adapted in teaching practices and provides insights on how to potentially move forward in both research and practice to ensure inclusivity and adaptability across varying levels of teaching and learning.
Keywords: Task-based Language Teaching, Communicative Competence, Pedagogical Strategies, Technological integration

Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), an evolution of communicative language teaching (CLT), is grounded in the principle that language learning should be both functional and communicative. TBLT has evolved to address the demand for an approach that prioritizes students' learning and practical applications of language skills in authentic contexts (Ellis, 2003). TBLT focuses on using the target language in order to perform real-life tasks through authentic materials using communication-driven learning, bridging the gap between knowledge of the target language with how the language is used and developing both competence in the language and performance in a variety of communication situations (Nunan, 1991). This means using the target language as a medium for cognitive processes that should achieve an outcome or goal in communication, going beyond accurate grammar to using the target language to communicate effectively.

By applying TBLT, teachers design hands-on tasks that enable students to apply their existing language knowledge and distinct learning approaches to reach desired learning goals and acquire new skills (Ellis, 2009). According to Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011), TBLT emphasizes the need for learners to be enthusiastic and take a leading role in learning the target language. Students are responsible for learning content, including language forms and expressions, while working on tasks. Moreover, they also play a role in discussing and assessing the methods used in TBLT. This approach ensures that learners actively use the language in real-world scenarios and develop effective communication skills.

Tasks employed in class are characterized by six key attributes: They help guide work sessions, reflect real language situations, focus on meaning, incorporate any of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), stimulate thinking, and lead students to a specific, defined communication goal (Ellis, 2003). According to Seedhouse (1999), through these six attributes, students acquire the language through practical and situational tasks.

Key Features and Instructional Phases

Willis's (1996) optimal conditions for TBLT include three essential elements including exposure to authentic language, opportunities for meaningful language use, and motivation during language exposure and use, and one desirable element including a focus on language form instruction to prevent fossilization that can result from repeated language mistakes.

The emphasis on language forms, working as a group, different sub-stages in instructional phases, and a diversity of task types are some of the main differences among different researchers' TBLT concepts. In contrast to Skehan (2003), whose focus-on-form occurs predominantly at the pre-task phase and Ellis (2003) whose focus on form is included in each of the three instructional phases, Willis (1998) places a focus on form at the end of the learning sequence at what she terms the "language focus" phase. Moreover, unlike Willis, Ellis does not see group work as an essential feature of TBLT. Willis' framework includes sub-stages within the task cycle and a wide variety of task types.

Willis's TBLT for teaching English language includes three main phases: Pre-task, task cycle (with three sub-phrases of tasks, planning, and reporting), and language focus (with two sub-phrases of analysis and practice). These key phases promote practical language use, intrinsic motivation, and structured feedback for effective learning as described in detail below.

Pre-Task Phase

A brief activity is conducted to introduce the topic and explain the tasks to ensure that students understand their objectives before moving to the next phase. Teachers may demonstrate the task using pictures, audio, video, or live modeling. Brainstorming and discussing useful words and phrases related to the task are encouraged, but new structures should not be explicitly taught at this stage.

Task Cycle

Task: Meaning is emphasized over form. Students complete goal-oriented activities using language to achieve defined outcomes rather than practicing accuracy. Tasks are categorized into six main types: Listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. These categories include sub-types such as brainstorming, sequencing, classifying, decision-making, narrating, and describing.

Unlike Willis's TBLT tasks, Prabhu (1987) categorizes TBLT tasks into three main types: Information gaps, reasoning gaps, and opinion gaps. During task completion, students are encouraged to use existing language knowledge freely, focusing on fluency and spontaneity. Errors in language use are not immediately corrected to foster intrinsic motivation and reduce anxiety (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Planning: After task completion, students collaborate in pairs or groups to prepare presentations of their outcomes, receiving guidance from the teacher to refine their language use.

Reporting: Selected pairs or groups present their work to the class while other students listen attentively. Teachers may rephrase errors during this stage but should avoid direct correction, maintaining the focus on communication.

Language Focus Phase

The final phase directs attention to language forms, particularly those identified as problematic during the task cycle, consolidating learning and bridges the gap between meaning-focused tasks and accurate language use.

Analysis: During this substage, learners analyze the language they used during the task. This often involves looking at transcripts or recordings of their performance to notice and correct errors. The teacher may highlight useful language forms and draw attention to grammatical, lexical, or pronunciation issues that arose during the task.

Practice: Students engage in activities designed to practice the language forms they analyzed in the previous substage. This might include controlled practice through exercises, such as gap-fills or sentence transformations, which help reinforce the correct use of the language points discussed.

Feedback can be immediate or delayed, depending on the focus of the lesson and the nature of the task, but it is generally detailed to maximize learning and reflection on language use. Feedback, which includes both compliments and corrections, is provided to support student improvement. Teachers may use various feedback methods, ranging from explicit corrections to indirect strategies such as underlining errors (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Klimova, 2015). Additional tasks or exercises can be designed to allow students to practice accurate language forms repetitively, reinforcing their learning.

The Roles of Teachers

Before implementing tasks, teachers primarily serve as task setters, responsible for carefully deciding, selecting, and systematically arranging tasks to ensure the effective application of TBLT (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). One of the teacher's key responsibilities in TBLT is to design meaningful tasks. These tasks help students to experience real-life situations with learning, practice critical thinking and creativity, help guide their learning, enable self-monitoring and develop social skills through collaboration.

Well-designed tasks further foster student motivation, encourage active engagement, and promote the exploration of new lessons while enabling students to use their prior knowledge and recognize their role in sharing, researching, and completing assignments.

Van den Branden (2006) emphasizes that teachers in TBLT are not merely learning resources but facilitators who help develop students' language abilities by creating opportunities for meaningful communication and guiding learners through task-based activities. This requires planning tasks that are relevant to students' linguistic needs and interests and supporting their development by offering suitable assistance and feedback during the task cycle. Teachers assist students in overcoming difficulties, encourage them to work together, and establish a supportive environment that encourages students to discuss and use language. Providing sufficient guidance and support while fostering learner autonomy is necessary, ensuring that tasks are accessible and valid, enabling students to practice their language use in contextualized, realistic scenarios. Recognizing this fact, teachers must now take on the essential role of designing and delivering the task.

Apart from the primary role of task designer and setter, teachers also play the role of a facilitator, in which they observe students, clarify problems and questions, create a safe, positive, motivational learning setting, and provide positive reinforcement through compliments and praise, regardless of whether student responses are correct or incorrect (Boyle & Rothstein, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2024; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Teachers also help maintain student motivation and encourage interpersonal interactions, which help students overcome challenges during the learning process while also advising that teachers should avoid strict attention to language accuracy because it may lower students' confidence and shift their focus from meaning to language forms.

Van den Branden et al. (2009) concur, emphasizing that teachers in TBLT should support language use and perspective development while promoting a student-centered approach. This student-centered methodology contrasts with traditional teacher-centered instruction, where teachers dominate the learning process.

The shift to a student-centered approach aligns with Dewey's (1963) experiential learning

theory, which argues that students become active participants when they are deeply engaged in the learning process. Consequently, the teacher's role changes from that of a lecturer to a designer, task setter, and facilitator. Skehan (1998) believe classrooms implementing TBLT require teachers to avoid employing traditional teaching methods.

They contend that teacher-centered approaches often result in a rapid delivery of content, which students passively absorb without transferring it to long-term memory. To counter this, Handelsman et al. (2004) recommend supplementing lectures with activities that actively engage students, promoting deeper involvement and better retention of knowledge.

Likewise, Fink (2002) highlights the need to engage students in learning activities and learning experiences. Fouts and Myers (1992) also emphasize the importance of involvement in student-centralized activities, which increases engagement, and reinforces positive attitudes which they state can only serve to further language growth. Thompson discusses that self-directed behaviors should be encouraged as they can assist in improving literacy skills for adult learners. Collins and O'Brien (2003) contribute that students can develop independence and extend peer support when they are given opportunities to lead their learning.

Although TBLT is generally considered a student-centered approach, some researchers acknowledge the usefulness of teacher-centered approaches in particular contexts. According to Ellis (2003), lectures and demonstrations can be useful for developing specific skills and knowledge. Teacher-centered instruction is more efficient in delivering essential content (Bain, 2004; Mehan, 1979), and teachers themselves serve an important role as a transmitter of all essential knowledge resources and as an evaluator of skills and performance. Therefore, this shows no total and radical rejection of teacher-centered methods, as Williams shows the importance of assessing what students know and can achieve through the quality of the questions teachers ask while they are doing the tasks; thus teacher-centered procedures may assist with task-based language teaching in some situations.

Implementation of TBLT in English Classes: Thailand and Global Perspectives

TBLT has been evaluated differently for its appropriateness in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. For critics such as Burrows (2008) and Sato (2009), TBLT may not be appropriate in contexts where English is not the mother tongue or a communicative medium in students' daily life. This view is also supported by Medgyes (2017) which further classifies English learning in Thailand as EFL. For those reasons, Bruton (2002) and Swan (2005) raise a significant concern with TBLT for low-proficiency learners, namely the limited inputs available in such settings. In contrast to these critiques, a number of studies have reported the benefits of TBLT in EFL contexts. Japanese EFL students' long-term language improvement with TBLT instruction was observed in Little and Fieldsend's (2009) study. Willis and Willis (2007) and Ellis (2009) argue that TBLT is a valuable method for students with low proficiency because it allows them to adopt their current knowledge of the language and apply it. Additionally, Edwards and Willis (2005) also support the idea that task-based activities can help students with low literacy to expand their knowledge of vocabulary.

TBLT has gained attention from researchers and educators around the world since Prabhu (1982) implemented the TBLT approach. TBLT has been employed in many Asian nations including China, Thailand, Iran, Tunisia, and Japan in addition to countries in other regions. Many studies conducted in China explore how to make TBLT the preferred teaching approach in English classrooms at both primary and tertiary education levels. For instance, Ji and Pham (2020) conducted a mixed-method study in China that adapted TBLT to teach English grammar at the university level to the cultural and educational context of China. Through a mixture of questionnaires, focus group interviews, and audiotaped group discussions with 122 students, the study identified a number of mismatches between traditional Chinese educational practices and the fundamental underpinnings of TBLT. First, students faced a challenge in acquiring implicit knowledge, since TBLT requires comprehension of knowledge to not be explicitly learned. More traditional teacher-

led instruction predominates, but TBLT encourages independent learning. This would contrast with TBLT, which has a student-centered, collaborative focus, as students seem reluctant to engage in groupwork. Students needed specific grammatical instruction, while TBLT focuses on holistic language acquisition.

In Thailand, Prapasaranont et al. (2014) demonstrated that TBLT is highly effective in enhancing students' writing skills and attitudes toward English learning in primary schools. Moreover, at the secondary level, Siripitak (1999) described positive development in English skills, particularly in speaking and writing. In a tertiary context, Tachom (2021) indicated that TBLT facilitates more profound learning and retention of vocabulary, with results showing a substantial increase in students' vocabulary knowledge.

Supporting the effectiveness of TBLT further, Rahimi and Rezai's (2023) mixed-methods study demonstrated that TBLT students had significantly better writing performance compared to those in a control group learning through traditional teaching methods. The classroom implementation of TBLT principles was confirmed with observational data and focus group interviews which indicated positive student attitudes towards this teaching approach.

Additionally, TBLT has been proven effective for lowering writing anxiety in EFL context (Belgacem & Deymi, 2023). Adding structured support through all the task sequences decreases the anxiety associated with the task as students build confidence and skills over time. TBLT also leads to improved writing outputs because TBLT tasks are purposefully designed to align with students' needs, connect with relevant topics, and involve useful language practice, all of which positively influence writing quality. Although TBLT is utilized for the morpho-syntactically related aspects and the socio-cognitive aspects are promoted, it has not been as effective in addressing the mechanical aspects of writing such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar, suggesting that targeted instruction is required to complement the holistic approach to writing offered by TBLT. Students need specific grammatical instruction, while TBLT focuses on holistic knowledge acquisition.

The proponents of TBLT highlight its pedagogical strengths, claiming it promotes natural language use in real-life scenarios, thus motivating students and enhancing their problem-solving skills, self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships. Long and Crookes (1992) reinforce this viewpoint by citing the significant impact of TBLT on language acquisition as students actively engage with tasks that enhance their language proficiency and confidence. Furthermore, TBLT fosters the application of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in real-world contexts, as evidenced by students demonstrating their capabilities in completing well-designed tasks. Student engagement increases when they are interested in the task's subject matter, which in turn boosts their motivation (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Despite these advantages, implementing TBLT also presents challenges. TBLT requires much more varied skills from teachers than conventional methods and the less predictable nature of lessons can make TBLT unappealing to teachers used to more controlled settings (Skehan, 1996). Additionally, allowing students to direct their learning may cause discomfort. Among beginners with low knowledge of the target language, TBLT can be intimidating because it requires sufficient communicative competence to successfully deal with activities. According to Hedge (2000), traditional teaching methods are evidently more suitable for beginners as they advance through a structured learning progression. Furthermore, creating an effective sequence of tasks to simulate meaningful language development is very difficult.

Despite these challenges, the advantages, including high learner engagement, use of language knowledge in real-world contexts, and greater language proficiency generally surpass the difficulties. As a result, TBLT continues to gain recognition as an effective approach towards foreign language education in varied educational contexts worldwide, and especially in Thailand where curricula have widely adopted TBLT.

Integration of Technology in TBLT

Advancements in technology have brought new methods to teach languages which help students study

materials that match their personal interests while increasing their satisfaction (Solanki & Shyamlee, 2012). Not only has technology transformed the scope of tasks in online environments, but because of the ability to create various and complex tasks, this has led to greater productivity and variety even with the shifting goals of language learning or other educational contexts (Stone & Wilson-Duffy, 2009).

Additionally, technology allows students to access information beyond what teachers might provide, offering students opportunities to control their learning process independently (Gilakjani, 2017; Gilakjani, 2014). Such intrinsic motivation for self-guided learning through digital resources plays a crucial role in allowing for greater in-depth engagement with material, as well as different paces and styles of learning. Technology used in language tasks can also provide interactivity and experiences in a realistic context that promote language skills, interest, and motivation in addition to critical thinking and problem-solving, making the learning process more effective.

However, technology-enhanced language learning environments also bring challenges, such as technical problems, environmental novelty associated with the use of technology resulting in distractions, and privacy impacts. Nevertheless, these environments have a substantial impact on learners' willingness to communicate by enhancing situational, affective, linguistic, and cognitive factors that not only foster richer interaction, but also promote greater self-confidence and less language anxiety, as well as greater enjoyment of the learning (Huang & Li, 2024).

Recent studies have shown effective use of technology in TBLT. Mulyadi et al. (2021) conducted technology-enhanced TBLT instruction incorporating various technology-supported tasks such as online presentations, role-plays, and group discussions proved its effectiveness as evidenced by significant improvements among 97 English for specific purposes students' listening comprehension and speaking performance in listening comprehension after participating in technology-enhanced TBLT instruction, particularly through tasks that provided authentic language use and interaction. While roleplay activities showed considerable gains in speaking performance, other speaking tasks such as online presentations and group discussions did not show significant improvements.

Similarly, Fang et al. (2021) incorporated mobile-supported TBLT to enhance English language learning among 66 EFL university students over three weeks during a general English course. Students were divided into two groups, an experimental group that used the mobile-supported TBLT with built-in linguistic and task scaffolds and a control group that used traditional paper-based TBLT without these scaffolds. An English achievement test with components related to vocabulary, grammar, and conversation comprehension, and measurements focusing on students' self-perceived use of oral communication strategies produced similar results, showing that mobile-supported TBLT effectively improves some aspects of the language learning process. the authors suggested its ability to provide additional scaffolds not typically provided in a traditional TBLT environment, such as vocabulary acquisition and conversational skills.Moreover, the experimental group showed greater consciousness towards fluency-and accuracy-oriented strategies in speaking. Some findings and remarks from the study provide some insights on how the integration of mobile-technological opportunities into language teaching in EFL settings might respond more appropriately to students' learning and interaction.

However, challenges remain, such as ensuring equitable access to technological resources and providing adequate support for students less familiar with digital platforms.With equitable access to devices, blended learning implementations and training programs toprepare teachers to use digital tools in the classroom can overcome challenging barriers.While many learners adapt quickly and effectively to digital tools which can enhance their educational experience and engagement, some students may face challenges due to limited technology skills. This disparity can lead to variations in motivation and learning effectiveness, as students who struggle with technology may require additional time and support to reach proficiency (Ormrod, 2019). To create an inclusive learning environment in which all students benefit from technology-enhanced language learning, it is crucial for teachers

to receive appropriate training and support. This preparation ensures that technology is used to its full potential and aligns with educational goals, rather than becoming a distraction or a mere novelty.

Conclusions

By focusing on authentic materials, meaningful communication, and targeted feedback, TBLT represents a powerful approach to language learning that connects the classroom to the real world. While TBLT offers significant benefits in promoting active language use and student engagement, its implementation in EFL classrooms requires careful consideration of students' proficiency levels, teacher readiness, and the structure of the task sequence. Although TBLT has high potential as an approach that ties language use and learning to meaningful participation, its implementation in EFL classrooms requires careful consideration of students' English proficiency levels, teacher readiness, and sequencing of tasks with regards to linguistic aspects and skills.

One of the benefits of integrating technology into TBLT is that it aligns well with the needs of 21st century students. It facilitates access to interactive and engaging resources which leads them to build personalized learning paths while achieving academic autonomy. Technological tools allow students to engage in authentic language practice, collaborate virtually, and simulate real life interactions in a controlled setting. In addition to enhancing students' learning of the language, it also provides them with useful skills for the digital age.

Given the integration of technology in TBLT, it is necessary to address the fact that students have varying levels of comfort and confidence when using technology. While teachers can take advantage of technology to make education more interactive and accessible, teachers must be careful about providing enough support for those who are less familiar with digital tools to ensure that the implementation of technology in education is inclusive and benefits students equally. Along with addressing these challenges, future directions should mainly be aimed at continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to stay updated with teaching methods and technological advances to ensure successful teaching.

Future research should examine adaptive learning technologies that adjust educational experience according to learners' specific needs and investigate the influence of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality on enhancing TBLT practices. In addition, longitudinal studies assessing the long-term effects of TBLT or technology-enhanced TBLT could provide greater insight into the effectiveness of these methods over time, potentially leading to improved outcomes.

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