



## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

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### Abstract:

Task-based language teaching has been advocated as a potentially effective approach in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Asian contexts, including Vietnam. However, little is known about perceptions of tasks used by teachers in actual classroom practices at tertiary education. This article therefore examines teachers' perceptions about task-based language teaching and its implementation in EFL classes. Questionnaire and interviews were conducted to investigate the perceptions of sixty-eight university teachers in the Mekong Delta. The findings reveal positive perceptions and understanding of teachers towards task-based language teaching (TBLT). Implications for practical applications of TBLT are also presented.

**Keywords:** task-based language teaching (TBLT), tasks, communicative

### 1. Introduction

Research into TBLT has addressed its role and dramatically positive impact on students' learning for communicative purposes with regard to English language use and interaction for the past three decades. This influence, despite its small scale, as noted by Adams and Newton (2009), continues to emerge in Asian contexts of teaching and learning English a foreign language (EFL) in Korea (Jeon & Hahn, 2006), Thailand (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007), in Turkey (Ilin, Inozu, & Yumru, 2007), in China (Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011), in Vietnam (Dao, 2016; Le & Nguyen, 2012; T. T. B. Nguyen, 2013; Phuong, 2016; Tran, 2015). Recent reforms in higher education in Vietnam have called for quality of teaching and learning foreign languages, particularly students' English language proficiency in their daily communication, study and work in a globally competitive integration (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008). However, in the context of teaching and learning English in Vietnam, teaching at universities is mainly based on traditional lecturing (H. B. Nguyen, 2013; Pham, 2010), and thus, TBLT

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is not widely utilized. In addition, few studies have examined teachers' perceptions about task implementation in classroom practices particularly in the Mekong Delta community college where students did not have much exposure to English language use on a daily basis. This paper is therefore aimed to explore teachers' perceptions about task implementation and reasons for their choice, or avoidance of this instructional approach. The research questions for this article were, 'How do teachers perceive task-based language teaching?' and 'What are the reasons for teachers' choice or avoidance of task-based language teaching in their classroom practices?'

The following section reviews the literature on task-based language teaching, perceptions and some related studies.

## 2. Task-based language teaching

TBLT has evolved in response to the limitations of the traditional PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Performance) approach (Ellis, 2003). This approach allows learners an opportunity to communicate language use through tasks (Douglas & Kim, 2014; Le & Nguyen, 2012; Lin & Wu, 2012). Therefore, it implies that language learning is a developmental process that can promote learners' communication and interaction rather than mastering knowledge by practicing language items, and that learners can effectively use the target language when exposed to activities in a natural way. This trend has developed into a practical framework for the communicative classroom in which the learners perform task-based activities through the cycles of pre-task preparation, task performance, and post-task feedback (Skehan, 1996, 2014; D. Willis & Willis, 2007; J. Willis, 1996). Specifically, Ellis (2003) indicates that TBLT has been noted in recent years from different perspectives focusing on meaning, real-world language use, and communicative-oriented activities to integrate four language skills.

### 2.1 Task

A *task* has become an increasingly recognized term in language teaching and learning and resulted in a variety of meanings. Long (1985) views a task as a piece of work based on needs or targeted at real-world. By nature, this real-world task involves learners in goal-oriented learning process beyond the classroom. According to Willis (1996), a task is "*an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome*" (p. 23). This definition suggests that tasks can allow learners to use a language in a meaningful way because language use is more important than language practice (Nunan, 2004). An example of a task may be an answer to a question (linguistic), or asking for directions to get to a specific place (non-linguistic). In the same vein, Ellis (2003) defines tasks as activities that are meaning-focused language use (Lin & Wu, 2012). Advocate for communication context, Nunan (2006) defines a task as a classroom activity that involves learners in processing language while the focus is on meaning-making for communicative purposes.

Although there are variations in defining tasks, communication and meaning-making process are conceptualized relevant to this current study with regard to the nature and implementation of task-based language teaching.

## **2.2 Task implementation**

Tasks have been widely used within the EFL teaching and learning contexts as evolving from communicative language teaching (CLT) (Skehan, 1996, 2014; J. Willis, 1996). Particularly, research has shown that teachers experienced varying degrees of the effects of application of tasks on student learning process. The case studies in Asia: in Korea (Jeon & Hahn, 2006), in Hong kong (Carless, 2007), in Thailand (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007), in Iran (Tababaei & Hadi, 2011), in China (Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011) and in Taiwan (Lin & Wu, 2012) indicate the potential use and positive impact of TBLT on materials, activities, and feedback although this interactive instructional approach was found difficult to implement.

A research conducted with 228 teachers from thirty-eight high schools in Korea, Jeon and Hahn (2006) indicate that teachers understood TBLT but doubted the feasibility of this instruction in actual classroom (Lin & Wu, 2012; Pohan, Andhimi, Nopitasari, & Levana, 2016). These authors point out the concerns about task implementation were teachers' lack of knowledge of TBLT, large class size, classroom management, limited language proficiency, and difficulty in student assessment. Similarly, Carless (2007) carried out a study on eleven teachers and ten teacher educators to examine the appropriateness of task-based instruction in Hong Kong high schools. Their findings reveal that class size, exam-based syllabi, and untrained teaching staff were their concerns while implementing tasks.

In a study by McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) on a task-based EFL course in Thailand, they indicate that students needed time to shift from traditional teacher-centered method to TBLT. Since its influence, students required more grammar instruction and target language forms in their task-based course.

In a study of fifty-one EFL teachers in Iran, Tabatabaei and Hadi (2011) reported on teachers' perceptions about TBLT implementation and the reasons they chose or avoided TBLT. The results revealed that most participants had positive attitudes about this learner-centered constructivist approach although few had negative views on applying tasks in actual classroom practices.

In Xiongyong and Samuel's (2011) survey of EFL teachers' perceptions and implementation of tasks in China secondary schools, it was found that most teachers held positive attitudes toward the use of tasks; however, large-size class and difficulty in students' task assessment were their concerns.

Lin and Wu (2012), in a survey with 136 high school teachers in Taiwan, indicated both positive teachers' attitudes and understanding of tasks and task-related issues. These issues hindering teacher from task practice include inflexible syllabus, class size, exam-oriented system, and limited teaching time.

These studies above suggest that, despite its positive impact of TBLT mainly on high school contexts, this interactive student-centered approach has not been well-

researched at tertiary levels, particularly in the foreign language teaching and learning context in Vietnam. Thus, the study discussed in this article contributes to the literature of TBLT implementation in Asian contexts.

### 3. The study

In order to investigate teachers' perceptions of TBLT within one semester period in a university, a mixed-method design was used. This kind of research combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches can provide an opportunity to gain in-depth understanding of a particular topic under investigation (Creswell, 2014; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). For quantitative approach, a questionnaire was adapted from Jeon and Hahn (2006) Teacher Questionnaire (See Appendix 1). There were 31 questions on the four-section questionnaire. Questions 1 to 29 were closed-ended questions and Questions 30-31 were open-ended. The first section focused on teachers' demographic information regarding gender, age, and years of teaching experience. The second section inquired teachers' understanding of task and TBLT concepts. The third section sought to explore teachers' perceptions towards task implementation. The final section collected the reasons for their choice or avoidance of implementing TBLT. To complement the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participating teachers individually at the tenth week of the study. The interview questions were divided into three clusters: teachers' understandings of TBLT; their perceptions about task implementation, and the challenges while implementing TBLT (see Appendix 2).

Participants in this study were sixty-eight EFL teachers from five universities in the Mekong Delta on the basis of convenient sampling (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). All of the participants have had at least two-year experience of teaching English as a foreign language. Of this sample, 51 (75%) were female and 17 (25%) were male. Their age ranged from twenties to forties. At the time of the study, the range of teachers' years of experience was 5 to 15 years. 12 teachers had five years of experience (17.6 %), 22 teachers had from five to nine years of experience (32.4 %), 23 teachers had 10 to 15 years of experience (33.8%), and 11 teachers had more than 15 years of experience (16.2 %).

All of the survey questions were read and checked by the supervisor and then piloted to ensure the reliability of this investigative tool. Thirty EFL teachers were chosen to participate in the pilot in the first week of the study. The Cronbach's alpha for the pilot .764 indicates the high reliability of the questionnaire for data collection. Concurrently, the responses and feedback received from the participants in the pilot interviews allowed for the clarity of the questions, the length of time spent in the process, and modifications with regard to the content and sequence in preparation for the actual interviews, as noted by Nguyen (2014).

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were statistically analyzed using the computer software Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The interview responses were hand-coded, transcribed, and then translated into

English. Analysis of the interviews was based on identifying the themes emerged through the interview process.

## 4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study with regard to teachers' perceptions about TBLT and its implementation in EFL classroom practices. The findings reveal that all teachers had positive perceptions about TBLT implementation as a result of high level of understanding of this instructional approach. They also expressed their willingness to adopt TBLT in their classroom practices.

### 4.1 Teachers' understanding of TBLT concepts

Section Two of the questionnaire contains fourteen items with regard to EFL teachers' understanding of TBLT, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Teachers' understanding of task-based language teaching concepts

n=68			
Items		M	SD
A task is a communicative goal directed.		3.99	0.87
A task mainly focuses on meaning.		3.15	1.06
A task has a clearly defined outcome.		4.16	0.73
A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learners.		3.99	1.00
Tasks are only done in pairs or in groups.		2.28	1.23
A task involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, and interacting with the target language.		4.22	0.67
A task motivates learners to be engaged in language use.		4.46	0.68
Through tasks, students can develop their interlanguage.		4.02	0.78
TBLT is consistent with principles of communicative language teaching (CLT).		3.85	0.74
TBLT and CLT share several principles.		3.88	0.82
TBLT is based on student-centered approach.		4.18	0.65
TBLT includes three phases: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.		4.19	0.70
TBLT offers an opportunity for natural learning to occur inside the class.		3.93	0.98
In TBLT, teachers should not teach grammar and forms.		2.37	0.90

As seen from Table 1, the overall mean scores indicate that participating teachers conceptualized the role task plays while involving students in their learning process to use the target language. In particular, 89.7 percent of the participants ( $n = 61$ ) strongly agreed that a task motivates learners to use the language ( $M=4.46$ ,  $SD=.69$ ) as a result of their understanding that a task must involve students in processing and interacting with language use ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=.67$ ). With regard to instructional philosophy and TBLT stages ( $M=4.19$ ,  $SD=.70$ ), teachers were more aware of TBLT principles to align with student-centeredness ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=.65$ ) and defined outcome ( $M=4.16$ ,  $SD=.73$ ). Together with understanding of TBLT concepts, the teachers confirmed that tasks as communicative goal oriented provided students with an opportunity for natural use of language. However, few teachers agreed with the idea that tasks are only done in pairs

and in groups ( $M=2.28$ ,  $SD=1.23$ ) or without the integration of grammar and form in lessons ( $M=2.37$ ,  $SD=.90$ ).

#### 4.2 Teachers' perceptions about implementing TBLT

Section Three of the questionnaire consists of fourteen items which correspond to EFL teachers' perceptions about implementing TBLT, as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Teachers' perceptions about implementing task-based language teaching

n=68 Items	Frequencies (%)			M	SD
	SD	N	A & SA		
I am interested in implementing TBLT in class.	1 (1.5)	13 (19.1)	54 (79.5)	4.00	.69
TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.	2 (2.9)	19 (27.9)	47 (69.1)	3.93	.82
TBLT meets learners' needs and interests.	0 (0)	22 (32.4)	46 (67.6)	3.85	.70
TBLT helps to develop integrated skills in class.	0 (0)	7 (10.3)	61 (89.7)	4.20	.60
TBLT lays much psychological burden on teachers.	21 (30.9)	29 (42.6)	18 (26.5)	2.97	.99
TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.	8 (11.8)	15 (22.1)	45 (66.2)	3.72	.94
TBLT is proper for making classroom arrangements.	10 (14.7)	24 (35.3)	34 (50)	3.40	.79
TBLT materials should be meaningful and purposeful based on real world context.	1 (1.5)	5 (7.4)	62 (91.2)	4.40	.69
Learners will not be able to do a task unless their English is fluent and accurate.	44 (64.7)	15 (22.1)	9 (13.3)	2.29	1.1
TBLT is not useful in large classes.	41 (60.3)	18 (26.5)	9 (13.2)	2.32	1.04
TBLT can promote learners creativity and ability to do things	3 (4.4)	6 (8.8)	59 (86.7)	4.10	.79
Low proficient learners are able to do task well.	13 (19.1)	18 (26.5)	37 (54.5)	3.40	.95
My learners are not excited in task-based lesson.	40 (58.8)	25 (36.8)	3 (4.4)	2.32	.76
My learners cannot benefit from implementing TBLT in class.	54 (79.4)	11 (16.2)	3 (4.4)	1.84	.91

SD: strongly disagree, N: neutral; A & SA: agree and strongly agree

As can be seen in Table 2, the frequency and mean scores for each item reflect teachers' perceptions about the implementation of TBLT, whereby the majority of responses fall under the category of 'agree and strongly agree.' Results reveal that teachers perceived this type of instruction as a positive way to impact student use of the target language as the mean scores are above 4.0 (a value between 4.0 and 4.4). In particular, the results for Item 8 represent the highest response rate 91.2% ( $n=62$ ) of the participants who realized the most important thing while implementing tasks is the meaning and purpose of tasks presented in teaching materials ( $M=4.40$ ,  $SD=.69$ ). The second most percentage of responses for Item 4 with 89.7% ( $n=61$ ) of teachers is the necessity for inclusion of skills-integrated tasks ( $M=4.20$ ,  $SD=.60$ ), followed by 86.7% ( $n=59$ ) of respondents to Item 11 considering the involvement of learners' creativity and ability to do things ( $M=4.10$ ,  $SD=.79$ ), and 79.5% ( $n=54$ ) of responses to Item 1 mentioning teachers' interest ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=.69$ ). However, with regard to Item 1, one respondent found no interest in implementing tasks in class. As a check on the relationship between teachers' understanding of TBLT and their perceptions about TBLT implementation, the *Linear*

*Regression Test* was computed, as shown in Table 3. A Pearson's *r* analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation,  $r = .432$ . Moreover, squared correlation coefficient,  $R^2 = .186$  indicates that the participants' understanding of TBLT influenced the participants' perceptions about TBLT implementation at a low rate (18.6 percent). Therefore, changes in teachers' perceptions about implementing tasks may be attributable to other predictors (factors).

**Table 3: Linear Regression Test**

Correlations		MeanP	MeanU
Pearson correlation	MeanP	1.00	.432
	MeanU	.432	1.00
Sig. (1-tailed)	MeanP		.000
	MeanU	.000	
N	MeanP	68	68
	MeanU	68	68

  

Model summary									
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	SD error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	Df1	Df2	Sig.F change
1	.432	.186	.174	.24182	.186	15.113	1	66	.000
a. predictors: (constant), MeanU									
b. dependent variable: MeanP									
MeanP: mean of participants' perceptions about TBLT implementation									
MeanU: mean of participants' understanding of TBLT concepts									

Results from Items 5 (*task-related psychological burden on teachers*), 9 (*learner ability and English language competencies*), 10 (*unsuitability of task in large classes*), 13 (*feeling unexcited with tasks*), and 14 (*no benefit from task-based lessons*) with the mean range below 3.0 (at value between 1.84 and 3.00) confirm that teachers perceived the benefits of task implementation.

### 4.3 Factors that influence teachers' perceptions about TBLT

#### A. Gender

As can be seen in Table 4, the results of One-Way ANOVA indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between groups ( $F(1, 66) = 2.743, p = .102$ ).

**Table 4: Result of One-Way ANOVA (Gender)**

Test of Homogeneity of Variances					
MeanP					
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.		
1,056	1	66	.308		
ANOVA					
MeanP					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

Between Groups	.189	1	.189	2.743	.102
Within Groups	654	66	.069		
Total	4.743	67			

**Note:** MeanP = Mean of participants' perceptions about implementing TBLT

### B. Age

Table 5 reveals the result of One-Way ANOVA to check whether there was a difference among different age group. Results show a statistically significant difference between groups ( $F(2, 65) = 3.187, p = .048$ ).

**Table 5:** The result of One-Way ANOVA (Age)

#### Test of Homogeneity of Variances

MeanP				
Levene Statistic		df1	df2	Sig.
.775		2	65	.465

#### ANOVA

MeanP						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups		.424	2	.212	3.187	.048
Within groups		4.320	65	.066		
Total		4.743	67			

**Note:** MeanP = Mean of participants' perceptions on implementing TBLT

As can be seen from Table 6, the results of Tukey post hoc test show that there was no statistically significant difference between groups whose age ranges from 22 to 30 and the group from 31 to 40 ( $p = .809$ ) as well as those from 22 to 30 and the group from 41 to 50 ( $p = .147$ ). However, the Tukey post hoc test reveals that there was a statistically significant difference between groups whose age ranges from 31 to 40 and the group from 41 to 50 ( $p = .037$ ).

**Table 6:** Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: MeanP

#### Tukey HSD

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
22 - 30	31 - 40	.04376	.07043	.809	-.1252	.2127
	41 - 50	-.18810	.09905	.147	-.4257	.0495
31 - 40	22 - 30	-.04376	.07043	.809	-.2127	.1252
	41 - 50	-.23185*	.09188	.037	-.4522	-.0115
41 - 50	22 - 30	.18810	.09905	.147	-.0495	.4257
	31 - 40	.23185*	.09188	.037	.0115	.4522

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Note:** MeanP = Mean of participants' perceptions on implementing TBLT in classroom practice



### C. Years of teaching experience

The One-Way ANOVA Test in SPSS was employed to figure out the differences between those groups. As shown in Table 7, it can be concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between groups of total years of teaching experience as determined by One-Way ANOVA ( $F(3, 64) = 1.146, p = .337$ )

**Table 7:** The result of On-Way ANOVA (Total years of teaching)

**Test of Homogeneity of Variances**

MeanP			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2,331	3	64	.083

**ANOVA**

MeanP					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.242	3	.081	1.146	.337
Within Groups	4.502	64	.070		
Total	4.743	67			

Note: MeanP = Mean of participants' perceptions on implementing TBLT in classroom practice

#### 4.4 Reasons for teachers to choose task implementation

Section four of the questionnaire consists of two open-ended questions related to the reasons for teachers' choice or avoidance of task implementation in their classroom practices. Table 8 shows that the majority of teachers (76.47%) reported that TBLT improves learners' interaction skill, followed by its potential of collaborative learning environment (72.05%), encouragement in learners' intrinsic motivation (61.7%) and their academic progress (50%). However, more than one third of respondents (38.3%) thought that TBLT was appropriate for small group work and four teachers (5.88%) shared some other reasons. One of them revealed that once students were given something specific to do, they felt responsible and urgent to do because once the task was repeatedly used; it could help learners improve their language use. Another teacher stated that her adoption of TBLT could help her learners and the teacher herself know the lesson objectives and understand her student learning At the end of her classroom practices. The two others teachers indicated that because TBLT promoted the learners' self-study and self-correction ability, they, hence, preferred applying TBLT in their classrooms.

**Table 8:** Frequency of reasons for teachers to choose TBLT

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Task-based language teaching promotes learners' academic progress.	34	50
Task-based language teaching improves learners' interaction skills.	52	76.47
Task-based language teaching encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.	42	61.7
Task-based language teaching creates a collaborative learning environment.	49	72.05
Task-based language teaching is appropriate for small group work.	23	38.33
Other reasons	4	5.88

#### 4.5 Reasons for teachers to avoid task implementation

Table 9 reveals the teachers' responses regarding their avoidance of using tasks in their classroom practices.

**Table 9:** Reasons for teachers to avoid implementing TBLT

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Students are not used to task-based learning	10	14.7
Materials in textbooks are not proper for using task-based language teaching	15	22
Large class size is an obstacle to use task-based methods	14	20.58
I have difficulty in assessing learner's task-based performance	12	17.64
I have limited target language proficiency	10	14.7
I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction	11	16.17
Other reasons	3	4.11

Inappropriate contents in teaching materials as a barrier to their implementation of TBLT (22%), large class size (20.58%), difficulties in assessing learners' performance (17.64%), and limited knowledge of task-based instruction (16.17%) were four major issues teachers encountered while implementing tasks. The last two reasons were associated with teachers' perceived lack of English language proficiency (14.7%) and students' unfamiliarity with task-based learning (14.7%). Besides, three surveyed teachers mentioned other reasons. The idea that students almost always used mother tongue to complete the task was also a reason. Additionally, time constraint was considered as another reason to prevent EFL teachers from implementing TBLT lessons. The last reason for their avoidance of adopting TBLT was the teachers' preparation time in order to conduct TBLT lessons.

#### 4.6 Insights into teachers' perceptions about implementing TBLT

Interview data revealed that participating teachers perceived the role tasks play in helping students learn in their teaching practice. The themes include increased students' interaction and participation, skills integration, and applicability of tasks.

For example, when asked if Mai had used a task in her classes, she said,

I did use tasks rather frequently in my class. I think task-based teaching can help my students become more active. While working in pairs or with peers, students need to interact with each other and move around the class. In addition, they are able to practice English in a more comfortable and natural way (Mai, interview extract).

From Mai's perspective, it appears that she understood the value of task-based language teaching in enhancing her students' interaction and participation while learning English and conceptualized the use of tasks as a communicative activity that provides students with an opportunity to learn English with positive feeling in a friendly atmosphere.

Similarly, four teachers said they had used tasks to integrate all four English skills into their lessons. Lan shared her views: *"I often introduce the lesson by asking students the general questions related to the topic first, and then have them do some activities in*

*pairs. I think this can help students speak first and from a simple activity, they learn other skills at the same time"* (Lan, interview extract).

The above quote indicated that Lan was aware of her role shift from teacher-centeredness to a facilitator of communicative-oriented learning through pair work, and of students who were exposed themselves to using English with confidence and increased opportunity to doing things.

When asked about the applicability of tasks in their classrooms, five teachers thought that tasks could be used because these activities made their students more interested in the lesson than available ones in the book. For example, Cuc said: *"... I think using tasks in my teaching practice is efficient as we can offer various types of activities during our teaching process. If we only use the available activities in the textbook, our lessons might be boring because, you know, students have their own books and know the answers to some exercises"* (Cuc, interview extract)

#### **4.6.1 Challenges in implementing TBLT**

With regard to what difficulties teachers had to encounter when implementing task-based language teaching, all of six teachers mentioned three issues such as students' unfamiliarity with tasks, time constraints, and their lack of English language proficiency while conducting tasks in their practices.

##### **A. Students' unfamiliarity with tasks**

Four out of six teachers expressed their concern about students' unfamiliarity of implementing tasks. For instance, Binh said, *"When being assigned a given task, students do not know clearly what to do as they think task is totally new to them. Sometimes, they know what to do but they cannot complete the tasks or even they incorrectly do the tasks"* (Binh, interview extract)

Two teachers claimed that students' shrinking from familiarity or contact with other peers. For example, Cuong said, *"Students are too shy to do the task as they are afraid of being laughed at. When students were asked to work in pairs or in small groups of five to complete one activity, they often passed the buck to others"* (Cuong, interview extract)

This quote suggests that Cuong perceived tasks as challenging and this neglect may influence how he implemented tasks.

##### **B. Time constraints**

All of six participating teachers shared the view that they had to spend too much time designing or choosing appropriate tasks assigned for their class within two periods per week to teach English. For example, Hanh said, *"The time for almost all activities is not enough for me to implement tasks in my classroom practice."*

##### **C. Teachers' lack of English language proficiency**

Hung expressed his concern about his lack of English language proficiency he had in his classes and this influences him on carrying out a particular activity. He stated, *"Teachers must be proficient in using English. Then giving students clear instructions is*

*sometimes hard for me.*" Three out of six interviewees also shared the view that they had to involve their students in classroom activities. For example, Truc said, "...*We have to create a friendly learning environment so that our students do not feel under pressure while doing a difficult task. We have to make the students think that task is just a fun activity for them to participate in*" (Truc, interview extract)

## 5. Discussion

This study indicates that the participating teachers had positive perceptions about task-based implementation as a result of high level of understanding of task-based language teaching although there are few variations of reasons for such practice. The following sections are discussed in relation to the research questions.

### A. Research Question One: How do EFL teachers perceive TBLT?

The participating teachers conceptualized tasks and recognized the benefits the students gained from using tasks in their learning process. It is believed that the teachers understood the role of tasks as key to their teaching practices. The findings from the questionnaire showed that the teachers had positive perceptions about TBLT implementation. This may be due to their high level of conceptual understanding of TBLT, which, with reference to the participants' questionnaire reports and interviews, resulted in their implementation of TBLT. However, the students' unfamiliarity of using tasks was the biggest constraint in the process of the participants implementing TBLT. With respect to teachers' roles and classroom arrangements, it could be inferred that the participating teachers preferred to employ tasks interactively rather than one-way instruction. This may result from the fact that most participating teachers were university teachers who frequently worked with students with a higher level of thinking.

Although the previous studies in the field (Ansari & Shahrokhi, 2014; Jeon & Hahn, 2006) have indicated that the teachers understood the conceptions of tasks but doubted the feasibility of implementing TBLT, the findings from this study are in line with those of other similar studies (e.g., Pohan et al., 2016; Tababaei & Hadi, 2011; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011). These authors indicated that teachers were keen on applying this learner-centered approach to their classes as they conceptualized the meaning and role of tasks embedded in their teaching settings.

### B. Research Question Two: What are the reasons for EFL teachers' choice, or avoidance of TBLT in their classroom practices?

The data analysis of the two open-ended items reveals that the EFL teachers had different reasons for choosing or avoiding implementing TBLT. While some participating teachers decided to apply TBLT in order to encourage students' intrinsic motivation, to improve interactive learning strategies, and to create a collaborative learning environment, others were hesitant to integrate tasks due to students' unfamiliarity of using tasks, large class size with mixed-level students, and

inappropriate materials. Interview data also indicate two issues that teachers concerned include time constraints and their lack of English language proficiency in dealing with task implementation. These concerns fit with the role of the teacher in task-based language teaching, as noted by van den Branden (2016) who confirms that teachers play a vital role in planning and designing appropriate tasks pertinent to students' needs and interests to improve language skills. As TBLT challenges traditional views of classroom management, both teachers and students, who were accustomed to conventional methods giving great emphasis on accuracy over fluency, may find it difficult to use English in task-based classrooms. This finding is therefore in line with Leaver and Kaplan (2004a). These researchers found that teachers' and students' perceptions are major factors influencing the implementation of TBLT. The participating teachers also suggested the following solution to the problem of the presence of students with multiple ability levels in each class. The teachers could arrange students into groups which consist of not only high-achieving students but also low-achieving ones. Besides, EFL teachers probably have to spend time preparing tasks thoroughly to ensure that tasks could be used appropriately to meet students' abilities and interests.

As far as task-based materials were concerned, the participating teachers thought that the contents in their textbooks were one of the reasons they avoided the use of TBLT, as noted by Leaver and Kaplan (2004b). Hence, it was very difficult for teachers to conduct task-based language lessons with such contents. Understanding such dissonance suggests that teachers should be encouraged to design task-oriented materials that may well fit students' learning needs and interests, thereby facilitating interactive and collaborative learning environments.

## 6. Conclusions

This study has discussed the positive and negative aspects of TBLT, EFL teachers' perceptions towards the use of tasks in classroom practices, and their problems when employing tasks into classroom practices. TBLT has its valuable points and is an exciting and interactive approach to improve students' communicative competence. Successful introduction of TBLT would require changes not only in governmental policies but also in the mindsets of Vietnamese educators and school administrators. The following conclusions are drawn from the findings of the current study and theoretical propositions of related literature: TBLT is a wonderful tool to improve students' fluency in speaking skill, and in TBLT classrooms, teachers are able to assume various roles proposed by Nunan (2004) and Richards and Rogers (2014). The roles include selector/ sequencer of tasks, preparer of tasks for students, pre-task consciousness raiser about form, guide, and feedback, when needed.

Based on the findings of this study, three important pedagogical implications for teachers, school authorities, and curriculum designers are proposed. Firstly, since teachers' views regarding the instructional approach have great impact on classroom practices, it is necessary for teachers, as practical controllers and facilitators of learners'

activities in the classroom, to have positive attitudes towards TBLT in order to successfully implement it. In order to achieve this, teachers should be frequently trained through professional development seminars or units so that they can shift their conventionally-based thinking to tailoring their syllabi and lesson plans, thereby making their classroom practices more lively and interactive. Additionally, the teachers should help, praise and encourage their students to improve the use of tasks. More importantly, it is necessary that teachers should not pay too much attention to accuracy in language use, particularly, grammar. Moreover, teachers should adjust some of the contents of the text-books they use according to the procedures and principles of TBLT. By doing so, they can diversify their teaching procedures, and as a result, their students will be motivated to learn English as a foreign language. Secondly, school authorities are encouraged to organize pre-service and in-service training programs for teachers to use TBLT in their daily classroom practices. Thirdly, curriculum designers are recommended to include TBLT in textbooks. In particular, well-designed activities and tasks should be integrated into English language skills-based texts.

### **About the authors**

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## Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

### Section 1: General information

Name:

Email address:

Phone number:

Gender:  male  female

Age: 22 - 30  31- 40  41- 50

Total number of years teaching English:

less than 5 years  5 to 9 years  10 to 15 years  more than 15 years

### Section II. Teachers' understandings of task-based language teaching (TBLT)

Please answer the following statements by putting  $\surd$  in a box, according to the following scale:  
1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree).

Questionnaire Items	1	2	3	4	5
1. A task is a communicative goal directed.					
2. A task mainly focuses on meaning.					
3. A task has a clearly defined outcome.					
4. A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learner.					
5. Tasks are only done in pairs or groups					
6. A task involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing and interacting in the target language.					
7. A task motivates learners to be engaged in language use.					
8. Through tasks, students can develop their interlanguage.					
9. TBLT is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching					
10. TBLT shares the same several principles with communicative language teaching.					
11. TBLT is based on the student-centered instructional approach.					
12. TBLT includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.					
13. TBLT offers the opportunity for natural learning inside classroom.					
14. In TBLT, teachers should not teach grammar and forms.					

**Section III: Teachers' perceptions about implementing task-based language teaching**

Questionnaire Items	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have interest in implementing TBLT in the classroom.					
16. TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.					
17. TBLT meets learners' needs and interests.					
18. TBLT helps to develop integrated skills in the classroom.					
19. TBLT lays much psychological burden on teachers.					
20. TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.					
21. TBLT is proper for making classroom arrangements.					
22. TBLT materials should be meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context.					
23. Learners will not be able to do a task unless their English is fully fluent and accurate.					
24. TBLT is not useful in large classes					
25. TBLT can promote the learners creativity and ability of doing things.					
26. Low-proficient learners are able to do a task well.					
27. My learners are not excited in Task-based lesson.					
28. My learners cannot benefit from implementing TBLT in class.					

**Section IV. Reasons teachers choose or avoid task-based language teaching**

29. Do you use task-based language teaching in your teaching? (If YES, please go to question 30. If NO, please go to question 31)  YES  NO
30. Please put ✓ any reasons that you decide to implement task-based language teaching.

Task-based language teaching promotes learners' academic progress.  
Task-based language teaching improves learners' interaction skills.  
Task-based language teaching encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.

Task-based language teaching creates a collaborative learning environment.

Task-based language teaching is appropriate for small group work.

If you have other reasons, please write them down.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

31. Please put ✓ any reasons that you avoid implementing task-based language teaching.

Students are not used to task-based learning.

Materials in textbooks are not proper for using task-based language teaching.

Large class size is an obstacle to use task-based methods.

I have difficulty in assessing learner's task-based performance.

I have limited target language proficiency.

I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.

If you have other reasons, please write them down.

.....

## **Appendix 2: Interview Questions**

### **A. Conceptual understanding of task-based language teaching**

1. Can you tell me what a task means/ is?
2. What, according to you, are the roles of teacher and students in a task-based language teaching classroom?
3. How do you correct your students' mistakes?

### **B. Perceptions towards the implementation of task-based language teaching in classroom practice**

4. Have you ever used a task in your teaching practice? Classroom practice?
5. Do you think tasks can be used / applied/ applicable in your teaching? Please explain.

### **C. Common challenges in implementing task-based language teaching and solutions**

6. What challenges do you have while implementing task-based language teaching in your classroom?
7. Can you tell me some possible ways to make task-based language teaching successful in the long run?

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