

**TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EFL CONTEXTS: OPPORTUNITIES
AND LIMITATIONS***Gulandom Abdullajonova**EFL Instructor, ISFT Institute, Uzbekistan**Email: gulandomasilbekovna@gmail.com*

Abstract: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has become a widely endorsed instructional approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, focusing on real-world communicative tasks rather than isolated linguistic forms. This paper explores the pedagogical foundations of TBLT, its implementation strategies, and the learning outcomes it generates. Drawing on recent empirical studies and case reports, it also identifies limitations such as curricular constraints, teacher readiness, and assessment challenges. The discussion underscores the need for ongoing teacher training and contextual adaptations to make TBLT effective and sustainable in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: TBLT, task-based learning, EFL pedagogy, communicative competence, language acquisition, classroom practice, learner-centered instruction

1. Introduction The evolving needs of global learners and the inadequacy of traditional grammar-focused methods have led to a shift in foreign language pedagogy. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), grounded in communicative principles, promotes learning through meaningful engagement with language. This article examines how TBLT operates in EFL settings and analyzes its potential and limitations through practical illustrations.

Traditional language education often emphasized rote memorization and rule-based grammar instruction. However, such methods rarely equipped learners with the ability to use language in authentic situations. As the emphasis in education has shifted toward communicative competence, fluency, and interaction, TBLT has emerged as an effective model that responds to these priorities. It promotes a dynamic classroom environment where learners interact, negotiate meaning, and develop linguistic and strategic competence simultaneously.

2. Theoretical Background of TBLT TBLT is rooted in the communicative approach and the cognitive-interactionist view of second language acquisition (Skehan, 1996; Ellis, 2003). It proposes that language is best learned when learners are actively involved in completing tasks that resemble real-life communication. A "task" in this framework is a goal-oriented activity that requires the use of target language for achieving an outcome (Nunan, 2004).

The rationale behind TBLT is also supported by sociocultural theory, particularly Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Collaborative tasks allow learners to function at a higher level than they would independently. Language emerges through interaction and scaffolding, providing cognitive engagement and social support. TBLT thus facilitates both linguistic input and output, making it a balanced approach to acquisition.

3. TBLT in Practice: Key Features and Examples TBLT implementation usually follows a three-phase model: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task (Willis & Willis, 2007). In the pre-task stage, learners are introduced to the topic and vocabulary. The task cycle includes performing the task in pairs or groups, followed by planning and presenting their outcomes. In the post-task phase, language forms and strategies are reviewed.

Classroom Example: In a high school in Uzbekistan, students were tasked with preparing a travel itinerary for a visiting tourist. They conducted online research, made group decisions, wrote descriptions of landmarks, and presented their trip plan to the class. Throughout the activity, learners used English to negotiate, compare opinions, and deliver information, thereby integrating all language skills.

Another example comes from a college in South Korea where students created a promotional video for a local business. The project required research, script writing, filming, and post-production — all conducted in English. Not only did the learners practice relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures, but they also engaged in critical thinking and digital storytelling.

4. Benefits of TBLT in EFL Settings

4.1 Enhanced Communicative Competence: TBLT shifts focus from grammar accuracy to fluency and meaning, allowing learners to develop pragmatic competence. Through negotiation of meaning and interaction, learners gain confidence in using English spontaneously (Ellis, 2009). The functional nature of tasks — such as solving a problem, planning a trip, or debating an issue — equips students with skills directly transferable to real-world communication.

In multilingual contexts like Singapore or the UAE, TBLT has shown success in encouraging learners to use English as a lingua franca. Role-play scenarios, simulations, and structured interviews help learners practice turn-taking, clarification, and discourse management.

4.2 Learner Motivation and Engagement: Tasks often involve real-world scenarios and collaborative learning, which increase motivation. Learners enjoy creating presentations, conducting interviews, or solving problems, especially when outcomes are tangible. The experiential nature of TBLT fosters emotional investment, making the learning process enjoyable and memorable.

For example, designing a “green school” project can engage learners in sustainability discussions, while simultaneously improving their lexical range and argumentation strategies. When students feel ownership over their learning process, they are more likely to take initiative and remain engaged.

4.3 Integration of Skills: TBLT activities typically combine listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For instance, a project to write a restaurant review requires reading menus, visiting eateries, speaking with peers, and finally composing a written piece. This integration aligns with the holistic nature of communication in real-life settings.

Moreover, interdisciplinary projects such as science reports, business plans, or health campaigns enable students to explore subject content in English, bridging content and language learning (CLIL). This dual focus prepares learners for academic and professional contexts where English is used as a medium of instruction.

5. Limitations and Challenges of TBLT

5.1 Curricular Inflexibility: Many EFL contexts follow rigid curricula with predetermined grammar points and textbook structures. TBLT, which thrives on flexibility and student choice, can be difficult to reconcile with such systems (Carless, 2007). Teachers may feel pressure to “teach to the test,” especially in exam-oriented cultures.

In some cases, education ministries have mandated exam syllabi that do not accommodate project-based or task-oriented methodologies. As a result, innovative teaching approaches are often sidelined despite their pedagogical value.

5.2 Teacher Readiness and Training: Effective TBLT requires teachers to shift roles from knowledge transmitters to facilitators. Without proper training, many educators feel ill-

equipped to manage open-ended tasks or assess process-oriented outcomes (Butler, 2011). They may also lack the resources or support needed to implement student-centered approaches.

Professional development programs are often limited or theoretical, failing to provide hands-on practice in designing and evaluating tasks. Mentorship and collaborative planning sessions can help bridge this gap by modeling TBLT in action.

5.3 Assessment Difficulties: Standardized tests often focus on discrete language items, while TBLT emphasizes communicative success. Developing reliable rubrics to assess task performance and language development is an ongoing challenge (East, 2012).

Assessing collaborative output and group work introduces subjectivity. Moreover, balancing formative and summative assessment within a TBLT framework requires thoughtful planning and alignment with learning objectives.

5.4 Classroom Management and Mixed Proficiency Levels: In large or heterogeneous classes, implementing group tasks can be chaotic. High-proficiency students may dominate, while others remain passive unless tasks are carefully differentiated. Group dynamics, motivation gaps, and language anxiety can affect participation.

One solution is to use rotating roles within groups—such as note-taker, timekeeper, presenter—to ensure balanced contribution. Teachers can also design tiered tasks that allow students to participate according to their abilities while still meeting shared goals.

6. Strategies for Overcoming Limitations

- **Blended Approach:** Combining TBLT with form-focused instruction can address syllabus goals while promoting communication. Explicit grammar teaching can be integrated during post-task reflection.
- **Professional Development:** Ongoing teacher training workshops and peer coaching can build confidence and competence. Online platforms and webinars offer accessible options for continual growth.
- **Task Adaptation:** Designing tasks that align with textbook themes or unit objectives makes integration smoother. Teachers can use textbook dialogues as springboards for more open-ended communicative tasks.
- **Assessment Innovation:** Using self-assessment, peer reviews, and performance-based rubrics can capture broader learning outcomes. Teachers might video-record group performances for portfolio evaluation and student reflection.

7. Conclusion TBLT represents a transformative pedagogy for EFL instruction, providing learners with meaningful opportunities to use language actively. While limitations exist—especially in assessment, curriculum design, and teacher preparation—these challenges are not insurmountable. With strategic support, contextual adaptation, and institutional commitment, TBLT can foster communicative competence and learner autonomy in EFL classrooms worldwide.

The continued growth of digital technologies and online collaboration tools also opens new frontiers for TBLT. Virtual exchange projects, webquests, and mobile learning apps can support task design and expand learner exposure to authentic communication. As educational paradigms shift toward personalization and competency-based outcomes, TBLT offers a compelling framework for the future of language education.

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