EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Task-Based Language Teaching: A Qualitative Study from Iran

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ABSTRACT

While research on task-based language teaching (TBLT) has grown extensively, little is known about teachers' beliefs of this approach. The study sought to uncover the potential factors influencing teachers' beliefs and practices regarding TBLT. Examining these factors allows for a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics that shape teachers' approaches in implementation of TBLT. In response to this lacuna, the current study explored Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about task-based language teaching. Data were collected from 15 teachers using interviews and analyzed based on the principles of thematic analysis. Data analysis showed four themes in the teachers' beliefs about TBLT: (1) learners' eagerness to communication through TBLT and their resistance to TBLT, (2) more acceptance and implementation of PPP (present-practice-produce) compared to TBLT, (3) time constraints and management for TBLT implementation, and (4) preference to use the previously-designed materials than task-based materials. Based on the findings, implications are provided for teacher educators to run professional development courses that enhance teachers' awareness of TBLT.

KEYWORDS: Iranian EFL Teachers; Task-Based Language Teaching; Teacher Beliefs; Teacher Cognition

INTRODUCTION

Task-Based language Teaching (TBLT) has been widely touched in various foreign language contexts in recent years and there is a great body of knowledge on the rigor of adopting authentic tasks in developing language acquisition (Branden, 2006; Bygate et al., 2001; Willis & Willis, 2007). The significance of TBLT in language teaching lies in the point that it has solid psychological, cultural, and conceptual roots, which has rendered this approach a useful methodology for language teaching (Ur, 2013). By its focus on using real-life tasks in language teaching contexts, TBLT has been able to establish its principles and make its way through classroom settings in an attempt to replicate those real-life contexts in the language teaching classes (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). In this regard, Littlewood (2004) argued that language teachers are now widely encouraged TBLT because it facilitates learners' socio-educational growth due to extending social situations into the language teaching context.

Along with the growth of TBLT, there have been concerns regarding its success in language educational settings. In this sense, Avermaet et al. (2006) argued that the success of TBLT is extremely contingent upon the way teachers understand, accept, and practice it. This perspective has opened room for exploring language teachers' beliefs about TBLT (Crookes & Ziegler, 2021; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010; Viet, 2014; Zheng & Borg, 2013). However, there is little research available on teachers' beliefs about TBLT and most of the previous studies have called for further exploration of teachers' beliefs about TBLT, especially through qualitative research approaches. In response to this call for research, the present study explored Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about TBLT, as a context in which teachers' beliefs and practices of TBLT have been little investigated. Thus, the current study contributes to the

knowledge base of language teacher cognition on TBLT and offers implications for teacher educators to design professional development courses that enhance teachers' awareness of TBLT and its principles.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE
TEACHER COGNITION

Borg (2003) defined cognition as "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching" in relation to their knowledge, beliefs, and thought processes (p. 81). Teacher cognition is argued to significantly impact teachers' professional understandings and pedagogical practices (Borg, 2015; Farrell, 2016; Li, 2019). In his renewed definition of teacher cognition research, Borg (2019) defined such research as "Inquiry which seeks, with reference to their personal, professional, social, cultural and historical contexts, to understand teachers' minds and emotions and the role these play in the process of becoming, being and developing as a teacher" (p. 20). This definition shows that teacher cognition is tied to the historical, situational, and future perceptions of teachers and the range of issues that significantly define their professionalism.

Early works on language teacher cognition (Richards & Freeman, 1996; Woods, 1996) attempted to discuss the boundaries of language teachers' mental processes and how this differs from teachers of other areas. Following the seminal review by Borg (2003), research has extensively examined language teachers' cognitions in different areas. Li (2019) stated that "Studying teacher cognition is important in understanding teachers' perceptions and decisions, teaching and learning, the dynamics of the classroom, effective pedagogy and teacher learning" (p. 335). That is, research on language teacher cognition is now attempting to explore how teachers explore different skills and sub-skills and how different educational contexts come to play a central role in teachers' professional development and growth (Karimi & Nazari, 2017; Kim et al., 2013; Kuzborska, 2011; Nazari & Xodabande, 2022; Xodabande & Nazari, 2023).

TEACHER BELIEFS ABOUT TBLT

In his discussion in defense of TBLT, Long (2016) reviewed different perspectives and criticisms of TBLT, and defined it as "real-world communicative uses to which learners will put the L2 beyond the classroom – the things they will *do* in and through the L2 – and the task syllabus stands alone, not as one strand in a hybrid of some kind" (p. 6, original italics). Over the years, different terms have been coined in relation to tasks and how various tasks could be divided into task types based on teachers' and scholars' perspectives (Carless, 2003, 2004). For example, Ellis (2003) discusses different task types from psycholinguistic, psychological, anthropological, and linguistic dimensions and enumerates consciousness-raising, information-gap, and jigsaw tasks and divides tasks into pedagogic and non-pedagogic types.

Parallel with the growth of attention to the nature of tasks, research on teachers' beliefs and practices of TBLT has grown. For example, Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) explored the effects of a constructionist-based initiative on 12 student-teachers' beliefs about TBLT in Canada. The researchers collected the data before and during the course, and after their teaching practicums through written reflections, a questionnaire, and interviews. The results of the research revealed that the course positively impacted the teachers' beliefs about TBLT, but there were incongruities between the teachers' TBLT-related beliefs and practices.

In another study, Andon and Eckerth (2009) explored four teachers' beliefs about TBLT using interviews and classroom observations. The interviews were run in three stages. The first stage involved exploring the teachers' backgrounds and their beliefs about TBLT. The second interview included exploring the teachers' beliefs after observing their classes, which was a stimulated recall interview. The third interview focused on the points raised in the teachers' beliefs about TBLT. Moreover, the teachers' classes were observed twice to gain a more comprehensive grasp of their beliefs about TBLT. The results of the study revealed that the teachers were "generally well aware of ideas in the TBLT literature, and that this is reflected in the way they talk about tasks themselves, the principles underlying their use of tasks, and the way they implement tasks" (p. 304).

Furthermore, Harris (2016) explored 78 Japanese teachers' beliefs about TBLT, issues related to implementing TBLT, and the appropriacy of TBLT in this context. An online questionnaire was used to collect the data. While the teachers generally perceived TBLT as a favorable pedagogy, four themes emerged in relation to applying TBLT as "issues related to task design, the need to actively involve students, the need for teachers to make decisions about

classes contingent on individual students, and problems related to the greater educational situation in Japan" (p. 109). Harris suggested that more research is needed on how teachers perceive TBLT as successful implementation of this approach is highly dependent on the way teachers see it.

Finally, Karimi and Nazari (2021) collected data from 73 Iranian teachers in light of their degree. In this regard, 39 teachers were TEFL holders, 30 were Translation holders, and 4 had a degree in English Literature. The researchers used the pedagogical beliefs questionnaire (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010) and classroom observations of 15 teachers. The data were analyzed based on independent samples t-test to explore how TEFL-degreed and non-TEFL-degreed teachers perceived and practiced TBLT. The study results revealed that there a significant difference between the teachers did not exist in terms of their beliefs about TBLT. However, it was found that TEFL-degreed teachers outperformed the non-TEFL-degreed teachers in terms of their TBLT-related instructional practices. The researchers suggested that more research should be conducted on Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about TBLT, what the current study focuses on.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The current study aims to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about TBLT. The reasons for conducting this study are twofold: first, TBLT has been argued by many researchers to be a significant theme of teaching methodology in the current discussions of applied linguistics and thus needs more attention from teacher education researchers (Chan, 2014; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Second, while research on teachers' beliefs about TBLT has been conducted, the results of these studies are inconclusive and most of the studies call for more research on this area. Thus, the current study aims to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about TBLT to fill the gap in this regard. The study addressed the following question:

How do Iranian EFL teachers perceive task-based language teaching as an effective methodology for language teaching?

METHODOLOGY
CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANT

This study was run in private language schools of Iran, in Sari, Babol and Amol cities. In these schools, the teachers used the textbooks of *American English File, Got It,* and *English Time* series because they were assigned by the institutional policymakers. The teachers could teach based on their preferred methodology but they had to follow the institutional policies such as covering the textbooks and following the curriculum in terms of student assessment (both formative and summative). Fifteen teachers participated in this study that had five to eight years of experience. Moreover, they had degrees in ELT, Translation, and English Literature. There were 10 female and five male teachers and their age ranged from 26 to 37. Before conducting the study, the approval of the teachers and policymakers were obtained to ensure ethical considerations.

DATA COLLECTION

This study is part of a larger project that explored Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about TBLT. Data for this study were collected from semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, as believed by Rubin and Rubin (2012), are "a data collection method that pairs predetermined survey questions with interviewer-initiated open-ended, ad hoc follow-up probes. These probes give the respondent the opportunity to provide more detailed information based on their initial answer" (p. 45). Moreover, semi-structured interviews use a mixture of closed- and open-ended questions, as accompanied by the relevant follow-up questions (Ravitz et al., 2000).

The interview questions were based on the related studies (Carless, 2004; Jeon & Hahn, 2006) in order to examine the teachers' points of view regarding TBLT implementation and the factors that might lead to their avoidance of applying TBLT in their classroom. It is worth mentioning that the participant teachers were randomly selected to take part in interview sessions. The use of random selection was for promoting objectivity and reducing potential bias in participant selection. Dornyei (2007) emphasized the significance of employing random sampling to ensure fairness and representativeness of the study. As some teachers could not physically take part in interviews, online interviews were also carried out. Interview sessions were audio-recorded for further analysis. The interviews

lasted on average 30 minutes and were run in Persian (L1). Conducting interviews in the participants' native language is crucial for fostering a sense of cultural sensitivity and understanding. It allows participants to fully express their thoughts and experiences, minimizing the potential for misinterpretation and language barriers that can occur when using a second language.

The interview questions probed the areas of (1) whether the teachers heard about TBLT, (2) the contributions of TBLT to ELT literature, (3) barriers to implementing TBLT, (4) how teachers have benefited from TBLT, (5) how teachers think about task design, (6) how teachers think about the innovativeness of TBLT, (7) the superiority of TBLT over other approaches, (8) how teachers generally perceive TBLT, and (9) how TBLT responds to learners' needs.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed based on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), namely: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, and writing up the analysis. At first, the data were read to become familiar with the teachers' responses. Then the researchers searched for codes from the data. This process involved line by line reading of the teachers' statements to develop the codes. After developing the initial codes, we looked for themes by constant-comparison. The connection between codes and themes was strengthened by reading them several times and reviewing the themes. Then, the themes were named and the final stage was writing the paper based on the teachers' beliefs about TBLT. Measures of trustworthiness were taken by peer reading and member-checking.

VALIDATION PROCEDURE

In the realm of qualitative research, maintaining the validity and trustworthiness of the data analysis is paramount. To this end, this section provides a detailed account of the rigorous validation efforts employed in the study, highlighting the measures taken to ensure the credibility and dependability of the qualitative analysis processes.

The data obtained from the interviews underwent a meticulous validation process. Following the principles of thematic analysis, the initial coding of the data was a crucial first step, followed by a comprehensive thematic exploration to identify patterns and key themes within the dataset. To fortify the credibility and dependability of the analysis, a rigorous peer review and member checking process were conducted. The study sought feedback from experienced qualitative researchers through a peer review, fostering a critical review of the interpretation of the themes. In addition, member checking was employed, involving the study participants themselves in validating and confirming the accuracy of the interpretations derived from their interviews. These procedures were indispensable in cementing the credibility and dependability of the study's findings. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) assert the critical role of establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research. The peer review and member checking procedures mirrored precisely this guidance, aligning with Creswell's robust framework for ensuring the trustworthiness and validation of qualitative data. These validation processes fostered a stringent examination and confirmation of the qualitative data analysis, strengthening the credibility, dependability, and overall validity of the study's findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative analysis of the interviews resulted in the following themes: (1) learners' eagerness to communication through TBLT and their resistance to TBLT, (2) more acceptance and implementation of PPP (present-practice-produce) compared to TBLT, (3) time constraints and management for TBLT implementation, and (4) preference to use the previously-designed materials than task-based materials. In the following, each theme is discussed with respect to the teachers' beliefs extracted from the interviews.

LEARNERS' EAGERNESS TO COMMUNICATION THROUGH TBLT AND THEIR RESISTANCE TO TBLT

The teachers' interviews reflected their attention to the learners' preference to be more involved in the classroom by working on the selected activities provided by teacher. In fact, almost all the teachers, 14 out of 15 believed that TBLT can foster learners' communication, resulting in their eagerness to take an active part in classroom participation. The extract below shows the teachers' beliefs in this regard.

Extract 1

Teachers play an important role in paving the way for the learners to communicate enthusiastically. This communication can be carried out when we as teachers benefit from tasks in our classroom, which can increase more learning opportunities for learners and cause their eagerness to be more involved in the classroom. (T5)

In line with this extract, it can be inferred that willingness to communicate facilitates language learning so that they can practice language use more. Actually, students' inclination to speak is contingent upon their communication willingness and it is shown that willingness to communicate highly depends on the contexts learners are positioned at. The following extract provides another side of the same point:

Extract 2

Learners are dependent on the teachers' performance. I mean teachers can use a variety of tasks to help learners share their points of view in the classroom. In this way, learners feel less anxious to be as the active participant in the classroom. In fact, tasks trigger their classroom involvement, which demands our important role in using the tasks as carefully as possible. (T12)

This statement suggests that TBLT relies heavily on learners actively experimenting with their schema and language skills to employ the most from the situation. TBLT emphasizes communicative fluency, which helps learners, as T12 stated, become more expert through teachers' use of tasks.

The second category of teachers' beliefs on TBLT with respect to the learners' expectations can be directed toward their resistance toward using tasks in the classroom. More than 65% of the participant teachers', 10 out of 15 held the belief that they encounter the learners' resistance in TBLT-assisted learning environment. In fact, due the learners' habit to form-focused instruction, concentrating on rules of the language explicitly in the classroom, it appears that learners might find it difficult to adapt themselves to TBLT. The following extract reflects teachers' beliefs in this regard.

Extract 3

We teachers have gotten used to traditional type of instruction in teaching language skills. In fact, it is rather difficult to change such learning atmosphere with TBLT. This causes the learners' reluctance and resistance towards using tasks in the classroom as it leads to more learners' participation. We have to change their behavior and encourage them to be more active in the classroom and raise their awareness of TBLT. (T1)

It points to an important point that a large number of learners in the Iranian context carry beliefs related to the grammar-translation approach. Conceptions of foreign language teaching and learning, mistakes management, skill focus, and accuracy are still approached by an important part of the learners in a traditional way. Thus, due to their adherence to the traditional and form-focused learning process, they appeared to be reluctant to accept a new approach which forces them to be more active and communicative. The following extract shows the same point by another teacher:

Extract 4

As learners were taught conventionally in their high schools by directing their attention to grammar and translation of the reading texts, it can be very difficult to change their learning behaviors by using TBLT. When you are working on grammar, they expect you to explain the rules explicitly, which make the teaching difficult for teachers to cope with such resistance to TBLT.

In relation to this statement, it can be inferred that resistance to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be attributed to different reasons, among them the lack of previous application of such an approach, which leads to learner anxiety and subsequent reluctance to engage in communicative tasks (Smith, 2015; Johnson & Lee, 2018). In other words, learners have been primarily exposed to form-focused approaches, and altering this established teaching method seems to present a formidable challenge, as they currently lack adequate awareness of TBLT principles (Brown, 2017). Thus, this incongruence between learners' beliefs and the experiential nature of TBLT may led to their complaints about lack of grammar instruction.

These findings align with the earlier arguments regarding the way learners receive TBLT. For example, Ellis (2003) argued that learners may have negative attitudes toward TBLT as arising from their traditional teaching culture. Similar observations have been made by Littlewood (2004) and Ur (2013) regarding the importance of acceptability of TBLT for learners. These findings imply that teachers need to always move based on students' perceptions of TBLT because, as Avermaet et al. (2006) stated, the success of TBLT relies heavily on the way teachers and students receive the approach. This finding provides novel understandings about the complex nature of TBLT and that more research is needed to better understand teachers' and learners' perceptions and more importantly how teachers' perceptions of TBLT is informed by students' perceptions of this approach.

MORE ACCEPTANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PPP (PRESENT-PRACTICE-PRODUCE) COMPARED TO TBLT

The second theme of the findings pertained to the issues related to accepting and implementing TBLT and PPP. Concerning the teachers' interviews, it was found that almost half of the participants (n=8) asserted that they recognized the role of PPP more tangibly than TBLT. In other words, they found PPP less challenging as teachers are doers of actions in the classroom assigning limited roles for learners. The following extract reveals that PPP is more acceptable than TBLT in the classroom.

Extract 5

I can say that PPP is more preferable by me due to its easy application compared toTBLT. Teachers rely more on PPP because they think that it has been considered as an approved approach in ELT research although it might deprive the learners' more interaction in the classroom. (T11)

As it is inferred from the above statement, PPP is more teacher-centered and does not to perfectly match humanistic and learner-centered frameworks. Apparently, teachers control the classroom context and learners are dependent on the teacher to learn the new language. Hence, it is easy to apply both for teachers and learners. In general, PPP, as a rule-driven and deductive approach to teach language, directly focuses on the point and is timesaving which makes it more preferable by some instructors as well as their learners. The extract below attests to this point further:

Extract 6

PPP is more acceptable by the experienced teachers because they seem to have been using this approach for more than 20 years although TBLT has its own educational benefits for both teachers

and learners. PPP can be better applied by the teachers as they can handle class time and the materials and less flexibility takes place for the learners. (T2)

Turning to the statement above, it can be suggested that PPP impacts teachers and learners due to its ease of application. Preparing lessons using a PPP method is easy for teachers as the contents are graded from simple to difficult. Thus, it seems quite natural for teachers and learners to abide by such PPP due to its ease of employment in the educational settings.

The second theme of teachers' beliefs regarding the teachers' challenges with using TBLT or PPP can be related to the feasible implementation of PPP compared to TBLT. The teachers' interviews showed that the majority (n=9) of their perceptions lied heavily on the feasible application of PPP as they are less involved with task and material design. Their beliefs are provided in the following extracts.

Extract 7

Teachers try to use the best materials in the classroom in order to facilitate the learning progress. When we say PPP or TBLT, it is a very broad question. But, PPP has been with us for more than three or four decades although TBLT has its long history. PPP is more applicable for teacher as they do not have to design tasks or take their time on piloting the tasks. (T7)

As this teacher posited, PPP is interesting for teachers and learners because it the idea of 'practice makes perfect'; moreover, it facilitates controlling the content and form of the lesson. It means that PPP allows more time for the practice and application of rules, which can consequently level up the understanding process and suits many students who prefer learning contents on metalanguage aspects of language, as the extract below shows:

Extract 8

The feasibility of TBLT makes it more usable for teachers. Of course, I should admit that I am the supporter of TBLT; however, PPP does not have the limitations of TBLT in terms of designing the tasks and then do the required piloting in order to check its validity. So, teachers do not prefer to be involved with such challenges although there are teachers who are willing to take all these into account. (T15)

The above excerpt suggests that the PPP approach connects with classroom management, the ability to plan, and to feeling that you are in charge. Also, well-handled PPP is preferable to less effective implementation of TBLT and that teachers are more able to implement PPP than TBLT. Actually, this participant sees PPP as more within their control and more easily manageable. Thus, due to its feasibility, PPP seems quite natural for teachers to rely such an approach which is easier to implement compared to TBLT which is much more demanding.

Bygate et al. (2001) provided an extensive discussion on the implementation of TBLT and stated that TBLT provides a better account of learners' interlanguage development because it replicates real-life situations in the classroom context and provides the learners with tools to develop educationally and linguistically (see Van den Branden, 2006). However, the teachers of the present study had a different perspective and were more oriented to practice traditional approaches because TBLT was more difficult to implement. Moreover, Long (2016) ardently defended TBLT and prioritized it over traditional approaches, which is incongruent with the teachers' statements in this study. It seems that the teachers' perceptions in favoring PPP over TBLT is more oriented toward its ease of implementation and the demanding nature of designing tasks in a TBLT-driven class. This condition makes it difficult to see the teachers' practice as defined by TBLT principles and this point needs more attention from teacher educators and policymakers to design professional development courses that enhance teachers' awareness of the befts of TBLT.

TIME CONSTRAINTS AND MANAGEMENT FOR TBLT IMPLEMENTATION

The teachers' beliefs on TBLT targeted the time-consuming nature of task implementation in the classroom as more than 80% of the teachers (n=13) highlighted the existence of time constraints for TBLT implementation. In fact, they stated that when using tasks in the classroom, it makes more pressure for teachers to either implement the task in the best way or consider the course syllabus to cover all the materials. The following extracts exemplify their beliefs.

Extract 9

When we use tasks, it usually takes a lot of time as all the learners are expected to work and participate in classroom interaction. Although it might be promising, it can lead to our acceleration of covering the whole syllabus due to time constraints imposed during the term. Thus, TBLT demands careful organization and conscious policy making on the part of the decision makers. (T14)

Dealing with the issue of time, most teachers, as an example is given above, agreed that they have to devote much time to their teaching when introducing a new teaching content. They have to carefully structure all tasks and activities and cope with many spontaneous issues. Although following novel teaching techniques can be time consuming, the teachers showed positive attitudes toward it as they believed that the efforts were worthwhile. The following extract extends this thread of statement:

Extract 10

In my opining, all teachers are worried about time to cover the textbook or any materials that had to be finished in the course. This limits us to benefit from tasks as it might take the entire time of the session, leading to more pressure for teachers to ignore some parts of the book in some occasions. (T6)

Dealing with the issues of time allowance and the textbook at hand, the teachers also differed in their perceptions. Most of the teachers, among them this participant, asserted that the time available was not adequate to organize TBLT. They accepted that it was hard to attain the purposes of TBLT and develop high scores on form-based modes of assessment (as expected by the learners). Thus, to mitigate this problem, they may have to ignore some parts of the textbook in favor of task-based instruction. In other words, the textbooks adopted by the institute did not support their implementation of TBLT.

The teachers' interview data also revealed that more than the half of the participants (n=12) believed in the difficulties of time management for using tasks in the classroom. They insisted that teachers have to feel free of using tasks regardless of time constraints for finishing the course in due time. The following extracts reveal that the importance of the existence of time management for appropriate application of tasks:

Extract 11

I myself have less flexibility in managing my time to benefit from TBLT. You know, our classes are 1.5h and the pages are too long. Most of the time, you should design the tasks or find them on the Internet and then apply them in the classroom. But, when you think that class time does not allow you to use them, you have no option unless you could manage your time or allocate extract time for tasks. (T11)

It can be concluded from the above statement that apart from the implementation of different task types, TBLT can be attained by changing the main textbook contents, order of activities, and activity balance. Moreover, features of TBLT can be utilized as complementary to the current textbook contents by finding more intriguing contents and clarification of the lesson objectives more carefully. The following point shows another side of this issue:

Extract 12

I have no time management in my classroom. It is my fault because I am responsible for all the events taking place in the class. However, some parts are out of control and you should let the class time go. TBLT is one of these cases in which the flow of communication and interaction in the classroom necessitates continuous teacher-learner talks, which finish all the class time. All in all, time management can be helpful to successful implementation of TBLT. (T1)

What can be inferred from this statement is the importance of time management for EFL teachers as one of contributory factors to promote the learning process. To teach effectively, it is significant to observe time management. Time management skills can result in teachers' enhanced productivity while leveling up the quality of education. As a whole, if teachers observe the issue of time management seriously, it is more likely for them to be effective and provide quality education.

The issue of time constraints and management is a recurrent theme in discussions surrounding teachers' beliefs about TBLT (e.g., Karimi & Nazari, 2021; Littlewood, 2004). Harris (2016) discussed this point in greater details and highlighted that there should be an alternative to teachers' lack of time in applying TBLT. The teachers of this study argued that TBLT can be mixed with effective materials to deal with the issue of time management. This finding is novel in that the teachers seem to (1) be aware of how TBLT manifests in practice, and (2) know the alternatives in effective implementation of TBLT to deal with the issue of time. This finding should be acknowledged by teacher educators in designing courses that focus on enhancing teachers' knowledge of how to mix TBLT principles with the existing materials. This approach, as Oglivie and Dunn (2010) found and supported, makes teacher education more dealing with contextual needs and enhances the possibility of effective TBLT implementation.

PREFERENCE TO USE THE PREVIOUSLY-DESIGNED MATERIALS THAN TASK-BASED MATERIALS

Almost all the teachers (n=14) believed in the time-consuming feature of task design and materials. In other words, they asserted that task design put much burden on the teachers' shoulders to plan the tasks according to the needs and levels of the learners, leading to devoting more time for TBLT design. The extracts below concentrate on the time-consuming nature of designing tasks, which might impede teachers to benefit from TBLT.

Extract 13

It takes a lot of time for teachers to design a task. Most of the teachers don't like this part of task because of its time-consuming nature. As a task should consider and fit the needs and level of the learners, it takes the designer's time very much. Usually, we are the designers and it causes not use task very other in the classroom. (T3)

It is obvious that this participant believes in the time-consuming nature of task designing in EFL contexts. It can be attributed to the fact that tasks demand an initial design (planning), an assessment phase (classroom implementation), and a later revising of the original content (re-planning: perhaps when that same lesson is next taught). Thus, accordingly, task design seems to be the most time-consuming process in the TBLT approach. The following extract continues this line of statement:

Extract 14

When we are expected to use task in the classroom, the most challenging part is designing the task, which might be very boring for teachers due to time. Because of this, teachers prefer not to design the task and cope themselves with the existing condition. (T13)

Based on this participant's belief, preparation time is a reason for the hesitation of TBLT. Most of the teachers admitted that tasks require too much time for preparing as well as great efforts of teachers. Thus, it can be regarded as hindrance in the acceptance of TBLT as a more novel approach compared to PPP which is easier to design and implement.

The second category of teachers' belief reflected in their preference to use the other teachers' tasks. As to the teachers' interviews, more than 80% of the teachers (n=13) asserted that they would like to use the task contents designed previously. The following extracts illustrate such beliefs:

Extract 15

It is very difficult when a teacher is asked to design a task. We usually escape from task design due having less or no time for that. Maybe we are not educated to design a task. In general, using other's tasks can be a good option. (T6)

Extract 16

I prefer to use a task designed previously by another co-worker. There are some teachers who have more time to design a task, but I don't have any time for that. A colleague might not be satisfied with such action, but we are co-workers and friends. (T8)

The above statements refer to the complex as well as time-consuming nature of the task design by the teachers. Thus, due to theses complexities and probable lack of designing knowledge of the teacher themselves, they prefer to take recourse to the tasks which are previously designed by the experts. By this way they can make sure of the task reliability and authenticity.

Although the issue of task design and materials has been extensively discussed by TBLT researchers (Branden, 2006; Ellis, 2003; Long, 2016b, 2016a), little attention has been paid to teachers' perceptions of this issue, and much less among the research studies on teachers' beliefs about TBLT (e.g., Avermaet et al., 2006; Viet, 2014). In this regard, the findings of the current study offer novel perspectives on the importance of TBLT-oriented materials from teachers' perspective. That is, the teachers stated that TBLT-related materials put too much responsibility on their shoulders, which makes them cling to the previously-designed materials than those driven by TBLT principles or designing tasks. This finding shows that the issue of material design in TBLT is a major concern for EFL teachers and researchers should pay more attention to how to deal with this issue as it may occur to teachers of other contexts as well.

CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about TBLT. Data were collected through interviews and four major themes emerged from the data; issues of (1) learners' attitudes toward acceptance of and resistance to TBLT, (2) better-ness of PPP over TBLT, time management in TBLT, and preference to use already-designed materials than TBLT-driven materials. Interactions among the four major themes in the study can be elucidated by considering how each theme is intertwined with and influences the others. For instance, learners' attitudes toward acceptance of and resistance to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can significantly impact their perceptions of the "better-ness" of Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) over TBLT. Additionally, the issues of time management in the context of TBLT may affect educators' preference for using already designed materials over TBLT-driven materials. The interconnectedness of these themes highlights the comprehensive, multifaceted nature of the challenges and opportunities inherent in language teaching methodologies. Understanding these interactions is crucial for gaining a holistic view of how teachers perceive and navigate the complexities of TBLT within the framework of language education. These findings extend the literature on teachers' beliefs about TBLT by showing how teachers

think about novel aspects of TBLT that have gone less-noticed in the literature of teacher education. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the relationship between the four emerged themes:

Figure1: *Interplay of TBLT Themes: A Visual Representation*
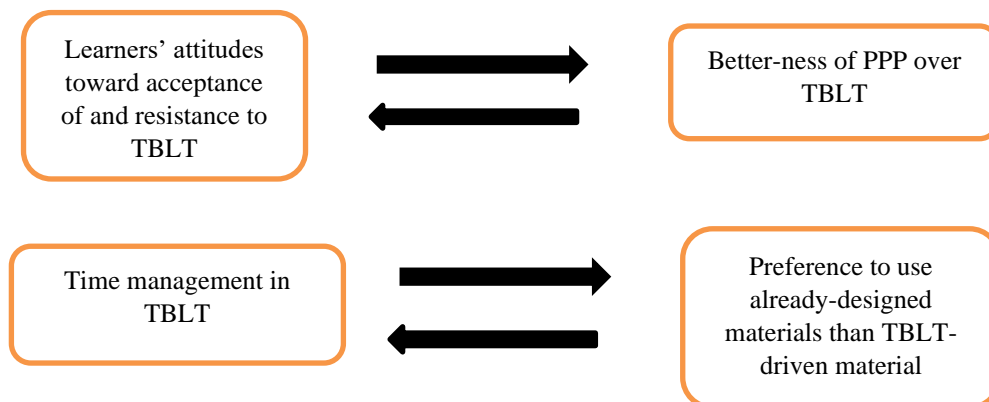
The findings of the study provide implications for teacher educators. In this regard, as the teachers of the present study were more oriented toward traditional approaches of language teaching and were less intent to try TBLT, and the scholarship on TBLT argues for the effectiveness of this approach for language teaching, teacher educators can design professional development courses that effectively help teachers to embrace TBLT. In this sense, teacher educators should support teachers in all the stages of TBLT engagement, from task design, to implementation, and to assessment so that teachers do not feel that they are left to themselves to be TBLT-oriented. This way, teachers can experience a safe environment in which they are ready to become more receptive of TBLT and its benefits can extend to learners as well.

The present study had several limitations. First, the study was conducted with only 15 teachers and this number cannot provide a full understanding of teachers' beliefs about TBLT. Specifically, because the studies of TBLT teacher cognition are conducted in different contexts, it is better to run transnational studies that include teachers of different settings with a greater number of teachers. Second, the teachers' practices of TBLT were not examined in this study and future research should pay more attention to this point with a specific focus on the way teachers engage with materials. Third, this study only used interviews for data collection. Future research should use triangulation to reach a more comprehensive outlook of how teachers from different perspectives view and practice TBLT. It is hoped that teacher educators use the outcomes of this study to better contribute to teachers' knowledge about and practice of TBLT.

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