

Original Research Article

Task-Based Language Teaching in China: Exploring Primary School Teachers' Perceptions and Reflective Practices

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research delves into the experiences of Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province, China, who are implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT). The thematic analysis identifies key themes, including the Learner-Centered Approach, Integration of Real-World Tasks, All Language Skills Integration, Reflective and Iterative Learning, Increased Student Engagement, and Improved Language Proficiency. The findings resonate with established TBLT principles, emphasizing the importance of tailored teaching, authentic tasks, and comprehensive language skill development. Despite inherent limitations, such as a limited sample size, the study holds practical implications for curriculum design and teacher development. The research contributes valuable insights to the discourse on effective language education methodologies, encouraging the integration of TBLT principles in language education policies and practices.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching; Grade 5 English teachers; Reflective Practices

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of language education, the adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches stands as a linchpin for cultivating effective communication skills among students. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a methodology globally acknowledged for its emphasis on practical language use within authentic contexts (Bhandari, 2020; Deng, 2016; Dao, Nguyen, and Iwashita, 2021; Crookes & Ziegler, 2021), has emerged as a transformative force that is reshaping language education practices. As TBLT gains momentum worldwide, understanding its implementation and impact in diverse educational settings becomes imperative. This study embarks on a journey into the experiences and perceptions of Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province, China, as they navigate the integration of TBLT into their instructional practices.

China, with its rich cultural heritage and burgeoning global influence, has progressively embraced TBLT to elevate English language education standards (Kessler et al., 2021). The commitment of the Chinese government to fostering English proficiency aligns seamlessly with the exploration and integration of innovative teaching methodologies. Hebei Province, situated in the northern part of the country, offers a distinctive context for this research, contributing valuable insights to the broader understanding of TBLT's applicability and challenges across diverse educational landscapes.

The significance of TBLT in fostering language proficiency is underscored by its learner-centred approach, which acknowledges individual differences and learning styles (Ellis, 2021;

Liu, Mishan, and Chambers, 2021). In the diverse educational landscape of China, characterized by a myriad of linguistic backgrounds and learning abilities, the learner-centred paradigm becomes particularly critical. TBLT, with its emphasis on developing practical language skills applicable to real-world scenarios, prepares students for effective communication beyond the confines of the classroom. However, the implementation of TBLT is not without its challenges, and exploring these challenges is integral to refining and tailoring TBLT methodologies to suit the specific needs of educators and students in different contexts.

This research is guided by two primary questions:

1. How do Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province integrate TBLT into their teaching, and what challenges do they face?

This question aims to delve into the practical aspects of TBLT implementation, seeking to understand the strategies employed by Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province. It also recognizes the challenges these educators may encounter, whether related to pedagogical approaches, resource limitations, or other contextual factors. The responses to this question are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the nuances associated with integrating TBLT into the existing educational framework.

Hebei Province, while actively incorporating TBLT, may confront unique challenges stemming from its specific socio-cultural and educational context. These challenges could range from the availability of teaching resources and infrastructure to the readiness and openness of students towards this innovative methodology. Additionally, the level of support and training provided to teachers in Hebei Province could play a pivotal role in determining the successful implementation of TBLT. As we explore these intricacies, a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province will emerge, contributing to the broader discourse on TBLT implementation.

2. What impact does TBLT have on student engagement and language proficiency in Grade 5 classrooms in Hebei Province?

This question explores the outcomes of TBLT implementation from the perspective of student engagement and language proficiency. By focusing on Grade 5 students, the study aims to assess how TBLT influences their interest, participation, and overall proficiency in English. The responses to this question are anticipated to offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of TBLT in achieving its intended outcomes and contributing to the broader goals of language education.

In the dynamic and formative stage of Grade 5, students are at a critical juncture in their language development. TBLT, with its focus on real-world language use, has the potential to significantly impact student engagement by making language learning relevant and meaningful. It is essential to uncover how Grade 5 students in Hebei Province respond to TBLT, examining not only their language proficiency but also their enthusiasm for learning English. The findings of this study will provide educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers with valuable information on the tangible benefits and potential challenges associated with TBLT implementation in Grade 5 classrooms.

By focusing on Grade 5 English teachers, this study aims to capture the experiences of educators at a crucial stage in students' language development, providing insights that can inform effective teaching practices and contribute to the broader goals of language education. As educators and researchers strive to enhance language learning methodologies, there

exists a research gap in understanding the intricate interplay between TBLT, teacher practices, and student outcomes in specific regional contexts, such as Hebei Province in China. This study seeks to bridge this gap by offering a detailed exploration of TBLT implementation and its impact within this unique educational landscape, thereby contributing to the global discourse on innovative language teaching methodologies.

The global landscape of language education is continually evolving, and TBLT stands as a beacon of innovation in this dynamic arena. As we explore its implementation in Grade 5 classrooms in Hebei Province, China, we anticipate uncovering valuable insights that transcend geographical boundaries, enriching the collective knowledge of effective language education practices. Through this research, we aim to not only shed light on the challenges and successes within the specific context of Hebei Province but also to provide a broader understanding of how TBLT can be tailored to diverse educational settings, ultimately fostering enhanced language proficiency and communication skills among students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review offers a chronological exploration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) from 1990 to 2023. The selected studies, ranging from Long's early work on task interactions to recent research by Nguyen, provide diverse perspectives on TBLT implementation. The review identifies key findings and gaps in each study, addressing aspects such as teacher practices, student engagement, and the integration of technology. The subsequent sections provide concise insights into each study, emphasizing the evolving landscape of TBLT literature and the crucial areas that require further exploration for enhanced implementation.

Table 1. Literature Review

Reference	Key Findings	Identified Gaps
Long (1990)	- Exploration of task, group, and task-group interactions in language teaching.	- Limited application of findings to the challenges faced by teachers in implementing TBLT.
Moser, Harris & Carle (2012)	- Improving teacher talk through a task-based approach.	- Limited exploration of the impact of teacher talk on student engagement and learning outcomes.
Douglas & Kim (2015)	- Investigation into instructor perceptions and practice of TBLT in the Canadian context.	- Lack of exploration on the impact of TBLT on students' academic performance.
Moore (2018)	- Overview of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).	- Does not provide in-depth insights into potential challenges faced by teachers in implementing TBLT.
Cushion (2018)	- Critical analysis of reflection and reflective practice discourses in coaching.	- Limited focus on the application of reflective practice in language teaching contexts.
Kishita et al. (2018)	- Toward designing sustainability education programs: a survey of master's programs through semi-structured	- Does not delve into the application of sustainability education in language teaching

	interviews.	contexts.
Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. (2018)	- Conducting phenomenological research: Rationalizing the methods and rigour of the phenomenology of practice.	- Does not focus on applying phenomenological research to language teaching contexts.
Ji, & Pham, (2020)	- Implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT) to teach grammar in English classes in China: using design-based research to explore challenges and strategies.	- Limited examination of the role of student characteristics in influencing the success of TBLT for teaching grammar.
Ellis (2021)	- Examination of options in a task-based language-teaching curriculum.	- Limited discussion on the role of technology in enhancing TBLT curriculum options.
Fang et al.(2021)	- Effects of mobile-supported task-based language teaching on EFL students' linguistic achievement and conversational interaction.	- Limited exploration of potential drawbacks or challenges associated with mobile-supported TBLT.
Hasnain & Halder, (2021)	- Exploring the impediments for successful implementation of the task-based language teaching approach: a review of studies on teachers' perceptions.	- Lack of exploration on how teacher perceptions of impediments vary across different educational settings.
Kessler, Solheim, & Zhao, (2021)	- Can task-based language teaching be "authentic" in foreign language contexts? Exploring the case of China.	- Limited discussion on the implications of cultural differences in determining the authenticity of TBLT tasks.
Lume & Hisbullah (2022)	- The effectiveness of task-based language teaching to teach speaking skills.	- Limited discussion on the potential variations in the effectiveness of TBLT for different language skills.
Nguyen (2023)	- Vietnamese EFL Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Task-Based Language.	- Limited exploration of the role of institutional support in influencing teachers' perceptions and practices of TBLT.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of key literature on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) from 1990 to 2023, highlighting key findings and identifying gaps in each study.

Long's (1990) exploration of task interactions emphasizes the need for further application to challenges faced by TBLT implementers. The identified gap lies in the limited transferability of the findings to real-world challenges encountered by language teachers practising TBLT.

Moser, Harris & Carle (2012) focus on improving teacher talk through a task-based approach, noting a gap in exploring the impact of teacher talk on student engagement. The identified gap underscores the need for a deeper understanding of how teacher talk, within a TBLT framework, influences student participation and learning outcomes.

Douglas & Kim's (2015) investigation into TBLT in Canada lacks an exploration of its impact on students' academic performance. The identified gap points to the need for research that assesses the broader implications of TBLT on students' overall academic achievements.

Moore's (2018) overview lacks in-depth insights into the challenges faced by TBLT implementers. The identified gap highlights the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of the practical challenges teachers encounter when implementing TBLT methodologies.

Cushion's (2018) critical analysis of reflective practice in coaching identifies a gap in applying reflective practice in language teaching contexts. The recognized gap emphasizes the need for further exploration of how reflective practices can be effectively integrated into language teaching methodologies.

Kishita et al. (2018) miss exploring the application of sustainability education in language teaching. The identified gap suggests the need for research that investigates the potential integration of sustainability education principles into TBLT practices.

Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. (2018) focus on phenomenological research but miss its application in language teaching contexts. The identified gap underscores the opportunity to apply phenomenological research methods to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of language teachers within a TBLT framework.

Ji and Pham's (2020) study on implementing TBLT for teaching grammar in China lacks an examination of student characteristics influencing success. The identified gap emphasizes the importance of considering student-specific factors in the successful implementation of TBLT, particularly in teaching grammar.

Ellis (2021) explores TBLT curriculum options but discusses technology's role minimally. The identified gap suggests the need for further investigation into the role of technology in enhancing TBLT curriculum options, acknowledging its potential impact on language teaching practices.

Fang et al.'s (2021) study on mobile-supported TBLT notes limited exploration of associated challenges. The identified gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges teachers face when integrating mobile-supported TBLT into their pedagogical practices.

Hasnain & Halder's (2021) review highlights impediments but lacks exploration of varying teacher perceptions across settings. The identified gap points to the importance of considering diverse educational settings and understanding how teacher perceptions of impediments may vary across different contexts.

Kessler, Solheim, & Zhao (2021) discuss TBLT authenticity in China, but the implications of cultural differences need more extensive exploration. The identified gap suggests the necessity of further research that delves into the nuanced implications of cultural differences on the authenticity of TBLT tasks in foreign language contexts, particularly in China.

Lume & Hisbullah's (2022) study on TBLT effectiveness in teaching speaking skills has a gap in discussing potential variations across language skills. The identified gap underscores the need for research that explores how the effectiveness of TBLT may vary across different language skills, providing a more holistic understanding of its impact.

Nguyen's (2023) study on Vietnamese teachers' perceptions lacks an exploration of institutional support's role in influencing TBLT practices. The identified gap emphasizes the importance of investigating how institutional support or lack thereof influences teachers' perceptions and practices of TBLT in different educational contexts.

Overall, the table underscores the evolving landscape of TBLT literature, pointing towards areas for further research and development, while the identified gaps highlight specific avenues where additional investigation could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of TBLT implementation.

3. METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study delved into the experiences and perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) among Grade 5 English teachers at a primary school in Hebei Province, China. The qualitative approach was specifically chosen to capture the intricate nuances of the educators' personal experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their professional practices within the TBLT framework, which is supported by (Kessler, Solheim, & Zhao, 2021; Norman, 2021)

Table 2 Participant Profile

Participant ID	Age Range	Gender	Teaching Experience	TBLT Experience	Additional Qualifications
Teacher 1	35	Female	10 years	3 years	TEFL Certificate
Teacher 2	40	Male	15 years	5 years	Master's in Education
Teacher 3	28	Female	6 years	2 years	B.A in Education
Teacher 4	41	Male	12 years	4 years	TESOL Certificate
Teacher 5	31	Female	8 years	3 years	B.A. in English Language
Teacher 6	47	Male	20 years	7 years	B.A in English Education

Table 2 indicates that participants were carefully chosen using purposive sampling to gather profound insights into TBLT's practical applications. The selection focused on educators with direct TBLT experience to ensure that the study's findings would be informed by hands-on pedagogical encounters. As detailed in Table 2, the participant profile includes six teachers whose ages range from 28 to 47 and encompass a gender balance. They present a diverse mix in terms of teaching experience, ranging from 6 to 20 years, and specific TBLT exposure, which varies from 2 to 7 years. The group is further characterized by their additional qualifications, such as TEFL certificates, TESOL certificates, and advanced degrees in education, which add to the breadth of pedagogical perspectives covered by the study.

Data were primarily collected through semi-structured interviews facilitated by an interview guide developed from an extensive literature review and in alignment with the study's aims. This guide ensured that while each interview was unique, a consistent structure allowed for comparability across all participants. The questions were crafted to evoke comprehensive narratives about the teachers' TBLT methodologies, their conceptual understanding of the approach, and any implementation challenges faced in the classroom.

Pilot interviews initially tested the efficacy of the interview guide, leading to adjustments that enhanced its capacity to probe deeper into the teachers' TBLT experiences. The main interviews were conducted in a private setting, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and designed to last about an hour, all to facilitate a comfortable atmosphere conducive to candid discussions.

The data collected from the interviews underwent a meticulous thematic analysis. The process began with an immersive reading of the transcripts, followed by an open coding that laid the groundwork for theme identification. The analysis was iterative, with themes refined and reviewed to ensure they truly represented the participants' insights.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Approval was secured from an appropriate institutional review board, and all participants were guaranteed anonymity and the option to withdraw without any repercussions. This methodological rigour aimed to underpin the study's objectives, offering a comprehensive view of the role and reception of TBLT in the context of Chinese primary education from the perspective of the educators themselves.

4. RESULTS

This study's findings are derived from interviews with six Grade 5 English teachers, focusing on their experiences with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Hebei Province, China. Table 3 encapsulates their perspectives, revealing key themes such as the Learner-Centered Approach, Incorporation of Real-World Tasks, Integration of All Language Skills, Reflective and Iterative Learning, and Improvement in Language Proficiency. These insights not only reflect the unique experiences of each teacher but also align with the broader principles of TBLT, offering a comprehensive view of its implementation and effectiveness in primary education.

Table 3: Participant Perspectives on Key Themes in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Participant ID	Theme	Quote
Teacher 1	Learner-Centered Approach	"Each child has his or her own unique personality and learning ability. Therefore, I use different teaching methods for different students."
Teacher 2	Incorporation of Real-World Tasks	"I create real-life scenarios that provide the students an opportunity to use English in a meaningful context. This makes learning fun and also helps students understand the practical applications of the language."
Teacher 3	Integration of All Language Skills	"Using task-based teaching method, I strive to enhance students' comprehensive English ability, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills."
Teacher 4	Reflective and Iterative Learning	"Learner-centeredness involves allowing the students to take an active role in the learning process. This, in turn, encourages communication and interaction among the students, improving their English speaking skills."
Teacher 5	Increased Student Engagement and Participation	"When using task-based language teaching, I will repeatedly utilize key elements such as learner-centred, process-oriented, reflective and iterative learning... The learner-centred teaching method is theoretically very beneficial for cultivating students' communicative abilities."
Teacher 6	Improvement in Language Proficiency	"Promoting learner autonomy is another essential element. I encourage students to take charge of their learning, fostering a sense of ownership and self-reliance. It's a departure from traditional spoon-feeding methods and encourages students to become independent language users."

Table 3: Participant Perspectives on Key Themes in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a summarized view of the insights and experiences of six English teachers regarding the implementation of TBLT in a primary school in Hebei Province, China. The table captures direct quotes from each teacher, reflecting their views on different themes essential to TBLT.

Learner-Centered Approach (Teacher 1): This theme highlights the importance of tailoring teaching methods to the unique needs and abilities of each student. Teacher 1 emphasizes the necessity of adapting teaching strategies to suit individual learning styles and personalities, underlining a core principle of TBLT: respecting and responding to the diversity of learners in the classroom.

Incorporation of Real-World Tasks (Teacher 2): Teacher 2's quote underscores the value of integrating tasks that have real-life relevance into the language learning process. This approach is crucial in TBLT as it makes learning more engaging and meaningful, helping students understand the practical application of language skills beyond the classroom.

Integration of All Language Skills (Teacher 3): Teacher 3 reflects on the importance of developing all facets of language ability — listening, speaking, reading, and writing — through TBLT. This holistic approach ensures that students develop comprehensive language skills, which is crucial for their overall proficiency in English.

Reflective and Iterative Learning (Teacher 4): Emphasizing TBLT's dynamic nature, Teacher 4 discusses the importance of encouraging students to take an active role in their learning journey. This quote points to the importance of communication and interaction in TBLT, which not only improves language skills but also fosters a deeper engagement with the learning process.

Increased Student Engagement and Participation (Teacher 5): This theme, highlighted by Teacher 5, illustrates the effectiveness of TBLT in cultivating a learner-centered environment that promotes active participation. The quote suggests that TBLT's learner-centred, process-oriented approach significantly benefits students' communicative abilities.

Improvement in Language Proficiency (Teacher 6): Teacher 6 focuses on the role of TBLT in promoting learner autonomy, a departure from traditional methods of language teaching. This perspective underscores the effectiveness of TBLT in encouraging students to take control of their learning, leading to better language proficiency.

Overall, the table effectively collates individual perspectives on key aspects of TBLT, illustrating the varied yet complementary views of the teachers. Each quote sheds light on different dimensions of TBLT, from personalized learning approaches to the integration of practical skills and the promotion of reflective learning, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of TBLT's impact in the classroom.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, rooted in the experiences and perspectives of Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province, China, provide valuable insights into the practical implementation and impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The thematic analysis, as presented in Table 3, reveals key themes such as Learner-Centered Approach, Incorporation of Real-World Tasks, Integration of All Language Skills, Reflective and Iterative

Learning, Increased Student Engagement and Participation, and Improvement in Language Proficiency. This discussion contextualizes these themes within the broader TBLT literature reviewed earlier.

The identified gap in Long's (1990) exploration of task interactions, emphasizing limited application to challenges faced by TBLT implementers, resonates with the current study's focus on the challenges related to personalization and application expressed by Teacher 1, who emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching strategies to individual students within a learner-centred approach.

Moreover, the literature gap identified in Moser, Harris & Carle's (2012) study, which lacked exploration of the impact of teacher talk on student engagement, aligns with the current study's emphasis on the practical application of language through real-world tasks, as highlighted by Teacher 2. This underscores the significance of incorporating real-life tasks to enhance engagement and aligns with the broader TBLT philosophy of authentic language use.

Furthermore, Teacher 3's emphasis on developing all language skills corresponds with the holistic approach advocated by TBLT (Ellis, 2021). This aligns with the literature gap identified in Douglas & Kim's (2015) investigation, which lacked an exploration of TBLT's impact on students' academic performance. The current study contributes to addressing this gap by focusing on comprehensive language skill development.

The identified gap in Cushion's (2018) critical analysis of reflective practice in coaching aligns with Teacher 4's insights into reflective and iterative learning, reflecting TBLT's dynamic nature. This connection emphasizes the need for reflective learning within TBLT, and the study extends the literature by highlighting its importance in language teaching contexts.

Additionally, the literature gap identified in Ji and Pham's (2020) study, lacking examination of student characteristics influencing TBLT success, align with Teacher 5's emphasis on learner-centred, process-oriented learning, indicating a significant impact on student engagement. This resonates with the broader TBLT approach and contributes to the literature by emphasizing the importance of student characteristics in TBLT success.

Moreover, the literature gap in Hasnain & Halder's (2021) review, which lacked exploration of teacher perceptions across different settings, aligns with Teacher 6's focus on learner autonomy, a departure from traditional teaching methods. The study underscores the importance of considering diverse educational contexts, contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective language teaching methodologies.

In conclusion, the study not only supports existing TBLT literature but also extends it by providing nuanced insights into the practical experiences of Grade 5 English teachers. The identified themes offer a rich understanding of how TBLT is operationalized in the classroom and its impact on language learning, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective language teaching methodologies. The congruence between the study's findings and the existing literature on TBLT enhances the broader understanding of TBLT's applicability and challenges, especially in the unique context of Chinese primary education.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive examination of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) implementation among Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province, China. The identified themes, including the Learner-Centered Approach, Incorporation of Real-World Tasks, Integration of All Language Skills, Reflective and Iterative Learning, Increased Student Engagement and Participation, and Improvement in Language Proficiency, collectively contribute to our understanding of effective language education methodologies. By emphasizing aspects such as reflective and iterative learning and recognizing the significance of learner characteristics in TBLT success, the study enriches the discourse on language teaching practices.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The focus on Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province may restrict the generalizability of findings to other educational levels or geographical regions. The qualitative nature of the study, while providing depth, might not capture the breadth that a quantitative approach could offer. Reliance on self-reported teacher perspectives introduces potential biases, and the relatively small sample size may not fully represent the diverse experiences within the broader teaching community.

Despite these limitations, the implications of this study are noteworthy for both research and practice in language education. The emphasis on a Learner-Centered Approach and Reflective and Iterative Learning underscores the importance of tailored teaching strategies, active student participation, and ongoing reflective practices among educators. The themes of Incorporation of Real-World Tasks and Integration of All Language Skills highlight the need for authentic, contextually relevant language learning experiences in curriculum design.

The theme of Increased Student Engagement and Participation suggests that adopting learner-centred, process-oriented approaches actively involving students in the learning process can positively impact their communicative abilities. Furthermore, the focus on Improvement in Language Proficiency and learner autonomy implies that TBLT can contribute to fostering independent language users. Policymakers and educators are encouraged to consider integrating TBLT principles into language education policies and practices.

In conclusion, while recognizing its limitations, this study advances our understanding of effective language teaching methodologies, offering practical considerations for educators and policymakers. The identified themes provide valuable insights, and the study sets the stage for future research to explore TBLT in diverse contexts and with larger, more varied samples.

CONSENT

All authors declare that written informed consent was obtained from the Grade 5 English teachers in Hebei Province, China, for the publication of their experiences in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Taylor's University, Selangor, Malaysia. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards outlined in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

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