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Original Article

Is Task-based Language Teaching Evident in Tertiary Level English as an Additional Language in New Zealand? An Exploration into Teachers' Practices Related to Task Uses

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been promoted as more effective for language acquisition than conventional communicative pedagogic practices in a variety of literature. However, it is unclear whether TBLT principles are integrated into English as additional language (EAL) teachers' beliefs and how they made use of ideas announced in the TBLT literature at tertiary level in New Zealand. This exploratory study investigated whether TBLT is evident in three tertiary EAL teachers' classes and how these teachers used tasks in language classes in New Zealand. Repeated semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were employed in this case study research. A key finding is that teachers were using a Communicative Language Teaching model rather than what they claimed to be TBLT. Furthermore, teachers did not prioritize a particular task feature, which was to have a non-linguistic outcome at the end of the task. This study contributes to our understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to TBLT in New Zealand.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Education programme, English as Additional Language (EAL), Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), Task implementation, Teachers' beliefs

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1. Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a language teaching approach which is believed to promote language acquisition by engaging students in authentic language use through tasks (Willis & Willis, 2007). TBLT has gained considerable popularity around the world and has come to be viewed as a 'new orthodoxy' over the last two decades (Ellis, 2003), resulting in a large body of research and publications with respect to various aspects of TBLT. This has led to an encouragement of TBLT in curricula in New Zealand to promote the dramatic shift from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred and experiential model (East, 2014). Recent studies in New Zealand have investigated the understanding and implementation of TBLT as a response to the curriculum innovation to provide implications for successful innovative practices (East, 2014, 2017,2018; Ellis, 2003). However, all these studies are concerned with school teachers involved in the curriculum innovation related to TBLT and it is unknown if TBLT principles are integrated into EAL teachers' beliefs or if the ideas in the TBLT literature are being made us of at tertiary level in New Zealand. This case study explored the understandings of task-based language pedagogy held by three EAL teachers in a New Zealand institution, and looks at the ways in which tasks are employed in their classrooms.

2. Literature Review

In this section, two areas of literature underpinning this research are reviewed, including key features and principles of Task-based language teaching, and studies into teacher beliefs and practices related to TBLT in New Zealand.

2.1 Key Features and Principles of Task-Based Language Teaching

It has been argued that TBLT assists students to learn a language more effectively than other approaches as it focuses on meaningful communication rather than systematically focusing on grammar rules (Willis & Willis, 2007). In TBLT, the primary focus is on meaning, where language learners use the target language with a communicative purpose in order to achieve the outcome of a task (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). In TBLT, language learners attend to grammar (language forms) on the basis of what Long (2015) describes as a focus on form approach, in which learners' attention is drawn to language forms when they arise incidentally from communicative interactions. A

decade ago, Ellis (2009) observed that TBLT "has progressed well beyond theory into actual practice" (p. 222).

The notion of 'task' is central to TBLT (Ellis, 2003). Ellis (2003) proposed that, while there is no agreement as to what exactly constitutes a task, it is necessary to aim at "a generalized definition that can serve to identify the essential commonalities in tasks" (p. 9). In this study I have borrowed the three frameworks used by East (2012b), which include: the four criteria of a task proposed in Ellis (2009); the definition of a task put forward by Samuda and Bygate (2008); and the six questions to evaluate whether an activity is task-like as offered by Willis and Willis (2007). These three frameworks are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Three Frameworks to Evaluate a Task

Criteria from Ellis (2009)	Criteria from Willis and Willis (2007)	Criteria from Samuda and Bygate (2008)
1. Primary focus on meaning	1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?	1. Does the activity involve language use?
2. Clearly defined outcome	2. Is there an outcome? 3.Is success judged in terms of outcome?	2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?
3. Some kind of gap	4. Is completion a priority?	3. Is it a holistic activity?
4. Learners relying on their own resources	5. Does the activity engage learners' interest?	4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?
	6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?	

The three frameworks are chosen because of the following three reasons. To start with, Ellis (2009) puts forward the task criteria on the basis of a detailed study of a number of previous definitions of tasks. Secondly, the Ellis (2009) and Samuda and Bygate (2008) frameworks propose theoretical definitions of tasks. Samuda and Bygate (2008) present a holistic definition, rather than providing separate features of a task, as Ellis (2009) does. Willis and Willis (2007), by contrast, analyse tasks from the practitioner's perspective by offering six questions as means for teachers to evaluate the task-likeness of given tasks. Finally, one or two of the three frameworks are often used in other studies. For instance, Erlam (2016) and Andon (2009) use Ellis's criteria to evaluate tasks in their studies. A primary focus on meaning and a clearly defined outcome are overlapping features of the three frameworks, hence these aspects may be considered as crucial for defining a task.

There are also some differences in the approaches they take to evaluating tasks as illustrated in Table 1.

TBLT is regarded as a development of CLT and it draws on the general principles of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Just like CLT, in TBLT activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning; Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, the generally agreed three task phases (pre-task, during-task and post task) differ from the traditional procedure of Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) of CLT in the following three aspects (East, 2012a). Firstly, the pre-task phase is meaning-focused, "providing students with the language needed to complete the task at hand" rather than having "teacher-led and grammar-focused" instruction as in the first 'P' stage (p. 15). Secondly, the task-phase has "more open-ended communicative tasks" and the outcomes of the tasks are not the use of targeted language or structures as in the final 'P' of PPP, that is, practice of the pre-determined language which has been learnt in the first 'P' in a communicative guise (e.g., structured role-play) (p. 15). Thirdly, the post-task phase focuses on grammar arising from students' difficulties with communication in task performance.

In the task cycle, students pay attention to language forms in the post-task stage, after they have completed the task(s) through the previous two meaning-focused stages. While in the procedure of PPP, the pre-selected language items are presented at the beginning of the PPP cycle, that is, during the first 'P' stage. In the current study, teachers' identified tasks or task-like activities are evaluated against the three task stages.

Faced with a wide choice of activities in the task cycle, teachers play a key role in deciding the exact activities. Ellis (2003) asserts that "teachers must make their own methodological decisions based on their understanding of what will work best with their own students" (p. 278). In fact, teachers play multifunctional roles in task-based classrooms where they act as course guide, monitor, linguistic advisor and chairperson. With such a wide range of responsibilities, it is quite possible that teachers implement the task cycle in various ways in classrooms in widely different contexts. It is therefore useful to investigate teachers' task implementation in diverse contexts. Studies into teachers' task implementation in New Zealand are reported in next section.

2.2 Studies into Teacher Beliefs and Practices Related to TBLT in New Zealand

A good deal of research has been carried out to investigate teachers' understandings of TBLT and its implementation. Research findings have reported a diversity of concerns and adaptations of TBLT in different countries around the world at both school and tertiary levels (Andon, 2009; Ellis, 2013; Littlewood, 2012). These scholars pointed out that TBLT is a highly context-specific approach and the implementation of TBLT is predicated on a wide range of contextual factors. In New Zealand, there has been a growing number of studies on teachers' principles and practices related to TBLT (East, 2012b, 2014, 2018; Erlam, 2016).

East (2012b) conducted a nationwide study exploring foreign language teachers' uptake of TBLT as a result of a revised national curriculum for schools. East (2012b) found that teachers' understandings of task principles differed, ranging from a high level to non-existent. Teachers of European languages had a good understanding of TBLT principles; while the four Asian language teachers appeared to prefer traditional approaches which may have been influenced by their own and their Asian students' backgrounds. However, it should be pointed out that there was one Chinese teacher and one Japanese teacher who were familiar with and enthusiastic about some of the TBLT principles. East (2012b) also identified three challenges which were: "a) teacher education which will address lack of knowledge and understanding of TBLT; b) a supported approach to planning and implementation that will help to reduce teacher anxiety around TBLT; c) assessment systems that support rather than undermine TBLT" (p. 213).

Subsequent research conducted in New Zealand (Erlam, 2016) investigated how well teachers were able to design tasks that fulfilled the four criteria proposed by Ellis (2009) by analyzing teachers' descriptions of their tasks in a year-long professional development programme. This study found that over three quarters of teachers were able to design activities that were more like language tasks than like language exercises. Teachers have difficulty understanding and designing two aspects of task criteria, that is, to rely on their own resources and to close a communicative gap. The criterion that was easiest for teachers was the requirement that the task should have an outcome.

East (2014; 2018) carried out two more studies to explore the understandings, implementation, design and evaluation of tasks from the perspective of twenty pre-service secondary school teachers in an education programme for foreign languages in New

Zealand. He found that teachers were provided with opportunities to challenge their existing beliefs and practices, leading to new thinking and changes in practice through reflective education programme. The findings suggest that teachers were able to evaluate tasks critically, and to apply theories related to TBLT into their practices. However, all these studies were carried out at school level, with little research investigating tertiary English teachers' beliefs and practices related to TBLT in New Zealand. Thus it is meaningful to investigate if tertiary teachers are implementing tasks in their classrooms. The following research questions are addressed in this article:

1. Are there any TBLT tasks in the three teachers' classes?
2. In what ways do these teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practices?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

This study was originally set up as a large comparative research to investigate six English teachers' beliefs of, and practices related to, using tasks in language classes in two different countries. For the purpose of this paper, the data has been re-analyzed to report on only three New Zealand teachers' beliefs and practices of task uses. This research is framed as a qualitative study. Two qualitative methods were used to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices related to TBLT: semi-structured interviews and observations.

New Zealand is a part of the BANA sector (that is, Britain, Australasia and North America) where TBLT were believed to have originated (Andon, 2009). Andon (2018) argues that the acquisition-rich and well-resourced BANA context has 'optimal conditions for TBLT' in that qualified teachers in the BANA sector are more likely to learn about TBLT and experiment with the use of tasks.

There are six levels of English course in this institution, with a New Zealand Certificate in English language (NZCEL) awarded on the completion of each level. Their students are non-native English speakers and the aim of these classes was to enable students to become proficient in reading and writing academic English for further tertiary level study. The institution chooses the textbooks for the teachers. The teachers teach at least three-hour classes each day for four days a week and each level's study lasts for 16 weeks in a year. The assessment for the courses is an examination designed by the

teachers, taken at the end of the 16 weeks of study, which includes listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3.2. Participants

Three EAL teachers at one tertiary institution in New Zealand were selected as participants because they were all experienced teachers and reported to use TBLT in their classrooms. Furthermore, two of these teachers are teacher educators familiar with a range of language teaching approaches, most likely including TBLT. Two are first language (L1) English speakers and one is a second language (L2) English speaker, who speaks Chinese as L1. Further background information on the three participants and their teaching contexts is provided in appendix A.

3.3 Instruments

Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to investigate teachers' principles and practices related to task uses in their classrooms. These methods were chosen to complement each other in that interviews capture teachers' statements about their teaching principles and practices, whereas observations record teachers' behaviours in actual classrooms.

The semi-structured interview questions were adapted from Andon's (2009) interview questions with his agreement; they were divided into four parts. The first part focuses on the context and background of the participants. The second part elicited a broad description of the participants' teaching approaches. The third part investigated teachers' perspectives and practices regarding TBLT, and the last part asked about the influence of teachers' learning experiences and training on their perspectives and practices.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Two steps were designed to collect data in the present research. Firstly, semi-structured interviews for a minimum of 40 minutes were conducted to gather the teachers' background information, their general teaching methods, and beliefs about and perspectives on TBLT. Secondly, observations were undertaken for a minimum of three hours per teacher. Teachers' instructions and actions and the classroom activities at different stages were the objects of focus. Field notes were taken to provide

complementary evidence. Questions arising from the observations were asked during the class break or after the classes to elicit comments on key issues or for clarification about their task uses. Interviews, teachers' instructions and lectures were digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis of the study involved two stages. At the first stage, the interviews with teachers were transcribed by the author. With regard to the accuracy of transcripts, a proficient English speaker checked the accuracy of the transcriptions. The transcripts of the teacher interviews were coded with reference to TBLT theories and the three task criteria frameworks suggested by East (2012b) which have been reviewed in detail in the literature review section. Repetitive checks play a key role in the data analysis. I read the transcripts repeatedly and became very familiar with the data from the interviews, paying attention to the data that appeared relevant to the TBLT theories and task criteria, and I labelled them accordingly.

At the second stage, observations of the teachers' practices were analyzed in the following way. To begin with, all the teachers' recorded classroom activities were transcribed by the author and verified by a native English speaker. Then these classroom activities were interpreted in detail and were classified into different instructional stages. Each stage was then evaluated according to the criteria listed in Table 1 and the activities that seem to align most closely with the criteria to examine if the tasks were evident in the teacher's classes were identified and analyzed.

This analysis was submitted to coder reliability until agreement was reached on the use of the frameworks. The independent coder, a PhD student doing research in the area of TBLT, had been trained by me to evaluate tasks according to the three frameworks by using, as examples, two tasks and two exercises from Ellis (2003). The second coder and I evaluated the activities from two teachers' classes (Mary and Rachel) and we reached a high level of agreement (90 percent). Finally, the teacher's reported beliefs about TBLT were compared with their actual classroom practices to analyse these teachers' task implementation.

4. Results

In this section, an outline of the observed classroom activities of each teacher is provided, and task-like activities or tasks in the observed classes are identified. An analysis of task implementation is presented after comparing each teacher's beliefs with her actual practices related to tasks.

4.1 Molly

Three of Molly's ninety-minute lessons were observed. The three classes were closely related to each other as they were on a similar topic: the differences and similarities in eating habits between today and fifty years ago. The first class elicited students' ideas on this topic. The second provided reading materials on the topic built on the first class in which students were given two reading materials on eating habits currently and fifty years ago. Students were required to sum up the general ideas of each part of the first reading passage to their group members as each group was provided with different parts of the whole reading passage. The third class was developed from the first two classes where students were required to write on the main differences of eating habits between today and fifty years ago by referring to the reading passages. An outline of the classroom activities is provided in Appendix B.

Overall students were mainly involved in a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities throughout the three observed classes, while teacher-fronted instructions took up a smaller amount of the entire class time.

A total of 19 different activities over the three classes were evaluated. Of particular note is the first reading activity (Activity 10-12 in Appendix B) as it appeared to fulfill all the criteria apart from a clearly defined outcome. In these activities (Activities 10-12), groups were given different information in a reading passage, to encourage meaningful communication between students. As they talked, they conveyed different information to each other to develop an idea of the whole reading; however, they did not reach any definite outcome other than using the language. They were asked to write down a summary of the information in the whole reading passage, but there was no evaluation either of the students' discussion or the summary. Molly did not provide any follow-up activity based on the students' discussion but moved them on to another reading passage quickly. The success of the activity, therefore, does not appear to have been judged in terms of an

outcome. According to Willis and Willis (2007), if "the teacher gives little value to the conclusions that students have reached and moves on rapidly to another activity, this will detract from the importance of outcome" (p. 15).

Although Molly claimed that she frequently used information-tasks in her teaching, it was only in this first reading activity (activity 10-12) that an information-gap task was observed. Molly's explanation for a lack of an evaluation of students' discussions was that there would be a follow-up essay. It appears she regarded essay writing as the outcome of the task because of course demands for academic reading and writing.

Apart from Molly's misunderstandings of what constituted an outcome, her professed teaching beliefs about tasks were consistent with her classroom practices. Her professed beliefs, such as facilitating students to use language, encouraging students to communicate by relying on their own resources and choosing materials or topics relevant to engage them in using the language are consistent with the TBLT principles cited in literature (Willis & Willis, 2007). Molly said that she learnt about TBLT when completing her diploma. She emphasised that she learned to use TBLT, however, through her practice and her students' responses, as she explained, "We are introduced to it through course book we use... Instead of starting from theory to practice, we are going from practice to theory. We are going from the opposite direction".

In her interview, Molly stated that her teaching approach was to promote communication among her students. She explained the aim of the tasks that she designed was to get her students to produce language, "I think I use TB [task-based] materials and communicative activities to encourage students to produce language. I don't care what they produce as long as they are producing and communicating." In her practice, the majority of the classroom activities were observed to be communicative. This principle was also evident in the task-like activity in which students had to read, summarise and convey the general ideas of a passage to their group members.

Moreover, Molly was aware that students needed to use their own language resources for communication. She explained, "I don't tell them what the language is. I think it is important that they use whatever they can". During the class observation students appeared to use their own resources to communicate information to the other group members in the selected activities. Molly did not provide students with any language forms before, or during, the reading activities. Molly emphasised students' independence in that she left the

groups to get on with their discussion of the reading passages. She seldom interrupted her students when they were involved in discussion groups unless they approached her with questions. Molly said she preferred to encourage students to explore language use; she saw her role as a facilitator and observer, rather than an instructor of form-focused activities.

Molly stated that she stopped using tasks focusing on specific language items because students did not use the targeted language forms, as she explained, "I think one of the biggest problems, one thing that is quite common is that students will complete the task without necessarily using the language". Observations of her practice did not record any specific language items. She said that: "it is important to help them to monitor what comes out of their mouth". She was observed to focus on the specific words only when she noticed that most of her students confused the words for meat with the animals' names.

To conclude, in Molly's communicative classes there was one task-like activity observed. Her professed beliefs were mostly consistent with those noted in the TBLT literature, and with her observed practices. Her practices, however, may have been influenced by her communicative language teaching approaches. Furthermore, her misunderstanding of one of the task criteria, that is, to have an outcome beyond the language use, may prevent her from using true tasks in her classrooms.

4.2 Mary

I observed Mary's classes for one and a half hours twice. Both classes were on the same topic, comparing any aspects of students' own home countries with those in New Zealand. She was creating a context in which her students could practise the specific language item through a series of listening and speaking activities - language of comparison and contrast, and finally produce an essay by using this grammatical form. Appendix C provides a brief outline of the classroom activity sequences.Around 40 per cent of the whole class time was devoted to grammatical expressions before students summarised the listening materials by writing five sentences with the language of comparison and contrast and composed their final writings. Her classes demonstrated the Presentation, Practice and Production characteristics of traditional communicative language teaching classes, drawing on the targeted language items.

I evaluate her classroom activities to examine if there are tasks in the classrooms.The writing activities (Activity 9-12 in Appendix C) contained more task-like features than

other observed parts. This series of writing activity demonstrated some task-like elements, such as engaging students and promoting language learning, however, they did not satisfy the two essential criteria across the three frameworks: the primary focus was not on meaning and there was a lack of non-linguistic outcome. It would therefore appear that there was no true 'task' in Mary's classes because the lifted activities only met a few task criteria as presented in the three frameworks.

In this series of writing activities, before commencing the target activities, that is, the discussion and writing of the students' own home countries with New Zealand, students were given explicit instruction on sentences of comparison such as, "Unlike London, everything in New York is taller." Students were therefore more likely to pay attention to the language of comparison provided by Mary during the following group discussions rather than drawing on their own language resources, having been primed with these expressions. Such explicit introduction of the language forms prior to the discussion and writing may lead to a tendency to focus on form and pre-determined language rather than on meaning. As Willis and Willis (2007) said, "the more we try to control the language that learners produce, the more learners are likely to be concerned with form rather than meaning, and the less task-like the activity becomes" (p. 14). In this series of activities, Mary maintained high control of the language by building up the activities little by little until she considered students were capable of producing correct forms for comparative sentences in their writing.

With regard to a clearly defined outcome, these two stages lack a non-linguistic outcome.The purpose of the students' brief discussion on the differences between their own home countries and New Zealand was to write an essay co-operatively, but these targeted goals were still a display of language rather than a non-linguistic outcome. Moreover, Mary did not offer any feedback on the students' discussion; instead she explained how to structure the essay and students moved on rapidly to the writing. Hence, there was a lack of clear non-linguistic outcome and the success of the activity was not judged in terms of achieving an outcome.

Although Mary claimed that she "designed her classes around a task" and illustrated her task theories and gave an example in the interview, there was no real task observed in her classes. Mary's classes resembled a traditional Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) class with the procedures of PPP, rather than a task-based class, as she claimed. The

identified task-like activities were integrated into her CLT-based classrooms, and were described by her as "free activities", that is, writing an essay, based on a series of "controlled activities". Mary's practices diverged from her expressed beliefs in terms of two task criteria: she asserted that students used their own resources and that there was an end product or outcome for her task; neither of these was observed in her practice.

Mary claimed that her students used their own resources in the final discussion of differences between their own home countries and New Zealand. In her practice, however, she was observed to give explicit grammatical instructions on words, phrases and a comparative sentence pattern twice before the students' discussions. Ellis (2013) argues that students should not be taught the language form before the task but should rely on their own resources. While comparing their home countries with New Zealand, students may therefore deliberately use the language provided by Mary, rather than completely relying on their own resources, in their discussion and writing.

Mary's explanation for her explicit instruction on the language forms before the group discussion was as follows:

But this is the stage before the task, for me, for task is very important. I don't want to do the task straight. I don't feel comfortable because I just feel the learners are struggling. They are not confident, they may complete the task with your help, but in the end, they didn't get it.

In addition, Mary said that she was confident about her explicit instruction of language forms before the tasks as her students had given her 'positive feedback' after she investigated their needs from both a teacher's and a researcher's perspective. As she said:

The feedback from students is always positive. So I think the positive feedback is because, again, I think I need to look at my learners, where they are from. Mostly they are from Asia, from Africa, from the Middle East. Normally, in their home country, they were taught with translation grammar approach, or the audio lingual approach.

Furthermore, although Mary claimed there was an outcome at the end of the observed task, the identified task-like activity from the observed classes lacked a real outcome. Outcome is the term used to describe the finished product of a task in TBLT. Ellis and Shintani (2013) explained that "there is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language, that is, the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right" (p. 135). The tangible end products of Mary's task-like activities

seemed to be an essay (Activity 12) displayed on the wall. However, these were not the outcome of a task rather a means to practise the language focus, and so the language was the means as well as the end. Her classroom activities did not result in a clear non-linguistic outcome that was in line with the definitions of task in the literature.

The mismatch between her claim of a task-based class and the classroom observations, which suggested a more traditional CLT class, may be attributed partially to her misunderstanding of the differences between CLT and TBLT. She explained that, for her, the major difference was that the pre-task, during-task and post-task stage activities in TBLT were more integrated.

But at the end of the day, I don't think there are many differences between the two [CLT and TBLT], for me it is just that task-based language teaching is more surrounded by the task: before the task, during the task, after the task.

Furthermore, when asked to explain her general approach, Mary mentioned an "eclectic approach" although she claimed that she designed her classes around a task.

To conclude, Mary's classes resembled a CLT class rather than a class "designed on a task". Her commitment to explicit instruction for targeted language items before the tasks, misunderstandings about task outcomes, and her claimed equivalence of CLT with TBLT appeared to constrain her from using actual tasks in her classes. Her description of using an "eclectic approach" may also account for the mismatch between her stated beliefs and her practices in implementing tasks.

4.3 Rachel

Rachel teaches lower proficiency level students and two of her two-hour classes were observed (Appendix D). The topic of the first class was interacting in business settings around the world and the main purpose of this class was to provide opportunities for students to practice the targeted language form. The class started with a group discussion about travelling before a series of listening activities. Rachel then gave explicit instruction on the use of first and second conditionals by analyzing the two sentences from the listening materials. Students finally practiced the targeted language forms in a series of follow-up exercises. In this class,Rachel planned all the activities and controlled what happened in the classrooms by managing the activities systematically. This class

demonstrated a traditional communicative process of PPP through practicing the particular language form (Ellis, 2003).

Class two involved students mainly in communicative activities rather than practicing target language. In the second class, the students focused on discussing the factors people consider if they plan to live abroad. Students communicated their personal opinions during several rounds of pair and group discussions, and listening activities.

Two parts of the observed activities were selected from all the 19 activities as they met nearly all the criteria of a task. The first one is the warm-up activity (Activity 1-2) from first class where students communicated with each other by asking their classmates about personal information, such as birthday, interests, jobs and studies. The clearly defined outcome was the information students collected from their classmates, that is, their classmates' names on their information cards. The second was the speaking activity (Activity 17-18) at the end of a series of closely related listening and speaking activities from the second class. This task required the students to reach an agreement on the top three factors when choosing which city to live in, which was then presented to the class.

Rachel's task implementation appeared to be greatly influenced by her belief in a communicative approach because the two tasks were fitted into her communicative language teaching classes. However, these two tasks occurred only at the beginning of the class as a warm-up or at the last stage of practice of pre-planned language forms and occupied only a small amount of the two observed classes activities.

Rachel claimed that she aimed to create a context in which her students can focus on the language saying, "that general line of context, language focus, and practice is what I would call my base approach". She also illustrated this approach with an example of how students learned to introduce and greet each other in her classes. Firstly, she showed her students a video of conversation on greetings and self-introduction; she then asked students questions about the video before watching the video again to notice how people greeted each other. She described how she would draw students' attention to the phrase in the target language, which is "hello, how are you, my name is…". Students were then given opportunities to use the target language in what she called "a controlled practice". Following this she would move to "some kind of free-spoken practice or maybe written practice". She claimed that "the idea is for students to be able to notice, understand and practice using the target language". Thus Rachel integrates tasks with her communicative

approach with the first task serving as a warm-up activity and the second task at the end of a series of activities following the procedure of PPP.

Rachel appeared to have some misunderstandings of tasks for she equated focus on form with TBLT. When asked about using tasks, she mentioned "focus on form" frequently. However, Rachel was not observed to use tasks to focus on form even though she described tasks as related to focus on form and said that she used focus on form in a task. She appeared to favour pre-planned language forms with tasks integrated into her communicative language teaching classes. Prior to the students' task, which was reaching an agreement about their discussion; she highlighted expressions used for giving opinions in the listening materials they had been using. From the observations, it appeared she pre-planned vocabularies and phrases to present to the students before their task performance rather than attending to language forms arising from the task performance. These data show an inconsistency between her claim to focus on form in a task, with a focus on language usually coming after the tasks, and her observed task performance.

Rachel gave reasons for her pre-planned language forms before the tasks. She explained that she saw the classroom learning as the starting point for real communication, saying that, "I guess the classroom is a stepping stone to communication in the outside world". She said she believed she should draw students' attention to the language forms at the appropriate time, providing opportunities to practise the target language so they could use the language to communicate in the world outside the classroom.

To conclude, two tasks were observed in Rachel's classes as a part of her communicative teaching approaches. However, these two tasks took up only a short period of the overall class time, and her claimed focus on form was not observed in her classes. Her belief in Communicative approach greatly influenced her task uses. Rachel had asserted in her interview that she definitely used tasks as a means of focusing on form, but this was not observed in her practice.

5. Discussion

Drawing on data from both the interviews and the classroom observations, I investigated the two research questions. The first question examined if TBLT tasks are evident in the three teachers' classes. None of the teachers really employed tasks although they self-claimed that they used tasks in their classrooms. In Mary and Molly's classes,

after reference to the three frameworks, only task-like activities were observed. Mary and Molly similarly failed to satisfy the task criterion of having a clearly defined outcome. Two tasks that met the criteria of the three frameworks were observed in Rachel's classes. However, these two tasks merely appeared as a very small portion of the whole class room activities to serve as a warm-up activity or to practice oral English at the end of a communicative class.

The second research question asked about how the teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practices. Two major characteristics were identified in the three teachers' task uses. Firstly, the three teachers appeared to employ task-like activities or tasks into their more CLT-oriented classrooms rather than what they claimed to be TBLT. Two of them (Mary and Rachel) were observed to follow the procedures of PPP in their classes, with task-like activities or few tasks integrated into these CLT classrooms. Both Mary and Rachel tended to teach pre-planned language forms in the communicative context. Mary, especially, devoted more time to the explicit instruction of language forms prior to task-like activities than the other two teachers, influenced possibly by her teaching experience in China. However, there was no explicit instruction on language forms in Molly's classes as the other two teachers. In her practice, the majority of the classroom activities were observed to be communicative. This principle was also evident in the information-gap task-like activity in one of her observed classes. For all three teachers, their approach to language teaching, that of promoting communication for their students, seemed to influence their task implementation. Such similarities are likely due to their common teaching experiences and professional training with the focus on CLT, as well as their employment in the same institute.

In addition, the task-like activities in two teachers' classes did not prioritize a particular task feature, which was to have a non-linguistic outcome at the end of the task after evaluating against the task criteria. It appeared that these teachers did not put much emphasis on an outcome as understood within the theory of TBLT or even had misunderstanding about what an outcome was. They assumed that the outcome can be linguistic in that they regarded 'outcomes' as an essay or a summary of the reading passage based on the needs of their academic course.

Teachers may find it difficult to understand how a non-linguistic outcome fits into a language teaching classroom. Having a non-linguistic outcome is one of the key criteria

that distinguish TBLT from the traditional approaches which have a major focus on teaching language forms. Long (2015) also pointed out that TBLT is so fundamentally different from a traditional approach, therefore, to understand this non-linguistic outcome is to challenge teachers' deep-rooted traditional ideas of teaching language in their classrooms. In addition, there appeared to be a tension between this task criterion and the demands of their reading and writing courses which expected students to produce an essay as the last stage. As a result, it seemed that teachers assumed that the essay was the task outcome, which, however, is not the sort of outcome anticipated in task criteria (Ellis, 2009).

Although all the teachers' descriptions of tasks seemed to demonstrate an apparent enthusiasm for using tasks, in practice (at least in the lessons observed for this study) they were less enthusiastic about using tasks. Two reasons may account for this mismatch. Firstly, all the three teachers had been trained to use CLT rather than TBLT in their education programmes. For example, both Mary and Rachel mentioned that CLT had had a great influence on them - Mary, when she was doing her master's degree, and Rachel, while she was completing her CELTA course. This finding also challenges the assumption that TBLT may be more advanced in some western countries because of the privileged BANA(Britain, Australasia and North America) context(Andon, 2009). A substantial body of research suggests that teachers' education can exert an influence on teachers' cognitions (e.g., Borg, 2015; Farrell& Ives, 2015). These three teachers claimed that their general approach was to promote communication among students. Teachers, it appeared, had not learned about TBLT during their teacher education; they reported that they learned about TBLT through using textbooks (Molly), attending conferences and reading recently published articles (Rachel and Mary); and also through her own reflections on these (Mary).

Secondly, the mismatch was possibly because of similarities between the CLT model that they had been exposed to during their teacher education and TBLT. TBLT is noted as a development of CLT (East, 2015). Borg (2015) argues that teachers are more likely to incorporate new approaches with old ones, especially if there are similarities between their initial teacher education approaches and the new approaches. The observed mismatch between their reported use of tasks and their practices may also be because the classroom

observations were limited and they may have used tasks in other classes that were not observed.

It is evident from the observations that teachers modified tasks to "make them fit more comfortably with their own preferred teaching styles" (East, 2015, p. 10). The findings also appear to concur with Andon and Eckerth's (2009) conclusion that teachers "experiment with different elements of TBLT, reject some of them, embrace others, and combine all of them with other pedagogical elements" (p. 305). These three teachers adapted and integrated tasks into their communicative language teaching classrooms based on their own course demands and understandings of TBLT.

6. Conclusion

As with any study, it is important to identify limitations. This was a small-scale study focused on three teachers in a tertiary institution and the generalizability of the findings is therefore limited. It should be recognized that more teachers' classroom observations from other institutions would have provided a stronger basis for claims about the teachers' work. Nonetheless, this study provided interesting and in-depth understandings of three teachers' perspectives and practices related to TBLT. As Andon (2009) says, understanding how teachers interpret and practise TBLT has the potential to inform future teacher education programmes. East (2012b) states that investigating teachers' beliefs and practices related to TBLT can ultimately challenge theoretical perspectives and promote teachers' practices in this area.

A key recommendation of this study is a greater emphasis on appropriate teacher education initiatives. More research should be conducted on educational programmes to improve teachers' understanding of TBLT. TBLT ideas could be integrated into education programmes such as CELTA and DELTA courses, since these education programmes were found to have substantial impact on teachers. My findings suggest that teachers learned CLT rather than TBLT from their education programmes such as CELTA and DELTA, both of which have an influence on the teachers. This finding is consistent with studies which also argue that teacher education has a great impact on teachers' beliefs and practices (Borg, 2015; East, 2014). Incorporating TBLT into teacher education programmes would be an effective way to ensure tasks are employed more successfully than at present.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: The Participating Teachers

Name (pseudonyms)	Experience	Qualifications	Status	Courses and students Level
Rachel	28 years' English teaching experience in Japan, Berlin, London, Spain and NZ	CELTA, obtained postgraduate diploma in language teaching.	Lecturer and teacher trainer	EAP elementary level
Molly	35 years' English teaching experience in London and NZ	DELTA obtained in London.	Lecturer and teacher trainer	EAP Intermediate level
Mary	30 years' teaching experience both in a Chinese University and then in a NZ language school and an institute	MA in linguistics in a Chinese University and a NZ University, PhD in a NZ university.	Senior lecturer in NZ (Associate professor in China before moving to NZ)	EAP Intermediate level

Appendix B :Outline of Molly's Observed Classes

Activity type and time (90')
1. Dictation of twelve questions concerning the different eating habits between the current generation and their grandparents 50 years ago. (20')
2. Teacher-centered explanation of new vocabulary arising from the questions. (10')
3. Group discussion of the questions followed by teacher-led discussion of the questions with the whole class. (13')
4. Students' transcriptions of further questions related to the same topic in the form of phonetic symbols in groups, with each group holding 6 questions different from the other groups. (8')
5. Teachers' introduction of the new words from the questions. (5')
6. Students' peer monitoring of the transcripts of the questions and discussing the questions in groups. (12')
7. Regrouping the students to have further group discussion about the questions since each group had been given different questions. (8')
8. Monitoring of vocabulary arising from group discussions. (4')
9. Identification of general ideas from all the questions by students summarised to elicit the topic words: "eating habits". (10')
10. A reading passage, Did your grandparents have better eating habits than you do now? was divided into five parts given to different group to read and summarise. (15')
11. Group discussion of the summary of each part of the reading. (10')
12. Regrouping the students to have further discussions, then each student writing down the general ideas of the whole reading passages. (28')
13. Dictation of another short passage on daily diet. (15')
14. Teacher's explanation of passage through graphs and explaining of the new words.(20')
15. Teachers showed students' the webpage of the two passages to read. (5')
16. Teacher's presentation on structure for a comparing and contrasting essay of eating habits between today and fifty years ago. (15')
17. Students discussion of the structure and content of the essay in pairs, followed by recording the structure of the essay. (10')
18. Teacher monitoring of, and feedback to, each group on the structure. (10')
19. Pair writing of the essay in the lab. (55')

Appendix C: Outline of Mary's Observed Classes

Activity type and time
1. Teachers' introduction to the classroom activities. (7')
2. Review: doing textbook exercises one and two. (41')
3. Oral activity: teacher-fronted whole class description of pictures of London and New York and brainstorming the topic-related words and ideas. (10')
4. Listening activity: listening to audio material concerning people talking about the two cities; then students filled in a table with key words about the two cities. (23')
5. Language focus: Mary's explicit instruction on words, phrases used for comparison and contrast. (10')
6. Language practice: writing five sentences according to the listening material by using the language of comparison and contrast. (17')
7. Display of all the students' sentences on the wall for the others to read. (10')
8. Break time: offering feedback for some individual students' writing from the previous class. (20')
9. Language focus: teacher's explicit instruction on more sentence patterns of comparison and contrast. (21')
10. Preparation for writing activity: group discussion of the content of the writing by comparing students' own home countries with New Zealand, then students were assigned writing tasks in groups of four. Then teacher-fronted discussion on how to structure the writing. (15')
11. Practice: Group writing of the essay. (30')
12. Display of students' essays on the wall for other students to read. (10')

Appendix D: Outline of Rachel's Observed Classes

Activity type and time
1. Warm up activity: students turned statements on a card into questions and then elicited answers from their classmates. For instance, one of the statements is to find someone who can read music.Finally, they wrote down the students' names on the cards. (10')
2. Report of the answers in a teacher-fronted conversation. (10')
3. Pair discussion of questions given by teacher and then teacher-fronted whole class conversation: eliciting of the topic-related words and ideas on business meetings. (20')
4. Pre-listening activities: cloze, true or false exercises and correction of statements that contained errors. (15')
5. Listening activity and repeat of true or false exercises again. (15')
6. Language focus: teachers' explanation of two chosen sentences of the first and second conditional from listening material; highlighting all the sentences with first/second conditional from the transcripts of listening material. (20')
7. Language practice: turning statements into first or second conditional sentences. (20')
8. Playing a game by throwing the dice and answering questions by using the conditional. (10') (The end of the first observed class)
9. Warm-up activity: group discussion of experiences on the previous day, then teacher-fronted conversation of the same topic. (10')
10. Teacher-fronted picture description in the whole class: the picture is the city Zurich in Switzerland. (10')
11. Pair discussions and teacher-fronted whole-class conversation related to the topic: what are the factors people consider before they move to live abroad? (10')
12. Pair discussions: ranking of the six factors that people would consider when choosing which city to live in. (7')
13. Writing down the reasons for their first choice and then pair discussions of the reasons. (15')
14. Pair work and discussions of the reasons for the first three choices. (7')
15. Listening comprehension: listening to an audio text with a similar topic and discussing the questions given by the teacher, first in groups then in the teacher-fronted whole class discussions. (7')
16. Language focus: identifying and emphasis of the expressions for giving opinions from the listening transcript. (10')
17. Group work: to reach an agreement on the three top factors for moving to a new city. (17')
18. Students' presentation of the three factors and reasons from each group. (10')
19. Listening to another audio text with a very similar topic and then answering questions raised by the teacher. (10')