

Original Research

Task-Based Language Teaching in Iraqi Secondary Schools: EFL Teachers' and Students' Perceptions Toward the Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become a leading approach in language education, mainly due to its potential to make language learning more meaningful and realistic for language learners. However, teachers and students might face some challenges in implementing TBLT. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine the opportunities and challenges of implementing TBLT in Iraqi secondary schools, as perceived by English language teachers and students. This mixed-methods study employed two questionnaires administered to 42 teachers and 61 students, as well as two semi-structured interviews conducted with five teachers and five students. The findings indicated that both teachers and students acknowledged the effectiveness of TBLT. Teachers emphasized the positive impact of TBLT on learners' collaboration and interaction skills, and students noted its role in enhancing learners' interest, communication, learning, and retention of materials. However, the teachers and students confirmed that some challenges make TBLT implementation difficult in Iraqi secondary schools. Teachers were more concerned with the large number of students in classes, time limitations, unsuitable teaching materials, and students' unfamiliarity with TBLT. Students saw insufficient time, their unfamiliarity with TBLT, and the difficulty of practicing TBLT as the major challenges. The study suggests that TBLT can be beneficial for language teaching and learning in Iraqi secondary schools; however, this requires some adjustments, specifically in the time allocated to English teaching and the textbooks and materials used in schools.

Keywords: Mixed methods research, Student perceptions toward TBLT, Task-based language teaching, TBLT challenges, TBLT opportunities, Teacher perceptions toward TBLT

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1. Introduction

TBLT emerged from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and gained widespread attention for several reasons. First, TBLT can help learners master real-world communication because the kinds of language learning activities used in TBLT are meaningful (Abdullaeva, 2023; Parmar, 2019) and reflect the activities that learners are supposed to face in the real world outside the classroom (Ellis et al., 2020; Keo et al., 2024). Second, TBLT increases learner motivation (Chua & Lin, 2020; Huang, 2024; Malik & Pervaiz, 2023), which, in turn, enhances learners' engagement with the language to complete tasks (Keo et al., 2024). Third, TBLT can enhance learners' creativity (Mehardin & Areej, 2025; Wen, 2024) by engaging them in problem-solving activities. Finally, learners take advantage of TBLT in various educational settings (Oliver & Bogachenko, 2024) due to its flexibility and adaptability.

The large amount of attention to TBLT led to a large bulk of studies on the effectiveness of TBLT in different educational settings (e.g., Huang, 2024; Liu, 2024) and in enhancing certain second language (L2) skills, such as listening (Maghsoudi & Golshan, 2017), speaking (Azizifard, 2024; Jassem & Sarkhosh, 2024), reading comprehension (Wongchalee & Tutwisoot, 2024), and writing (Kafipour et al., 2018; Milarisa, 2019; Nhem, 2020). Additionally, some studies investigated teachers' perceptions towards TBLT (Lin & Wu, 2012; Liu et al., 2021; Pham & Nguyen, 2018; Phuong, 2016; Saragih et al., 2022; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011), TBLT opportunities (Hima et al., 2021), and TBLT challenges (Hasnain & Halder, 2023; Hima et al., 2021), while some others examined learners' perceptions about TBLT (Hadi, 2013) and TBLT challenges (Butarbutar, 2021; Nhem, 2020). However, no comprehensive study of teachers' and learners' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges of practicing TBLT in Iraq is found in the literature. Thus, this study aimed to examine the perceptions of Iraqi secondary school teachers and students regarding the opportunities that TBLT provides and the challenges they face in implementing it in their English classes.

2. Literature Review

As an instructional approach that emphasizes the use of tasks as meaningful activities in language teaching and learning (Ellis et al., 2020), TBLT has become quite common in L2 instruction (Parmar, 2019). It emphasizes fluency without ignoring the role of accuracy in

successful communication (Parmar, 2019). As noted by Ellis et al. (2020), the theoretical bases of TBLT can be discussed from several viewpoints, including cognitive-interactionist, psychological, psycholinguistic, educational, and sociocultural perspectives.

From an educational perspective, several studies (e.g., Azizifard, 2024; Jassem & Sarkhosh, 2024; Maghsoudi & Golshan, 2017; Milarisa, 2019; Nhem, 2020; Wongchalee & Tutwisoot, 2024) have centered on the role of TBLT in language learning. Maghsoudi and Golshan (2017) investigated the impact of labeling and form-filling task types on the listening comprehension of freshman EFL learners and found a significantly positive effect for labeling tasks. Kafipour et al. (2018) observed a significant improvement in the writing ability of EFL learners who received TBLT-based writing instruction. Jassem and Sarkhosh (2024) reported positive effects of TBLT on the speaking ability of EFL learners. Moreover, Wongchalee and Tutwisoot (2024) found a significantly positive effect of TBLT on students' reading comprehension.

From a psychological perspective, studies (e.g., Dao et al., 2024; Donate & Leow, 2024; Sand & Hiver, 2021) have demonstrated that individual variables, including learner anxiety, motivation, engagement, and beliefs, can impact the effectiveness of language-learning tasks. Donate and Leow (2024) examined the role of task anxiety as an individual variable on Spanish learners' performance on simple and complex tasks. They found that learners performing complex tasks experienced greater anxiety during task performance but also greater enjoyment. However, doing the simple tasks led to more anxiety after the task had been completed. Namkung and Kim (2024), in a systematic review of the relationship between learner motivation and engagement in TBLT research, concluded that more longitudinal research would provide a clearer picture of the dynamic and multidimensional nature of these two constructs. In addition, Sand and Hiver (2021) recommended that the role of teachers, peers, and learning on task engagement could be examined longitudinally.

Teacher and learner attitudes or beliefs constitute another individual-difference factor that may impact the efficacy of TBLT. Based on Dao et al.'s (2024) systematic review on teachers' and learners' beliefs about TBLT, teachers held both positive and negative attitudes about TBLT. They believed that TBLT could enhance learner engagement and enjoyment, create a better class atmosphere with more opportunities for participation, communication, and collaboration, and decrease learner anxiety. On the other hand, they

thought that teacher, learner, and contextual factors might create some challenges in practicing TBLT. Regarding teacher factors, Dao et al. (2024) found that many teachers lacked an acceptable understanding of TBLT, did not feel confident enough to implement a new pedagogical approach, and believed that TBLT negatively impacted their classroom management and control.

Regarding learner issues, they found the implementation of TBLT challenging due to mismatches with their expectations (specifically in explicitly teaching grammar and practicing pronunciation), their low proficiency in performing tasks in the L2, heterogeneous classes, and differences in learning strategies, learning styles, and interests. Concerning contextual factors, the problems mainly arose from the need to follow a strict syllabus, address the points (mostly grammatical) required for passing final exams, and teach from specific coursebooks during the limited time in school. Neupane (2024) studied EFL teachers' perceptions and practices regarding TBLT and found that teachers considered TBLT an approach that links classroom practices with real-world language use, making language learning a meaningful and engaging experience. The teachers, however, considered time limitations and assessment problems as challenges in implementing TBLT. Zhang (2024) surveyed teachers' attitudes toward challenges in implementing TBLT in China and found that problems with textbooks, curriculum, large class sizes, and insufficient teacher training were the primary issues.

In the same vein, studies examining learners' attitudes toward TBLT (Bao & Da, 2015; Butarbutar, 2021; Hadi, 2013; Nhem, 2020; Vahdat et al., 2022) have shown that learners hold both positive and negative attitudes toward its use. Based on Nhem's (2020) study on learner attitudes toward TBLT in L2 writing classes, a frequent challenge was insufficient L2 proficiency to complete the tasks. Vahdat et al. (2022) examined the attitudes of Iraqi primary school teachers and learners towards the six-grade task-based textbook. The results showed that difficulty in understanding, doing, and redoing tasks was a major challenge for the students. Jassem and Sarkhosh (2024) surveyed the attitudes of Iraqi EFL learners and found that they had positive attitudes towards the implementation of TBLT for developing L2 speaking. In addition, Wongchalee and Tutwisoot (2024) examined students' attitudes toward the effects of TBLT on their reading comprehension and found that students had positive attitudes toward it.

Given the importance of teachers' and learners' attitudes, the primary objective of the current study was to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers and students regarding the opportunities in and challenges of implementing TBLT specifically in Iraqi secondary schools. In line with the stated objective, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are Iraqi secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of the opportunities provided by implementing TBLT in their English classes?
2. What are Iraqi secondary school students' perceptions of the opportunities provided by implementing TBLT in their English classes?
3. What challenges do Iraqi secondary school EFL teachers face in implementing TBLT?
4. What challenges do Iraqi secondary school students face in practicing TBLT?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

This study employed a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design, collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire results were analyzed quantitatively, and the interview data were analyzed qualitatively. Data from English teachers and their students in Iraqi secondary schools were collected via Telegram and WhatsApp in 2023.

3.2. Participants

Both EFL teachers and students in public secondary schools in Iraq participated in two phases of data collection, serving as questionnaire respondents and interviewees. Participants in the study were selected through convenience sampling. To encourage higher participation of teachers and students, the questionnaires were sent to Telegram and WhatsApp groups for Iraqi secondary school English teachers. The teachers were asked to fill out the teacher questionnaire and have their students complete the student questionnaire. The final number of completed questionnaires after initial screening and removal of those with missing items or corrupted data was 42 from the teachers and 61 from the students. The teachers included 17 males and 25 females. The years of experience were less than 5 for nine teachers, 6-10 for 13, 11-20 for 16, and more than 20 for four teachers. The participating students, aged 15 to 18, consisted of 24 males and 37 females

from various secondary grades. The participants were all speakers of Iraqi Arabic and had relatively similar socio-economic status.

The second group of participants consisted of five teachers and five students from the previous phase, who were selected based on their willingness to participate in semi-interviews. Two of the teachers were male and three were female, with ages ranging from 32 to 50. Their years of experience were less than five for one teacher, 6-10 for 2, and 11-20 for two others. The students were three males and two females, aged 15-18. It should be noted that in the Iraqi context, English is taught as a foreign language, and students' exposure to English is primarily limited to English class time. For Iraqi secondary school students, English is a subject studied alongside many others in their curriculum.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Perception Questionnaires

Two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students, were prepared for this study to assess perceptions of TBLT, the opportunities it provides for language teaching and learning, and the challenges associated with its implementation. The initial numbers of items for the teacher and student questionnaires were 34 and 53, respectively. The content of the items was based on a literature review and consultation with authorities. The validity of the questionnaires was ensured by having two experienced university instructors review them and by modifying the content based on their comments. After the revision process, the number of items was reduced to 28 in the teacher questionnaire and 45 in the student questionnaire. Then, the revised versions of the two questionnaires were piloted with 30 teachers and 33 students, who represented the participants in this study. The questionnaires were sent to these teachers and students via Telegram and WhatsApp. The students were given explanations of TBLT and initial instructions for completing the questionnaire to ensure they understood what TBLT is and how to fill out the questionnaire. No specific time was given to the teachers and students to answer the items carefully and comfortably. Additionally, the first researcher was available online to answer questions about the items. The teachers and students were asked to write their comments about any problems or ambiguities with the items.

Based on feedback from teachers and students, some items were modified, while others were omitted from each questionnaire. Thus, the final teacher and student

questionnaires consisted of 26 and 41 items, respectively. The items were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1, showing "Strongly Disagree", to 5, indicating "Strongly Agree." The reliability statistics of the questionnaires were determined by means of calculating Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha was 0.78 for the teacher questionnaire and 0.74 for the student questionnaire, both indicating acceptable levels of reliability. Data triangulation was used to provide evidence of construct validity, as the small sample size prevented the researchers from conducting a factor analysis. At the end of the questionnaires, a section asked participants whether they would like to attend a related interview, and they marked the relevant box.

3.3.2. Interviews

The interview questions were formulated based on a review of the relevant literature, the questionnaire responses, and consultation with an authority. First, based on a review of the related literature, five questions were formulated for the interviews. Next, the teacher and student questionnaires were checked, and, based on notes some participants left, two additional items were added, as the purpose of the interviews was to complement the questionnaire data and provide deeper insights into participants' perceptions. Finally, the interview questions were given to the same university professors who had evaluated the questionnaires to assess their validity. Based on their comments, the questions were revised into two sets of five questions each. The questions for students mainly focused on their knowledge of TBLT, their ideas about it, and its educational, psychological, and challenges. The questions in the teacher interview addressed their general understanding of TBLT, ways to implement it, and its educational, psychological, and challenges.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

First, the required instruments—two questionnaires and two sets of interview questions — were designed. Next, the questionnaires were distributed via Telegram and WhatsApp to the groups of Iraqi secondary school teachers. The teachers were invited to complete the teacher questionnaire and to ask their students to complete the student questionnaire. Due to the low response rate, follow-up messages and requests were sent to the teachers to encourage their participation and to ask them to encourage students to attend the study. To triangulate the data, the questionnaire collection was followed by interviews with five

teachers and five students who had expressed readiness to participate. The semi-interviews were conducted by the first author via Telegram and WhatsApp and guided by the prepared interview questions. Participants were advised to be honest in their answers and to ask for clarification if they encountered any ambiguities. They were assured that their personal information and identity would remain confidential.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Both quantitative and qualitative data analyses were used in the study. First, quantitative data analysis was conducted to evaluate the perceptions of Iraqi EFL teachers and students based on questionnaire data. The analysis of the questionnaire data involved calculating frequencies and percentages for each option of each questionnaire item. The items in the questionnaires were analyzed into two categories: opportunities and challenges of TBLT implementation. Then, the qualitative data from the interviews were coded thematically to identify key insights of the teachers and students about TBLT in Iraqi secondary schools. The extracted themes were divided into two categories: opportunities and challenges in implementing TBLT.

4. Results

4.1. Opportunities in Implementing TBLT Based on Teachers' Perceptions

The teacher questionnaire, comprising 26 items, achieved a 100% response rate among 42 secondary teachers. Responses on a five-point Likert scale were recoded into a simplified three-point scale: "Strongly agree and Agree," "Undecided," and "Disagree and Strongly Disagree." The frequencies and percentages of teachers selecting any of the three options for the 17 questionnaire items related to opportunities in TBLT implementation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Opportunities Based on Teachers' Perceptions (Questionnaire Results)

Item	SA & A		U		D & SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. A task is a communicative goal-directed activity.	38	90%	2	5%	2	5%
2. Tasks involve a primary focus on meaning.	32	76%	5	12%	5	12%
3. A task has a clearly defined outcome.	34	81%	3	7%	5	12%

4. A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learner.	31	74%	6	14%	5	12%
5. TBLT is consistent with the principles of the communicative approach.	32	76%	6	14%	4	10%
6. TBLT is based on the learner-centred instructional approach.	28	66%	6	14%	8	20%
7. TBLT has three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.	35	83%	4	10%	3	7%
8. I have interest in implementing TBLT in the classroom.	33	79%	4	9%	5	12%
9. TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.	38	91%	4	9%	0	0%
10. TBLT meets learners' needs and interests.	34	81%	3	7%	5	12%
11. TBLT pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom	34	81%	5	12%	3	7%
12. TBLT is proper for organizing classroom activities.	29	69%	7	17%	6	14%
13. TBLT materials are meaningful and purposeful materials and based on the real-world context.	33	79%	6	14%	3	7%
14. TBLT improves learners' interaction skills.	39	93%	2	5%	1	2%
15. TBLT encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.	34	81%	2	5%	6	14%
16. TBLT creates a collaborative learning environment.	36	85%	4	10%	2	5%
17. TBLT promotes learners' academic progress.	34	81%	6	14%	2	5%

Note. F frequency, SA & A= Strongly agree and Agree, U= Undecided, D & SD= Disagree and Strongly disagree.

The results in Table 1 (Items 1-7) indicate the level of task understanding among English teachers with varying levels of experience. The findings indicated that a significant majority (90%) of respondents believed the task had a communicative aim, while 5% disagreed and 5% were undecided. Moreover, the results showed that 76% of the respondents believed that the task should emphasize meaning-centeredness, while 12% disagreed and 12% were undecided. Regarding the outcomes associated with tasks, the results showed that 81% of respondents believed there was a clear outcome for a task,

while 12% disagreed and 7% were undecided. The results also showed that 74% of the respondents perceived a task as an activity in which the learner employed the target language, while 12% disagreed and 14% were undecided. Regarding the connection between TBLT and CLT, 76% of the respondents believed there was a connection, whereas 10% disagreed and 14% were undecided. Furthermore, 66% considered TBLT as a learner-centered approach, while 19% disagreed and 14% were undecided. Regarding the three stages of task use — pre-task, task implementation, and post-task — the results showed that 83% of the respondents recognized the three distinct stages and the structured nature of TBLT implementation, while 7% disagreed and 10% were undecided.

Regarding teachers' perceptions of TBLT implementation in their classes, as indicated in Table 1 (Items 8-13), 79% of the respondents expressed interest in implementing TBLT in their classrooms, while 12% said they were not interested and 10% were undecided. Additionally, 91% agreed that TBLT could foster a relaxed environment conducive to target language use, and 10% chose to remain undecided. Additionally, 81% thought that TBLT met learners' needs and interests, while 12% disagreed and 7% were undecided. It was also shown that 81% of the teachers agreed that TBLT advanced the development of integrated language skills, while 7% disagreed and 12% remained undecided. Furthermore, 69% agreed that TBLT was suitable for organizing classroom activities effectively, while 14% disagreed and 17% were undecided. Regarding the TBLT materials, 79% affirmed that the materials used in TBLT were meaningful, purposeful, and relevant to real-world contexts, while 7% disagreed and 14% were undecided.

As for the reasons teachers used TBLT in the classroom, the results in Table 1 (Items 14-17) showed that the majority of teachers (93%) agreed that TBLT enhanced learners' interaction skills, while 2% disagreed and 5% were undecided. Moreover, 81% agreed that TBLT could foster intrinsic motivation among learners, while 14% disagreed and 5% were undecided. Furthermore, 85% agreed that TBLT contributed to the creation of a collaborative learning environment, while 5% disagreed, and the rest (10%) were undecided. Finally, 81% of the respondents agreed that TBLT promoted academic progress among learners, while 5% disagreed and 14% were undecided.

Regarding the interview results, the data obtained from semi-interviews with five EFL teachers who volunteered to participate in this phase of the study were thematically analyzed. The themes centered on two major issues: teachers' ideas about the opportunities

they believed TBLT offered in their classes, and the challenges they faced in implementing TBLT in public schools in Iraq. The responses regarding the opportunities yielded four themes, presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Opportunities Based on Teachers' Perceptions (Interview Results)

Themes	Codes
Fostering a collaborative learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating group work collaboration among students • Increasing students' chances to help each other • Facilitating cooperation among students of various proficiency levels • Encouraging small group work
Improving interactive skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging student communication with peers and teachers • Leading to active and regular communication between students
Promoting student progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resulting in the development of different language skills • Improving students' interpersonal skills • Enhancing students' academic performance by providing opportunities for them to apply the language they are learning
Making language learning more meaningful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizing the real use of language

As indicated in Table 2, the participating teachers believed that TBLT had positive influences on their students' learning by fostering a collaborative learning environment, improving interactive skills, promoting student progress, and making language learning more meaningful. Some of the teachers' responses are provided below. Due to ethical considerations, pseudo names are used for the five teachers attending the interview.

Bassam (pseudo name):

Iraqi English teachers are still using traditional ways for teaching but TBLT is a good approach for language actual use. It demands a continuous communication between students that enhances both their English language and interpersonal skills. It promotes communication among students and interaction between students and teacher.

Anwar:

TBLT focuses on ensuring that learners use the target language to communicate during their learning process. TBLT tasks enhance

collaboration among students by facilitating group work. Tasks require pair or group work where students must assist each other out in completing the tasks.

Jamal:

Tasks enable group work, and this could make chances for students to exchange help. Collaboration between students is significant and can be facilitated by engaging in group work. TBLT enhances learner interaction skills. TBLT prepares learners for real-life communication, and we need to interact with people in daily life. Joint effort can improve collaboration, especially in tasks that require pair or group work.

Jasim:

TBLT has positive effects on learners' academic skills. TBLT emphasis is on language use beyond rules. It also takes care of the real use of the language.

Nabil:

TBLT supports learners' academic progress by providing chances to apply the language they are learning.

4.2. Opportunities in Implementing TBLT Based on Students' Perceptions

Sixty-one students filled out the student questionnaire. As with the teacher questionnaire, the five scales were combined into three categories: "Strongly agree and Agree," "Undecided," and "Disagree and Strongly Disagree." Table 3 presents the results for each of the 25 questionnaire items addressing opportunities in TBLT implementation. The table encompasses the frequencies and percentages of the students choosing any of the three options for each item.

Table 3.*Opportunities Based on Students' Perceptions (Questionnaire Results)*

Item	SA & A		U		D & SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. Tasks are fun and enjoyable.	37	61%	17	28%	7	11%
2. Tasks are useful and beneficial for us.	41	67%	13	22%	7	11%
3. Tasks are better than the traditional exercises.	44	72%	13	21%	4	7%
4. Tasks are similar to my real life activities.	25	41%	24	39%	12	20%
5. The tasks used in our class are interesting.	45	74%	12	20%	4	6%
6. The tasks are easy to learn and practice because they are related to my daily life.	42	69%	13	21%	6	10%
7. Tasks help me in retention of the subjects.	48	79%	7	11%	6	10%
8. Task help me to review my previous information.	52	85%	7	11%	2	4%
9. Tasks help me to think to solve problems.	29	47%	23	38%	9	15%
10.I understand the subjects easily when the teachers use tasks.	48	79%	12	19%	1	2%
11. Tasks increase my interest in my English class.	45	74%	10	16%	6	10%
12. Tasks improve my communication skills.	45	74%	9	15%	7	11%
13. I understand the subjects easily when the teachers use tasks.	48	79%	12	19%	1	2%
14. Tasks have facilitated my relationship with the teacher.	39	64%	12	20%	10	16%
15. I feel happy whenever my teachers use tasks like solving puzzles.	49	80%	10	17%	2	3%
16. I enjoy the teaching strategies used by the teacher when using tasks.	42	69%	11	18%	8	13%
17. I like doing tasks in groups.	50	82%	8	13%	3	5%
18. I have high satisfaction with tasks.	40	65%	15	25%	6	10%
19. While doing tasks, I do my best to understand everything that my teacher teaches us.	46	75%	11	18%	4	7%
20. At home, I regularly repeat tasks that we have completed in the classroom.	32	52%	17	28%	12	20%
21. I examine myself to check if I remember what I have learnt by doing new tasks.	45	74%	8	13%	8	13%
22. I use the explanation given before each task to understand the subject better.	46	75%	9	15%	6	10%
23. When doing tasks, groups have competition with each other.	50	82%	5	8%	6	10%
24. I communicate with my classmates in collaborative group activities.	47	77%	9	15%	5	8%
25. We frequently get help from the teacher while doing tasks.	39	64%	11	18%	11	18%

The results in Table 3 (Items 1-5) show that a large percentage of the students considered tasks fun and enjoyable (61%), useful and beneficial (67%), better than

exercises (72%), interesting (74%), and easy to learn and practice due to their relation to their daily life. Around 41% of the students (Item 6) thought that the tasks were similar to their real-life activities, while 39% had no idea, and 20% disagreed. Furthermore, as shown in Table 3 (Items 7-9), the majority of the students believed that tasks helped them retain the materials (79%), review their prior information (85%), and understand the subjects easily (79%). Approximately 47% of the students (Item 10) reported that tasks helped them think when solving problems, while 38% were undecided, and 15% disagreed. Additionally, a large percentage of students agreed that tasks increased their interest in their English class (74%), improved their communication skills (74%), and strengthened their relationship with their teacher (64%). Moreover, a majority expressed happiness while performing tasks (80%), enjoyment of the teaching strategies employed by teachers in task-based instruction (69%), interest in completing tasks (82%), and satisfaction with the tasks (65%). Many students believed that doing tasks encouraged them to do their best to understand everything that the teacher taught (75%), to regularly repeat at home the tasks completed in the classroom (52%), to test themselves to check if they remembered what they had learnt by doing new tasks (74%), to use the explanation given before each task to understand the subject better (75%), to have group competition with other groups (82%), to communicate with their classmates in collaborative group activities (77%), and to get help from their teachers (64%) frequently.

Among the students who had completed the questionnaire, five who had shown willingness to attend a semi-structured interview were selected. The responses were thematically analyzed and categorized into two groups: opportunities and challenges of implementing TBLT in their classes. The themes and codes related to the opportunities are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.

Opportunities Based on Students' Perceptions (Interview Results)

Categories			Codes
Making	learning	more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to use the language they learned in real situations • Making language learning more meaningful • Helping them to do things with the language
meaningful			

Creating positive feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating them to learn English • Motivating them to use the tasks in similar activities • Making them more interested in language learning
Increasing student interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging the students in group activities • Helping them to encourage others to attend the group task completion • Helping them ask for teacher help • Helping them get help from other students

In line with the questionnaire results, the interview results indicated that the students considered TBLT beneficial because it made language learning more meaningful for them, helped them develop a positive attitude toward language learning, and was effective in increasing student-student and student-teacher interactions. Some sample student responses are provided below, using pseudonyms to protect the participating students' identities.

Zaidan:

TBLT make English class more interesting. I like my class. The teacher explains everything.

Noor:

Because I do tasks in my class, I can talk better and ask questions when I need information or don't know something. I enjoy working with my friends in the class.

Fuad:

I can remember things better when I use tasks in class. When I go home, I think about the things we did in class. I repeat them for myself.

Shihab:

Because of TBLT, it is easy for me to review lesson. I remember what we did in class.

Nawaf:

TBLT is good because I understand lessons better. I like doing things with other students. We ask teacher to help us. We ask others to help us.

4.3. Challenges of Implementing TBLT Based on Teachers' Perceptions

The frequencies and percentages of the 42 teachers who chose any of the three options for each of the nine items in the questionnaire addressing challenges of TBLT implementation are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

Challenges Based on Teachers' Perceptions (Questionnaire Results)

Item	SA & A		U		D & SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. TBLT imposes much psychological burden on teacher as a facilitator.	30	72%	9	21%	3	7%
2. Large class size is an obstacle to use TBLT.	28	67%	6	14%	8	19%
3. TBLT is appropriate for small group work.	31	74%	7	16%	4	10%
4. TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.	32	77%	4	9%	6	14%
5. I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.	20	48%	6	14%	16	38%
6. Learners are not accustomed to task-based learning.	20	48%	8	19%	14	33%
7. Materials in textbooks are not proper for using TBLT.	20	48%	6	14%	16	38%
8. I have limited target language proficiency to implement TBLT easily.	18	42%	4	10%	20	48%
9. I have difficulty in assessing learner's task-based performance.	14	33%	8	19%	20	48%

Results in Table 5 (Items 1-4) show that the majority of the teachers believed that TBLT imposed much psychological burden on them as the facilitator in the class (72%), TBLT was difficult to apply in their classes because of the high number of students (67%), it was more suitable for small group work (74%), and it required much preparation time for the teachers (77%). Moreover, as shown in Table 5 (Items 5-8), nearly half of the teachers agreed that they did not have sufficient knowledge of task-based instruction (48%), their learners were not accustomed to task-based learning (48%), the textbook materials were not suitable for TBLT (48%), and they had limited target language proficiency to implement TBLT (42%) easily. Additionally, as shown in Item 9, approximately one-third (33%) of the teachers expressed concern about the difficulty of assessing students' task performance.

Next, teacher interview responses on the challenges of implementing TBLT in Iraqi secondary schools were thematically analyzed. The analysis yielded nine codes and three themes, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6.

Challenges Based on Teachers' Perceptions (Interview Results)

Items	Responses provided by participants
Time limitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient time to practice TBLT • Insufficient time to guide individual students in a TBLT class • Time-consuming preparation for TBLT • Insufficient time to assess students' performance in completing tasks
Class size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large number of students in each class • Difficulty in getting students' attention to the class • Difficulty in managing the class during TBLT • Difficulty in monitoring students while doing tasks
Pedagogical problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course books which are not suitable for TBLT • Students' unfamiliarity with TBLT • Difficulty with assessing students' performance because of its subjective nature

Some example teacher responses are provided below. For ethical considerations the names used for teachers are pseudo names.

Bassam:

Iraqi English classrooms are crowded. TBLT needs sufficient time for each individuals when using TBLT.

Anwar:

I must complete the book given by the school to me that is not suitable for TBLT. Even if there will be other materials proper for TBLT, then the time would not be enough.

Jamal:

The large number of students does not facilitate the TBLT process. Large classes hinder TBLT implementation. Students are not used to TBLT.

Jasim:

It is really difficult to practice TBLT in our lasses because there are so many students. Also, students are not very used to learning by using TBLT.

Nabil:

The bad economic level make students work outside school to help their families which results in lack of sufficient time to practice TBLT outside the classroom. The students are not familiar with TBLT, and there is a big number of students in the classroom.

4.4. Challenges of Implementing TBLT Based on Students' Perceptions

The frequencies and percentages of the 61 students who selected any of the three categories of options for each of the 16 questionnaire items related to challenges of TBLT implementation are given in Table 7.

Table 7.

Challenges Based on Students' Perceptions (Questionnaire Results)

Item	SA & A		U		D & SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. I must work hard to do the tasks.	48	79%	9	15%	4	6%
2. I have to obtain some information on my own to do some tasks.	54	89%	4	6%	3	5%
3. I have to frequently ask for clarifications during doing the tasks.	49	80%	10	17%	2	3%
4. Task completion needs cooperation among students.	50	82%	7	11%	4	7%
5. The assistance by classmates and teachers during doing tasks is necessary to do the tasks.	41	67%	12	20%	8	13%
6. The posters and pictures are needed to help me understand the tasks.	54	89%	4	6%	3	5%
7. I cannot do the tasks successfully.	34	56%	15	25%	12	19%
8. I need more time to do tasks.	42	69%	14	23%	5	8%
9. The tasks are not suitable for me.	22	36%	18	30%	21	34%
10. The information about TBLT is strange to me.	17	28%	17	28%	27	44%
11. I dislike the tasks because they are too difficult.	15	25%	19	31%	27	44%
12. I have problem with doing tasks.	26	43%	17	28%	18	29%
13. I have problem with task instructions.	22	36%	20	33%	19	31%
14. I struggle with unfamiliar tasks.	34	56%	11	18%	16	26%
15. I cannot redo the tasks out of class by myself.	21	34%	21	35%	19	31%
16. I do not find any teaching aids to help me with my tasks in the classroom.	35	57%	13	22%	13	21%

As shown in Table 7 (Items 1-6), the findings indicated that a great majority of the students believed that they had to work hard to do the tasks (79%), and that while doing tasks, they had to obtain some information on their own (89%), they had to ask for clarifications (89%) frequently, they needed cooperation with other students to accomplish the tasks (82%), that the assistance by classmates and teachers was necessary to do the tasks (67%), and that posters and pictures were needed to help them understand the tasks (89%). The results in Table 7 (Items 7-8) further showed that more than half of the students (56%) stated they could not complete the tasks, and 69% needed more time to complete them. In addition, 36 percent of the students thought that the tasks were not suitable for them (Item 9), 28% believed that the information about TBLT was strange to them (Item 10), and 25% showed dislike for the tasks because they thought the tasks were too difficult for them (Item 11). Moreover, as shown in the table (Items 12-17), the students believed that they had problem with doing tasks (43%), task instructions (36%), unfamiliar tasks (56%), redoing the tasks on their own out of class (34%), and finding teaching aids to help them with the tasks in the classroom (57%).

The thematic analysis of students' responses to the semi-structured interview on the challenges of practicing TBLT in English learning yielded the themes and codes presented in Table 8.

Table 8.

Challenges Based on Students' Perceptions (Interview Results)

Categories	Codes
Time limitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient time to complete the tasks • Insufficient time to get help from their teacher • Insufficient time to work with other students in groups • Insufficient time to practice tasks
Unfamiliarity with TBLT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfamiliar tasks • Insufficient instructions about how to do the tasks • Unclear instructions about how to do the tasks
Problems with doing tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in doing the tasks • Difficulty in applying the tasks to other related tasks

Below are a few sample student responses. Pseudo names are used for the participating students.

Zaidan:

There is little time whether for joint tasks or individual tasks. The tasks cannot be completed in its pinpoint time. We need more flexible time to complete the assigned tasks.

Noor:

I have problem because I cannot do the tasks completely. Also, I cannot repeat the tasks that I can do sometimes. Sometimes, I complete a tasks, but after that I cannot do a tasks that is very similar.

Fuad:

Doing the tasks depends on time given to each type of task. Tasks that require teamwork, can't implement in a short time among other study subjects. This shows that TBLT tasks can't be done in this status.

Shihab:

Some tasks are strange. I cannot understand how to do them. They are difficult. The information is not easy. How should I learn to do the task?

Nawaf:

We do not know about tasks a lot. We need help. But, time is not enough to ask the teacher to help us We need help from friends, from classmates. But, we don't have time.

5. Discussion

This study examined teachers' and students' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges of implementing TBLT in Iraqi schools. Regarding the opportunities, the findings indicated that teachers generally had a good understanding of tasks and TBLT principles. They were interested in using TBLT for its positive impact on fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere, enhancing student interaction skills, and preparing them for real-life

situations. In addition, students believed that TBLT could increase their interest in English lessons, improve their communication skills, make subjects easier to understand, enhance subject retention, and provide opportunities to review previously covered material. As for the challenges, the results showed that teachers had numerous reasons, including large class sizes, student unfamiliarity with TBLT, inappropriate teaching materials, and time constraints, for avoiding TBLT in their classes. In addition, students faced challenges in practicing TBLT, including time constraints, unfamiliarity with TBLT, and difficulty completing tasks.

The findings, therefore, indicate that although both teachers and students have high perceptions of TBLT's effectiveness in Iraqi secondary schools, several serious challenges make its implementation difficult. The opportunities identified by both teachers and students support the integration of TBLT in language teaching, as highlighted by Neupane (2024). On the other hand, the challenges identified by teachers and students indicate that the current curriculum does not enable them to implement TBLT effectively. Ellis et al. (2020) warn that focusing on the challenges of implementing TBLT might lead to the conclusion that TBLT is not worth applying in our classes. However, as they suggest, the solution is not to ignore TBLT but to identify and address the challenges. In fact, the successful implementation of TBLT in Iraqi schools requires some changes to the educational system. It requires more time for English classes in secondary schools and demands teaching materials, textbooks, and assessment methods that better align with TBLT practice. In addition, it calls for teacher education programs as recommended by some studies (e.g., Neupane, 2024; Zhang, 2024), in order to equip teachers with a profound theoretical understanding of TBLT (Zhang, 2024) and skills in task creation, classroom control and management, and assessment in TBLT (e.g., Neupane, 2024; Zhang, 2024). Teachers need training in adapting their scaffolding to learners' levels during TBLT (Oliver & Bogachenko, 2024). This would help teachers recognize the significance of learners' awareness of TBLT and incorporate it more readily into language teaching.

The findings of the study are in line with a number of other studies with regard to high perceptions of teachers (Dao et al., 2024; Jassem & Sarkhosh, 2024; Neupane, 2024) and learners (Butarbutar, 2021; Dao et al., 2024; Hadi, 2013; Nhem, 2020; Vahdat et al., 2022) about TBLT. Oliver and Bogachenko (2024) stressed the importance of school teachers' certainty that tasks are effective and beneficial for their students. Regarding

teachers' and students' perceptions of TBLT's efficacy in language education, this study's results indicate that both groups are aware of its efficacy. This efficacy has been empirically demonstrated in numerous studies (e.g., Azizifard, 2024; Huang, 2024; Jassem & Sarkhosh, 2024; Liu, 2024; Milarisa, 2019; Nhem, 2020; Oliver & Bogachenko, 2024; Wongchalee & Tutwisoot, 2024).

Additionally, regarding teachers' and students' perceptions of the opportunities arising from TBLT, the findings confirm those of other studies (e.g., Dao et al., 2024; Neupane, 2024). For instance, the finding that teachers consider TBLT effective in enhancing the collaborative learning atmosphere and students' interaction skills aligns with the results of Dao et al. (2024) and Nhem (2020). Moreover, teachers' positive attitude toward TBLT, due to its potential to prepare students for real-life communication, has been confirmed by Neupane (2024). The results concerning students' perceptions about the positive consequences of TBLT implementation corroborate with other studies showing that TBLT can increase their interest in English lessons (Hima et al., 2021), improve their communication skills (Bao & Da, 2015), make learning more meaningful (Hima et al., 2021), help better retention of subjects, increase their motivation (Hima et al., 2021), and decrease their anxiety (Bao & Da, 2015).

As far as teachers' perceptions about the challenges of TBLT are concerned, the results of this study are in line with other studies regarding large class sizes (Zhang, 2024), student unfamiliarity with TBLT (Phuong, 2016), inappropriate teaching materials (Dao et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024), and time constraints (Dao et al., 2024; Neupane, 2024; Zhang, 2024). About students' perceptions toward challenges of TBLT, the results of this study align with some other studies concerning time constraints (Bao & Da, 2015; Hima et al., 2021; Nhem, 2020) and students' unfamiliarity with TBLT (Hima et al., 2021), insufficient L2 proficiency (Nhem, 2020), and difficulty in completing tasks (Hima et al., 2021; Vahdat et al., 2022).

However, it is worth noting that perceptions of tasks and TBLT practice may be influenced by other factors, including individual differences (Dao et al., 2024) and task characteristics (Donate & Leow, 2024). Donate and Leow (2024) have shown that higher task complexity may lead to higher levels of both positive and negative learner emotions. Moreover, in TBLT implementation, teachers should be aware that, as Oliver and

Bogachenko (2024) show, its effectiveness depends on a range of other factors, including learners' age, level, and individual factors, in addition to task difficulty and complexity.

6. Conclusion

The current study aimed to examine the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the opportunities and challenges of TBLT practice in Iraqi secondary schools. It was revealed that teachers and students have positive perceptions about using TBLT in English classrooms. They believe that using TBLT provides teachers and students with opportunities for both teaching and learning. However, they believe that implementing TBLT in Iraqi schools is challenging due to several factors, including the curriculum, school textbooks, instructional time, learners' English proficiency, and their unfamiliarity with the TBLT approach. The study's findings suggest that teachers' and learners' awareness of the usefulness of TBLT, as a prerequisite for successful TBLT implementation, is provided. Therefore, steps should be taken to empower teachers to use TBLT easily and effectively in their classrooms. This empowerment requires the cooperation of curriculum developers, syllabus designers, teacher trainers, school authorities, and language teachers. It demands devoting more time to English classes in Iraqi schools, planning teacher training on TBLT implementation, and giving school teachers greater autonomy to choose freely the teaching materials, teaching methods, and assessment approaches that are more compatible with TBLT.

This study has several shortcomings that should be acknowledged. First, participants were selected through convenience sampling. Therefore, the sample's representativeness is not guaranteed. Second, due to the difficulty of persuading school teachers and students to participate in the study, a limited number of participants from each category were included.

Based on the study's findings and limitations, further research could examine and compare the perceptions of teachers, students, and other stakeholders regarding the implementation of TBLT across various educational settings, including private schools, institutions, and higher education centers. Further research is recommended to compare the effectiveness of TBLT in public and private schools in Iraq, aiming to determine whether the institutional context affects outcomes. More studies are recommended to examine the roles of teacher variables, such as autonomy, reflection, and identity, and learner variables, including motivation, willingness to communicate, and intercultural competence, in the

effectiveness of TBLT in language education. Studies focusing on the in-depth analysis of the roles of teacher and learner proficiency, as well as TBLT knowledge and familiarity, would be enlightening. Furthermore, future studies are recommended to investigate the role of teacher training in TBLT implementation and to assess how continuous professional development can mitigate the challenges that teachers face in adopting TBLT. Moreover, it would be promising to examine how sustained use of TBLT influences teachers' and learners' perceptions and practices over time. Ultimately, further research can investigate the potential of digital tools and online resources to enhance teachers' and learners' perceptions and practices of TBLT in specific instructional settings.

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