Teachers' Perspectives on Task-Based Language Teaching: Practices, Strengths, and Weaknesses

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Article Info

Abstract

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a modern, effective and widely discussed method prioritizes purposeful tasks to improve students' communicative competence. Although it enhances classroom engagement through authentic language use, the majority of English teachers in Nepal continue to employ conventional methods, with very few embracing learner-centred, task-based practices. This study explores teachers' perspectives on task-based language teaching: practices, strengths, and weaknesses. It employs a narrative research design to explore participants' lived experiences of TBLT. Four secondary school teachers from Rupandehi, Nepal were purposefully chosen. Information was collected through semi-structured interviews. The raw data was transcribed and translated into English, coded, organized it into themes, analyzed and interpreted descriptively to derive meaning. This study reveals that teachers hold positive perceptions of TBLT that can improve students' communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. It also encourages learners' freedom and integrates linguistic skills. However, exam-focused curricula, resource constraints, students' unwillingness to collaborate and insufficient teacher training are challenges in its implications. The study can contribute to teachers adopting the learner-centered approach in their classrooms.

Introduction

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of the most innovative, student-centred and widely discussed approaches. However, English language teachers still employ conventional approaches rather than using TBLT in their classrooms in Nepal. TBLT underscores learners' natural abilities to acquire language incidentally through task completion, which draws their devotion to language form (Ellis et al., 2020). Through pedagogical and real-world tasks, TBLT enables language learners to

grasp the language dynamically. Instead of concentrating solely on language structures, it prioritizes communication, real-life language application, and authentic, goal-oriented tasks (Putri & Refnaldi, 2021). Thus, TBLT can bridge the gaps in structural approaches to teaching speaking, which primarily focuses on systematic instruction, deliberate learning, and the formal aspects of language (Ellis et al., 2020). It fosters meaningful interaction (Harris, 2016) and learner autonomy through structured task cycles involving preparation, performance, and feedback. TBLT employs students' first language (L1) to help them complete tasks and learn L2; however, excessive L1 use could make implementation challenging (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

TBLT is a widely recognized approach in language teaching, highlighting meaningful communication and practical language application. It encourages learners to engage in tasks that reflect real-life language use, fostering both linguistic skills and communicative proficiency (Mudinillah et al., 2024). It aligns with a humanistic teaching approach by emphasizing both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning, fostering collaboration and understanding. TBLT defines tasks as real-world activities requiring learners to use language meaningfully (Nunan, 2010). These tasks include problem-solving and negotiating meaning, contributing to effective language acquisition. It is a key component of communicative language teaching, where language used in communicative tasks serves as a means to accomplish goals through meaning exchange (Nunan, 2010). Harmer (2007) highlights three key phases in task-based instruction: the pre-task phase, where teachers introduce the topic, provide instructions, and emphasize essential vocabulary; the during-task phase, where students engage in activities with potential guidance such as time constraints or assigned roles; and the post-task phase, where students reflect on their learning, share experiences, and refine their language skills. However, many teachers do not strictly follow this structure (Xue, 2022). Rather than focusing on traditional grammar instruction, TBLT engages learners in activities that require language use to accomplish specific goals (Mudinillah, 2019). This approach highlights practical language application, ensuring learners develop both linguistic competence and real-world communication skills.

Literature Review

TBLT emerged as a response to the limitations of conventional methods, such as rote learning. TBLT emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks as the main tool for language learning, enabling students to participate in real-world communication and apply language skills practically (Ellis, 2018). It increases and improves student classroom participation. The research study identifies three essential features of TBLT that enhance classroom practice. Firstly, TBLT aligns with learner-centred teaching (Ellis, 2009). Secondly, it includes clear goals, structured procedures, and defined outcomes (Nunan, 2010). Lastly, TBLT emphasizes meaningful, content-

driven activities rather than focusing solely on linguistic forms. Similarly, Ellis (2009) outlines eight principles for implementing TBLT, such as maintaining appropriate task difficulty, setting clear objectives, and ensuring students understand the purpose of tasks. Moreover, active participation, risk-taking, and meaningful communication are encouraged, with reflection and discussion playing a key role in learning. Self-assessment is also emphasized to promote learner autonomy and constant language growth.

TBLT is a student-centered approach that aligns with real-life experiences, increasing motivation and learner autonomy (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Prabhu (1987) categorizes tasks into three types: information gap (transferring information), reasoning gap (using logic to generate ideas), and opinion gap (inferring or deducing solutions). Ellis (2009) further differentiates focused tasks, which target specific grammar structures, from unfocused tasks, emphasizing real-life communication. Nunan (2010) contrasts real-world tasks, simulating authentic language use, with pedagogical tasks, which prioritize classroom-based learning. These approaches balance linguistic accuracy with communicative competence in EFL instruction and increase the communicative efficiency of the students in English (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2019). Pedagogical tasks maintain a balance between linguistic accuracy and communicative competence in enhancing students' efficiency in using English. TBLT has both benefits and challenges. Huang (2016) found increased motivation and language skill development in general English classes. Suhendi and Purwarno (2018) stated that learning occurs through interactions with peers, teachers, and the broader world. Also, Sun (2022) found that TBLT improved listening skills, cultural knowledge, and student engagement in communication skills.

TBLT boosts students' speaking skills through communicative activities. Xinran (2023) confirmed TBLT's effectiveness in enhancing undergraduate students' speaking skills. Bui and Tai (2022) explored the integration of translanguaging with TBLT, showing its potential for improving L2 learning. Research has shown that TBLT is highly effective in developing speaking skills, especially in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Research studies by Panduwangi (2021) and Kong et al. (2022) indicated that TBLT plays a crucial role in enhancing students' linguistic accuracy and speaking ability. Despite its advantages, the wider implementation of TBLT faces barriers, including teachers' lack of confidence and expertise in designing task-based activities and conflict with shifting from traditional teaching methods. However, English language teachers' perceptions and practices in the Nepalese ELT context are still underexplored. The purpose of this article is to explore English language teachers' perspectives of TBLT regarding practices, strengths, and weaknesses they encounter in the implementation of it. To reveal this phenomenon in this study, I formulated two research questions.

1. How do English language teachers perceive and practice TBLT in secondary schools?

2. What strengths and challenges do they encounter in implementing TBLT English classes?

Research Methodology

This study focuses on secondary English language teachers' perceptions and practices of TBLT. The study employs a narrative research design to explore participants' perceptions and lived experiences of task-based language teaching. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that explores human experiences through storytelling, emphasizing the significance of lived experiences in understanding culture and identity (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). It involves collecting and analyzing personal narratives to gain deeper insights into individual perspectives. Four experienced English language teachers from four community schools located in Rupandehi were purposefully selected for interviews to explore their real perceptions and lived experiences in employing TBLT in English language classrooms. Semi-structured interviews facilitated open-ended answers, allowing participants to share their perspectives and emotions about TBLT in depth (Chen, 2016). In-depth interviews serve as the most efficient approach for gathering detailed information on a topic, facilitating clear communication between the interviewer and participants (Morris, 2015). Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis, I transcribed and translated the raw data into English, coded, organized it into themes, and interpreted it to derive meaning. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants.

Results and Discussion

The findings have been discussed, analyzed and interpreted relating to the relevant literature, organized around the following four main themes.

Teachers' Perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching

Teachers believe that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a successful, learner-centred method that encourages student participation and fosters the development of useful language skills via relevant assignments. However, because of their training, experiences in the classroom, and contextual challenges, their perspectives differ slightly.

Shanti mentioned, the significance of both theoretical knowledge and real-world application of TBLT. She revealed, *"I studied the theoretical aspect of task-based language instruction in my M. Ed. But after completing NELTA training, I discovered how to use it in an actual classroom."* She learned both the concept and application of TBLT through academic courses and training. She added, "*I know that TBLT decreases the amount of time teachers spend talking while encouraging communication, collaboration, critical thinking, student autonomy, and problem-solving skills."* Her opinions are very similar to those of Richards and Schmidt (2010), who describe TBLT as a student-centred method that actively engages

students in the planning, teaching, and evaluation processes. Krishna asserted, *"TBLT is a learner-centred approach, so it supports learners' active involvement and their interest in solving the problem of the assigned task by the teacher."* The learner-centred approach of TBLT, according to Krishna, encourages students' active participation and interest in resolving the task's issue. Both viewpoints emphasize how student-driven learning has replaced teacher-led learning. This opinion is supported by Ellis et al. (2020), who contend that TBLT improves student engagement in discussion and decision-making. TBLT not only enhances learner participation in discourse and social problem-solving but can also boost their concentration in the learning process. However, challenges such as time constraints, classroom management and exam-oriented education systems hamper its implementation in English classes.

Deepa placed more emphasis on skill integration than Shanti did on implementation and its cognitive strengths. She proclaimed, *"Task activities that are done in or out of the classroom integrate four language skills that encourage students to collaborate and think critically."* Her viewpoint is in line with that of Willis & Willis (2007) and Ellis (2009), who contend that task-based activities support language development in a comprehensive way. In this line, Kamal stated, "*Assigning tasks in the classroom allows students to practice and explore language meaning, enhancing their communication and problem-solving abilities,"* Students can meaningfully interact with language through classroom activities, which enhances their communication and problem-solving abilities and results in notable progress. According to Harris (2016) and Dorathy & Mahalakshmi (2016), TBLT increases motivation and helps learners enhance accuracy and fluency.

All these perspectives support Shanti's assertion that TBLT encourages independence and collaboration. The others did not specifically address the significance of formal training in effectively transferring theory to classroom practice, but Shanti did. Participants accepted some challenges in spite of the promising perspectives. The successful use of TBLT in English classes is frequently hindered by time limits, problems with classroom management, and exam-oriented educational systems. Although teachers admire TBLT, these structural constraints imply that, in the absence of institutional support, its adoption may be uneven.

Moreover, Shanti clarified, "*TBLT incorporates diverse tasks-ranging from discussions to collaborative projects which enhance creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork."* According to her, more accomplished students frequently help their peers, fostering a welcoming and engaging environment. This finding is in line with Chen et al. (2023) who asserted that TBLT promotes interaction through collaborative learning. Shanti's views are in line with those of her peers and demonstrate a fair grasp of the theoretical and practical facets of TBLT. Her focus on professional development and training adds a subtle dimension that hasn't been

covered in great detail by others. All things considered, the participants have a favourable perspective of TBLT and recognize both its advantages and disadvantages in actual classroom settings.

Teachers' Practices of Task-Based Language Teaching

Instead of acting as a direct teacher in TBLT, the teacher facilitates learning. Before the work, the instructor presents the subject and pertinent terminology, helps students with the task with little assistance, and then gives feedback (Richards & Rodgers, 2013). Before the task, the teacher discusses the subject and vocabulary; during the task, the teacher offers minimal assistance; and after the task, the teacher provides feedback.

Deepa stated, *"As a facilitator, I engage my students actively in the assigned tasks based on students' needs through group work to enhance their interaction and self-directed learning."* She involves students in assigned tasks personalized to their needs, using group work to promote interaction and self-directed learning. Students are encouraged to communicate with their classmates more actively in the classroom when they get task-based language instruction (Simion & Genova, 2019) and are provided with opportunities to interact with one another, helping them lower their anxiety (Ganta, 2015). Krishna claimed, "*I organize the class into groups consisting of students with diverse abilities. In these groups, the more capable students assist those who struggle, and they seek the teacher's guidance for more challenging tasks."* This indicates that the teachers are somewhat comfortable with implementing TBLT in their classrooms and are well aware of its theoretical components. Both participants Krishna and Deepa support the idea that interaction and collaboration improve learning. The practices of the participants are consistent with Chen et al. (2018). According to them, learning outcomes are better for pupils who work in small groups than for those who work alone. Supporting this approach, Vygotsky (1986) emphasizes that true learning occurs when students work together in pairs and groups.

Teacher plays multiple roles, including mentor, facilitator, and resource provider, adapting their support based on students' needs to engage them in meaningful communication, collaborate in groups, and use real-life language applications (Richards & Rodgers, 2013). It promotes autonomy, as learners navigate challenges, negotiate meaning, and reflect on their progress (Van den Branden, 2012). By fostering real-world communication and student involvement, TBLT enhances motivation and confidence in learners (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In this regard, Deepa claimed, "*While teaching, I give general instructions before assigning tasks and activities to my students. I engage my students with the content and provide support. At the end of the session, students present their work, which combines their learning."* While teaching, he first provides his students with general instructions before assigning tasks and activities. She actively engages students with the content and offers support as needed. At the end of the session,

the students present their work, reinforcing their learning. These findings align with the study by Chen and Wang (2019). TBLT enhances students' engagement in language learning, making them more active in class. It fosters better interactions by promoting collaborative learning. Deepa emphasizes thought and synthesis, offers broad guidance, promotes participation, and invites students to share what they have learned whereas Krishna highlights the creation of mixed-ability groups and outlines a more encouraging network in which the instructor steps in mainly to help with difficult parts of the assignment.

Participants' practices are in harmony with Chen and Wang (2019). They found that task-based language teaching (TBLT) enhances motivation, critical thinking, engagement, and collaboration. Students responded positively to TBLT as it connects to real-life experiences. Task-based language teaching increases students' motivation to learn English (Simion & Genova, 2019). These principles collectively contribute to a structured, student-centered approach that enhances language proficiency through engagement and interaction.

Benefits of Using Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a communicative approach that emphasizes meaningful tasks over isolated language structures, enhancing real-life language use and fluency. Kamal stated, *"TBLT promotes active learning by engaging students in problem-solving and decision-making. It also fosters critical thinking and creativity and takes responsibility for their learning."* TBLT encourages students' active learning by involving them in problem-solving and decision-making. It enhances their critical thinking and creativity, taking charge of their learning. His experience is in harmony with East (2017). He stated that TBLT has been developing as a learner-focused and experiential teaching method, originating from the implementation of communicative language teaching.

Krishna claimed, *"TBLT reduces teacher dependency on textbooks, integrates four language skills and makes learning reliable, real and practical."* Task-Based Language Teaching minimizes the teacher's reliance on textbooks and naturally integrates language skills, making learning more authentic, real and practical. TBLT enhances the authenticity of language teaching by recreating real-life situations. Although perfectly authentic contexts may not always be possible, these simulations still successfully prepare students for using the language in actual settings. He added, *"TBLT increases students' fluency through interactive and goal-oriented tasks and encourages collaboration, enhancing social interaction and teamwork."* TBLT boosts students' fluency with interactive, goal-focused tasks and fosters collaboration, strengthening social interaction and teamwork. His lived story is in harmony with (Nunan, 2004; Larsen Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Masuram & Sripada, 2020). They stated that it encourages student interaction, builds confidence, boosts fluency and confidence and supports real-world language use in interaction. Language assignments provide students with the chance to

actively engage with the material, discuss real-world problems, negotiate, and come up with the best answers in groups or pairs. TBLT emphasizes meaningful language use and real-world tasks in speaking (Moore, 2018). TBLT enhances practical communication skills and addresses the teaching challenges of learners

Shanti asserted, *"When I use TBLT in my class, it helps my students develop communicative skills by the use of communicative activities, deepening their understanding of the content. Even my shy students engage in discussions with their classmates in pairs or groups and improve vocabulary and language structures."* Using TBLT in his class enhances his students' communicative skills while deepening their understanding of the subject matter. Students in TBLT programs outperformed those in traditional language programs in terms of communicative competence. His findings are similar to Long (2015). She added, "*TBLT engages students, enhances real-life tasks and authentic language."* She highlights the importance of real-world tasks and interaction in language learning, emphasizing the need for authentic communicative activities in the classroom. Research suggests that even shy students actively engage in discussions when working in pairs or groups (Ulla & Perales, 2021). TBLT fosters natural interaction in the target language, helping students overcome hesitation and develop confidence. Additionally, it encourages a sense of responsibility, as learners must complete tasks independently without constant teacher supervision. These findings align with Kafipour et al. (2018), who reported that task-based learning enhances Iranian EFL learners' language use, vocabulary acquisition, content development, and organizational skills. Similarly, Panduwangi (2021) found that TBLT significantly improves communicative competence and fluency. The participating teachers in this study also acknowledged that the effective use of language tasks enhances students' communicative abilities.

In the same vein, Krishna stated, *"When I provide an interesting task to my students, they are motivated to learn as it reduces their nervousness. I can also engage them in learning as they enjoy working actively with their friends."* Providing interesting tasks reduces students' nervousness and motivates them to learn by encouraging active, enjoyable collaboration with peers. Krishna's view aligns with Wangdi and Zimik (2024). They stated that if teachers select engaging tasks, they can enhance students' enjoyment of learning, which increases their participation. Enjoyable tasks help reduce students' nervousness (Bao & Du, 2015) and minimize classroom monotony (Shimray & Wangdi, 2023). Kamal shared his experience thus, *"TBLT can support students to learn language naturally and develop their communicative competence."* The participant's lived experience makes it clear that TBLT supports natural language acquisition in the real world, developing their communicative competence. Similar findings were made by Waluyo and Bakoko (2022), who asserted that students' speaking abilities and their desire to communicate were positively correlated.

He further clarified, *"TBLT can address the problems faced by mixed-ability learners. They can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their learning themselves."* It allows for differentiated learning and self-assessment, helping students recognize their progress and areas for improvement. This is similar to Ellis (2009), who highlights that TBLT fosters natural learning by emphasizing meaning while incorporating language rules.

Kamal, Krishna, and Shanti all agree that TBLT increases students' fluency and confidence, particularly when they collaborate in groups or pairs. They stated that when given well-designed assignments, even introverted students participate more actively. The participants affirmed that TBLT promotes authentic language use, student engagement, fluency and communicative competence, and collaborative and learner-driven environments. However, Kamal emphasizes cognitive development and autonomy, Krishna emphasizes motivation, fluency, and enjoyment, and Shanti emphasizes inclusive participation and the development of communicative skills. They all support TBLT as a very successful, student-centred pedagogy that promotes language competency and human development.

Challenges of Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT requires extensive planning, high teacher expertise, and effective classroom management. Assessing student progress can be difficult since traditional tests may not align with task-based learning. Deepa stated, *"My students love using structured learning over interactive tasks. So, they do not enjoy interactive activities."* It requires both time and resources for effective classroom management. My school does not provide adequate support for implementing it."* Beginners may struggle due to a lack of explicit grammar instruction, and some students may prefer structured learning over interactive tasks. TBLT can be time-consuming, and resource-intensive, and may lead to classroom management issues. She faces challenges as she does not get institutional support in supplying adequate resources for TBLT implementation.

Teachers must create engaging tasks while managing classroom dynamics, which requires flexibility and careful planning. Shanti stated, *"Due to the exam-oriented curriculum, it is difficult to complete the course on time because it requires both time and effort. Extroverted students may overpower introverted students, making shy students feel uncomfortable in class."* Exam-oriented curriculum, resource limitations, time constraints, and shy student reluctance to participate can hinder its implementation. In addition, students may overemphasize fluency at the expense of accuracy. These findings are consistent with Yassin et al (2018). Any task or activity that enhances students' fluency and proficiency in a language class through active engagement. Kamal stated, *"I cannot implement TBLT effectively due to my students' inadequate proficiency in English. They are familiar with learning English through traditional methods of teaching and grammar-focused activities. I am also not trained properly to use TBLT in the class."* Kamal's narratives reveal that

more controlled speaking tasks, conventional teaching methods with grammar-oriented exercises, more organized speaking activities and inadequate training hinder implementing it. His view is in harmony with Hu and McKay (2018), who emphasized that teachers must have adequate pedagogical skills and language proficiency to successfully implement EMI and support student achievement. However, difficulties persist, especially in environments where conventional, teacher-focused methods dominate teaching (Ya, 2021). The narratives revealed that in the classroom, teachers usually use teacher-dominated pedagogy. The evidence of low learning outcomes and inadequate levels of English among students was a low rate of student-centred and active learning practices that hindered the implementation of TBLT.

Teacher training is vital for effective TBLT implementation, enhancing task facilitation, student outcomes, and overcoming resistance in traditional settings (Mudinillah et al, 2024). Teachers often struggle to transition to TBLT without adequate training, as they struggle to apply a task-based approach efficiently in teaching English. Conventional learning environments may also create difficulties in adopting this approach. Despite these challenges, TBLT remains an effective approach for enhancing meaningful language use (Ellis, 2020). Deepa asserted, "*There is inadequate collaboration, information gap and group problem-solving activities among teachers.*" Her experience highlights the absence of collaborative tasks in the TBLT framework, which are essential for advanced speaking skills like negotiation and critical thinking. Willis and Willis (2007) argue that tasks promoting information gaps and group problem-solving lead to more meaningful language use. The lack of such tasks indicates a need for more cognitively demanding, collaborative activities in TBLT.

Deepa, Shanti, and Kamal all agree that TBLT implementation calls for a significant investment of time, energy, and institutional support all of which they believe are absent from their present teaching environments. They agree that many students, particularly those with weaker English proficiency or exam-focused mindsets, find interactive assignments difficult and prefer structured or traditional training. TBLT implementation is context-sensitive, obstructed not only by the approach but also by teacher capacity, student preparation, and institutional culture. Their shared experiences confirm the findings of Ellis (2020) and Mudinillah et al. (2024), which state that TBLT can only encourage meaningful language usage in coincidence with sufficient training, materials, and support networks.

Conclusion and Implications

In spite of the continued domination of conventional approaches over learner-centred practices in English language instruction in Nepal, TBLT is steadily gaining popularity. This study aims to explore English teachers' perceptions and practices regarding task-based language teaching, along with its strengths and weaknesses using narrative inquiry. The findings indicate that teachers have positive

perceptions of TBLT, recognizing its role in enhancing communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving through real-life tasks. Teachers are well aware of their roles in facilitating student engagement and fostering collaborative learning through communicative activities such as language games, role-plays, discussions, project work, pair work, and group work. Tasks personalized to learners' needs, interests, and proficiency levels enhance both communicative skills and content knowledge. Furthermore, teachers' skills and the use of ICTS play a key role in TBLT's success, integrating speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Despite its benefits, challenges such as controlled speaking tasks, over-reliance on conventional methods, limited resources, time constraints, classroom management issues, insufficient teamwork, and inadequate teacher training hinder its effective implementation. Addressing these requires balancing fluency and accuracy, engaging students in meaningful tasks, and adapting communicative activities to language classrooms.

The study suggests incorporating TBLT into EFL curricula and providing teacher training to overcome challenges. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, to further explore TBLT implementation. Government support in professional development and resource provision is essential for the successful implementation of TBLT in language teaching.

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