



TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ACTION:



*Principles, Research Insights,
and Horizons*

EDGAR EMMANUELL GARCÍA-PONCE



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TEACHING IN ACTION:
Principles, Research Insights, and Horizons

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Edgar Emmanuell García-Ponce

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DEDICATION

To Chey Ponce

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PREFACE

This book offers an in-depth exploration of the use of communicative tasks in language classrooms, drawing on the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). While grounded in TBLT, the primary focus of the book is on the implementation of tasks in classrooms, rather than on a comprehensive theoretical account of the communicative approach. It examines the use of tasks as pedagogical tools from cognitive, interactional, and instructional perspectives, understanding the realities of language teaching and learning contexts. Based upon this, the book argues that task-based language practices are influenced by an interaction of cognitive, practical, and instructional factors, thereby affecting students' language performance and development. Central to this book is the recognition that contextual variables, including task design characteristics, planning conditions, teacher beliefs, and classroom dynamics, can shape these practices. The book explores the ways in which these context-specific variables influence task implementation, with particular attention to how the roles and behaviours of teachers and students mediate language learning. It argues that task-based interactions are not merely the result of instructional design but are co-constructed in specific classroom settings, where cognitive, practical, and sociocultural dimensions interact to shape language performance and learning. In response, the book advocates for teacher education informed by classroom-based research. It emphasises how crucial it is to provide pre- and in-service teachers with both knowledge of TBLT principles and the critical, context-sensitive ability to recognise and respond to local challenges and demands that may affect the successful use of communicative tasks.

The contribution of the book is threefold. First, it outlines foundational tenets of TBLT and communicative tasks, offering practice-oriented insights for teachers interested in adopting task-based strategies to improve communicative language teaching. Second, it examines research on how task design, implementation conditions, and student- and teacher-related factors influence task performance and the implementation of TBLT. Third, it proposes future directions for task-based research and pre- and in-service teacher education on TBLT, with the purpose of promoting successful task design in diverse classroom contexts.

This book is a helpful resource for pre- and in-service teachers seeking to use communicative tasks with improved results, particularly those struggling in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. It is equally relevant for teacher educators, curriculum designers, and researchers committed to supporting more communicative, responsive, context-sensitive approaches to language teaching and learning. By bridging research and practice, the book supports a more grounded, adaptable, and impactful use of tasks in the language classroom.

BACKGROUND

For decades, attention has been placed on classroom interactions that promote students' participation and the use of the target language (Walsh, 2011). According to Walsh (2002), these interactions are significantly intricate since during their performance, several discourse functions and learning and interactional strategies are used to communicate efficiently. When classroom interactions are performed effectively, students have greater opportunities to develop and reinforce language knowledge, modify their production speech to make it more accurate, and maintain relationships with other individuals (Gass, 2003; Walsh, 2013).

The above learning and interaction benefits are maximised when teachers and students adopt the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach. TBLT is considered a communicative approach in which the use of tasks is key to advancing language acquisition. The emerging interest in adopting TBLT has been the result of recent movements towards student-centred language teaching, which sees students as “interactants who can transform and push their own language skills towards greater development” (Garcia-Ponce, 2020, p. 47). This suggests that TBLT is a communicative approach that could be used to promote students' use of the target language for communicative purposes, reflective practices oriented towards raising awareness of language aspects, and learning autonomy and involvement.

Based upon the above, we can thus claim that TBLT supports students in developing English skills that are necessary to fulfil the demands of a globalised world in which we are currently immersed. This is the primary objective of higher education since the competitive labour market requires that university students and graduates are able to perform disciplinary and professional

activities which most often require the use of English as an international language. To this end, TBLT plays an important role because through the use of tasks, students need to communicate using the target language to reach an outcome. Depending on the characteristics and design of tasks, students have opportunities for using different interactional and learning strategies to foster their interlanguage development.

However, TBLT and, more precisely, the use of tasks may encourage complex interactions that involve students' unequal interactional roles, several participants, fast communication, multiple foci and discourse functions, etcetera (Garcia-Ponce, 2020). Moreover, studies indicate that a wide range of context-specific variables, including class size, class time, textbook use, institutional exams, and the expected roles and behaviours of teachers and students, may influence the nature of classroom interactions, TBLT implementation, and task use. Given this, the effectiveness of adopting TBLT principles in language classrooms can be restricted by a number of locally-situated factors and needs. Because of these locally-situated needs and factors, classroom interactions may not always be conducive to promoting the development of language skills as expected in the communicative approach (Walsh, 2002). This is explained by the strong influence that context-specific factors and needs exert on teaching and interactional practices which in some cases may not be in line with pedagogic principles.

Purpose and Benefits of the Book

The purpose of this book is threefold. Firstly, it provides the reader with an overview of the TBLT approach and the characteristics of tasks, so he or she understands the teaching and learning principles of the communicative approach. Secondly, it seeks to demonstrate how task-based practices in the language classroom can be influenced by context-specific variables, including task design, students' individual differences, teachers' beliefs, and other contextual factors. Finally, it intends to show the intricacy of implementing TBLT and particularly tasks by revealing the impact of the characteristics of tasks, implementation conditions, and other relevant variables (e.g. language proficiency, task engagement, and teachers' beliefs) on task performance in language classrooms.

Considering the above, one of the benefits of reading this book is that it allows the reader to gain a full understanding of TBLT and how to use communicative tasks in his or her teaching and learning context. By drawing on research evidence, the reader will be able to evaluate from a critical viewpoint how contextual factors (including cognitive, practical, and instructional factors) influence task implementation and how they can be addressed in practice. Also, the book provides an opportunity to develop an understanding of future research areas and practice-oriented teacher education recommendations, helping stakeholders (i.e. teachers, students, researchers, and policymakers) take into account the impact of context-specific factors on task-based practices and how they can prepare to address them and design strategies to implement the TBLT approach more effectively in line with their teaching and learning principles.

Outline of the Book

The overall structure of the book takes the form of five chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of TBLT. The aim of the chapter is to present a brief description of the origins of the approach and its evolution throughout the decades. The remaining sections of the chapter review the main tenets of TBLT, as well as the innovation that it promotes in teaching and learning languages. Chapter 2 starts by laying out the four language dimensions (complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency [CALF]), and analyses the interaction of the CALF dimensions as a result of the design characteristics of speaking and writing tasks. The purpose of Chapter 3 is to give a review of task implementation conditions (i.e., task complexity, task difficulty, planning opportunities, and task repetition). Similarly to Chapter 3, Chapter 4 discusses the role of teacher- and student-related factors (i.e. language proficiency, task engagement, and teacher beliefs) in the implementation of task-based practices and language performance. The final chapter discusses the benefits of teacher education on TBLT, arguing that for the communicative approach to be effective in the teaching and learning of languages, teacher education should support teachers with the tools to implement it in their local teaching contexts. This entails acquiring an in-depth understanding of TBLT principles and the locally-situated factors that impact classroom practice. To this end, the chapter proposes that reflection and data collected by teachers have an important role to play in the process of implementing TBLT effectively. It concludes by outlining future directions for the application of TBLT, teacher education, and task-based research.

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CHAPTER ONE

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

For more than four decades, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been an important innovation in the teaching and learning of second and foreign languages, as it integrates communicative practices considering students' learning and language needs. Drawing on principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), TBLT supports a change from traditional, grammar-focused to more authentic, communicative language teaching. The approach prioritises the use of meaningful tasks as central classroom activities for language performance and acquisition. It also emphasises real-world language use, encouraging students to be involved in authentic communication rather than merely mastering the learning of discrete grammatical structures. By placing tasks at the heart of language teaching, TBLT promotes the development of students' communicative competence in a way that is pedagogically feasible and contextually relevant.

The present chapter provides an overview of TBLT. It begins with a brief historical account of the methodology and its theoretical background. It then discusses the central principles of communicative tasks and the realities of using them in second and foreign language classrooms based upon research evidence. It also addresses the challenges and difficulties of using communicative tasks, particularly in classrooms where traditional teaching prevails. The chapter concludes with the argument that the use of tasks and TBLT in general are necessary innovations for a language education change and thus transformation in language classrooms.

1.2 Task-Based Language Teaching: A Historical Review

The 1970s marked the beginning of CLT in the teaching of languages. Initially, one of the main characteristics of this communicative approach was that it drew upon theories that promote the development of communicative competence (Hymes, 1971) and the practical function of language (Halliday, 1973). Since its beginning, CLT has been a useful approach for the development of students' communicative skills through real-world language interactions in different contexts.

Traditional methods promoted grammatical knowledge as the primary aim; CLT, in contrast, has emphasised interaction as both the means and the primary goal of study. With this nature, CLT put forward the idea that to develop communicative competence, one must go beyond language learning practices focused just on producing grammatically accurate utterances and obtaining knowledge of isolated language structures (Savignon, 2002). The approach shifted from a 'synthetic' method of teaching founded on an inventory of grammatical structures to an 'analytic' approach based on language functions such as 'expressing agreement and disagreement' and the semantic notions such as 'time' and 'space' (Widdowson, 1978). The significance of authentic communication was then recognised by the transition to the 'analytic' approach (Skehan, 2003). In other words, CLT concentrated on activities that stressed significance and necessitated the communication of meanings (Widdowson, 1978). CLT therefore focused its attention on activities that emphasise meaning and require the transmission of information (Skehan, 2003). These pedagogic shifts and developments were influential

on several pedagogic levels, including syllabus design, methodology, and language assessment.

Nevertheless, despite its popularity in language education, CLT never developed into a well-defined approach. This resulted in several interpretations of its pedagogical principles and how teachers should implement it in their classroom contexts. Howatt (1984) indicates that the absence of a clear definition of the approach resulted in teachers adopting two different versions of the approach: a weak version, where linguistic realisations guided content selection, but the actual classroom methodology was largely traditional and structural, and a strong version that aligned content with communicative activities and heavily emphasising fluency.

Between the 1970s and 1980s, two other developments occurred during the CLT movement. First, the vague term ‘communicative activity’ was then replaced by that of ‘task’ (Skehan, 2003). Therefore, tasks began to gain significance in the language curriculum of CLT (Nunan, 2004). Second, TBLT emerged from CLT (Skehan, 2003). In its early stages, besides drawing on principles of a strong version of CLT, TBLT received much input from research and theory in the field of second language acquisition (Skehan, 2003). According to Ellis *et al.* (2020), the emergence of TBLT was based on the following incidents:

- Dissatisfaction with the Structural-Oral Situational Method. Prabhu (1987) was dissatisfied with this method, which was prominent in India. He believed that to develop students’ communicative competence, there must be meaningful conditions, provided by tasks, that encourage them to necessitate authentic communication.

- Combination of both syllabus and methodological issues. There was a belief that the TBLT approach could provide an “integrated solution to both syllabus and methodological issues” (Long, 1985, p. 89). In relation to this, Long stated that “there is no reason to assume that presenting the target language as a series of discrete linguistic or sociolinguistic teaching points is the best, or even a way to get learners to synthesize the parts into a coherent whole” (p. 79).
- General educational principles and students’ needs. Candlin (1987) noted that it is important that teachers and students jointly negotiate the content of a course. He contended that an approach based on tasks would be the best means for centring the education on students and their needs for learning. At that time, the value of learning that is connected to real-world experience was emphasised through the use of tasks (Long, 2015).
- A link between what students learn (the syllabus) and how they learn (methodology). Nunan (1989) recommended that syllabi should not guide classes; they could be used as check-lists of what has been attained with the use of tasks for a particular lesson.

Moreover, as part of these early proposals for TBLT, scholars in the 1980s attempted to formulate definitions of a ‘task’ and its characteristics. For example, Breen (1989) defined a task as “a structured plan for the provision of opportunities for the refinement of knowledge and capabilities entailed in a new language and its use during communication” (p. 26). Long (1985) described tasks as “the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in between” (p. 89). Nunan (1989) considered that it is necessary that a task provides “a sense of completeness

and stand alone as a communicative act in its own right” (p. 10). However, since the emergence of TBLT, there has been considerable disagreement about what a task is. In Section 1.3, I provide a full discussion of the definitions and current criteria used for defining communicative tasks.

Besides attempts to consistently define a task, new issues have emerged over time. These issues refer to the limited attention paid to general educational principles (Ellis *et al.*, 2020). Subsequently, the rationale for TBLT was further expanded to incorporate general theories of education (Ellis *et al.*, 2020). Since then, it has been believed that TBLT is highly compatible with holistic and experience-driven pedagogies (Ellis *et al.*, 2020). In the next two sections, I further discuss the main principles of tasks and the innovative characteristics of the TBLT approach.

1.3 Core Principles of Tasks and Research Evidence

As we have seen, TBLT is widely regarded as the most prominent communicative approach to teaching and learning languages. Central to TBLT, as indicated by its name, tasks play a pivotal role in fostering language development (Ellis, 2005). Therefore, one of the central aspects of the approach is *the task*. In the literature, defining a task within the context of instructional materials has proven challenging, leading to multiple and diverse definitions. For example, Nunan (1989) describes a task as “a piece of classroom work which involves students in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (p. 10). This definition suggests that a task is primarily focused on meaning, which is associated with fluency.

Prabhu (1987) views a task as “an activity which requires students to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process” (p. 24). Richards (2015) concurs, viewing tasks as “language learning activities in which the primary focus is on meaning, have a real-world connection, and have non-linguistic outcomes” (p. 750). Skehan (1998) describes several features that define a task. These are:

- There is some communication problem to be resolved;
- there is some sort of relationship to analogous real-world activities;
- task completion has some priority; and
- the assessment of the task is in terms of outcomes.

Ellis *et al.* (2020) outline key criteria for defining a task in TBLT:

- The primary focus is on meaning. The workplan is intended to ensure that students are primarily concerned with comprehending and/or producing messages for a communicative purpose (i.e. there is a primary focus on meaning-making).
- There is some kind of gap. The workplan is designed in such a way as to incorporate a gap which creates a need to convey information, to reason or to express an opinion.
- Learners rely mainly on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources. Learners need to draw on their existing linguistic resources (potentially both L1 and L2) and their non-linguistic resources (e.g. gesture; facial expressions) for comprehension and production. There is therefore no explicit presentation of language.

- There is a clearly defined communicative outcome. The workplan specifies the communicative outcome of the task. Thus, task accomplishment is to be assessed not in terms of whether learners use language correctly but in terms of whether the communicative outcome is achieved. (p. 10)

The significant points that emerge from these definitions and criteria are that a task is a pedagogical instrument where L2 communication and meaning are important for addressing real-world needs. Considering their characteristics, it is evident that tasks act as classroom activities that influence students' L2 performance and development, both quantitatively and qualitatively (Garcia-Ponce, 2017). The influence of tasks is motivated by their design characteristics that activate cognitive processes essential for communicative and pedagogical objectives, thereby enhancing language performance and development (Garcia-Ponce, 2017). In language teaching, tasks have been instrumental because they help “engage naturalistic acquisitional mechanisms, cause the underlying interlanguage system to be stretched, and drive development forward” (Skehan, 1998, p. 95). Furthermore, tasks promote language learning through experiential learning (Willis & Willis, 2007). Tasks facilitate “opportunities for authentic language use within the classroom” (Faez & Tavakoli, 2019, p. 2). Other learning benefits are that they foster 1) negotiation, 2) language adjustments, and 3) language experimentation.

Because tasks have the capacity of maximising the learning process (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Walsh, 2002), scholars and practitioners in second language acquisition have focused on comprehending how task design and

implementation procedures (of pre- and post-task activities) can maximise language performance as well as learning (Ahmadian, 2012). Their interest has now shifted towards the relationship between tasks, language performance, and development. A considerable number of scholars have investigated the influence of different task types on L2 performance and development (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Foster & Tavakoli, 2009; Gilabert, 2007; Skehan, 2009; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005; Yuan & Ellis, 2003, among others). These researchers have scrutinised elements of task design, including task complexity (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Gilabert, 2007; Tavakoli, 2009), tasks in different modalities, such as writing versus speaking (Byrne & Manchón, 2014; Kormos, 2014; Tavakoli, 2014), and the interaction of tasks with individual student differences (Awwad & Tavakoli, 2019; Wright, 2013). Historically, research predominantly occurred in second language contexts. Nevertheless, there is a growing tendency toward foreign language contexts where tasks are also used to foster language instruction and acquisition. Some evidence is discussed below.

In an early investigation of the influence of task type on students' language performance, Foster and Skehan (1996) examined the effects of three distinct tasks (personal information, oral narrative, and decision-making tasks) on the performance of a group of pre-intermediate English language students. Their findings show that the personal information task led to error-free and fluent language, but limited syntactic complexity was found in the students' performance. The oral narrative task resulted in high levels of complexity but compromised accuracy. The decision-making task stimulated accurate and complex language. Drawing on Foster and Skehan (1996), Garcia-Ponce and Tavakoli (2022) confirmed that the design characteristics

of the three task types significantly influenced all language dimensions, including complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency (CALF). Their results showed that the personal information task encouraged error-free language and the highest levels of fluency. The narrative task elicited the most syntactically intricate language. In general, the study of Garcia-Ponce and Tavakoli (2022) elucidates that task types promote certain dimensions of performance in CALF measures, corroborating and expanding the findings of Foster and Skehan (1996). As we can see, this evidence and other in this book demonstrate that task and language performance is complex and affected by several contextual conditions (Sadeghi, 2016). In Chapter Two, I provide more empirical evidence regarding the interaction between task design characteristics, task performance indicated by CALF, and context-specific factors.

In sum, the amount of research on TBLT demonstrates the influence of tasks on language performance and development. The studies that I have presented in this section confirm that tasks go beyond classroom activities; they are significant pedagogical instruments capable of influencing language performance and development positively. This evidence suggests that the design and effective execution of tasks can result in significant student engagement, thereby enhancing students' communication abilities that are relevant to real-world needs and situations. As we can see, while we continue to investigate the multifaceted interaction between task design characteristics and students' language performance, TBLT is of great importance in pursuing successful language instruction that significantly benefits students' language proficiency.

1.4 Task-Based Language Teaching as Innovation

For over three decades, educational innovation has received significant attention because of its role in developing students' critical thinking, autonomy, creativity, and other qualities. Innovation is believed to substantially impact students' engagement and offer more individualised learning experiences. As a result, scholars have directed research to understanding the learning opportunities created by innovation. Some pioneer scholars who have investigated innovation are Kennedy (1988) and Henrichsen (1989). More recently, recognition has been given to the prominent work of Fullan (2001) and Hargreaves (2003), who have explored innovation in education.

As in other complex concepts, several definitions of innovation have been proposed in the literature, but for the purpose of this book, I use Carless' (2013) definition of innovation¹ as "an attempt to bring about educational improvement by doing something perceived by implementers as new or different" (p. 1). Some examples of innovation are: new teaching approaches, a change of teaching materials, and technological advancements. Considering this, TBLT can be thus considered an innovation in teaching languages because its main objective is to create communicative opportunities, moving away from teaching rooted traditional methods.

However, although innovation is important in language teaching and learning, numerous attempts to introduce innovations have failed. Carless (2013) identifies three key barriers to effective implementation:

¹ In this section and throughout this book, I use the concept of 'innovation' interchangeably with the term 'change'.

- Teacher-related limitations. A lack of teacher ownership or understanding of the innovation; change not congruent with existing teacher values and beliefs; negative attitudes, often engendered by the additional workload entailed; teachers are often emotionally bound up in established practices; and change can be personally threatening.
- System-related barriers. Poor communication and a lack of mutual trust between change agents and frontline implementers; putting too much emphasis on the complexity of the innovation itself and not adequate consideration of practical implementation; a lack of appropriate resources to support the innovation; insufficient professional development and ongoing support for teachers; failure to reconcile policy rhetoric with classroom realities; cynicism engendered by previous failed attempts at innovation; misalignment of innovation with the requirements of high-stakes examinations.
- School-related barriers. Lack of supportive culture for change; conservative forces within a school; lack of support or understanding from senior management; inadequate school-based resources; student difficulties in adapting to teacher change, particularly if the rationale has not been persuasively articulated. (p. 2)

Given these barriers, it is clear that implementing TBLT as innovation can be a complex endeavour (Van den Branden, 2016), as it is influenced by multiple factors that vary depending on their unique characteristics. One potential reason for this complexity is that many innovations originate in Anglophone contexts and are then transferred to cultural contexts beyond Western areas, where English is taught as a foreign language (Carless, 2007, 2012; Ellis, 2003). Carless (2013) explains that such transfers can

lead to conflicts between pedagogical values, beliefs, philosophies, and traditional teaching methods. Markee (1997) also notes that innovations often fail because organisational changes are not implemented to support new materials or pedagogies.

In view of the multiple challenges that teachers may face implementing innovations, Rogers (2003) outlines five factors essential for successful innovation implementation:

1. relative advantage
2. compatibility
3. complexity
4. trialability
5. observability

Reforms that are perceived as having greater relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and observability, and less complexity, tend to be adopted more swiftly and effectively. Carless (2013) echoes these factors, outlining conditions for effective innovation:

- The innovation is not overly ambitious and has support from organizational changes.
- It has appropriate time frames and seeks to facilitate early, small-scale success which generates momentum and positive sentiments.
- Teachers are brought on board at an early stage, and feel belonging and ownership that is of more than a token nature. These teachers may act as brokers, “champions,” or opinion leaders.
- Effective institutional-based professional development and support are built into the project.

- The innovation is contextually and culturally appropriate, and does not promote values which are incongruent with those of implementers.
- Problem-solving strategies are built into the project and there are change-management strategies to tackle challenges arising. (pp. 2-3)

It is crucial to address these conditions during both pre- and in-service teacher education. Given the complexities and challenges of introducing innovation, it is therefore crucial that teachers receive teacher education and continued support to effectively implement TBLT. Moreover, teacher education should promote “task-based principles and coaching based in the classrooms of teacher participants” (Carless, 2013, p. 3). In this book, I propose that the implementation of the approach and particularly tasks can be influenced by a complex system of factors that are cognitive, practical, and institutional. To address this, my contention is that teacher education should not just focus on their implementation but must help teachers make sense of the contextual factors that come into play and devise strategies that will mitigate the effects of these factors.

In conclusion, to facilitate successful TBLT implementation, teachers should develop an awareness of the contextual factors at play. In line with Carless (2013), the conditions focused on effective innovation, namely, realistic goals, early teacher involvement, cultural sensitivity, and robust support systems, must be considered in pre- and in-service teacher education. I should acknowledge that one possible challenge would be that of recognising the cognitive, student-related, practical, and institutional factors affecting the adoption of TBLT and use of tasks in educational settings. However, by doing so, we will

better serve the aim of keeping TBLT not just as another trend, but as a prevalent approach that fosters classroom interactions in which teachers and students engage to practise the language through tasks and develop proficiency.

1.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I provided the history of TBLT and the main principles of communicative tasks as a point of reference. My discussion was directed to how TBLT addresses the limitations of previous teaching methodologies by promoting authentic language use through the use of tasks. Also, I focused on the unique characteristics of TBLT as an innovation which can be adapted to address the needs and demands of language teaching and learning in diverse classroom contexts.

However, as I stated, the practice of TBLT is not without obstacles. My suggestion is that successes and failures of TBLT largely depend on a careful and nuanced exploration of contextually situated factors, such as teacher training, resource availability, and cultural contexts. Chapters 2-4 offer additional evidence on other contextual factors (i.e., task design characteristics, implementation conditions, language proficiency, task engagement, and teachers' beliefs) that play a significant role in task implementation, students' language performance, and acquisition. In these chapters, I argue that both the effective use of tasks and the successful contextualisation of the TBLT approach are dependent on adequate pre- and in-service teacher education. Teachers should be supported in developing a context-sensitive understanding of the factors that shape their classroom practices and the specific needs and demands of their language classrooms.

In conclusion, this chapter argued in favour of TBLT because it provides potential for more meaningful and effective language teaching and learning through the use of tasks. As teaching contexts continue to evolve, TBLT is expected to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of language teaching and learning. In the remainder of this book, I propose that maximising the learning benefits of TBLT and tasks requires sustained engagement with research and teacher education that integrates context-sensitive insights into teaching and learning processes. When these two areas are effectively addressed, TBLT can fulfil its potential as an innovation and continue to support the development of students' communicative skills.

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CHAPTER TWO

COMPLEXITY, ACCURACY, LEXIS, AND FLUENCY DURING TASK PERFORMANCE

2.1 Introduction

Complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency (CALF) are key language dimensions in second language acquisition (SLA) research. As language education continues to embrace student-centred communicative methodologies, the CALF dimensions have become increasingly important because they provide information about the relationship between task performance and language development. As a result, the CALF framework provides a multidimensional perspective on language performance and development, allowing researchers and teachers to assess L2 learning comprehensively.

The present chapter examines the CALF dimensions, offering empirical evidence about their interaction with task features and design. The argument is that comprehending how these dimensions interact during task performance enables researchers and teachers to better design strategies and tasks that foster language development in both spoken and written forms. The chapter looks at the impact of speaking and writing tasks on the CALF dimensions as indicators of language performance and development. Moreover, it analyses the effects of locally-situated factors (e.g., students' attentional capacities, task design, and classroom conditions) on students' language performance, with particular focus on the interaction with the CALF dimensions. Given the paucity of research on lexis and its interaction with the other three language dimensions, the discussion in this chapter will centre primarily on research evidence on complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF).

The overall structure of the chapter takes the form of three sections. The first section provides a description of CALF and

their role in task performance. The second section analyses the impact of task design and students' limited attentional capacities on CAF. Section 2.4 examines the relationship between writing tasks and CAF. The final section draws together key points in the chapter, highlighting research areas that remain underexplored regarding task performance, the language dimensions, and classroom dynamics.

2.2 Understanding Complexity, Accuracy, Lexis, and Fluency

In recent years, there have been several efforts to reconceptualise the role of students in student-centred, communicative teaching approaches. These efforts now emphasise that students are given a more agentive and prominent role in the development of their language competence. Consequently, they are expected to be aware of their language needs and learning affordances. This kind of awareness is cultivated when students are given opportunities to participate in classroom interactions in which they have to make significant use of the target language. These opportunities are facilitated when students interact through the use of tasks that are conducive to L2 development.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2006) and Skehan and Foster (2008), students' L2 performance and development during tasks can be assessed using the CALF framework. These dimensions provide opportunities to gauge, describe, and benchmark L2 production. With these dimensions, Larsen-Freeman (2006) and Skehan and Foster (2008) maintain that the complex nature of L2 performance and development is effectively captured. I further explore these dimensions below:

- **Complexity.** This dimension is defined as the extent to which students are ready to use more elaborate, complex, or sophisticated language and a wide range of syntactic patterning (Ellis, 2012). Richards (2015) defines complexity as “the extent to which target language production reflects grammatically complex structures” (p. 734). High levels of complexity thus show grammatically complex and advanced language structures (Skehan, 2009). For Richards (2015), complexity reflects students’ abilities to use grammatically complex utterances. Foster and Skehan (1996) contend that students’ abilities to produce high levels of complexity indicate the cutting edge of interlanguage development.
- **Accuracy.** This dimension is defined as students’ belief in norms with performance that is native-like following its rule-governed nature (Skehan, 1996). Accurate language is considered “a concern to avoid error” (Skehan, 2009, p. 510), and the ability to produce target language that is free of grammar, vocabulary, or other language-related errors (Richards, 2015). In other words, accuracy reflects how well students produce the language in relation to its linguistic rule system, or how well students apply grammar rules.
- **Lexis.** This dimension is defined as students’ abilities to use the vocabulary of a language in contrast to its grammar. However, it is believed that lexis could also represent some kind of complexity. Lexis is considered to be an indicator of proficiency, indicating the extent to which language is advanced. Some metrics that are commonly used to measure the complexity of lexis use are ‘lexical diversity’, ‘lexical density’, and ‘lexical sophistication’.
- **Fluency.** This language dimension is defined as the students’ abilities to produce language in real time without

pauses, hesitation, or comprehension difficulties (Ellis, 2012). Fluency is “the extent to which target language production is continuous, without causing comprehension difficulties or a breakdown of communication” (Richards, 2015, p. 738). Skehan (2009) refers to fluency as “the capacity to produce speech at a normal rate and without interruption” (p. 510). According to Foster and Skehan (1996), fluency could be taken as an indicator of meaning production.

Initially, in the realm of task-based research, investigations primarily focused on language performance, particularly prioritising fluency and accuracy. However, it was Skehan (2009) who introduced complexity. Regardless of the progress made, a major research gap remains: the exploration of lexis. Despite efforts to incorporate lexical aspects into task-based research, lexis as a dimension has not yet been measured extensively and systematically. Several measures have been proposed, but recent suggestions indicate that the Vocabulary Occurrence and Complexity Database (VocD) offers a reliable measure of lexical density in relation to text length, also known as “D” (Malvern & Richards, 2002). Although research on the behaviour of lexis is scarce, it is widely acknowledged that enhanced lexical richness or complexity contributes to successful language performance. Due to this scarcity, Sections 2.3 (‘Speaking Tasks and the Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency Dimensions’) and 2.4 (‘Writing Tasks and the Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency Dimensions’) centre the discussion on research into the effects of tasks on 1) complexity, 2) accuracy, and 3) fluency.

In general, the CALF framework offers better perceptibility of L2 performance and development (evidenced by the changes in the numerical value of the indices), enabling comparisons

across studies (Rosmawati, 2014). The research evidence so far suggests that the relationship between L2 performance and development, indicated by levels of CAF, is complex (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Sadeghi, 2016) and is highly influenced by an array of contextual factors, including instructional factors such as task design characteristics (Walsh, 2002). In this regard, Barrot and Agdeppa (2021) contend that recent studies have demonstrated that CAF are “influenced by task-related factors, student factors, and context-related factors, including planning time, topic, and instructional setting” (p. 1). Therefore, it can be seen that task design and implementation conditions shape students’ language performance and development. This in turn shows the relevance of considering lexis in task-based research.

As suggested in this section, CALF constitutes an effective quartet for analysing language performance and development. With these dimensions, research evidence has indicated that performance and development tend to be influenced by a number of factors (i.e., task-related aspects, student-related characteristics, and local conditions). From a practical perspective, it is important that teachers understand these language dimensions and their potential interaction with a view to promoting more effective language teaching and thus an improvement of language performance and development. By looking at all four dimensions, a more complete perspective on language teaching and learning would be facilitated. However, further investigation is needed on lexis and its interaction with the other three language dimensions.

2.3 Speaking Tasks and the Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency Dimensions

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), it has been established that task design shapes students' performance (Garcia-Ponce, 2017). The popularity of tasks has grown considerably in recent years due to efforts to promote the development of students' speaking skills. This is based on the belief that students' L2 performance improves both quantitatively and qualitatively when they are given opportunities to perform tasks. Walsh (2002) corroborates this assertion when he claims that tasks influence the students' language production and engagement, as their design requires a variety of mental processes to accomplish the task at hand and, consequently, shape their utterances. In the same way, GarciaPonce (2017) argues that students' language performance, in terms of both quantity and quality, results from the interaction between task design and students' cognitive processing abilities in relation to their L2 performance. Building on this foundation, this section analyses the impact of tasks on students' L2 performance, as reflected in levels of CAF. As discussed in Section 2.2, due to the limited research on lexical behaviour and its interaction with CAF dimensions, the focus here is primarily on how tasks and context-specific factors influence students' CAF.

As language classrooms increasingly adopt communicative approaches that emphasise meaningful communication, research on CAF has shifted toward a more pedagogical and classroom-based perspective of L2 performance (Bulté & Housen, 2012; Khushik & Huhta, 2019; Kyle & Crossley, 2018; Lambert & Kormos, 2014; Skehan, 2009). From this perspective, CAF can serve as measures to understand students' L2 performance in both speaking and writing. In relation to this view, Skehan and Foster

(2012) note that “many studies of task-based second language performance use CAF to capture different aspects of second language performance” (p. 199). Thus, the CAF measures can help us identify the pedagogical factors that shape student performance (Kuiken *et al.*, 2010; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). Gaining insights into these language dimensions is crucial for 1) determining the pedagogic factors that shape student performance, 2) designing pedagogical interventions when necessary, and 3) ensuring effective language instruction.

Following the above, research has extensively examined how task design characteristics influence CAF dimensions in second language performance (Bamanger & Gashan, 2015; Ellis, 2005; Foster, 1996; Gilbert, 2007; Kawauchi, 2005; Ortega, 1999, 2008; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005; Wigglesworth, 1997; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). The evidence confirms that the nature and structure of task design highly influence the dynamism of students’ CAF during task performance (Rosmawati, 2014; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). Particularly, findings have reported that some tasks may enhance complexity and fluency, while others may impact accuracy and fluency—but rarely all language areas simultaneously. Evidence of such effects comes from Garcia-Ponce *et al.* (2018), who found that complexity and accuracy tend to compete during task performance. More frequently, beneficial effects are observed on complexity and fluency, or on accuracy and fluency. Drawing on research evidence, Skehan (2009) describes several ways in which task features influence these dimensions:

- Accuracy and fluency. When students engage with familiar or concrete content, their accuracy and fluency tend to improve.

- Complexity. Tasks that require students to manipulate information tend to increase complexity.
- Interactive tasks. When students interact, it raises accuracy and complexity.
- Narrative tasks. These tasks are conducive to high complexity, but low accuracy and fluency.
- Personal information. These tasks promote accuracy and fluency, but may not significantly impact complexity.
- Structured tasks. Tasks with clear structure encourage high levels of accuracy and fluency.
- Post-task activities. These tasks (e.g., class presentation of the outcomes of tasks) enhance accuracy.
- Pre-task planning. When students have opportunities for pre-task planning (i.e., a kind of planning that is conducted prior to the performance of the main task), it enhances both complexity and fluency.

These generalisations confirm that students' L2 performance can be influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including task features, cognitive capacities, attentional demands, and competition between form and meaning. The generalisations also indicate that task design encourages students to direct their attention to certain dimensions, but not all dimensions simultaneously (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Tavakoli & Foster, 2008; Yuan & Ellis, 2003, to name a few).

The dynamic nature of language performance can be explained by the fact that humans have limited attentional capacities (Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Skehan, 1998, 2009). Van Patten (1996) explains that students often struggle to attend to both form and meaning simultaneously, prioritising one at the expense of the other. In other words, it is difficult for students

to perform a task with equal results in both meaning (fluency) and form (complexity and accuracy). Specifically, Foster and Skehan (1999) suggest that “learners have limited attention capacities and different aspects of comprehension and language production, i.e., accuracy, complexity, and fluency, compete for these capacities” (p. 216). Thus, this cognitive challenge prevents students from attending to all CAF dimensions simultaneously, affecting their overall performance (Foster & Skehan, 1996, 1999, 2013; Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Skehan, 1998, 2003, 2009). Consequently, students have to make conscious decisions about where to focus their attention, favouring certain language dimensions over others (Bamanger & Gashan, 2015). In other words, when students attend to specific dimensions, it can lead to lower performance in other areas (Skehan, 2009).

Two prominent models have attempted to describe these trade-off effects: Robinson’s (2003) Cognition Hypothesis and Skehan’s (2009) Limited Attentional Capacity model. Robinson (2003) explains in the former model that students can rely on multiple attentional resources, which are highly influenced by task complexity. This allows them to achieve high levels of complexity and accuracy. In contrast, Skehan’s (2009) model posits that students have limited attentional resources, preventing them from attending to both form (complexity and accuracy) and meaning (fluency) simultaneously when performing cognitively demanding tasks. In other words, Skehan (2009) suggests there is a tension among the language areas, where “committing to one area, other things being equal, might cause lower performance in others” (Skehan, 2003, p. 511). Skehan (1998) further explains that this dynamic interaction results from using an imperfectly learnt second language, which requires students to process large amounts of information. This imposes a large burden on their

attention, prompting them to prioritise certain language areas over others. In line with Skehan's (2009) model, it has been suggested that "different task features, or different task conditions, exert systematic influences on performance, and that if one conceives of performance in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency, many individual or combined effects are possible" (p. 201). Thus, in addition to students' limited attentional capacity, task-related characteristics can significantly impact the interaction of these language dimensions.

From a pedagogical perspective, the trade-off effects of the CAF dimensions are a challenge for language teachers and students. Given our limited cognitive capacities, tasks designed to promote language performance and development must make realistic processing demands, so that students are able to allocate their attention equally across all CAF areas—not merely to complete the task, but to facilitate effective language development (Skehan & Foster, 2008). However, given the diversity of task design characteristics and the wide range of proposed measures for assessing CAF, achieving an ecological perspective on the behaviour of CAF during task performance remains elusive. Moreover, as Wolfe-Quintero *et al.* (1998) suggest, this dynamic interaction may not be generalisable, as students' oral performance is conditioned by the teaching context. This observation carries three key implications. First, it implies that students' L2 performance is strongly shaped by the specific teaching context. Second, tasks should be performed and analysed in relation to the context in which interactions occur. Finally, the interaction among the language areas may be influenced not only by cognitive factors, but also by instructional factors that are sensitive to the specific language classroom.

So far, we have seen that speaking task design and students' CAF in language education is a complex area of study. It seems that to have a complete picture of the relationship between task design and L2 output, it is necessary to conduct further explorations of the multifaceted factors shaping L2 performance. These explorations should include, for example, task design, students' cognitive abilities, their agency, and the context: the teaching and learning environment. These considerations will help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of how tasks influence the language dimensions and therefore design activities and strategies that have an impact on students' language development.

2.4 Writing Tasks and the Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency Dimensions

Due to the growth of global education, English plays a crucial role in the internalisation of higher education because it is an instrument that is used worldwide for communication (Romo López *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, learning English has become a worldwide phenomenon. Particularly, to ensure academic success, students have been required to develop writing skills in English (Lillis & Curry, 2006). In the language classroom, writing is not only a discipline and a concept, but also an activity that enables students to develop these skills. In terms of its nature, writing is considered to include skills that are difficult to master (Richards & Renadya, 2002). The challenge of developing writing skills is mainly a consequence of the complexity of the practice. The nature of L2 writing can be particularly challenging for students who have to write in a foreign language and

are assessed using native-like standards (Rosmawati, 2014). This suggests that writing is not only a practice in the language classroom, but also an indicator of writing proficiency. Additionally, a challenge that language teachers and students face is the influence of an intricate, yet interrelated, set of factors (instructional, interactional, and cognitive) that highly shape writing performance and the development of writing skills (García-Ponce *et al.*, 2018). The complex nature of writing has directed researchers' attention toward writing tasks and the various skills involved (Hyland, 2003; Rosmawati, 2014).

For more than two decades, writing tasks² have gained popularity in both second language pedagogy and research (Tavakoli & Foster, 2008). This rise in popularity is attributed to the usefulness of these tasks for promoting the development of writing skills, particularly when they emphasise meaning (Samuda & Bygate, 2005). In general, research has corroborated the learning benefits of writing tasks (Manchón, 2014; Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2011; Manchón & Vasylets, 2019). Particularly, the evidence shows that the design and implementation of writing tasks (e.g., planning time, task repetition, and task familiarity; please refer to Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion on these implementation conditions) positively influence students' language performance and learning (Manchón, 2014; Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2011; Manchón & Vasylets, 2019). Nevertheless, despite their benefits, the impact of writing tasks on the CAF of L2 students remains a topic of ongoing investigation, with mixed findings reported in the literature. For example, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009)

² In this book, I define a writing task as a pedagogic activity which gives students opportunities to use their language resources (e.g. meaning and form) to achieve an authentic writing objective.

conducted an experiment with two groups of ESL students in which they studied how the writing done collaboratively and individually affected the dynamics of CAF. Their results indicated that collaborative writing improved accuracy significantly, but the results did not show any improvement in terms of fluency and complexity. Similarly, another study regarding writing and CAF was conducted by Kuhl *et al.* (2014). They used two types of writing tasks, namely narrative and cause-effect tasks, with intermediate and advanced students. They concluded that “the results were significant in the measures of complexity and fluency in T-unit numbers but not in accuracy and fluency regarding word number and clause number across proficiency” (Kuhl *et al.*, 2014, p. 1036).

However, while writing tasks have proved to be effective in L2 pedagogy for developing writing skills, there is a general critique of the research on writing tasks and CAF. Few studies have been conducted concerning writing tasks in relation to CAF compared to an increasing amount of research related to speaking tasks and the CAF dimensions. The limited number of studies focusing on writing, in comparison with oral production, underlines an important gap in the complex and multidirectional link that exists between CAF and L2 written production. There is also limited research evidence on the influence of writing on lexis and the interaction of this dimension with the other three constructs. This research gap leaves considerably unexplored the interplay between the four CALF dimensions and L2 written production (Silva & Matsuda, 2002). Moreover, many studies have been conducted under experimental conditions that control both the context and the written production to ensure a uniform intervention implementation. The predominance of experimental studies indicates a need for more practical insights

into how writing tasks can be effectively implemented in real classroom contexts. These studies have not yet addressed how far or to what extent instructional and interactional practices in natural classrooms have facilitated the development of CALF through writing tasks. Thus, it is important that such research gaps are addressed in further research to provide valuable pedagogical implications that help educators make better use of writing tasks to enhance students' language learning and performance.

2.5 Conclusions

The evidence presented in this chapter underlines that task design, combined with cognitive, pedagogical, and contextual factors, significantly influences the CALF dimensions, with trade-off effects due to students' limited attentional capacities. This influence shows the interaction between task design, on the one hand, and students' individual characteristics and contextual factors, on the other. Given that the impact of tasks on L2 production is multifactorial, investigating task performance becomes highly complicated. This is because previous research has centred on how specific task characteristics influence complex linguistic performance, often at the expense of how language production is shaped by the task performers themselves, their intentions, and personal and discourse goals. In other words, it is not the characteristics of tasks in and of themselves that are important but, rather, the interaction between the task and the task performer. Consequently, we may not yet have a complete understanding of all the factors involved in task performance in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts.

Furthermore, despite the importance attributed to the impact of tasks on students' L2 performance, much of the evidence comes from second language contexts under experimental conditions. These studies focus on the manipulation of students' attention to target language forms or areas, aiming to draw general conclusions about task design features that enhance students' control of CALF. However, the extent to which these findings can be applied to typical EFL classrooms remains uncertain due to the nature of the experimental designs used. This highlights the need for research conducted in natural classroom settings, particularly EFL classrooms, that can provide more realistic insights into task performance and students' oral and written output, along with its implications for second language development. Moreover, despite advances in understanding task performance, the role of lexis remains underexplored. This gap calls for a greater amount of research evidence to know how lexis interacts with the other dimensions of language performance in both speaking and writing tasks. From a pedagogical standpoint, it is necessary that teachers know the dynamic interaction of CALF to make informed decisions about using different task types to balance the development of CALF during task performance.

To show the nature of task performance and L2 development, several research opportunities must be considered. The above evidence and arguments in turn indicate that using a one-size-fits-all approach to task design is insufficient. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers should understand the interaction of CALF when designing tasks and make appropriate and context-sensitive decisions about the use of different task types to balance the development of CALF during task performance.

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CHAPTER THREE

TASK DIFFICULTY AND PLANNING CONDITIONS DURING TASK PERFORMANCE

3.1 Introduction

In language teaching, it has been established that tasks constitute important classroom activities that influence the relationship between language performance and development (Garcia-Ponce & Tavakoli, 2022). A key concept in this relationship is task difficulty, which is multidimensional, involving code complexity, cognitive familiarity, communicative stress, and cognitive processing. Research evidence shows that the complex nature of task difficulty poses various challenges for students, thereby affecting their cognitive processing abilities. Under such circumstances, planning either before or during task performance serves to free up the cognitive burden associated with performing complex and cognitively demanding tasks.

The interrelationship between task difficulty and planning conditions in shaping both language performance and development forms the core focus of this chapter. This chapter first presents the concept of ‘task difficulty’, showing its effects on task performance. Given the effects, the chapter then discusses the role of planning in task performance and language development, indicating how planning conditions shape students’ language dimensions. Chapter 3 also addresses the effects of planning conditions during writing task performance. It concludes with a discussion of the importance of task repetition as a way to reduce the effects of task difficulty, hence improving students’ L2 production.

3.2 Understanding Task Difficulty

In previous chapters, it has been suggested that tasks impact oral and writing performance. Such influence can be partly

explained by task difficulty, which is the cognitive or physical effort a task requires for a specific (communicative) situation (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004). Describing task difficulty has proven to be complex, and several frameworks and categories have been proposed to describe this construct. For example, Skehan (1998) describes the following criteria to describe task difficulty:

- Code complexity involves linguistic complexity, vocabulary load, and redundancy and density.
- Communicative stress involves time pressures, speed, and number of participants.
- Cognitive familiarity is the level of student familiarity with a task topic.
- Cognitive processing includes the input and skills that a task facilitates to enable students to perform it.

Based upon the above criteria, we can see how task difficulty impacts the practical and cognitive ways in which students approach tasks. For this reason, task difficulty has become a key research area with an exceptionally large number of studies focusing on the perceptions of students concerning difficulty, with the intention of informing understandings of how task design impacts their language performance and development. For example, Tavakoli (2009) investigated the perceptions of ten students and ten teachers of task difficulty in an English as a second language context. The students were interviewed about factors influencing perceived difficulty immediately after carrying out four narrative tasks. Their teachers were also interviewed concerning their perceptions of task difficulty, including the driving variables. Interestingly, the results showed that the students and teachers did indeed have similar perceptions of the factors that increased

their perceived difficulty. In another study, Li *et al.* (2007) explored how task difficulty combined with the self-perceptions concerning ability and performance of 79 students. They showed that students who perceived tasks as highly difficult had lower self-perceived ability and achieved poorer performance scores on the skill tests than students who perceived tasks as less challenging. These findings underline the effects of students' perceptions about task difficulty on global performance. This suggests the need to not only help students address the effects of task difficulty, but also assist them in constructing perceptions that increase their confidence and perceived capability while performing such tasks. In line with this, Mangos and Steele-Johnson (2001) recommend that perceptions of task difficulty must be understood to promote learning, especially when students are in the process of developing skills or have to complete tasks with content or structure unfamiliar to them.

Despite the importance of students' perceptions of task difficulty, there is a paucity of research on perceptual factors related to task difficulty, their effect on students' written and oral production, and their interaction with language dimensions (Tavakoli, 2009). Tavakoli claims that such an insider perspective will broaden the current understanding of task difficulty, helping language educators design and employ more efficient language teaching materials. Also, having these understandings will enable teachers to design tasks tailored to maximise students' confidence, performance, and proficiency. By considering such perceptual factors, especially the relationship between task design, student perceptions, and language performance, teachers will be able to adapt their task-based language practices, promoting meaningful language learning when students face difficult tasks.

Given the above discussion, one potential way to improve performance during tasks perceived by students as difficult is to provide ample planning time for task performance. Since task difficulty can negatively affect performance, allowing students time to plan can help ease the cognitive burden during language production. As a result, both fluency and accuracy may improve (Ellis, 2005). Section 3.3 will provide more evidence of the role of planning in task performance.

3.3 Role of Planning in Task Performance

Throughout this book, consistent emphasis has been placed on how L2 performance and development tend to be influenced by task design, implementation (planning) conditions, and context-specific factors. Barrot and Agdeppa (2021) reiterate this by claiming that L2 performance is “influenced by task-related factors, student factors, and context-related factors” (p. 1), including planning time, topic, and instructional setting. Given their limited attentional capacity, students tend to focus on certain dimensions of language, but rarely on all four simultaneously. Studies conducted by Foster and Skehan (1996) and Tavakoli and Skehan (2011) support the statement above because even under varying implementation conditions, their research shows that students tend to focus on certain dimensions of language performance during task execution, but not all four dimensions simultaneously.

However, students can benefit from the four language areas (i.e. complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency; CALF) if they are given an opportunity to manipulate the structure and information of tasks (Skehan, 2003). For this reason, researchers have

begun to examine more closely task performance and the conditions under which they are performed, such as post-tasks, pre-task planning, and online planning. For example, post-tasks, or tasks performed after the main task, give students a chance to improve more accurate and complex language. This was confirmed by Foster and Skehan (2013), whose study indicated that students who completed post-tasks following decision-making tasks showed increased complex and accurate language.

Another condition which helps students manipulate the structure and information of tasks is 'planning'. Planning is necessary during both written and spoken production (Rahimpour & Nariman-Jahan, 2011). Planning conditions before (i.e., pre-task) or during (i.e., online planning) tasks can significantly improve students' language performance. Pre-task or online planning provides students with the planning conditions which impact the dimensions of language performance. For example, 'task repetition', a form of planning, helps students become familiar with the task they will perform. This familiarity enhances automaticity for performing tasks, thereby promoting language areas that often compete during oral or written performance (Garcia-Ponce & Tavakoli, 2022). Regarding this point, Bui (2014) states that task repetition "increases the degree of familiarity concerning the content or procedure of future tasks" (as cited in Arredondo-Tapia & Garcia-Ponce, 2021, p. 48).

Overall, planning reduces the cognitive load created during language production and processing. With this condition provided before, during, or after task performance, students can retrieve the information they need from working memory and produce more accurate utterances (Ellis, 2005). Studies by Foster and Skehan (1996, 2013), Foster and Tavakoli (2009), and Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) provide evidence of the benefits of providing

planning time either before or during task performance. Further research evidence regarding the role of planning in oral as well as written task performance is presented in the next section.

3.3.1 Impact of Planning on Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency

As we have seen in the previous section, it is well established that planning conditions improve language production during task performance. This has been confirmed by a high amount of research on task design, planning conditions, and the complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) dimensions. For example, Foster and Skehan's (1996) seminal study investigated how different oral tasks influenced CAF. The researchers used three types of tasks (personal information exchange, narrative, and decision-making) to show that planning enhances these three language dimensions. These results prompted further research in the field of task-based instruction, particularly on how tasks and implementation conditions can be manipulated to enhance immediate language performance, particularly long-term second language proficiency, even when CAF are in competition. In line with this research agenda, Foster and Skehan (1999) investigated three planning conditions (i.e. individual, group-based, and teacher-led planning) and concluded that accuracy and complexity, which normally compete during task execution, improved when planning was guided by the teacher.

Recently, Bamanger and Gashan (2015) demonstrated that providing students with pre-task planning time led to higher levels of CAF in an information-gap task. This planning time allowed students to focus on both meaning and form, resulting

in more fluent, accurate, and complex language production. In addition, the study suggested that pre-task planning boosted students' confidence. Bamanger and Gashan further noted that allowing pre-task planning facilitates the processing and planning of the content and organisation of language output, leading to increased confidence. They also suggested that:

Second language students, especially those with limited proficiency in the second language, often find it difficult to attend to meaning and form at the same time and thus have to make decisions about how to allocate their attentional resources by prioritizing one of these aspects of language over the other. (p. 2)

However, if students are provided with time to prepare the task, positive outcomes emerge and can lead to more successful task performance, and their attention can be focused on achieving better language output.

In the area of complexity, Foster and Skehan (1996) similarly suggested that planning was beneficial for language learning. However, in a subsequent study, Skehan and Foster (1997) found no significant effects in a narrative task. Instead, it was observed that planning led to greater visible grammatical complexity in personal and decision-making tasks. In another study, Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) also reported that "planners' language was more complex than that of the no-planning group and also that more proficient students' language was more complex. It can be concluded that planning has less of an effect in a testing context than in a teaching or laboratory context" (p. 6).

Turning to accuracy, it has also been studied at different stages of planning, with results that are complex and mixed. For example, in an early study conducted by Foster (1996), she noted

that the effects of planning were highly dependent on the task. Specifically, unguided planning had positive effects on accuracy when performing tasks related to personal information and decisionmaking. However, these results differed when performing narrative tasks. Another study conducted by Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) demonstrated that the type of planning can influence accuracy. The authors asked first-year Japanese high school English as a foreign language (EFL) students to perform an oral story-retelling task under three conditions: 1) no planning, 2) five minutes of unguided planning, or 3) five minutes of guided planning using a grammar-based handout on English relative clauses. The results indicated that guided planning led to more accurate relative clauses compared to the other two conditions.

In terms of research on fluency, Foster (1996) investigated planning time across three different tasks: 1) personal information, 2) narrative, and 3) decision-making tasks. The results indicated that students who had some planning time produced more fluent language across all task types. In a study conducted with advanced students of Spanish, Ortega (1999) found that fluency was enhanced when students were provided with pre-task planning. Yuan and Ellis (2003) studied the effects of pre-task planning on fluency. This language dimension was measured by counting the number of syllables per minute in students' utterances. The evidence showed positive results, highlighting significant effects of pre-task planning on fluency. In another study, Gilabert (2007) found that planning conditions led to greater fluency and lexical richness compared to unplanned conditions. In a testing context, Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) investigated the impact of task structure on students' fluency during the execution of narrative tasks. Fluency was assessed through speech rate, total silence, various repair measures (such as false starts), and length of run.

Additionally, they considered proficiency as a factor affecting production. The researchers observed significant differences in fluency related to both planning and proficiency levels.

The evidence presented above indicates that planning conditions can be tailored to promote specific language dimensions as well as overall L2 performance and development. The evidence also suggests the importance of facilitating opportunities for students to make decisions about what to produce and how to approach tasks (Ellis, 2005). However, although different planning conditions seem to have a positive effect on the CAF of language production, research continues to scrutinise their effect within the realm of L2 acquisition. This is because a high amount of research has yielded mixed results in terms of CAF, even if students are provided with planning time. For instance, while some studies demonstrate positive effects of planning on fluency and complexity (Foster, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Kawauchi, 2005; Ortega, 1999; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005), accuracy does not consistently follow the same pattern. The mixed results can be attributed to methodological differences and inconsistencies in measuring CAF behaviour during task performance (Bamanger & Gashan, 2015), which motivate various individual or combined effects (Skehan & Foster, 2008; Tabari, 2016). Additionally, another constraint is the limited number of task-based studies examining the effects of planning in second language writing. In Section 3.3.2, I provide further research evidence on the impact of planning on students' written performance, highlighting key gaps requiring further investigation that need to be addressed to fully maximise its potential during both speaking and writing tasks.

3.3.2 Role of Planning in Writing Tasks

During the execution of writing tasks, students must determine both what to express and how to execute the task. (Ellis, 2005). This process demonstrates the relevance of planning in task-based performance and in language teaching and learning. In fact, Rahimpour and Nariman-Jahan (2011) assert that “planning is an inseparable part of all spoken and written language use” (p. 120). Building on this idea, Hayes and Gradwohl Nash (1996) distinguish two types of planning in writing: ‘process planning’ and ‘text planning’. Process planning is the strategies used by writers for completing a task. Text planning centres on the content and form of what is to be written. Ellis and Yuan (2004) explain that “this can entail abstract text planning that leads to the production of ideas, notes, and outlines involving content and rhetorical organization, language planning, or both” (p. 7).

The relevance of planning for enhancing task-based writing compositions has been well-supported by research evidence. For instance, Foster (1999) suggests that online planning enhances accuracy when students have the opportunity to perform a task with minimal mental preparation. This type of planning allows them to carefully formulate their message and monitor their production. Ellis and Yuan (2004) examined pre-task planning, unpressured online planning, and no planning in relation to the written performance of Chinese students. The results indicate that pre-task planning resulted in greater fluency and syntactic variety, while unpressured online planning contributed to greater accuracy. The authors propose that these two types of planning impact different aspects of L2 writing processes. Furthermore, Kuhi *et al.* (2014) conducted a study on

the effect of manipulating task types (narrative and cause-effect) on written production in English. The results revealed that the genre of writing significantly influences students' fluency and complexity, which is associated with their styles for learning. In another study, Rahimpour and Nariman-Jahan (2011) examined the impact of planning and proficiency on 172 Iranian EFL students' written task performance in terms of concept load and CAF. Using a task based on pictures from Foster and Skehan (1996), the results indicated that "low-proficiency learners appear to benefit more from planning time with respect to concept load, fluency, and complexity. High-proficiency learners were advantaged by planning time concerning concept load and accuracy" (Rahimpour & Nariman-Jahan, 2011, p. 120). In a study conducted by Ghavamnia *et al.* (2013), the impact of planning conditions (specifically pre-task and online planning) on the CAF dimensions of 40 intermediate-level Iranian EFL students' writing was investigated. The students were divided into two groups: one group did online planning (within-task planning), while the other group engaged in pre-task planning. The results "showed that the pre-task planning group produced more complex and fluent writings, whereas the online planning group produced more error-free clauses, indicating a more accurate writing performance" (Ghavamnia *et al.*, 2013, p. 31). From this study, it was found that planning plays a beneficial role in the process of writing.

Taken together, these studies provide compelling evidence that the planning, design, and structure of tasks considerably influence students' L2 writing performance. However, writing remains one of the least understood, if not misunderstood, areas within the field of applied linguistics (Silva & Matsuda, 2002).

Much research has been carried out concerning speaking tasks, yet little research has examined the interaction of CAF and the role of planning in writing tasks. Another unexplored area pertains to lexis and its effect on student behaviour during opportunities to plan both speaking and writing tasks. Given the role that lexis plays in language production, exploring how planning affects lexis in both spoken and written communication presents a promising and important avenue for further task-based research.

3.3.3 Task Repetition as a Form of Planning

In the previous section, I presented studies that show that planning allows students to manipulate the structure and information of tasks. Specifically, it was suggested that task planning has significant effects on language performance both before and during task performance. Consequently, task planning should be an integral component of language use. As Barrot and Agdeppa (2021) contend, language performance is shaped by task-related factors, students' individual differences, and contextual factors, including planning time, the topic, and the instructional setting. Building on this understanding, task repetition becomes one such planning factor which involves implicit planning (Bui, 2014). According to Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2010), the planning opportunities afforded by task repetition have a beneficial effect on students' language production.

Throughout the years, researchers and teachers have increasingly focused on how task design and implementation procedures can be exploited to advance language performance and development (Ahmadian, 2012). In this context, task repetition has emerged as a particularly influential practice believed

to improve language performance and language development (Bygate & Samuda, 2005). Ahmadian (2012) defines task repetition as the process in which students perform the same or a similar task after intervals of one or two weeks. The concept is further expanded by Ellis (2009), who explains that task repetition can involve repeating tasks with similar procedures but different content or tasks with similar content. Such repetition is crucial for preparation of subsequent performance of the same task or tasks with varying content. According to Arredondo-Tapia and Garcia-Ponce (2021), “this preparation allows students to simultaneously focus their attention on the message content, scan their memory and seek appropriate language resources for use. This first encounter enables them to establish familiarity with the task and/or content” (p. 48). This suggests that when students perform a task on more than one occasion, they become more familiar and competent as they develop a comprehension of the content and how to perform the task more efficiently (Bygate, 1999). In other words, task repetition enhances students’ familiarity with the task content as well as with similar task designs (Bui, 2014). Bygate (1999) also states that repeating tasks helps students better cope with future tasks that require similar cognitive skills. This view is supported by Ahmadian (2012):

[B]y repeating the same or similar tasks, therefore, students might be able to build upon what they have already done in order to ‘buy time’ not only to do mental work on what they are about to communicate but also to access and (re)formulate words and grammatical structures more efficiently, effectively, and accurately. (p. 380)

As a result, the practice of repeating tasks provides substantial advantages that allow students to better manage their performance, thereby creating more opportunities for language development (Sohn & Anderson, 2001).

The above benefits have encouraged a significant amount of experimental research examining the relationship between task repetition and L2 performance and development (e.g., Bygate, 1996; Larsen-Freeman, 2006). There is strong research evidence that indicates that task repetition enhances fluency. In an experiment using a task repetition design to improve students' fluency and accuracy, Arredondo-Tapia and Garcia-Ponce (2021) used narrative tasks that involved a similar procedure but varied in content (e.g., procedural task repetition). The results showed that fluency improved progressively as students continued with task repetitions and became increasingly familiar with the procedural aspects of the tasks. Similarly, Lambert *et al.* (2017) implemented a task repetition framework in oral monologue tasks and noted steady improvements in students' fluency as they undertook the tasks repeatedly.

In spite of the advantages for fluency, empirical studies reveal mixed findings regarding accuracy and complexity. Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2010), for example, examined the effects of task repetition on 60 students' language performance using four different conditions: 1) careful online planning without task repetition, 2) pressured online planning with task repetition, 3) careful online planning with task repetition, and 4) pressured online planning without task repetition. The results suggested improvement in the three dimensions of CAF. Khezrlou (2019) examined the effects of task repetition on students' CAF. However, his results indicated that only accuracy and complexity showed significant improvement with little or no effect on

fluency. One possible explanation for such a discrepancy may be that these studies examined different task types, conditions, and learner-related variables.

From the above discussion, it is evident that task repetition can improve students' output and confidence when performing tasks. Teachers should thus exploit task repetition as a strategy to improve students' performance as well as their confidence. However, while advantages of repeating tasks are present, it remains important to account for the variables that impact the language outcomes. Also, regarding language performance and confidence, it is absolutely necessary that task repetition is examined in natural classroom settings. This would allow researchers and educators to gain a better understanding of how task repetition can be directed to developing language dimensions.

3.4 Conclusions

This chapter discussed the important role of task difficulty in shaping students' language performance and development. As presented in this chapter, the complexity of a task includes code complexity, cognitive familiarity, communicative stress, and cognitive processing. These elements, and in particular familiarity with the content, significantly shape student perceptions concerning the degree of difficulty, shaping in turn both students' immediate performance and the long-term development of their language skills.

The evidence reviewed in this chapter suggests the need to provide students with planning conditions before and during the performance of tasks. This evidence has indicated how planning conditions can have a beneficial impact on students' L2 oral

and written output, as these conditions help optimise students' mental workload, guiding their attention toward both meaning and form. However, we have also seen how findings concerning accuracy and complexity are mixed. Moreover, much of this evidence has been obtained in experimental, controlled conditions with limited investigation into its applicability within natural classroom environments. This calls for more continued investigation regarding how diverse planning conditions influence CALF in natural classroom settings, where other variables (e.g. student motivation, testing environments, differences in student backgrounds) may also play an important role. From a practical viewpoint, teachers must consider the structure and implementation of tasks, particularly the provision of opportunities for planning with a view to enhancing students' language performance and development.

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CHAPTER FOUR

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, TASK ENGAGEMENT,
AND TEACHER BELIEFS IN TASK-BASED PRACTICES

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four explores key factors that affect task performance. Specifically, it explores the relation between students' language performance and proficiency. Particularly, this chapter emphasises how students' language proficiency, involving language knowledge and skills, impacts task performance and their target language production characterised by the complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency (CALF) constructs. The idea put forward in the first part of the chapter is that investigating the relationship between language proficiency and task performance is necessary for assessing and promoting the development of students' language skills. Chapter 4 also presents task engagement as a complex element of learning, involving cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and social characteristics. As suggested in the second part of this chapter, the extent to which students engage with a task is key to understanding how task design and various student-related factors can be directed to supporting language development. By analysing how engagement influences students' investment in tasks, the chapter intends to show the relevance of task engagement for improving performance within language learning contexts.

The last part of the chapter analyses the impact of teachers' beliefs on their teaching behaviour and specifically the adoption of Task-Based-Language Teaching (TBLT), or the use of tasks. The discussion centres on how decisions in teaching practice can be influenced by teachers' pedagogical principles, personal experiences, and local needs and demands. Based upon this, I propose that exploring teacher beliefs and their effects on TBLT is central to an effective enactment of the communicative approach and tasks. Overall, this fourth chapter underscores language proficiency, task engagement, and teachers' beliefs as important

factors that should be recognised in task-based research, teacher education, and classroom practices involving tasks.

4.2 Language Proficiency and Task Performance

Proficiency encompasses what students know of the language and the competencies they have for efficient comprehension and production of the target language. According to Gaillard and Tremblay (2016), this construct includes “the linguistic knowledge and skills that underlie L2 students’ successful comprehension and production of the target language” (p.420). Considering this, proficiency becomes a key construct for tracking systematic progress in students’ language learning through tasks in TBLT.

From a language performance perspective, the set of students’ abilities to efficiently perform a communicative task is directly associated with their proficiency. That is, language competence directly impacts students’ ability to perform communicative tasks effectively. Since proficiency is required for successful comprehension and production in the target language, it gains prominence in language performance. The relationship between proficiency and language performance becomes apparent in analysing the constructs of CALF. As proficiency improves, students’ CALF outcomes are expected to improve, showing abilities to successfully complete a variety of task types. The relevance of the language dimensions to students’ proficiency and performance was previously validated by Kim *et al.* (2016). They conducted a study in which 130 students were asked to perform two narrative tasks. Their analysis focused on the extent to which students’ production was complex, accurate, and fluent during written and oral performances. The results revealed a strong correlation between

proficiency and these three language dimensions. Other studies also indicate a robust correlation between proficiency and fluent language (see, for example, Khang, 2014; Revesz *et al.*, 2019).

Given the important relationship between proficiency and performance, exploring how proficiency influences task performance is highly significant. Because of this, recent research has recently started to investigate how task type and proficiency influence language performance. For example, Garcia-Ponce and Tavakoli (2022) conducted a study that examined the effects of task type and L2 proficiency on second language students' performance and task engagement. Garcia-Ponce and Tavakoli examined performance in terms of CALF across personal information, oral narrative, and decision-making tasks. Their findings showed that proficiency impacted fluency and accuracy. Interestingly, the total number of repairs was not influenced by either task type or proficiency. This evidence provides support to Tavakoli *et al.*'s (2020) study in which no effects of task type or proficiency on repair measures were found. In general, their study showed that advanced students were the most fluent, accurate, and cognitively engaged group of students. In addition, no significant interactions were observed between task type and linguistic proficiency.

The above evidence collectively suggests that the CALF dimensions may accurately depict the strong link between proficiency and performance. Nevertheless, although significant findings have been presented by existing research, additional exploration is required on the links among proficiency, performance, and task type. This calls for a greater understanding of the nature of proficiency, its impact on task performance, and its link to other student- or task-related variables.

From the discussion above, proficiency is influential on students' ability to effectively perform communicative tasks,

thereby impacting CALF constructs. The research evidence discussed in this section and elsewhere indicates that proficiency is strongly correlated with these dimensions, highlighting its usefulness in assessing language performance and development. While current research depicts the complexity of proficiency, greater research discourse is needed to further understand how proficiency interacts with other relevant variables and its role in language learning.

4.3 Task Engagement

Understanding how task design influences learning outcomes has been at the core of discussion in this book, especially in relation to the dimensions of CALF. Attention has been given to task design to understand their learning benefits and their effect on the elements of L2 performance, including L2 processing, production, and development (Ahmadian, 2012). As we will see in this section, another important factor influencing students' performance is 'task engagement'.

Engagement has been a central concept in pedagogy for decades because it is recognised for promoting interaction, classroom participation, and learner autonomy (Appleton *et al.*, 2008). Engagement is defined as "a state of heightened attention and involvement" (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 51). According to Philp and Duchesne, engagement is essential because of its connection to attention and conscious mental involvement, which prepares students cognitively for learning. Both Butler (2017) and Phung (2017) contend that engagement reflects students' interest and involvement which impact language learning. These learning benefits also apply to task engagement, which is described as "the

degree to which students are intensely involved in a learning task” (Aubrey, 2017, p. 661). Task engagement is hypothesised to play an important role in L2 learning (Butler, 2017; Phung, 2017), similar to the general benefits of engagement.

Recent research suggests that task engagement is a complex, multidimensional construct (Appleton *et al.*, 2008), meaning that it encompasses at least cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and social characteristics (see Philp & Duchesne [2016] for a full discussion). These dimensions are defined as follows:

- Cognitive engagement is considered the extent to which students participate in a task, investing sustained attention and mental effort (Helme & Clarke, 2001). When students are cognitively engaged, they tend to exchange ideas and ask questions more frequently. Fredricks *et al.* (2004) argue that metacognitive strategies are relevant for planning, self-regulating learning, and assessing performance. Additionally, indicators of cognitive engagement include the use of discourse markers, connectors, and active questioning (Helme & Clarke, 2001; Philp & Duchesne, 2016).
- Behavioural engagement involves the physical aspects of engagement, that is, the time spent on a task or the number of turns taken in a dialogic activity (Appleton *et al.*, 2008; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Quantitative measures of behavioural engagement include word and turn counts, as explained by Bygate and Samuda (2009) and Dörnyei and Kormos (2000). Alternatively, qualitative assessments through classroom observations consider participation, effort, and conduct (Fredrick & McColskey, 2012).
- Emotional engagement involves students’ emotions during task performance (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). Emotions can range

from positive emotions, including enthusiasm and enjoyment, to negative ones, such as frustration and anxiety (Appleton *et al.*, 2008). However, the literature lacks consensus on a precise definition as well as detailed criteria to objectively measure it. While some scholars, like Yazzie-Mintz (2009), focus on students' sense of connectedness or belonging, others centre their attention on levels of enthusiasm, anxiety, and motivation (Skinner *et al.*, 2009; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). The challenge would be to capture the exact components of the emotional dimension and the underlying sources of these emotional reactions. Consequently, measuring emotional engagement remains a complicated endeavour.

- Social engagement reflects the degree of interaction among students during task performance. It involves activities such as careful listening, sharing experiences, peer assistance, as well as language contributions. Examples of social engagement include collaborative exchanges during conversations, providing scaffolding for each other's language skills, and negotiating meaning.

In mainstream education, there is research evidence which suggests that task engagement is central to L2 learning. This evidence has started to establish a link between task engagement and development (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). One pedagogical implication is that activities fostering engagement tend to have a positive impact on learning and overall achievement.

However, although some research work has been done to examine the relation between task design and CALF, task engagement remains an underexplored area in TBLT research. Specifically, there is a paucity of research examining the effects of task engagement on L2 learning. Moreover, some researchers (e.g.,

Baralt *et al.*, 2016) argue that looking at only one dimension of task engagement, although revealing and helpful, would provide only a partial picture of the complex phenomenon. Therefore, comprehensive examinations of task engagement in its full capacity are recommended. This thus requires in-depth investigations on the complexity of task engagement to better understand its language learning implications.

4.4 Teachers' Beliefs and Their Impact on TBLT and the Use of Tasks

Throughout their careers, teachers are expected to carry out practices that are continuously being improved and refined to meet learning objectives efficiently. This process requires them to make several decisions that tend to be influenced by a number of psychological constructs (Garcia-Ponce, 2020). As Borg (2003) notes, “[T]eachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and belief” (p. 81). In essence, teachers continuously construct and draw on their beliefs to make sense of and navigate everyday practices, determine appropriate actions in specific situations, and respond to the immediate teaching and learning needs and demands (Borg, 2011; Negueruela-Azarola, 2011). Therefore, “any full understanding of why teachers and students behave in the way they do therefore requires an investigation of their underlying beliefs” (Garcia-Ponce, 2020, p. 65). The examination of teachers’ underlying beliefs is necessary, as their beliefs about effective teaching can either promote or limit the implementation of TBLT (East, 2017).

The evidence presented in this book so far highlights how students' oral and written performance can be shaped by the design characteristics of tasks. According to Garcia-Ponce (2020), the implementation of tasks and the TBLT approach can also be influenced by the teachers' pedagogical belief systems. Borg (2003) explains that beliefs are a component of teachers' cognition, which can be influenced by prior learning experiences, contextual factors, extensive teaching experience, and pre-service teacher training. This suggests that teachers' beliefs as part of their cognition are complex and dynamic. This means that:

The constructs in teacher cognition are not static; they change over time, and can be influenced by personal experiences, context, and a number of interrelated factors. This thus suggests that teacher cognition is not linear; as teachers go through different stages during their teaching career, they shape and reshape their values, beliefs, theories, and the like. (Garcia-Ponce, 2020, p. 66)

Therefore, based upon the claim that teachers use their beliefs to make sense of what to do in specific situations, it is important to examine how teachers' belief systems influence teaching decision-making and interactional behaviour during the implementation of tasks and the TBLT approach.

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), several definitions of 'teacher belief' have been proposed. For the purpose of this book, I define 'teacher belief' as "the teachers' affective, evaluative and experiential memories of pedagogical principles, teaching and learning practices, and locally-situated needs and constraints" (Garcia-Ponce, 2020, p. 68). It was Pintrich (1990) who predicted that exploring teachers' beliefs would

be the most valuable ‘psychological construct’ for teacher education, given the influential nature of beliefs in shaping teachers’ behaviour and guiding their decision-making during the implementation of educational innovations. Numerous studies have since confirmed that teachers’ beliefs exert a strong influence on teaching behaviour (see Garcia-Ponce [2020] for a full discussion of studies which report this influence). These studies have also suggested that a considerable number of teachers’ beliefs are developed, strengthened, and appropriated during past experiences (Karaata, 2011). This is supported by Inozu (2011), who contends that teachers’ past experiences shape their beliefs about how teaching, learning, and classroom interactions should be conducted. Similarly, East (2017) acknowledges the influential role of beliefs shaped by past experiences:

It is recognised that teachers’ beliefs are strongly shaped by their own early learning experiences and may be resistant to change. Indeed, all beliefs held by teachers may become filters of new information and experiences, influencing teachers’ interpretations in the present. The relevance of this point is that some teachers’ beliefs may be compatible with innovative methodologies (like TBLT), but others may not. (East, 2017, p. 414)

The significance of teachers’ prior beliefs is that they may continue to embrace traditional teaching methods and practices, resisting change (East, 2017). Larsen-Freeman (2015) further emphasises this point, noting that despite research evidence advocating for innovation, traditional grammar teaching methods continue to be favoured by many teachers in line with their existing beliefs. She suggests that grammar instruction “remains traditional for

the most part, with grammar teaching centred on accuracy of form and rule learning, and with mechanical exercises seen as the way to bring about the learning of grammar” (p. 263). Moreover, it has been found that teachers’ beliefs about local needs and practical constraints heavily influence their teaching behaviour: “teachers’ beliefs about locally-situated needs and practical constraints may shape the way teachers teach a language, giving certain preference to particular language skills, methods, or teaching approaches” (Garcia-Ponce, 2020, p. 68). This influence can be attributed to the power of beliefs, which can undermine “teachers’ ability and/or willingness to teach in ways that are consistent with their pedagogical beliefs and theoretical knowledge” (Allen, 2013, p. 136).

In the context of TBLT, research has documented how its implementation in local classroom contexts is often affected by teachers’ beliefs about locally-situated needs and challenges (Zheng & Borg, 2013). These beliefs often arise because TBLT originated in Western countries and was later exported to developing countries where English has the status of a foreign language. This often results in pedagogic values and principles of the approach clashing with different philosophies and beliefs on which teachers may put greater emphasis. The importance of this influence is that in attending to these needs and challenges, teachers may adapt the implementation of the approach based on their knowledge, beliefs, and experiences or decide to avoid using it altogether (Carless, 2004; Cohen, 2002). However, TBLT has rarely been the subject of systematic investigation in educational contexts outside of Western countries (Lin & Wu, 2012). In particular, little is known about the local manifestations of TBLT and how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Latin America respond to these innovative practices. Consequently, the feasibility of TBLT in EFL classrooms remains

to be empirically proven (Carless, 2004; Musazay, 2018). As task-based approaches gain popularity in EFL classrooms, there is a growing need to critically assess the suitability of TBLT in contexts where it may conflict with traditional educational norms and cultural practices. Therefore, it is important to direct teacher education towards understanding pre- and in-service teachers' beliefs to promote TBLT practices that positively impact students' language achievement.

Despite claims that teachers' beliefs influence decision-making and classroom behaviour, actions can also shape teacher beliefs (East, 2017). This suggests that teacher education has a role to play in the adoption and implementation of TBLT. When teachers' beliefs are addressed within teacher education, evidence suggests that new understandings and teaching behaviour aligned with TBLT principles can be successfully established (East, 2017). Practices such as (self-)reflection, observation, and reexamination during teacher education can help question and change teachers' beliefs, transforming established practices and routinising innovative pedagogical methodologies like TBLT. Ji (2017) suggests that (self-)reflection and (peer) observation in teacher education can help teachers develop a clearer understanding of how to implement TBLT in their EFL classrooms and visualise areas of opportunity.

In a similar vein, Zheng and Borg (2013) believe that reflective practices and awareness-raising procedures based on the study of lesson transcripts and of teachers' commentaries on their teaching work lead to:

an awareness among participants of, for example, how teachers' beliefs and contextual factors influence instructional choices, of what TBLT is, and of the role of grammar in task-based teaching.

The insights emerging from case-based in-service teacher education of this kind can then be extended through reading and, most importantly, by inviting teachers to undertake similar reflective analyses of their own teaching. (p. 219)

Zheng and Borg assert that reflective analysis enhances ‘participant-centred in-service teacher education’, allowing teachers to explore and reflect on the extent to which they use TBLT and the role grammar plays in their work.

The above practices should aim not only to demonstrate the influential role of teacher beliefs, but also to assist teachers in developing new beliefs that significantly impact classroom practices in line with principles of the TBLT approach. These initiatives can better support teachers with perspectives on re-evaluating TBLT and endorsing innovation. Stakeholders should explore and test TBLT against theoretical claims to assess its feasibility and limitations (East, 2017). Moreover, the evidence would be beneficial for research-informed pre- and in-service teacher education, enabling teachers to understand the implementation of TBLT from a local perspective and assess the alignment between pedagogic principles and their beliefs. This in turn would encourage teachers to adopt the approach and direct efforts to use resources to implement it. Therefore, teacher education should not only promote experiential practices (Van den Branden, 2006), but also consider empirical evidence from teachers’ local contexts. Without support in developing beliefs and clear understandings of TBLT during pre- and in-service teacher education, teachers will face challenges to implement the approach, as envisioned by Ellis (2006) and Phuong (2016). Thus, as reiterated by Breen *et al.* (2001), “[A]ny innovation in classroom practice from the

adoption of a new technique or textbook to the implementation of a new curriculum has to be accommodated within the teacher's own framework of teaching principles" (p. 472).

In sum, the design of tasks and teacher beliefs are components of the TBLT implementation. The way teachers behave in the language classroom is dependent on their beliefs, which are fed by previous experiences, context-specific factors, and formal education. To facilitate the implementation of TBLT, it is necessary to engage teachers in reflective dialogues and practices that help them reflect on the beliefs that are not in line with educational innovation. By promoting a research-informed, context-sensitive approach to teacher education that prioritises both TBLT principles and teacher beliefs, more effective conditions will be created for adopting innovative methodologies like TBLT. Ultimately, the consideration of TBLT principles and teacher beliefs will strengthen the teaching and learning process, thereby providing more opportunities for improving students' language performance and development.

4.5 Conclusions

The chapter presented language proficiency, task engagement, and teachers' beliefs as important factors influencing task performance and the enactment of TBLT. The first part of the chapter showed how proficiency affects students' task performance as indicated by CALF levels. Building on this, the second part of the chapter recognised task engagement as a similarly intricate construct that shapes students' language performance and development. It was also discussed that fostering the cognitive,

behavioural, emotional, and social characteristics of engagement can increase their investment in learning the language. Nevertheless, existing evidence suggests that students' individual differences and task design exert a strong influence on their performance, promoting varied outcomes concerning the effects of proficiency as well as task engagement. This necessitates more nuanced research on the interactions of these variables and their effects on the language performance and development of students during tasks. The last part of the chapter described teacher beliefs as constructs fed by previous experiences, pedagogic principles, and local realities. The beliefs of teachers strongly impact perceptions of effective teaching, learning, and classroom interaction, shaping their willingness to adopt an innovation like TBLT. Such beliefs can either embrace or hinder methodological change, based upon their orientation.

Therefore, further research should investigate the relationship between proficiency, task engagement, and teacher beliefs to establish language learning environments in which tasks and the general TBLT approach are implemented efficiently. With this understanding, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers will be able to formulate strategies that impact students' L2 learning and help teachers to embrace the innovative methodology: TBLT.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONTEXT-SENSITIVE TEACHER EDUCATION ON TBLT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

5.1 Introduction

Throughout this book, my argument has been that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) represents a beneficial pedagogical innovation in language teaching. TBLT offers meaningful opportunities to foster authentic communication, student involvement, task engagement, and language achievement. Over the past few decades, a substantial body of research has provided solid evidence that confirms its effectiveness in fostering L2 development through communicative tasks (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). These findings indicate the pedagogical promise of TBLT in promoting language development.

However, as consistently noted in the literature, the development and implementation of TBLT are far from complete. Although the theoretical principles are confirmed by an increasing body of research, the realities of classroom enactment present ongoing challenges (Carless, 2007; East, 2014). The book has highlighted a number of local challenges, including limited teacher training, rigid curricula, contextual constraints, and cultural mismatches, as well as knowledge gaps that require continued empirical investigation, innovation, and contextual adaptation of TBLT in diverse teaching contexts, particularly in teaching contexts where English is spoken as a foreign language.

This final chapter emphasises the need to bridge theory and practice by investigating the interaction of teacher cognition, teacher education, and the implementation of TBLT. Moreover, this chapter is an invitation for reflection on the current state of TBLT and a recommendation for sustained research and innovation directions for an effective enactment of TBLT in diverse contexts. Overall, my argument is that

the successful implementation of TBLT requires more than understanding the design of tasks and how to execute them; it demands a supportive ecosystem in which teachers are empowered through reflective practice, sustained training, and collaborative professional networks. The future of TBLT and the use of tasks in diverse teaching contexts lies in a balanced and integrated system that prioritises robust theoretical tenets and context-sensitive applications. TBLT can only continue to develop as a relevant, transformative, equitable, and flexible methodology in diverse teaching contexts through such integration.

5.2 Context-Sensitive Teacher Education on Task-Based Language Teaching

As noted in this book, performing tasks can be difficult for students. This is exacerbated when students have limited experience learning through communicative approaches. While TBLT provides a promising framework for promoting authentic language use, its effectiveness is dependent on a careful design of tasks as well as the way teachers enact the approach in the classroom. For example, as previously discussed, task design characteristics, task complexity, implementation conditions (e.g. planning time, task repetition), and their content significantly influence both students' language performance and development (Robinson, 2011; Skehan, 2009). Given task complexity, teachers play an important role in their execution and in helping students achieve communicative and linguistic goals. Consequently, the teacher's role in TBLT deserves greater recognition, highlighting the importance of addressing the nature of training they receive during their (pre- and in-service) education.

The centrality of teachers in TBLT and task implementation has been highlighted in several studies. As Jeon and Hahn (2006) note, “[A] task in itself does not necessarily guarantee its efficient implementation unless the teacher, the facilitator and controller of task performance, understands how the tasks actually work in the classroom” (p. 129). Long (2014) further argues that the teacher’s role in TBLT is even more vital than in traditional, form-focused methods, since it requires a high level of pedagogical agility, responsiveness, and resourcefulness. Similarly, Skehan (2002) asserts that TBLT necessitates “a skillful, responsive, knowledgeable teacher who is able to manage groups of students and access relevant materials as the need arises” (p. 295). Han (2018) reinforces this point by stating, “[W]ithout a doubt, teachers’ own understanding of TBLT is fundamental to the success (or lack thereof) of TBLT” (p. 164). In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, where classroom instruction is often dominated by teacher-centred practices and students have minimal exposure to the target language outside the classroom, the need for well-trained teachers becomes crucial (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Thus, effective pre- and in-service teacher education on TBLT is necessary to ensure that teachers know the TBLT principles and are able to adapt them to the locally situated conditions of their classrooms.

However, Long (2014) notes that the teacher’s role in TBLT has been understated in theory as well as practice. He explains this criticism may, in part, arise from literature highlighting a disconnect between TBLT principles and current classroom realities. Further compounding this tension is the lack of consensus on how TBLT should be conceptualised and implemented by teachers, which creates uncertainty among practitioners (Nunan, 2004).

Han (2018) attributes this ambiguity to the difficulty of clearly defining TBLT and determining which version to adopt, resulting in inconsistent applications and misaligned teaching practices. Consequently, teachers may under- or overapply research, adopting multiple roles that sometimes contradict the principles of TBLT. In practice, this can lead to the use of ineffective strategies that fail to align with task-based pedagogical approaches, suggesting potential shortcomings in teacher education.

To overcome the above challenges, holistic and practical teacher education programmes are necessary. In this sense, Long (2014) advocates for adequate in-service (re-)training and continued teacher support, particularly in environments where innovation is met with resistance. Crucially, there have been calls for governmental bodies and institutions to provide teacher education that develops a deep understanding of TBLT and addresses its advantages and limitations as an approach (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). For example, Lin and Wu (2012) recommend that the Taiwanese government offer expanded access to professional development workshops that provide in-depth knowledge of TBLT. For them, this would result in teachers developing more confidence and ability to teach through TBLT. Similarly, Phuong (2016) suggests that governments and institutions should create conditions to facilitate the adoption of TBLT in non-Western educational contexts.

In terms of content, Han (2018) recommends that teacher education on TBLT should engage teachers at both conceptual and procedural levels, enabling them to grasp the underlying pedagogical rationale as well as the procedures for classroom application. Similarly, Brandl (2016) suggests:

A teacher trainer needs to walk the talk when training foreign language teachers. Teachers need many hands-on opportunities where they can try out and experiment with TBLT methodologies in a safe environment guided by an experienced facilitator. This practice will allow them to experience TBLT in action and will prepare them for some of the challenges. Examples of such training elements include writing reflective journals, peer/expert observations, task/case study analyses, developing tasks, developing lesson plans, and microteaching. One training element that is in particular noteworthy is the need for trainees to be involved in the development of the task materials. (p. 435)

As suggested above, Brandl suggests that effective teacher education should include reflective journaling, peer observations, the analysis of case studies regarding task implementation, task development, lesson planning, and microteaching. He further recommends that teachers should be involved in the creation and adaptation of their own task materials, a process that fosters the internalisation of TBLT principles while allowing for pedagogical adaptation to specific learning needs and local realities. In line with these suggestions, East (2017a) adds that teacher education should give equal attention to theory, research, and practice. He contends that:

These intersecting components will enable us to provide this: (1) challenging stakeholders (whether teachers, policy makers or assessment implementers) to consider the proposals of TBLT, and empirical findings associated with task efficacy, seriously; (2) acknowledging the genuineness of teacher perspectives on TBLT

in practice; and (3) articulating more clearly to stakeholders the conceptual broadness of TBLT. (p. 421)

Such a comprehensive orientation will support teachers in reconciling innovative practices with local realities. These recommendations align with recent proposals for a situated or context-sensitive approach to TBLT (Ji, 2017). Carless (2012) advocates for a version of TBLT that incorporates culture, the context, teachers' beliefs and practices, and the principles of TBLT to promote language acquisition. He notes that this approach is akin to context-sensitive teaching methods proposed by Bax (2004), in which TBLT should be adapted rather than imposed. Similarly, Ji (2017) supports a situated task-based approach, proposing that integrating traditional teaching methods and form-focused instruction in the pre- and post-task stages of task cycles can facilitate teacher acceptance and success. Han (2018) adds that offering teachers the flexibility to use either TBLT or a situated task-based approach in their context may foster more positive engagement. However, he insists that the implementation of any approach should be systematically introduced in a comprehensive teacher training programme. Ultimately, the two variants of TBLT (task-based language teaching or a situated task-based approach) offer significant benefits, such as the development of implicit knowledge, functional language competence, and balanced input-output exposure (Ellis, 2017; Van den Branden, 2016). In contexts where teacher-centred instruction persists, these benefits must be foregrounded in teacher education programmes to support the communicative aims of language teaching and learning.

This highlights the pivotal role of teacher education in bridging the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom

practice. Therefore, teacher education is key to an efficient implementation of TBLT. As Ji (2017) rightly asserts, “[T]he countermeasure to this problem involves the formal teaching training in language methodology to EFL teachers. Teachers should have a holistic and clear understanding of how to implement TBLT” (p. 155). However, current teacher education has been mostly focused on developing teachers’ theoretical knowledge of TBLT without much experiential knowledge which comes from their own classroom contexts. In Han’s (2018) words:

Much of the teacher training has been reduced to helping teachers gain familiarity with or deal with task routines (e.g., differentiating a task from an exercise), rather than cultivating a coherent understanding of TBLT, including its epistemological basis and broad methodological characteristics. But such a level of understanding is essential: Without it, teachers would be left to operate on an elusive grasp of TBLT—searching for guidelines or having only a narrow understanding of one version, only to feel confused and frustrated when encountering another. (p. 165)

As suggested by Han (2018), current teacher training often emphasises procedural familiarity over deeper epistemological and methodological understanding. Without this understanding, teachers will struggle to: 1) understand task concepts, 2) grasp task goals and pedagogical intentions, 3) master task routines, and 4) receive hands-on, experiential training (Han, 2018). Consequently, a superficial approach to teacher training undermines the goal of enabling teachers to design effective tasks, articulate pedagogic goals, and integrate task-based practices into their own classrooms. A key constraint in enhancing teacher

preparation for TBLT is the scarcity of literature on teacher training (Ellis, 2017; Long, 2014; Van den Branden, 2016). In addition to this, there remains a general paucity of research specifically addressing how TBLT training is conducted in practice. In fact, little is known about the nature, scope, and quality of the training teachers actually receive. According to Han (2018), “[A]ddressing this deficit is important, not only because implementation is part and parcel of what TBLT ultimately involves, but also (and more importantly) because the quality of implementation determines the success or lack thereof” (p. 162). Without a clear understanding of how they are prepared, teachers may apply TBLT in limited or misguided ways, reducing its pedagogic potential.

In summary, this book has argued that the implementation of TBLT and its associated tasks is an intricate process, influenced by multifaceted contextual factors, for example, teachers’ beliefs, institutional norms, and students’ readiness. These factors can limit the implementation of the approach in line with its pedagogic principles. Consequently, the successful implementation of TBLT hinges on the depth, quality, and contextual sensitivity of teacher education. As TBLT requires teachers not only to master the principles of the approach, but also to be able to adapt it to the complexities of the classroom, it is imperative that teacher education programmes go beyond imparting theoretical principles. It is vital that teachers know how to use it in their classrooms whilst addressing contextual factors that may diminish the benefits of the communicative approach. Teacher education programmes must also offer practical, hands-on experiences that prepare teachers to address the challenges specific to their contexts. By addressing these current gaps, particularly in EFL contexts, teacher education can support a

more meaningful and effective adoption of TBLT, ultimately enhancing students' language acquisition. As TBLT continues to be used in classrooms, teacher education must also evolve to ensure that teachers are prepared to address the intricacies of this communicative approach. To this end, contextual research has a role to play. In the next section, I offer some future directions for task-based research and recommendations for teacher education that may assist teachers in implementing TBLT in diverse classroom contexts.

5.3 Towards a Context-Sensitive Implementation of TBLT and Tasks

TBLT constitutes an important methodology shift in the education of languages. Moving away from traditional practices that emphasise decontextualised grammar instruction or rote memorisation, TBLT offers a more meaningful, communicative, and student-centred approach. This paradigm encourages active student engagement through task performance that reflects real-world language use, thereby positively influencing teaching practices, supporting effective L2 acquisition, and promoting students' communicative competencies (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014; Willis & Willis, 2007). By focusing on purposeful interaction and contextualised communication, TBLT considers 21st-century educational demands, such as the development of communicative competence, especially in EFL contexts. Consequently, TBLT holds considerable promise for addressing diverse student needs across a range of educational settings.

In this book, it was pointed out that tasks designed with real-world goals promote the development of students'

communicative competence, enrich linguistic output, and foster learning motivation and autonomy (East, 2017b; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). However, research has indicated that the implementation of TBLT and tasks is mediated by a complex array of variables, including task design, teacher cognition, institutional culture, and student-related factors (Kuiken & Vedder, 2011; Skehan, 2009). For example, this book provided evidence on how the complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency (CALF) framework offers an in-depth perspective for examining the complexity of task performance. Collectively, these dimensions provide opportunities to understand how different variables, for example, task complexity, planning time, cognitive demands, and interactional patterns, impact L2 output (Kuiken & Vedder, 2011; Skehan, 2009). This evidence highlights the necessity of developing a comprehensive, context-sensitive approach to TBLT implementation.

Despite many studies supporting TBLT, its adoption remains superficial and highly context dependent. Cultural expectations, institutional frameworks, teacher beliefs, and broader socio-educational factors all significantly shape how TBLT is interpreted and enacted by teachers (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2007). Without careful attention to these contextual variables, there is the risk that task-based instruction may be misapplied or reduced to a set of disconnected activities, undermining its theoretical and pedagogical foundations. Therefore, a nuanced and contextually grounded approach is necessary to preserve the integrity and efficiency of task-based instruction.

To promote a more sustainable implementation of TBLT in diverse language teaching and learning contexts, it is necessary to establish a focused research agenda. Key areas of inquiry should include task design and performance, students' task engagement, the long-term impact of TBLT and its associated

communicative tasks, and more. A better understanding of how TBLT functions in different environments will enable teachers to provide students with greater opportunities for authentic comprehension and production through the use of tasks. Importantly, research must be associated with teacher education initiatives that go beyond theoretical instruction and instead consider context-sensitive, evidence-informed, and experiential practices. Such preparation is especially critical in EFL environments, where teacher-centred instruction continues to dominate and where teachers may feel unprepared to adopt communicative methodologies.

These research-related and teacher education priorities form the basis of the final part of this book, which proposes some directions for both research and teacher education. Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 aim to reinforce the empirical base supporting TBLT and the use of tasks and offer directions for integrating communicative tasks into the classroom in ways that are locally responsive and pedagogically appropriate.

5.3.1 Future Directions for Task-Based Research

Building on the discussions and findings presented in this book, the advancement of TBLT as a pedagogical framework and tasks as instructional tools requires addressing a number of unresolved and underexplored areas. The following research directions aim to 1) expand our knowledge of communicative tasks, 2) refine the implementation of TBLT, 3) align tasks and TBLT with evolving educational needs, and 4) increase the flexibility of task-based instruction in different contexts, particularly in EFL contexts. Collectively, these directions contribute to a

more evidence-based, contextually grounded, and pedagogically responsive implementation of TBLT. These research directions are categorised into seven areas, as follows.

1. Contextual adaptation of TBLT. Traditionally, TBLT has been implemented in Western, predominantly Anglophone, educational contexts. However, transferring this model to non-anglophone teaching contexts presents important challenges (Carless, 2009; Littlewood, 2007). Butler (2011) and Littlewood argue for greater sensitivity to the cultural, institutional, and pedagogical realities of these environments. Based upon this, research should look at how tasks and TBLT can be meaningfully adapted to diverse contexts by exploring how contextual variables mediate implementation and outcomes (Butler, 2011; East, 2017a). This evidence would be useful for informing strategies with a view to reconciling TBLT principles with existing educational traditions.
2. Task and CALF dimensions. While research has documented the effects of task design on task performance, there remains a need for including the four CALF dimensions. Specifically, there is a paucity of research on how certain task conditions (e.g. task complexity, planning time, and task repetition) affect all four dimensions (Ellis, 2018; Skehan, 2009) and how they interact during writing and speaking task performance. Moreover, lexis, or lexical richness, continues to be under-researched, especially in relation to both spoken and written task output (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Bulté & Housen, 2012). This evidence would contribute to a fuller picture of how tasks promote language acquisition.
3. Focusing research on writing tasks. As previously mentioned, a high amount of research on tasks has historically

focused on oral production, leaving writing tasks relatively underexamined (Byrnes & Manchón, 2014). As these authors explain, writing tasks involve distinct cognitive demands, planning opportunities, and language production processing that merit deeper investigation. Therefore, more studies are needed to examine how writing tasks influence the CALF dimensions and how students develop their writing skills. This line of inquiry would support more cohesive and skill-inclusive applications of TBLT in classroom practice.

4. Investigating teacher cognition. Teacher cognition is a factor that impacts the classroom enactment of TBLT (Borg, 2006; East, 2014). Research should specifically focus on how teachers perceive TBLT, how they reconcile it with their existing teaching behaviour, and what professional development approaches most effectively support them (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). Investigating teacher cognition is thus important for designing effective professional development programmes that promote fidelity to TBLT principles while respecting local realities.
5. Student-centred research. Student-related factors, such as proficiency, motivation, learning styles, and affective states (e.g. anxiety and confidence), significantly influence task performance (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Robinson, 2011). Accordingly, research should examine the way in which these individual differences mediate task engagement and performance. Also, incorporating students' perspectives and experiences can contribute to a broader perspective on the effectiveness of TBLT and inform more inclusive, student-responsive practices (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).
6. Real-world applications of TBLT. One of the core tenets

of TBLT prioritises real-world communication and meaningful language use (Ellis, 2003). However, research on how efficiently task-based instruction prepares students for authentic communication in academic, professional, or social contexts remains scarce (Gilabert *et al.*, 2009). Future investigations should inform us of the efficacy of tasks, especially their potential to develop job-related language skills or transfer language skills outside the classroom. Such evidence would align task-based instruction with employability and learning goals (Long, 2014).

7. Longitudinal studies on the impact of tasks. Most task-based research tends to be short-term and focused on immediate learning outcomes. In order to assess the sustained benefits of task-based instruction (Ortega, 2009), longitudinal research is needed to examine how task-based learning influences language development over time. With this evidence, it would be possible to determine whether communicative competence developed through tasks endures over time and transfers to real-life language use (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008).

Together, these research priorities aim to promote a more nuanced, context-sensitive, and research-driven use of tasks and development of TBLT. Such advancements would enhance our theoretical understanding of task-based instruction and promote innovations that address inclusivity, sustainability, and responsiveness to evolving global educational demands in diverse teaching contexts, especially within EFL environments.

5.3.2 Future Directions for Teacher Education on TBLT

As emphasised throughout this book, teacher education is key to an efficient implementation of TBLT. The success of task-based instruction depends on both pedagogical principles and teachers' abilities to understand, adapt, and apply the communicative approach in their local contexts (Carless, 2007; East, 2017b; Ellis, 2018). However, while much research has focused on the design and effectiveness of communicative tasks, less attention has been paid to how teachers are trained to enact TBLT in diverse classrooms. The major limitation has been the lack of contextually relevant teacher education that can adequately support both pre- and in-service teachers. Enacting TBLT efficiently requires involvement with local realities and pedagogical flexibility, as well as the development of reflective and collaborative teaching practices (Borg, 2006; Van den Branden, 2009). Building on this, the following priorities outline relevant areas for developing context-sensitive teacher education on TBLT:

1. Context-sensitive teacher education on TBLT. Teacher education should transcend shallow introductions to TBLT and include explorations of how contextual factors (e.g. institutional culture, local needs, and limitations regarding resources) shape or constrain implementation (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2007). This would enable teachers to make informed pedagogical choices that are locally feasible and pedagogically sound.
2. Tailored application of TBLT through experiential knowledge and hands-on practice. Once teachers know the communicative approach and are aware of the relevance of

context-specific factors, they should be mentored in adapting TBLT principles to their unique educational, cultural, and linguistic realities and contexts. Adapting TBLT does not mean diluting its principles; instead, it calls for mentorship which ensures their meaningful enactment within local contexts (Carless, 2009; East, 2014). This mentorship may include modifying task content, complexity, or delivery methods. Teacher education should therefore include micro-teaching, development of materials, classroom simulations, and empirically grounded case study examinations. This active engagement would result in developing teachers' experiential learning which builds both their abilities and confidence in TBLT, allowing them to internalise pedagogical principles and practice implementing tasks in realistic scenarios (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Van den Branden, 2006).

3. Bridge research evidence and practice. The gap between research and classroom practice remains a concern in language teacher education. Based upon this, effective teacher education on TBLT should incorporate strategies to help teachers interpret, evaluate, and apply research findings in practical ways. For example, teachers should be empowered and trained to conduct action research on the implementation of TBLT. This method, and particularly its findings, could be beneficial for systematically examining their teaching, developing context-relevant solutions to constraints related to TBLT implementation, and enhancing their reflective practice (Borg, 2013; Burns, 2010).
4. Reflection as a core component of teacher education. Reflective practices should be central to teacher education on TBLT. Through these practices, teachers should be encouraged to explore their beliefs, instructional choices,

and classroom experiences. Journals, peer discussions, and mentorship can enhance teachers' comprehension of TBLT, its context-relevant factors, and strategies for addressing implementation challenges (Farrell, 2015).

5. Professional collaboration. To promote the development of practitioners concerning TBLT, it is important that professional learning communities are organised and fostered. This teacher collaboration could serve to facilitate opportunities for peer observation and feedback, co-construction of tasks, and collective problem-solving concerning TBLT implementation. Also, such communities would provide emotional assistance, which is valuable when implementing innovative approaches (Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Voogt *et al.*, 2016).
6. Sustained professional development. Teacher education on TBLT should not be limited to initial training phases; instead, it should include continuous teacher training. Activities, such as workshops, teacher networks, and webinars, should be included as part of teachers' continuous teacher training because they help teachers keep up to date with emerging research and reflect on evolving classroom practices. Particularly, these initiatives would sustain professional advancement while adhering to the principles of education following the TBLT approach (Graves, 2009; Reinders, 2010).

Overall, the above key areas show the importance of implementing a holistic and practical approach to teacher education for the effective enactment of TBLT. As the evidence presented in this book suggests, well-prepared teachers are more likely to adapt communicative tasks and the principles of TBLT to their

local contexts, effectively addressing implementation challenges and creating meaningful learning opportunities. By means of extensive training and heightened contextual awareness, it is therefore important to empower teachers to become skilled agents of change in task-based language instruction, so that TBLT fulfils its promise of creating transformative language learning opportunities in diverse teaching and learning contexts.

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*Task-Based Language Teaching in Action:
Principles, Research Insights, and Horizons,*
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Task-Based Language Teaching in Action: Principles, Research Insights, and Horizons offers an in-depth exploration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), highlighting its potential as pedagogical innovation oriented towards authentic and significant communication. The book combines theoretical principles with empirical findings and practical reflections, providing an integral vision of how tasks influence students' language performance and development.

Throughout its five chapters, this work reviews the origins and principles of TBLT, analyses the impact of tasks on key dimensions of language performance (complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency [CALF]), and examines factors such as task difficulty, planning conditions, language proficiency, student-related characteristics, and teachers' beliefs. Moreover, the book puts forward the need for language teacher education sensitive to the teaching and learning context which trains teachers to adapt the principles of TBLT to their local realities and respond to the challenges of its implementation.

This book therefore becomes an invaluable resource for pre- and in-service teachers, language teacher educators, curriculum designers, and researchers interested in communicative approaches centred on the student. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, it proposes a more effective, flexible, and contextualized use of tasks in the language classroom, contributing to the development of communicative competence in a globalised world.

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