

Perspectives and Practices of English Language Teachers on Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract

Task-Based Language Teaching (also called TBLT) is a popular and innovative approach to language instruction. The present study aimed to explore the perspectives and practices of TBLT in EFL classrooms. To achieve this, the researcher purposively selected five secondary-level English teachers from Butwal sub-metropolitan city of Rupandehi district. A semi-structured interview was the primary tool and technique for data collection. The collected data were thematically analyzed under six headings, including teachers' perspectives on the task-based method, tasks and activities, and classroom pedagogy. The findings reveal that TBLT is a learner-centered approach that enhances communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving through real-world tasks. It integrates language skills via collaborative activities, fostering motivation and autonomy. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding and assessing tasks for fluency, accuracy, and skill transfer. Despite challenges like time constraints and assessment complexities, TBLT effectively bridges classroom learning with practical language use through meaningful, engaging, and well-planned activities. The study underscores the importance of incorporating TBLT into EFL curricula to develop practical language abilities and critical thinking skills. It highlights the need for teacher training in task creation, classroom management, and assessment methods. Syllabus designers, textbook writers and policymakers can tackle challenges such as limited time and resources by linking assessment techniques with communicative objectives.

Keywords: Constructivist theory, phenomenological study, learner centered pedagogy, humanistic approach, benefits and challenges of TBLT

Introduction

Language teaching has undergone significant changes in recent years, influenced by advances in technology, research and evolving teaching methods. Traditional approaches that focused on grammar drills, memorization, and repetitive tasks are increasingly being replaced by more engaging, interactive, and student-centered techniques. Modern methods highlight meaningful interactions, practical communication skills, and incorporating cultural aspects into language learning (Neupane, 2024). This paper discusses one of the most influential, innovative, and learner-centered methods: task-based language teaching.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) was introduced to address the limitations of traditional language teaching methods, which often focused on rote memorization and Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) method (Ellis, 2003; Long & Crookes, 1992). TBLT prioritized communication and real-life application of language skills, emphasizing the process of learning through authentic, goal-oriented tasks. It was

designed to make language learning more engaging, practical, and effective by fostering meaningful interaction and learner-centered instruction. This approach emphasizes language learning as a developmental process centered on communication and social interaction, where learners gain proficiency through meaningful, task-based activities. Task-based language teaching was developed in the 1980s, leading to various task-based methodologies, and by the 1990s, it had evolved into a structured framework for communicative classrooms involving cycles of pre-task preparation, task performance, and post-task language feedback. Recent research has revisited task-based teaching, exploring aspects such as oral and written performance and assessment.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), also known as Task-based Instruction (TBI), is a relatively recent concept in the field of language education. It was initially introduced and developed by N. S. Prabhu during the 1980s through the notable Bangalore Project. The term 'task' refers to activities or exercises performed either inside or outside the classroom. Long (1985) considers task as "a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward" (p.59). Examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying shoes, booking a hotel room, taking a driving test, writing a check, finding a street, playing a game, solving a problem, and sharing or comparing experiences. When engaging in such tasks, learners participate in processes like negotiating meaning, rephrasing, and experimenting, which are believed to facilitate effective language development. They encounter numerous opportunities for meaningful language use in realistic contexts. The primary goal of the task is to communicate meaning, not simply manipulate language forms. Moreover, the task should feel complete, functioning as a communicative act on its own (Nunan, 2004).

A task is a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome (Willis, 1996). Tasks focus on meaning, relate to real-world activities, prioritize task completion, and are assessed on the basis of outcome (Skehan, 1998). A task has a defined objective, undertaken as a part of an educational course, at work, or to gather data for research (Ellis, 2003). Prabhu (1987) claims, a task is "an activity that requires learners to reach a specific outcome from given information through a process of thought, allowing teachers to manage and guide that process" (as cited in Ellis, 2003, p. 4). His definition emphasizes the cognitive and socio-cultural aspects of Second Language Acquisition. Task-based language teaching prioritizes the completion of meaningful tasks as a central element of the learning process (Harmer, 2007). A task is an activity that requires learners to use language with a focus on meaning (Ellis, 2003).

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is concerned with humanistic approaches to language learning, which emphasize helping students reach their full potential by recognizing both emotional and cognitive aspects of learning (Ellis, 2003)). Humanistic methods encourage learners to acknowledge their feelings and use them in a constructive way, such as by showing empathy and collaborating with others. This perspective is also linked to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), with TBLT representing a strong form of CLT by focusing on the communicative outcomes of tasks.

Previous Studies

Chen et al. (2023) conducted research on three Chinese secondary school students who took part in TBLT English lessons. The study found that many tasks were too challenging and complex for most students. It suggests that teachers should design tasks that match students' abilities and interests, and provide extra support to average learners during task completion. Similarly, Xinran (2023) examined the impact of TBLT on undergraduate students' speaking skills and their perceptions of the method. Through tests and surveys over 12 weeks, the research showed significant improvement in speaking skills, confirming TBLT's effectiveness in improving English learning, especially in speaking and listening. In another study, Bui and Tai (2022) combined translanguaging with TBLT, showing its potential to improve L2 performance, especially for learners with a shared first language. Furthermore, the study discussed how this approach could influence language education policies and be applied at different stages of TBLT lessons in China's Great Bay Area.

Sun (2021) found that TBLT greatly improved students' listening skills, cultural knowledge, and classroom engagement. Students enjoyed the better learning atmosphere, felt more confident, and were motivated to practice listening. They suggested using more real-life listening tasks and materials to make teaching more effective. Similarly, Bhandari (2020) claims that TBLT improves students' communication by involving them in tasks that relate to their lives. Teachers should design tasks according to students' age, interests, and level to ensure natural learning. Successful implementation depends on the teacher's skills and the students' readiness. Small classes provide more interaction, and teachers need to stay updated with ICT knowledge to make TBLT more effective.

Huang (2016) studied how TBLT impacts students' motivation and language skills in a general English class. Through surveys, interviews, observations, and teaching journals, the study showed that most students responded positively, reporting higher motivation, interest, and improvements in language skills, especially speaking and writing. Douglas and Kim (2014) also researched TBLT in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs. A survey of 42 TESL Canada members found that 69% used TBLT in at least half of their lessons, and 86% felt it was suitable for EAP. Common tasks included presentations, essays, and interviews. Benefits included practicality and learner-centeredness, while challenges included mismatched expectations, time constraints, and preparation demands.

The aforementioned literature reveals that there have been numerous studies in the field of English language education, focusing on engaging students in meaningful tasks to develop language skills. Despite its potential benefits, many teachers are still reluctant to employ this method in the language classrooms due to two key challenges: a lack of expertise and confidence in designing and implementing task-based activities, and insufficient motivation to move away from traditional teaching practices. These barriers limit the broader application of TBLT in classrooms, particularly at the secondary level.

So, the researcher was keenly interested to investigate teachers' perspectives on TBLT and examine how it is practiced in secondary level school education.

Methodology

The present research adopts interpretivism as its philosophical ontology and subjectivism as its epistemological approach, reflecting the multiple realities of the respondents. Knowledge is generated through the exploration and understanding of the social world. The study employs a phenomenological research design within a qualitative framework, focusing on the lived experiences of participants. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of human experiences as described by those involved (Creswell, 2009). This research specifically examines the experiences of secondary-level English teachers in Nepal regarding their experience in task based language teaching. However, the researcher purposefully selected only five English language teachers from Butwal sub-metropolitan city who had a wide range of teaching experience in English language. Initially, an interview guideline was developed, and interviews were conducted with the selected teachers, utilizing recording devices to capture detailed information. The data were then analyzed thematically under six distinct categories, then the researcher interpreted the findings by comparing them with previous studies. To maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity, all identifying details were removed from the transcripts, and participants were referred to using identification codes, specifically using a "T" code to indicate the source of quotations in the results section.

Results and Discussion

The gathered data were analyzed across the following distinct themes and the findings were interpreted by comparing them with previous research.

Teachers' Perspective of TBLT

Teacher perception refers to the way teachers view and interpret various aspects of teaching and learning, such as their roles, student abilities, classroom dynamics, curriculum effectiveness, and the challenges they encounter. These perceptions often shape teaching practices, classroom management strategies, and the overall learning environment. Many teachers view that Task-based language teaching engages learners with different activities and helps them develop practical language skills. Students become more motivated and confident, as tasks reflect situations they may encounter outside the classroom. In this regard, T2 explained:

Task-based language teaching is one of the learner-centered teaching methodologies as it minimizes the teacher talking time and maximizes student talking time. Students engage in different tasks and activities which help them develop collaborative, communicative, critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Richards and Schmidt (2010) argue that a learner-centered approach places learners at the heart of all aspects of language teaching, such as planning, instruction, and assessment. Emphasizing the significance of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Ellis (2003) suggests that this method focuses on learner-centered texts, promoting

discursive practices that encourage learners to actively participate in guiding and influencing the discourse, as well as social practices that assist them in managing and resolving social challenges. However, some teachers find TBLT challenging due to some constraints such as time factors, classroom management issues, and assessment difficulties. Planning and executing effective tasks can be time-consuming, and in larger or mixed-ability classes, ensuring all students are engaged can be difficult. Moreover, assessing communicative competence is not always straightforward, especially in systems that prioritize traditional exams. Teachers may also feel a lack of control, as TBLT shifts their role to a facilitator rather than a direct instructor, which can be daunting without adequate support and training. In settings with rigid curricula or strong exam-oriented expectations, teachers might hesitate to adopt TBLT fully, even if they see its potential benefits.

Tasks and Activities in EFL Classroom

Tasks are the activities undertaken inside or outside the classroom. Teachers typically design tasks on the basis of situations. In EFL classrooms, tasks and activities are designed to enhance language acquisition by integrating speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in meaningful ways. Teachers claimed that tasks are the essential activities to develop collaboration, critical thinking and practical language use. In this regard, T4 claims:

I assign the tasks and activities in the language classroom as I am in the position that teaching means designing and assigning tasks and activities to the students. If the learners are given an opportunity to practise tasks and explore their meaning in the language classroom, they will certainly increase their communication, and problem solving skills.

Common activities in task-based language teaching include role-plays, group discussions, and presentations to encourage communication and interaction in English. Reading comprehension exercises, vocabulary-building tasks, and grammar drills help learners understand and use the language structure effectively. Listening tasks, such as watching videos or responding to audio prompts, improve auditory skills, while writing assignments like essays, emails, or journals foster written fluency. Teachers often incorporate games, quizzes, and multimedia tools to make learning engaging and culturally relevant, promoting motivation and retention. In this regard, T2 claimed:

I use a variety of tasks and activities in my classroom, such as role-plays, discussions, and presentations, to enhance communication skills. Moreover, I incorporate reading, vocabulary, grammar, and writing exercises to strengthen language proficiency. Occasionally, I engage students with language games, research work, and collaborative projects to foster creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork.

TBLT supports all language skills, including grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, and is suitable for various teaching contexts (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). TBLT is student-centered, aligning with learners' real-life experiences, increasing motivation, and fostering a sense of ownership over their learning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Prabhu (1987) outlines three types of tasks: **information-gap**, **reasoning-gap**,

and **opinion-gap activities**. **Information-gap tasks** involve transferring information, like completing tables or pictures. **Reasoning-gap tasks** require logic and observation to generate ideas, fostering practical language use and opinion-gap tasks involve inferring new information, identifying patterns, or deducing solutions, like finding routes using a train schedule. Ellis (2003) distinguishes focused tasks, targeting specific grammar or language structures to enhance syntactic awareness, from unfocused tasks, which emphasize meaning and real-life communication. He further differentiates between *open tasks* which is flexible, outcome-based activities like debates, from *closed tasks* which focus on specific solutions, such as information gap exercises requiring precise answers. Similarly, Nunan (1989) differentiates real-world tasks, simulating authentic language use in everyday contexts, from pedagogical tasks designed for classroom learning, focusing on specific language skills and second language acquisition principles. Both approaches balance linguistic accuracy with communicative competence in EFL instruction.

Teacher and Student Role in TBLT

In TBLT, teachers act primarily as facilitators and guides rather than direct instructors. Before the task, they prepare students by introducing the topic, relevant language, and instructions, helping students understand the task's purpose and goals. During the task, the teacher's role is to monitor, provide encouragement, and offer support as needed, intervening minimally to allow students to communicate freely and explore language. After the task, the teacher leads feedback sessions, addressing any language difficulties observed during the task and helping students reflect on their performance. In this way, teachers focus less on delivering content and more on creating a supportive environment for language practice and problem-solving. In this context, T1 claims:

In TBLT, I take on various roles depending on the needs of the class. Most often, I act as a mentor, guiding students through tasks and offering feedback to help them improve. I also facilitate the learning process and occasionally join a group to participate in the task. Sometimes, I assume the role of the source person, providing necessary information and resources to support the learning process.

Rodgers (2002) outlines three teacher roles: selecting and sequencing tasks, preparing learners, and raising consciousness. Teachers choose tasks based on learners' needs and sequence them by difficulty. They introduce relevant vocabulary and instructions during pre-tasks. Tasks are meaningful and connected to real-life situations. Teachers then guide students through the tasks, monitoring and intervening as necessary to ensure desired outcomes are achieved.

In contrary, students in TBLT are active participants, engaging in tasks that require communication and collaboration. Their role is to use language meaningfully, often working in pairs or groups to complete tasks that mirror real-world situations. Rather than passively receiving information, students in TBLT are responsible for navigating challenges, making language choices, and contributing to the task's completion. This

approach encourages autonomy, as students must often rely on themselves and each other to negotiate meaning and solve problems. To support this, T1 explores:

Students in TBLT take an active role in completing meaningful tasks using the target language. They work collaboratively, solving problems, discussing ideas, or creating projects. The focus is on communication, with students learning through authentic use of language, receiving feedback and reflecting on their language development.

In task-based language teaching (TBLT), learners focus on completing tasks and take on roles like working in groups, keeping track of progress, and trying out new language skills. They work alone or with others, using real communication to learn. Students support each other, pay attention to messages even if they're unsure, and build skills such as guessing meanings, asking for help, and checking with classmates to improve their second language (Richards & Rodgers, 2002). They are also encouraged to self-assess and reflect on their learning process in post-task feedback sessions, taking ownership of their language development. Being student-centered, TBLT aligns with learners' real-life experiences and needs, making the learning context more relevant (Van den Branden, 2012). The approach allows students to guide the learning process and ensures their input is valued, which boosts motivation and confidence (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Pedagogy of TBLT

Pedagogy plays a vital role in language classroom. If the teacher select a good pedagogy, teaching learning and learning become easier and purposeful. Harmer (2007) outlines three task phases: **Pre-Task**, where teachers introduce the topic, explain instructions, and highlight key vocabulary to prepare students; **During-Task**, where students perform the task, guided by options like time limits or defined roles and **Post-Task**, where students reflect, report experiences, and engage in activities to refine language skills and review learning. Many teachers do not follow this strategy. In this context, T5 claimed:

In my classroom, I do not follow a set teaching method but instead provide general instructions before assigning tasks and activities. I emphasize flexibility, allowing students to explore and engage with the content. If they need assistance or clarification, I offer support throughout the task. At the end of the session, students are typically required to report on or present their work, giving them an opportunity to share their learning outcomes.

Recent research identifies three key features of task-based language teaching (TBLT) that are important for classroom practice. First, TBLT aligns with a learner-centered approach to education (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Second, it consists of essential elements such as clear goals, procedures, and specific outcomes (Skehan, 1998; Nunan, 2004). Finally, TBLT prioritizes content-driven, meaningful activities over a focus on linguistic forms (Beglar & Hunt, 2002). Similarly, Ellis (2003) outlines eight principles for implementing Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). These include ensuring appropriate task difficulty, setting clear goals for each lesson, and orienting students to the purpose of tasks. Active student participation is

emphasized, along with encouraging risk-taking to boost language production. Tasks should prioritize meaningful communication, with opportunities for reflection and discussion during and after completion. Self-assessment is also encouraged to foster autonomy and support continuous language development. These principles guide a structured, student-centered approach that focuses on effective language use and engagement.

Benefits and Challenges of TBLT

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) offers numerous benefits for foreign language learning, as outlined by Ellis (2009). TBLT encourages natural learning in the classroom, focuses on meaning while also including some attention to language rules, and gives plenty of target language practice. It is motivating, learner-centered, and allows teachers to guide students. It improves communication skills while still building accuracy and can work well with traditional teaching methods. In this reference, T3 claims:

TBLT promotes natural language learning by focusing on meaning with form. It provides rich target language input, enhances communicative fluency and accuracy, and aligns with learner centered approaches. This technique motivates students and works well with traditional teaching. It allows teachers to guide students while keeping them actively involved in learning.

TBLT encourages students to interact naturally with peers in the target language, helping them overcome hesitation and fear. It also teaches students to take responsibility for their tasks, as the teacher is not always present. TBLT emphasizes authentic language use, encouraging students to engage in meaningful tasks that mirror real-life situations, thus improving their language skills for practical applications (Nunan, 2004). It focuses on communication and meaning rather than specific language structures, promoting communicative competence (Ellis, 2009). A task-based approach connects language learning to students' real-life needs, making them more motivated to learn (Dorathy & Mahalakshmi, 2016). It helps students improve their language skills through meaningful communication while also allowing them to focus on specific language rules. This approach enables teachers to assess how well students can use the language in real situations.

On the other hand, Task-based language teaching presents challenges for teachers, as it requires creativity, flexibility, and careful planning. Teachers must design tasks that are engaging and relevant while managing classroom dynamics. If resources are limited, implementing task-based activities can be difficult. Additionally, teachers need to balance fluency and accuracy, ensuring students stay focused on learning the language effectively. In this context, T2 argues:

As a language teacher, I have faced many challenges while implementing tasks in EFL situations. It takes time and effort, making it difficult to complete the course on schedule. Some students remain passive and shy in class, which can make them feel uneasy.

TBLT has some challenges. Students might use very simple language during tasks, improving fluency but not accuracy or vocabulary. Some task designs may lead to shallow participation, with students rushing to finish without meaningful language practice. It can be hard to use TBLT in classrooms where traditional, grammar-based methods are common, and misunderstandings about TBLT can cause confusion with other methods like PPP. TBLT needs creative, flexible teaching, which can be tough if teachers lack time or resources. Students might prefer traditional methods and resist this approach. They may also rely too much on their native language, use limited communication strategies, or focus more on fluency than accuracy, which could slow their progress.

Evaluation of Tasks

Evaluation is very important in language teaching because it gives useful and accurate information about students' progress. With communicative language teaching, task-based learning has become more popular, focusing on how well students can use language in real-life situations. Task-based assessment evaluates students through activities that involve real communication. Brindley (1994) points out several benefits of this type of assessment. It treats language as a tool, combines assessment with learning, gives helpful feedback, and matches tasks to real-world situations, making the evaluation more valid. A good task should be relevant to students, challenging but manageable, and fit their language level and real-life needs. Teachers check if the task encourages meaningful communication and helps students use language naturally instead of just memorizing.

As a language teacher, I evaluate students' tasks assessing both the process and the outcome. I focus on the accuracy of language use, fluency, and creativity. I also consider students' ability to apply grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation effectively and provide constructive feedback, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Some times I use rubrics to ensure consistency, incorporating peer evaluations when possible for a holistic assessment.

Assessment in TBLT is challenging as tasks often resemble communicative activities without clear language-focused goals (Pica, 2008). This creates confusion for teachers on what and how to assess. Norris et al. (1998) emphasize the need for authentic tasks with clear objectives, judged by qualified evaluators to measure task performance effectively (as cited in Nunan, 2004). Effective task evaluation also includes assessing whether students are able to transfer language used in the task to other contexts, signaling that they have internalized the skills practiced. By analyzing these aspects, teachers can refine and adapt tasks to better meet learner needs, ensuring that tasks continue to build communicative competence in an engaging and contextually relevant way.

Conclusion and Implications

This study explored how Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is used and understood in EFL classrooms. Five secondary-level English teachers from Butwal, Rupandehi, were chosen for the interviews to collect data. The findings show that TBLT is a learner-centered method that uses meaningful tasks to improve

communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. It focuses on real-world tasks, promotes natural language use, and encourages student independence through collaboration and reflection. Teachers guide and support students, who actively participate in tasks, boosting motivation and practical language skills. TBLT combines skills like speaking, listening, reading, and writing through activities like role-plays, discussions, and projects. Tools such as games and multimedia support the learning process. While it increases fluency and communication skills, TBLT faces challenges like limited time, classroom management, and assessment issues. Teachers need to create engaging tasks, balance fluency with accuracy, and adjust to exam-focused systems. Assessment in TBLT evaluates both the task process and outcomes, focusing on creativity, language use, and skill transfer. With proper planning, TBLT connects classroom learning to real-life language use. The study recommends including TBLT in EFL curricula to develop practical language skills and critical abilities. It also emphasizes training teachers in task design, management, and assessment while addressing challenges like limited resources and aligning assessments with communication goals. Though this is a small-scale study, future research could use both questionnaires and interviews for a more comprehensive understanding.

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