TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CLASSROOMS 
A STUDY OF CHINESE EFL TEACHERS’ PRACTICE

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Abstract
This research used case study data to provide a picture of how school teachers in China are attempting to implement a task-based approach in language learning classrooms. Specifically, the task-based instruction as implemented by four Chinese EFL teachers were investigated through classroom observations. An adapted version of the COLT Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching observation scheme was used for data collection. The finding of this research indicates that teachers and their beliefs towards TBLT are the key factor contributing to the implementation of TBA. Based on this significant finding, the researcher provides recommendations for the EFL teachers in China.

Key words
Task-based approach, practice, case study

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The task-based approach has gained popularity in the field of language teaching in the last decades of the 20th century. It is widely believed that communicative tasks can facilitate the learning process by engaging students in negotiation of meaning in the form of small group work. Ellis 1997, Skehan 1998, Nunan 2004, Littlewood 2004, 2006.

Nevertheless, recently, quite a few scholars have also expressed their concerns about the effectiveness and practicability of this approach. Their concern of task-based approach mainly revolves around the problem that this approach seems not so successful in promoting high levels of linguistic competence. Bygate 2000, Foster 1999, Spada 1987, Swan 2005.

In China, research on task-based language teaching has received considerable attention in recent years. Zhang 2005, Zheng 2005. However, there have been few studies on the practical process of implementing the task-based language teaching in the context of Mainland China. Carless 2004, Zhang 2005.

The researcher was enrolled in a municipal teacher training program entitled “The implementation of TBA in secondary school classrooms” in the year of 2007 after this study commenced. Through her frequent contact with secondary school English language teachers in the city of Shenzhen and participants enrolled in her training program, the researcher found a need to investigate and to better understand how a task-based approach is being implemented in secondary school language teaching classrooms. Particularly, the researcher was interested in the classroom behaviors of teachers widely regarded as being highly competent and who were thought to be good at using CLT and TBLT in their English language learning classrooms.
The major objective of the study was to provide a picture of how secondary school teachers try to come to terms with the planning and implementation of a task-based pedagogical approach. By conducting the research, the researcher hoped to identify pertinent issues that arose during TBLT implementation and to offer workable solutions.

1.2 Research Questions

The major research questions of this study were:

1. How is TBA being implemented in lower secondary school classrooms?
2. What are teacher beliefs about TBA?
3. What factors seem to contribute to the implementation of TBA?

The first question aims to ascertain the real-life implementation processes of task-based language teaching in secondary school language learning classrooms. Several topics relevant to teachers’ TBLT practice are addressed which include design of teaching procedures, materials, organization of activities and tasks, instruction of four skills, teacher roles, and assessment. Observations of language teaching processes are made, and teachers and students’ behavior examined. The second research question deals with teachers’ views on TBLT. Their perceived TBA features and proper teaching practices are a major research area. Data regarding teachers’ beliefs are mainly drawn from follow-up summative and focus group interviews. The last research question focuses on the factors which might contribute to the effectiveness of the implementation of TBA. National, local, and classroom factors are taken into consideration, drawn partly from teacher interviews but also from the researcher’s own background knowledge and experience as applied to the findings of the study.

1.3 Significance of This Study

As mentioned above, there is a lack of empirical research on task-based teaching in school foreign language context. Therefore, the study aims to contribute to the enrichment of the knowledge about TBA practice in EFL classrooms while enhancing our understanding of ELT pedagogic change and curricular innovation on China’s mainland. It provides educational policymakers and local educational administrators insights into issues arising during the TBA implementation. Most importantly, the study hopes to assist the frontline teachers in a successful transition of authentic TBLT on China’s mainland. The finding of this research indicates that teachers and their beliefs towards TBLT are the key factors facilitating or retarding the implementation of TBA. Based on this significant finding, the researcher provides recommendations for the EFL teacher in China, including conducting of teacher continuous learning, frequent teaching reflections, and teacher-school cooperation.

This study is also significant from a methodological point of view by using an adapted classroom observation instrument called Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) Observation Scheme (Spada & Frohlich, 1995). It is designed to quantify and qualify the teachers’ classroom behaviors. Compared with the original COLT Part A, this adapted observation is much more simplified. TBLT oriented and qualitative nature by incorporating important TBLT principles and Littlewood’s framework of the five-category activities. Hopefully, this instrument with some “tailor-made” adaptations could help with further research on the implementation of TBA with a much broader sample of teachers in order to stretch the findings toward wider applicability.

2. Literature Review

2.1 TBA and Curricular Innovation in China

In China during the last decade, educators have realized the importance of shifting the pattern of ELT from an emphasis on linguistic forms to an emphasis on communicative competence. The shift was reflected in curricular reform during this period. He, 2002; Hu, 2002. The latest English language curriculum named “the National English Language Curriculum Standards” for secondary schools was issued in July of 2001 and was carried out experimentally in 38 designated national experimental districts throughout China beginning 1st September, 2001.
Tremendous changes have been made and innovative ideas have been added to the new curriculum "the Standards" regarding educational concepts, curricular aims and objectives, teaching methods, teaching content, implementation and assessment. Particularly, an innovative teaching approach—the task-based approach to English language teaching—was recommended and greatly encouraged in the new curriculum.

2 Definitions of Tasks and TBA in This Study

There are diverse opinions of what the term "task" entails amongst both teachers and researchers. Ellis 2003, Nunan 1989, Skehan 1998 and Willis 1996 define tasks as activities in which:

1. Meaning is primary.
2. Students work purposefully towards an objective.
3. There is negotiation of meaning between participants.
4. There is a relationship to learners' personal experiences.
5. The classroom is student-centered and communicative/competence-oriented.
6. There is an outcome, although it can be either concrete (e.g., a report or presentation) or intangible (e.g., agreement or solution) to a problem.
7. The assessment of task performance is evaluated in terms of task outcome.
8. The acquisition principle is "learning through doing."

The above defined task features demonstrate the basic principles of task-based language teaching as adopted in this study. In other words, these principles were used as the major criteria to identify whether and to what extent the participant teachers implemented TBA.

2 Theoretical Framework of TBA Implementation

2.1 Littlewood's five-category framework for classroom activities

As Littlewood 2000 points out, it is often impossible to draw a clear dividing line between activities where the focus is on form and activities where the focus is on meaning. He maintains that it is not a "yes or no" question, either focusing on meaning or form, but rather a matter of degree, to what degree are activities meaning focused and form focused? Littlewood 2004 goes on to classify classroom activities according to five types: non-communicative activities, pre-communicative activities, communicative activities, structured communicative activities, and authentic activities.

2.2 Skehan's framework of TBLT implementation

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a significant movement from such a form-focused teacher-dominated language teaching procedure to a more communicative, meaning-focused approach. Harmer 2001 In the communicative language classroom, tasks or themes tend to be the organizational principle when teaching. Many theorists, Ellis 2003, Nunan 1989, 2004, Skehan 1998, Willis 1996 suggest that TBLT be implemented based on three stages of classroom teaching—pre-task, during task, and post-task. Drawing upon the existing research, Skehan 1996 proposes a framework for task implementation which elaborates different goals and techniques of the three-stage practice of TBA.

3 Methods

3.1 The Research Contexts and Participants

The research centred on the city of Shenzhen, a young city at the forefront of economic reform in China. Prospective case teachers were identified according to recommendations by the head of the English Research Group of Education Bureau of Nanshan in the city of Shenzhen. Four teachers were selected to participate in the study. Two of them were from School A and the other two were from School B. All were female and their teaching experience ranged from 7 to 10 years. They were all widely believed to be competent "master" teachers thought by school managers to be good at using CLT and TBLT in her English language learning classrooms. To ensure confidentiality, the pseudonyms, Racy, Tina, Marie and Daisy were used throughout the study.
The following table 1 shows a summary of the four teachers’ personal information as obtained from interviews. Each participant’s pseudonym, school, education, age, years of teaching experience, subject training, professional training, and the year level of their students is provided in the summary.

Table 1. Teacher participants background information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Teaching years</th>
<th>Subject training</th>
<th>Professional training</th>
<th>Student level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racy</td>
<td>NFLS</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Junior 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>NFLS</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Junior 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>NES</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Junior 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>NES</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Junior 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Classroom observations. Teachers were asked to notify the researcher when they planned to conduct a lesson that they felt was TBLT oriented so that the lesson could be observed. Observations focused on language learning and teaching processes in the classroom as well as teacher and student behaviour. For this study, classroom observation consisted of macro and micro analyses. The former concentrated on the observer's general feelings of the classroom organization, including teacher and student interaction, teaching methods used, and student participation. The latter focused on a detailed record of classroom activities in which the adapted version of the COLT instrument was used.

Interviews. Three types of interviews were utilised in this study. a) follow-up interviews conducted after each classroom observation, b) summative interviews conducted with teacher pairs after all observations were complete, and c) focus group interviews conducted as a means to expand results gathered from the individual interviews.

As a means to further triangulate data and to gain more awareness of the study context, the researcher often had informal talks with students before or after the classroom observations. These helped to gain an informal view of student responses to instructional practices and led to better interpretation of the data. The data collection phase of this study lasted more than six months.

3.3 Instrument. The adapted COLT Part A

The COLT observation scheme was introduced for the first time in 1984 by Spada, Frohlich, and Allen. Flynn, and Mattsson in 1999. It was developed as an instrument to be used in the observation of teaching and learning in L2 classrooms in order to assess the extent to which lessons have a communicative orientation.

In view of the major purpose of the present study—to observe teachers’ implementation of the task-based language teaching—the COLT observation scheme was adapted so that it could be more suitable and applicable to TBLT implementation. Items added or adapted were based on the definitions of “task” and “task-based instruction” adopted in this study. The adapted coding sheet is presented in Appendix.

Compared with the original COLT A, the adapted version is much more simplified and qualitatively based. By adapting the COLT quantitative procedures, more detailed qualitative ones were used. The more qualitative oriented observational instrument also led to a number of issues to be explored in task-based implementation research.

4. Results

The research data focuses on four teachers at two schools in China. Findings and discussion revolve around the three major research questions of the study.

4.1 Research Question One. How is TBLT being implemented in classrooms?

As discussed in the literature review, in this study, data regarding the teachers’ classroom activities were collected and analyzed by adopting Littlewood’s framework of five categories of activities. Results
showed that for Racy, Tina and Marie tasks with more communicative features (communicative activities structured communicative activities and the authentic tasks) occupied the majority of their classroom time. The high degree of communication indicated a high degree of focusing on meaning Littlewood 2000.

Here, Racy was the most interesting case. During the observations, negotiation of meaning rarely happened in her class because nearly all the information could be found from the written samples provided by the teachers. Tasks were conducted and performed but highly controlled by the teacher or by the language structure targeted. Consequently, although Racy designed and organized a lot of communicative tasks and although her tasks were meaningful focused she did not implement TBLT successfully because real communication negotiation of meaning between learners rarely occurred. Thus, looking at the case of Racy, we find that the ability to design tasks does not necessarily mean the ability to implement TBLT.

Daisy was a case at the other extreme. Most of her class time was spent in organized communicative activities with very little time spent on tasks. Instruction was typically formal focused. The low degree of communication indicated a low degree of focusing on meaning. Similar to Racy, TBLT implementation with too many linguistic structures and suggested contents were given when students were performing tasks. As a result, her TBLT practice lacked meaning negotiation which also restricted students imagination and creativity in problem solving.

Of the four participants, Tina and Marie were the teachers who applied most of the TBLT characteristics in their English as a foreign language classroom at junior schools. In practice provided a lot of opportunities for students to practice making students play the leading role in the classroom. Their deliberate concern regarding students’ ages, interests and language proficiency levels was reflected in their careful design of activities and tasks. Although there were still some problems in their design and organization of TBLT, Tina and Marie’s tasks and activities lacked clear performance instruction and assessment criteria. Marie’s frequent error correction led to students’ frustration in participation and their teaching styles differed in significant ways both of these two young participants in the study were viewed as promising teachers regarding successful implementation of task-based language instruction.

4.2 Research Question Two: What are teachers’ beliefs of TBLT?

The second research question deals with teachers’ views on TBLT. Their perceived “task” features and proper teaching practice were a major research area. In this study, data regarding teachers’ beliefs were obtained from in-depth interviews which included initial interviews follow-up interviews summative individual interviews and focus group interviews. According to the findings of this study, teachers’ beliefs compatible or incompatible with TBLT principles are summarized in point format below.

4.2.1 Teacher beliefs compatible with TBLT

a) All participant teachers believed that it was important to shift the pattern of ELT from the traditional grammar translation method to CLT and TBLT.

b) All teachers believed that CLT and TBLT could facilitate students’ learning and they all agreed that TBLT was a more effective teaching approach.

c) All teachers believed that tasks should be related to students’ real experiences and that task design should be compatible with students’ ages, interests and language proficiency levels.

d) Marie and Tina had a stronger theoretical knowledge about TBLT as compared with other two teachers. They both realized the basic principles of TBLT were meaning is primary there should be an outcome assessment should be outcome centered students should be the centre of the classroom.

e) All teachers believed that textbooks which follow TBLT principles could facilitate their TBLT practices.

f) They all believed that grammar should be taught through doing activities or tasks.

g) All teachers believed that group work was an efficient class organization form. Three teachers Racy, Marie, and Daisy preferred to organize pair work or small group work.

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They all believed that one important teacher role was to activate and encourage students to participate in activities. They all valued students' class participation.

They all believed that classroom activities or tasks should help students solve practical problems in life.

Three of the teachers believed that authentic tasks were more challenging and that authentic tasks foster student potential and creativity.

All teachers emphasized their leading role in using the target language in class.

They all believed all four skills were of importance and that they should be integrated.

They all believed that a stress-free environment could facilitate learning and they encouraged students to learn from fun.

They all realized the importance of fostering among students good learning habits and efficient learning strategies. They believed these are beneficial for lifelong learning.

They all agreed that teachers should transmit positive attitudes towards life and conduct moral trait education.

They all believed that formative assessment is important. They believed that the exam-oriented assessment system retarded their TBLT practices.

They all believed that efficient in-service training could help improve their TBLT practices.

Teacher beliefs incompatible with TBLT

They did not know the difference between the traditional PPP teaching model and the TBLT implementation cycle although in practice they did adapt the PPP model so that it looked more like a task-based model.

Racy and Daisy mistook activities for tasks.

Racy believed that textbooks played a dominant role in TBLT implementation and relied heavily on textbooks.

Daisy and Racy believed that student performance of activities or tasks required teacher control so gave students detailed samples of reports which actually interfered with task authenticity.

Marie and Tina all believed that portfolio assessment was not practical.

Marie believed that teachers should frequently correct students' errors when they were performing tasks.

Daisy believed that teachers should speak more in class to give students language knowledge. According to her only after gaining good language knowledge could students do more challenging tasks later.

Daisy preferred large group organization possibly so as to keep class control.

Both Racy and Daisy believed that providing input was crucial for teaching. However according to them input mainly meant providing explanations about grammar and vocabulary.

Of the four participant teachers Tina and Marie had more theoretical knowledge about task-based teaching. Racy had some knowledge about TBLT. But she mistook activities for tasks which led to her improper practice of neglecting" meaning" communication in her language learning classrooms. Her views of controlling the classroom made her class a teacher-centred one which was inconsistent with the basic principles of TBLT. Daisy seemed to have only a vague concept of TBLT and did not adopt a communicative approach. She did not know the difference between tasks and activities and did not feel the merits of small group work. She gave priority to transmission of language knowledge and was comfortable with a teacher-dominated classroom.
In this study, the four teachers' TBLT practices were largely congruent with their educational beliefs. Thompson (1992) argues that the relationship between beliefs and practices is a two-way street. Not only do beliefs influence practice, but beliefs can be reshaped by practice. Here, a trend emerged from the results of this study. The more theoretical knowledge the teachers had, the more appropriately they could implement TBLT in practice.

4.3 Research Question Three: What factors contribute to TBLT implementation?

4.3.1 Supporting factors

As discussed in Chapter Two, all four participant teachers were working within the major background of national wide educational reform in China. Being aware of the importance of shifting the pattern of ELT from an emphasis on linguistic forms to an emphasis on communicative competence, Chinese educators have made tremendous efforts to revamp curricula, update English syllabuses, produce new English textbooks, develop skill-oriented examinations and upgrade teachers' professional competence. In the last decades, English teachers in China have been greatly encouraged to develop students' communicative competence by adopting communicative teaching approaches. TBLT, which was regarded as an efficient approach to implementing communicative teaching, was greatly advocated by educational policy makers in China and recommended as an applicable teaching approach in the latest National Curriculum. Guangdong Province, where the four teachers live and work, was one of the first regions in China to begin to experiment with the new curriculum as early as 2001.

Another supporting factor from the National level was flexibility regarding the use of teaching materials. Recently, more freedom on the selection of materials has been given to local-the provincial and municipal school contexts. The situation of "One Nation, One Textbook" is now history. Some schools usually the government "key" schools were even permitted to use imported textbooks. In this study, Racy and Tina at NFS adopted an imported textbook Longman Express published by Longman, which they both regarded as an important source of their knowledge about TBLT.

Classroom factors facilitating TBLT practice included teachers' factors and student factors. From students' perspective, as observed by the researcher and stated by Tina, students showed great interest and enthusiasm in task-based activities. During informal talks with students, the researcher found that most of the students preferred task-based student-centered classrooms over teacher-dominated ones. Student active participation and cooperation ensured that activities and tasks, which teachers designed for TBLT classes, could be organized smoothly.

There were a number of teacher factors which facilitated their TBLT practices. All had good language knowledge and abilities in English. They were willing and able to use English regularly in the classroom and understood the importance of being a motivated user of English as a role model for their students. All of them received tertiary education with a degree of BA or MA in English Education. Their own early learning experiences helped them to realize the ineffectiveness of the traditional grammar translation approach when trying to develop communicative competence and confidence using English. The in-service training provided opportunities for them to learn some theoretical and practical knowledge of TBLT through which they, Racy, Tina and Marie, also formed their goals as teachers, namely to make students use the language in practice. All four of the teachers believed in the importance of continuous development as a teacher through teaching and research. Their frequent reflections on teaching and their active cooperation with colleagues, all teachers, made it possible for them to improve TBLT skills and strategies through practice.

4.3.2 Hindering factors

Several common factors seemed to negatively influence the teachers' implementation of TBLT. The emerging factors among the four teachers in this study were exam-oriented assessment system, textbooks, limitations, time constraints and big class sizes, students' different needs and language proficiency levels, and individual teacher factors.

Examining features affecting teaching from the National level, most notable is the University Entrance examination, which focuses mainly on linguistic forms. To prepare students for the university
entrance exam therefore explicit grammar teaching is still considered a crucial teaching aspect in language classrooms. In this study school managers at regional and local levels were well aware that teachers working with higher grade students were bound to entrance examination preparation focusing on grammar knowledge. They were aware that teachers at lower levels were more likely to use TBLT and communicative approaches and had more freedom to do so. Even so the exam oriented assessment system influenced all the four participant teachers to some degree. Both School A and B in this study had good reputations in preparing students for the senior school entrance examination. So in the two schools the task of getting students to pass senior school entrance examination together with parents' high expectation for their children's good performance in big exams piled great pressure on school managers and teachers. Racy revealed that she was often felt a dilemma when adopting CLT and TBLT which she believed could help little to prepare her students for the examination. So in her lessons the completion of grammar instruction became the precondition for conducting TBLT. Moreover with an aim to consolidate student mastery of language knowledge and to make them prepared for the bigger exams later both Racy and Daisy frequently organized grammar focused tests. Although Tina and Marie had strategies to balance their TBLT practice with exams they both stated that the exam oriented system was one of the major factors inhibiting their TBLT practices.

All the teachers experienced challenges with the textbook limitations. Racy's instruction seemed to be greatly influenced by textbooks because she used textbooks to guide instruction and almost all of her activities revolved around the textbooks. The use of the English textbook Oxford English which Racy believed lacked a systematic approach consistent with communicative teaching principles also hindered her attempts to practice TBLT.

Two other classroom factors found to influence the implementation of TBLT were time constraints and class size. All the teachers found the 45 minute class period was not enough time to implement TBLT. They explained that there was too much teaching content to cover in each class period and implementing tasks was time consuming. Lack of instructional and practice time was a bigger concern to teachers than was class size. The big class size which was expected to be a major obstacle of implementing TBLT was not emphasized by the participant teachers. Only Marie mentioned that big class sizes made it impossible for her to take care of each of her students when they came across difficulties in performing challenging tasks. In observed lessons it seemed that all teachers were good at activating their students by organising all kinds of activities or tasks even in big classes.

Student needs and language proficiency levels often perplexed the four teachers during TBLT design and organization. Another issue regarding students was that because of exam pressure students felt they needed to pay attention to their formal knowledge of the language which to some extent weakened their enthusiasm to participate in class activities or tasks. Since all the students shared a common first language it was also difficult to ensure that they only used English during pair and group work.

There are some factors from teachers' perspective impeding their TBLT practice. Their vague ideas about implementation of TBLT misled their classroom practices. Besides the insufficient pre-service and in-service training and negative influences from their early English learning and teaching experiences more or less retarded their TBLT practice.

Racy and Daisy had vague understandings about TBLT which directly resulted in weaknesses in their TBLT practices. All of the participant teachers felt a lack of sufficient and efficient teacher training regarding practical techniques of implementing TBLT in classrooms. Besides the way that they had been taught as language learners themselves seemed to have a big influence on their teaching. For Daisy and Racy long term experienced teachers their teaching had already developed a fairly rigid and conventional pattern. It seemed that they were not ready to accept adopt or implement alternative innovative teaching approaches either pedagogically or mentally.

Some interesting findings arose through discussion of the factors affecting these teachers' practice. For example different from the findings of other studies in which students' passive roles and reluctant participation became major obstacles to the implementation of CLT in China in this study students were found to be interested and motivated in participate actively in class activities or tasks and their active
cooperation helped to make teachers' instruction go smoothly.

Another interesting finding was that class size and number of students, which were always emphasized as the big obstacles in implementing communicative language teaching in China, did not exert a great influence on teachers' TBLT practices in this study. In the observed lessons, each of the teachers excelled in activating students by organizing all kinds of activities with a big class size of more than 40 students and few of them stated that class size was the major obstacle.

As anticipated, however, teachers' beliefs about TBLT played a determining role in their classroom practice. As Richards (1996) states, belief system is a primary source of teachers' classroom practices. The study indicates that teachers' teaching practices develop from their own individual experiences as language learners, their teacher education experiences and their own personal beliefs.

It can be concluded that teachers and their knowledge of and beliefs towards TBLT were the most important factors contributing to successful implementation. The instructor's teaching philosophy and skills of class management among many other factors exerted a determining force upon the classroom organization and the learning atmosphere.

5 Implications

When implementing the new curriculum, EFL teachers in China have been greatly encouraged to use a task-based approach. However, according to results of this study, even 'top' teachers, the four 'master' teachers in this study, may have vague concepts about what constitutes a task and what are the essential elements of task-based teaching. Their mistaken understandings of this approach can lead to classroom practices which are inconsistent with the basic principles of TBLT. Recommendations for curriculum planners are that the theoretical underpinnings of TBLT be stated clearly in the curriculum, with detailed instructions for practice demonstrated. Another suggestion is that curriculum, which is regarded in China as an official document indicating the national educational policy should be carried out in logical steps. More training courses are needed so that teachers can better understand and know how to implement the teaching objectives using the new approaches. This training should be given before actual enforcement in a particular region and should be focused on practical techniques and demonstration lessons.

On the other hand, teachers need to engage in self-reflections when they come across difficulties in implementing innovative teaching approaches. It is of little use to attribute all obstacles to the external factors such as big class sizes, textbooks, student passivity and so on. Results of this study indicate that teachers and their beliefs are the most important factors influencing the implementation of a task-based approach. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to identify practices inconsistent with principles and beliefs about effective language learning and teaching.

Last but not least, cooperation within and between schools should be enhanced. Teacher cooperation not only benefits individual teachers' professional development but also ensures more successful implementation of curriculum reform in EFL contexts.

To sum up, as an innovative approach, TBLT in China needs more understanding and in-depth research. Teachers need more time to practice and most importantly, to feel the merits that tasks centred around the negotiation of meaning can bring to EFL classrooms and to students' learning. Therefore, government policymakers should take a long-term view of the development of TBLT in China and maintain an objective attitude in the face of criticism. China is still in a very preliminary stage of field testing TBLT. To improve implementation, we need understanding, adaptation, patience, tolerance and confidence.

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Notes for Appendix COLT Part A adapted

L Teacher to student or whole class
S Student to student or whole class
Same Same activities
Diff Different activities
Non Non communicative activities
Pre Pre communicative activities
Com Com municative activities
Str Structured communicative activities
Auth Authentic activities
L Listening
S Speaking
R Reading
W Writing