**University of Alberta**

**Learning to Implement Task-Based Language Teaching**

by

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**Abstract**

As a past student of traditional approaches to language learning and as a second language teacher with seven years of experience in the classroom using the audio-lingual method, I have recognized the need for a change in my teaching approach based on students’ poor communicative and second language learning outcomes. The purpose of this study is to document my experience of learning about task-based language teaching (TBLT) and how to implement it in the foreign language classroom through the exploration of literature. There has been much research carried out in diverse countries on the task-based language teaching methodology. These studies provide evidence of the effectiveness of TBLT on second language fluency in secondary students. My aim is for my students to be able to communicate effectively with native speakers in many contexts.

There are three sections in this project. The first section consists of an introduction, my personal connection to the topic, and a literature review on task-based language teaching. The second section of this project is about the main component of task-based language teaching, namely, tasks. This section includes an example of a task, as well as a lesson plan using the audio-lingual method that has been modified into a task-based language teaching lesson. The third section focuses on comparing the Audio-lingual method and task-based language teaching. It also discusses some challenges that I anticipate in implementing TBLT. Additionally, based on my experiences and the previous research done on the effectiveness and weaknesses of task-based language teaching and the illustrations of a task and lesson plan, a list of recommendations for using task-based language teaching is provided to help teachers who are considering implementing TBLT in their classroom.

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**Introduction**

During my tenure in high school, I was exposed to the traditional teaching methodology in most of my classes including my second language class. This was a teacher-oriented methodology in which the teacher taught the lessons by using a lecture style including verbal explanation and a blackboard. This type of teaching strategy does not aid in students’ holistic development of their L2. As a result, Spanish was seen as another subject instead of a second language because communicative aspects and the four foreign language skills were not included in the lesson; nor was opportunities for students’ application of the language in society. After becoming a teacher, I applied a different approach - the audio-lingual method - in my L2 classroom for seven years, which in my opinion targeted students’ L2 skills, yet the results appeared to be similar to those achieved from the previous traditional method. Based on my students’ learning results, I realized the need for a change in my approach to teaching.

This project documents my experience of learning about task-based language teaching (TBLT) and learning how to implement it in the second language classroom. Furthermore, as teachers, it is our duty to reflect on our practice and to evaluate ourselves when our methods have failed to capture our students’ interest or to educate them adequately through our chosen discipline. A second language is vital for the development of society, both for communication as well as competing in the global society. In order for our students to become able to speak a second language fluently, we need to first assess our teaching methods. This project blends my personal experiences with an exploration of literature on TBLT. It also discusses evidence for the effectiveness of TBLT for helping secondary students develop SL proficiency, so that they are able to communicate effectively with native speakers in society and in our global world.

**My personal connection**

My first introduction to Spanish, which is my second language, was in the seventh grade in Brown’s Town Secondary School in Jamaica. Although I had no prior knowledge or experiences of Spanish before secondary school, this did not hinder me from excelling in my study of the language. The main reason I was a successful student was because of my passion for the language which motivated me to study during my spare time.

In Jamaica, the eleventh grade is a preparation period for the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) exam for all subject areas. This was the most crucial period for students, as success in five or more of these exams is the qualification needed for attending a college or university. Therefore, most of my classmates did not choose Spanish and others withdrew from the class before the CXC exam; this left only four students in our class. Although there were only a few students in the class, the method that was applied for teaching Spanish did not engage students in practical use of the language but rather prepared them for a written paper and the exam. In two semesters, there was maybe an hour of oral practice as preparation for the oral portion of the exam. Without my own practice during my spare time along with my interest in Spanish, I believe that I would have had difficulty learning the language. This is because we were not exposed to applying Spanish to real-life experiences. As a result, I was the only student who excelled because of my individual practice during my spare time with my family members to supplement the grammar-based classes.

Although I passed the Spanish CXC exam, I still did not develop fluency in my second language. As a result, I had difficulty interacting with native speakers of the language as well as my lecturers in college. I was distraught to find out my shortcomings in my second language. Since my grades showed that I had excelled in my Spanish class in secondary school, I assumed that I had achieved fluency.

I started developing both written and oral fluency in my second language after being exposed to a variety of methods in college, especially those that offered real-life experiences with the language as well as practical interactions. Moreover, the classes were taught in Spanish, which aided in my listening skills and enhanced my oral production of the target language. This was very intense at the beginning due to my lack of experience, but I gradually became comfortable as the years passed and was able to graduate successfully.

After graduating, I became a Spanish teacher. In my seven years as a teacher, I had experiences teaching and observing other teachers instructing Spanish as well as assisting new practice teachers. I taught at four different institutions with students from grades seven to nine and was exposed to new methods. I mostly used the audio-lingual method since I had received training to use this method in college; nonetheless, the Heads of Departments for some schools used very little Spanish in their Spanish classes and mandated their traditional method for examination purposes, which I could not debate.

The audio-lingual method is based on repetition drills, which assist students with pronunciation and memorization of concepts. This approach had both positive and negative impacts on my students’ second language learning over the years. I observed that most of my students were able to pronounce given words in Spanish that were repeated. They also seemed to do well at memorizing certain concepts that were taught in a song or an interesting role play. Most of my students seemed to enjoy the class and were motivated to attend class because of the materials that I utilized during instruction; which were very creative but were not connected to their real-life experiences.

I noted, however, a number of factors that prevented most of my students from achieving fluency. The first factor is that they were unable to apply the concepts taught in class outside of the classroom. For instance, when my students greeted me outside of class, they would say “Buenos días señorita” (Good morning Miss) but when I responded and asked how they were doing, they would laugh and respond ‘I don’t understand Miss.’ This happened to the majority of my students. The few that were able to respond could not go beyond the greeting conversation in Spanish. Secondly, during instruction in class, my students were unable to remember or make connections with material from previous lessons.

Some students would fail throughout the entire course, which would demotivate them to continue the course at the CXC level, but even those who were successful would often withdraw from Spanish class as soon as they reached grade ten. This reminded me of Spanish classes during my own high school years. Moreover, as an observant educator, I realized that Spanish was not being taught as a practical and real-life experience for students in grades ten and eleven because they were being prepared for the Spanish CXC exams. After leaving secondary school and entering university or college, they often do not use the language, and they may forget what they have learnt.

After completing my Bachelors in Spanish and working as a teacher, I decided to do my Masters in a different country in order to gain more experiences. I had never heard of TBLT before studying in Canada at the University of Alberta. During my first and second semesters, I took two classes that introduced TBLT as a teaching methodology. The first course was Teaching English as an International Language. In this class, I learned that there has been a lot of research done on this method. Some countries, such as China, are implementing TBLT in their secondary schools due to its positive impact on second language learning. The other course that I took was an Individual Study course focused on TBLT. During this course, I learned more about TBLT and ‘Tasks,’ which are the basis of the framework for the TBLT methodology. Additionally, I learned that one of the main reasons for the effectiveness of TBLT is its emphasis on the authenticity of tasks. Tasks resemble real-life uses of language to help learners become able to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Moreover, TBLT focuses on students’ experiences so that they can connect language learning with their lives.

The ideas from these courses stimulated my interest to learn more about TBLT. Also, I was exposed to journals and articles about TBLT as well as research that has been carried out. This information enriched my knowledge as a student and a teacher and made me eager to explore more literature on TBLT and its effect on second language fluency in secondary students. Additionally, my personal, practical and scholarly goals motivated me to do this project. I would like to understand how to implement TBLT in the classroom as well as the success of using this method. I believe that my experiences as a student and educator have shaped my interest in TBLT.

**My approach to carrying out this project**

When I became aware of TBLT, I decided to do more enquiry during my courses in my second year of graduate studies. This project was carried out based on my understanding of TBLT and my examination of research conducted in diverse countries on TBLT. Readings about TBLT from my previous classes helped build my knowledge of TBLT over the past two years, and in carrying out this project, I read additional readings from scholarly sources. I was motivated to continue researching this approach which contributed greatly to my literature review.

Moreover, based on my knowledge of diverse teaching strategies in the past and my experiences teaching a second language, I was able to relate to teachers’ views as reported in research on TBLT. Those past experiences, along with my knowledge of TBLT, aided in my understanding of the importance of ‘tasks’ and how they are used in a TBLT lesson. As part of this project, I have also analysed and discussed an example of a task. Moreover, I have modified one of my previous audio-lingual method lesson plans by transforming it into a TBLT lesson. These aspects of my project will be presented following my literature review.

**Literature Review**

**What is task-based language teaching?**

There are a variety of teaching methods that exist for second language teaching and learning such as the Grammar-translation method, the Audio-lingual method, and Communicative approaches. TBLT is a method that helps to facilitate students’ learning of their L2 by linking the target language with their experiences in the world. This will not just aid in their knowledge of the L2 but also assist with their application of the language in the world where it is necessary. Long (1985) and Norris (2009) defined task-based language teaching and learning as a pedagogical approach to language instruction with the central aim of preparing students to accomplish real-world tasks that are directly relevant to their needs (as cited in González-Lloret, and Nielson, 2015, p. 526). Hence, task-based language teaching is a methodology that provides students with experiences in their second language by having them accomplish certain tasks that are designed to improve their proficiency in the target language.

**Historical background for TBLT.**

One of the earliest uses of TBLT was described by Prabhu (1987), a second language teacher who was involved in the Bangalore Communicative Project in India. He was dissatisfied with his students’ L2 outcome and recognized the need to change his instructional approach (as cited in Allen, 1988, p. 498). The main objective of the project was to help students focus more on communicating a message rather than the language code by allowing them to solve problems that were developed in tasks (as cited in Allen, 1988, p. 499). Students had to impart meaning through the message and apply the language to real-life situations instead of completing grammar exercises. Prabhu (1987) defined communicative tasks as activities that require students to arrive at an outcome through the process of thinking (as cited in Allen, 1988, p. 501). The teacher’s role is to guide students and to control and adjust the difficulty level of the activity. He also showed that TBLT can be used at different learning stages based on the tasks’ level of difficulty. Thus, TBLT was developed as a solution to resolve the issue of non-fluency in second languages.

***Communicative language teaching (CLT).***

Prior to the development of TBLT, the audio-lingual (oral-aural) method was one of the dominant methods used in L2 classrooms in the mid 1970s. This method focuses on the repetition of phrases and expressions. Sometimes students repeated meaningless phrases, until Chomsky’s work introduced the meaning component of this model in the 1960s (Melrose, 1995, p. 2). This led to the development of Communicative Language Teaching approaches (CLT), among which TBLT can be classified. Mustapha and Yahaya (2013), defined CLT as a language teaching approach that emphasizes students’ communicative skills through authentic language in meaningful contexts (p. 788). Additionally, Ellis (2003), stated that the aim of CLT is to develop students’ ability to use language in real communication, both as an interactional (where language is used to create and maintain contact) and transactional (where language is used referentially for the exchange of information) function (p. 27). Students would learn to communicate by focusing on meaning through interactions or conversations.

*The emergence of TBLT.*

TBLT has a strong theoretical background as it is built upon research and theory related to how language learning occurs. Furthermore, Legutke and Thomas (1991), Richard and Rogers (2001), Littlewood (2004), Nunan (2004) and Willis (2004) stated that TBLT is a branch of CLT, except that it focuses even more on meaning-oriented language use (as cited in Eckerth and Siekmann, 2008, p. 31) than many types of CLT, which often still revolve around grammar rules and structures. For this reason, TBLT was described by Ellis (2003) as the ‘strong version of CLT (p. 30). Dewey (1938) similarly believed that a key principle in learning a L2 is through experience and that students acquire language skills by using the language and doing tasks which is an outline for the structuring of language actions (González-Lloret, and Nielson, 2015, p. 526). Hence, due to the principles of tasks in TBLT, students can learn their L2 through their experience with the use of the target language during given tasks. As a result, the development and implementation of tasks in TBLT is vital and will need careful planning as well as time, as this plays an integral role in students’ L2 competency.

***Existing Research on TBLT.***

There is a large body of evidence-based research that points to the effectiveness of TBLT in the L2 classroom, based on the results of students’ achievement. Thus, TBLT is not just a theory but also a method that has been implemented in diverse classrooms and in many countries. It has been shown to have some advantages in comparison to other methods. For example, it can improve fluency in all four foreign language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). In this section, I summarize some research conducted in schools across different countries.

Danyan (2016), conducted research on the implementation of TBLT in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (L2) in a Chinese classroom after identifying some weaknesses of the traditional teaching approach. The author mentioned that the traditional lessons were teacher-centered since they were delivered in a lecture style and the roles of the students were to listen and take notes. As a result of this method, most students were unable to use their L2 as a communication tool due to their reluctance to speak in the English language classroom and they had many grammatical errors in their writing. Also, they had little understanding of English culture and society and lacked confidence in learning their L2 (p. 118). However, after exposing these students to the TBLT method, Danyan concluded that students had enhanced interest in learning English, they had more confidence in speaking and writing their L2, they developed a better understanding of English culture and most importantly, most students recognized a growth in their L2 (p. 124). Therefore, it is evident that the TBLT approach can assist students in learning their L2 more effectively than some traditional approaches.

Phuong, Van den Branden, Van Steendam and Sercu (2015), carried out a study to find out if TBLT can develop students’ writing performance as well as their writing strategies in comparison to the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach. Due to their findings, they suggested that once the differences between TBLT and PPP are analyzed, they may provide additional evidence to support the effectiveness of TBLT compared with some traditional teaching approaches (p. 113). Lei (2015) made a comparison between CLT and TBLT. The author stated that both methods are student-centered and allow students to experience authentic communication (pp. 124-125). These features can motivate students, which is essential for L2 learning. However, TBLT offers a specific concrete approach while CLT is a general overarching conceptual approach (pp. 458-459) that offers fewer specifics for classroom implementation.

Research has also shown that TBLT can help students achieve fluency through the four foreign language skills. As a result, tasks can be designed to achieve both written and oral fluency, which also motivates students as they develop their four language skills. For example, Córdoba Zúñiga, (2016) along with Choudhury and Dutta (2015), mentioned in their research with Colombian and Chinese students respectively, that students showed a preference towards the TBLT method as it developed all four foreign language skills and increased their ability to learn their L2 fluently.

NamazianDost, Bohloulzadeh and Pazhakh (2017), carried out a research to find out the effect of TBLT on the motivation of Iranian students and grammatical achievement in writing tasks. Based on their results, TBLT not only motivated their students but was also associated with a positive effect on students’ achievement in their L2 (p. 256). This shows that TBLT can improve students’ L2 writing skills. In another investigation of TBLT and writing, Abrams and Byrd (2017), conducted an exploratory study with second language students in German to inquire about students’ written performance with the use of TBLT methodology. Their findings were analysed in terms of complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexical richness, as well as a global measure of quality, to reflect the multi-componential nature of L2 performance (p. 442). Their results showed that the meaning-focused group outperformed the grammar-focused group in terms of grammatical accuracy and lexical richness but there was no difference between the two groups on syntactic complexity or fluency (p. 448).

Additionally, despite the complexity in learning a second language orally, TBLT can help students achieve this skill. Zhang (2009), stated that the oral skill in L2 poses a challenge for learners who must master several difficult micro skills, which include the pronunciation of unfamiliar phonemes, the correct placement of stress and intonation, and the appropriate use of formal and informal expressions (p. 32). Thus, the oral skills comprise of different categories to achieve oral competence. However, despite the complexity of developing the oral skills, Gurzynski-Weiss, Long, and Solon (2017), believe that tasks in TBLT can help students to target meaning in their L2 based on interaction and encourages automatization and fluency of target structures in the second language. Most importantly, Gurzynski-Weiss et al., (2017), conducted research to investigate the role of tasks in the development of the oral skills in the TBLT classroom. Based on their findings, the tasks used in TBLT not only aided in achieving accurate grammar but also in improving L2 pronunciation (p. 221). As a result, the tasks used in the TBLT classrooms can aid in developing students’ L2 oral fluency, which is vital for the application of the target language in real-life contexts.

Coombe and Shehadeh (2012), conducted a study with secondary school students in Japan to test the effects of task complexity and pre-task planning on L2 students’ oral production. Based on their results, attaining complexity can have a negative effect on language accuracy since students may try to focus on the complexity of the language instead of the form, while simple tasks allow students to use the target language more accurately. Additionally, they concluded that the pre-task phase is vital in L2 teaching as the planning for tasks contributes to more complex and fluent speech (p. 38). These studies suggest that TBLT is a flexible approach that aids in both written and oral competence, which is essential in learning and communicating in a L2.

Finally, teachers play one of the most crucial roles in TBLT as they are the ones who will create the activities, implement the method and assist students in developing L2 fluency. However, a lack of knowledge can prevent them from achieving this purpose. For instance, East (2012), executed a research study on L2 teachers’ perspectives on TBLT and effectiveness of L2 methodology in New Zealand. Based on his findings, there are teachers who lack knowledge and understanding of TBLT and as a result, have never applied it to their L2 classroom. His study showed that 26% of teachers within that institution were unaware of this method, 32% had heard about TBLT and had attempted to apply it to their classroom but were unsuccessful while 42% knew about TBLT and made attempts to introduce it to their classroom through the development of tasks (p. 193) The implementation of TBLT in the classroom can be demotivating for teachers if they do not understand it. As well, Sasayama (2016), cautioned teachers to be vigilant when creating activities, as task complexity and allotting limited time may cause low proficient students to be confused while it may increase knowledge for high achievers. This component of TBLT can improve fluency, as accuracy and pre-task can help to convey meaning and develop students’ ability to use the language proficiently.

In summary, TBLT is an effective methodology that can aid in L2 fluency. Based on research, there is evidence that TBLT promotes fluency in various language skills. Tasks can be designed to achieve both oral and written fluency. Nonetheless, it is challenging for teachers to implement this method if they are unaware of how to apply it in their L2 classroom. As noted previously, the aim of this project is to describe my own experience of learning to implement TBLT.

**What is a task?**

TBLT is structured around tasks, which are essential to the L2 syllabus. Skehan (1996), defined tasks as activities that require L2 students to use language with an emphasis on meaning, where there is a relationship of the task to the real-world, and where the assessment of task performance is in terms of the task outcome (as cited in Ellis, 2003, p. 4). Likewise, Ellis (2003) agreed that task authenticity helps to achieve real-world activities or situational authenticity, which should be developed based on students’ actual day-to-day language needs (p. 6). Consequently, tasks in TBLT do not allow teachers to pointlessly assign grammatical or vocabulary work to students, but rather are designed to achieve a specific purpose or objective. As a result, students learning a second language will not just complete tasks for the sake of doing so but also to prepare them for communication in the world. Moreover, TBLT is a tactical approach because the tasks used with this method can be adjusted to suit the needs of the students at their diverse learning stages.

Van Avermaet, Piet and Gysen (2006) argued that tasks should be cognitively demanding, hence, teachers should motivate students to invest time in task completion, support task performance and encourage the negotiation of meaning (as cited in JoséMiguel, Maciel and Carolina, 2016, para. 15). Long (2014) added that the tasks designed in TBLT assist students to learn what they need to know in the L2, as tasks are based on real-world activities that people engage in when they plan, conduct or recall their day (p. 6). Overall, tasks are one of the main features of TBLT, and they should be designed to meet the needs of the students. As a result, tasks should reflect students’ experiences in the real-world so that they can apply their knowledge of the second language effectively in the necessary contexts.

**Criteria for a good task**

Ellis (2009) identified four criteria of good tasks in TBLT. First of all, he proposed that there should be a focus on meaning where students should be encouraged to focus on the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances (p. 223). Secondly, he mentioned that there should be some type of gap such as an information gap, opinion gap or reasoning gap (p. 223), as these would motivate students to use the language to communicate a message proficiently. The next standard is that students should rely on both linguistic and non-linguistic resources in order to complete activities. The final criterion is that there should be a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (p. 223). As a result, students will have a purpose for using the language rather than using it solely to practice language forms.

**Illustrations of good tasks**

Tasks in TBLT should engage the use of the second language through holistic activities. For instance, Samuda and Bygate (2008) stated that the role of tasks in L2 learning is to develop students’ ability to communicate effectively in the target language; hence, the language should not just be used to show mastery but also for personal and professional information for social, political, artistic purposes and aesthetic pleasure (p. 7). As a result, students will not only use their second language to pass their exams in secondary schools but also apply it in their daily lives. In order to achieve L2 fluency with the use of TBLT, educators need to know how to select and develop good tasks. The following is an example of a good task in TBLT. The task is called *‘Things in Pockets* (pp. 9-10) and was developed by Samuda and Bygate (2008, pp. 9-10). The task example is accompanied by an analysis based on Ellis’ (2009) four criteria for tasks. This task can last for 45 minutes where students will spend 15 minutes on each step since the material will be written in the target language. Also, in this activity, the teacher will give simple instructions in the target language about the task and students will be expected to discuss their ideas in the target language as well as to respond to the information in the hand-out.

***Things in pocket.***

Objects that will be used to complete this activity are: bags containing plastic car keys and house keys, an empty bottle of Tylenol, plastic cell phone, purse, driver’s license made from paper, paper money (£10 pound), bubble gums and used tickets from movie theatres and horseback riding events. Also, the teacher will provide a chart with information to assist students along with markers and cartridge papers to make posters or to aid in presentations.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| This example illustrates what we mean by ‘task’ and the weight of some of these questions. In this task, participants are given a bag of objects, allegedly the contents of a person’s pockets, and are invited to work in small groups to speculate on the identity of that person. Each group needs to reach a consensus on their ideas concerning the person’s identity, presenting and justifying their conclusions to the rest of the class, first as an informal oral presentation and finally in written form as a poster or report. In this version, the groups use a chart to record their initial hypotheses about the person’s identity under categories such as age, gender, occupation, etc. The chart also requires groups to register the degree of probability/possibility of each initial hypothesis:A sample task

|  |
| --- |
| **Things in Pockets** |
| An overcoat was found on a plane after a flight from San Francisco to London. The objects that you have in front of you were all found in the pockets of that overcoat. Can they tell us anything about the owner? As a group, look at everything carefully and share your ideas about the identity of the owner of the overcoat. Be ready to present your group’s ideas about the person to the rest of the class and to explain how certain you are about your ideas. |

You can use the chart to organise your ideas and to show how certain you are about each one. For example, if you are 100% certain that you know the person’s name, write it in column 3 (100% certain). But if you are not at all certain about the person’s name, use Column 1 (less than 50% certain). If you are almost certain that you know this person’s name, use Column 2 (90% certain).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Less than 50% (it’s possible)** | **90% certain****(it’s probable)** | **100% certain (it’s certain)** |
| Name  |  |  |  |
| Sex  |  |  |  |
| Age  |  |  |  |
| Marital status  |  |  |  |
| Occupation  |  |  |  |
| Likes and interests  |  |  |  |
| Recent activities  |  |  |  |
| Any other ideas |  |  |  |

 |

Figure 1. Things in pockets (TIP). This figure illustrates an example of task used in TBLT (Samuda and Bygate, 2008, pp. 9-10).

**My Critique of ‘Things in Pocket’**

**Focus on meaning**

In figure 1, *‘Things in the Pocket,’* students will not just be practicing grammar and vocabulary. They will also be communicating messages and ideas as they try to determine the identity of the person who left their coat on the plane. Thus, the focus is on meaning because students are describing objects, trying to problem-solve, formulating hypotheses and justifying their thinking.

**Gap**

Figure 1, *‘Things in pocket,’* contains all three gaps: information, opinion and reasoning gap. For the first gap students are missing some information which results in the need to solve something that is not fully known. The second gap is an opinion gap since students will need to justify their own views and hypotheses. For the third gap, which is the reasoning gap, students will gain knowledge while figuring something out, and they will need to justify their answers. This will be done as they try to express themselves in the target language.

**Linguistic and non-linguistic resources**

Students will draw from all their knowledge about their L2 to convey information about the person to complete the task illustrated in Figure 1. Additionally, they will need to use their knowledge, experiences and problem-solving skills to complete the task accurately. These are examples of non-linguistic resources.

**Outcome**

The outcome for the task *‘Things in pocket,’* will be for students to figure out the identity of the person who lost the overcoat. As they try to figure out important details about the person who lost the overcoat, they will fill in the chart provided.

**Using tasks in a lesson**

To incorporate a task into a lesson, it can be helpful for teachers to use three task phases in their TBLT lessons to attain their objectives and encourage L2 acquisition. These are the pre-task phase which is the preparation stage, the during-task phase where students work on diverse tasks to accomplish a set of goals that the teachers design and the post-task phase, where students reflect on the previous task phase to present and expand their knowledge of the assigned task. Thus, all three stages are vital for L2 fluency as they help students understand, complete and evaluate their assigned task while learning in the target language.

**Pre-task**

Ellis (2003) stated that the goal of the pre-task phase is to prepare students to complete the task in ways that will encourage L2 acquisition (p. 244). As a result, teachers play a significant role at this stage which can affect students’ overall performance when completing the tasks. Van den Branden (2006) recommended that when teachers are introducing tasks to students, they should motivate the students to perform the task, prepare the students to perform the task by connecting real-world experiences and organizing the performance phase by using clear instructions (pp. 98-99). This will not only stimulate students to complete the activities but also develop their understanding of the topic and tasks that they need to accomplish. Additionally, Lockyer Willis (1996), explained that teachers should evaluate the extent to which the task they are preparing has the potential to motivate the students into meaningful action and to elicit the kind of cognitive and interactional processes assumed to enhance L2 learning (pp. 175-176). As a result, the preparation stage will help students to use both prior and current concepts together to accomplish the given tasks which will aid in L2 fluency. For example, Lockyer Willis (1996), stated that at the pre-task stage, teachers need tointroduce the topic to the students, help them recall previous knowledge and learn new concepts, explore different ways for them to understand task instruction and share the effects of preparation time (p. 50). Therefore, by facilitating students at the pre-task phase, the teacher would interactionally support task performance which is essential to L2 learning.

**During-task.**

The next stage in a TBLT lesson is called the ‘During-task phase.’ This phase is where students carry out tasks in their L2. For this stage, along with their role in monitoring and mediating, there are three task performance options that teachers need to take into consideration: time, control of agenda and task structure.

Teachers ought to plan tasks based on the allotted class time available.Additionally, Ellis (2003), mentioned that teachers can allow students to complete tasks in their own time or set a time limit (p. 249). This can be done based on the students’ level of maturity and experience with TBLT lessons as well as the teacher’s knowledge of the students’ behaviour towards tasks. Lockyer Willis (1996) stated that timing is important because students can take extended time to complete tasks; thus, the teachers’ role is to monitor students’ time based on the complexity of the tasks (pp. 54-55). Hence, during this phase, teachers may wish to give limited time for students to complete the tasks depending on the level of complexity and extend or add more activities if there is sufficient time left after the activity and remind students of the time when necessary. Additionally, agenda is important at this stage as it relates to the way in which tasks are carried out. Willis and Willis (2007) claimed that the agenda should be carefully structured and controlled to motivate low level students while giving a more complex task to higher level students (p. 161). The aim is to decrease low level students’ lack of interest and increase their ability to perform tasks, while at the same time, challenging high level students and preventing boredom.

Finally, the teachers’ role during this stage is to be a mediator, whether cognitively or affectively, by facilitating students in resolving issues or problems with meaning and form of their L2. Van den Branden (2006), stated that teachers should take the form of interactional support where they mediate between task demands and the students’ current abilities (p. 102). Consequently, teachers should not be problem solvers but rather guide students during the problem-solving process which will be different for students at diverse learning levels.

Therefore, the during-task is the second stage in TBLT which will require teachers to monitor students’ time allotted for the tasks, control the agenda and task structure and to be mediators for students during the problem-solving stage. These are important to support students’ successful completion of tasks while allowing them to be independent learners and acquiring fluency in their L2.

***Post-task.***

The final phase of task in TBLT is called the ‘Post-task’ phase, which is the report stage and the natural conclusion of the task cycle. During this stage, teachers should play the role of chairpersons, allow opportunities for reflection on the task and revise the form of the target language with students.

Lockyer Willis (1996) stated that the teacher’s role at this phase is to be a chairperson by introducing the presentations, setting a purpose for listening, choosing the speakers and concluding the presentations (pp. 58-59). This will aid in organization as well as to set the atmosphere for learning.

Additionally, during this phase, Ellis (2003) recommended that teachers should allow students to reflect on their performance of a task and advise students to review ‘form’, especially the forms that were challenging for the students (p. 258). This will increase students’ knowledge of their L2. Likewise, Van den Branden (2006), stated that teachers and students should verbally reflect on the way in which each group or individual attempted the task and whether it led them to the correct or incorrect solutions (p. 104). Through such reflection, not only will students learn from their accomplishment, but also from their mistakes and the diverse routes that other students used to complete the task. Moreover, Van den Branden (2006), mentioned that this phase offers many opportunities for students and teachers to focus on linguistic forms that are relevant to students or expressions that they failed to produce in the during-task phase (p. 105). Although these reflections are vital for students’ growth, teachers should not convert this final stage into a drill or another lesson as it will divert from the purpose of this stage.

Having described the general phases of a task-based lesson, I will now present two lesson plan outlines. The first is a lesson plan that I previously used in Jamaica. The second is an adaptation of my previous lesson into a TBLT lesson.

*Example of a lesson plan without TBLT.*

The following is a lesson plan outline for a grade seven class that I taught in a Jamaican classroom. The use of the audio-lingual method was employed, and the four second language skills were addressed in the same lesson.

|  |
| --- |
| **Spanish Lesson Plan**  |
| **Duration:** 1hr. 20 minutes **Grade:** 7 |
| **Topic:** ¿Qué es esto? **Sub-topic:** Los objetos de la clase |
| **General Objective:** At the end of this lesson, students should understand how to use the concept ‘¿Qué es esto?’ and know the different objects in their classroom in Spanish. |
| **Specific Objectives: Students should be able to:**1. Listen keenly to a song in Spanish which entails the use of the concept.
2. Sing the song in Spanish
3. Say the different classroom objects in Spanish.
4. Draw pictures to match the given classroom objects.
5. Ask the question ‘¿Qué es esto?’
6. Answer to the question in Spanish accurately.
7. Fill in the blank spaces with the missing classroom objects in Spanish.
 |
| **Materials:** Dime 1 textbook, Classroom objects, Chart with the song and Flash Cards with the Spanish word for the classroom objects. |
| **Previous Knowledge:** Students already know the difference between the masculine and feminine objects from previous lessons. |
| **Four Second Language Skills:** listening, speaking, reading and writing.**Method**: audio-lingual method- repetition drill. |
| **Content****¿Qué es esto? -What is this?****Esto es un lápiz. This is a pencil.**(The Words ‘Esto’ and ‘Un’ are used with masculine objects).**Esta es una mesa. This is a table.**(The words ‘Esta’ and ‘Una’ are used with feminine objects).**Vocabulary** (Examples of some of the words used)Un lápiz- a pencil una silla- a chairUn libro- a textbook una mesa- a tableUn cuaderno- a notebook una pizarra- a chalkboard |
| **Teacher will:****Introductory Activity:** introduce the lesson with a song titled ‘¿Qué es esto?’ and allow students to join after the first model of the song.**Step 1:** encourage students to repeat the different classroom objects in Spanish while she touches them and instructs volunteer students to label the classroom objects in Spanish by placing their given flash cards on the correct items.**Step 2:** write five classroom objects on the board and ask students to draw pictures to represent each of the objects after which she will assess each of their work.**Step 3:** model the concept by asking and answering to the question ‘¿Qué es esto?’ and then, ask individual students the question in Spanish while pointing to different classroom objects and allowing them to answer to the question in Spanish.**Culminating Activity: s**tudents will be instructed to read five given sentences in Spanish and fill in the blank spaces with the most appropriate classroom objects in Spanish. After that, the teacher will instruct students to read their answers and then, assess individual students’ work. |

*Figure 2.* Example of a model lesson plan. This figure illustrates a model lesson plan taught in the past without TBLT.

The following is a lesson that addresses similar material to the first lesson, but this second lesson has been designed based on TBLT.

*A modification of the model lesson plan into TBLT with the use of the three-phase task.*

|  |
| --- |
| **Spanish Lesson Plan**  |
| **Duration:** 1hr. 20 minutes **Grade:** 7 |
| **Topic:** Los objetos de la clase |
| **General Objective:** At the end of this lesson, students should understand how to identify some objects in their classroom in Spanish and use this knowledge to carry out tasks. |
| **Specific Objectives: Students should be able to:**1. listen keenly to the instructions for the during-task phase.
2. identify some classroom objects.
3. sort classroom objects into categories.
4. poll their classmates to determine how many carry specific classroom objects in their backpack.
5. share their challenges and experience with the given tasks.
6. repeat and or complete additional tasks.
 |
| **Previous Knowledge:** Students already know the difference between the masculine and feminine objects from previous lessons. Students also know some general words about school (e.g., school, classroom, student, teacher, etc.) |
| **Four Second Language Skills:** listening, speaking, reading and writing. |
| **Method:** TBLT. |
| **Materials:** Classroom objects, sets of Flash Cards with the Spanish words for the classroom objects (including photos of the objects), sets of Flash Cards with the Spanish words for the classroom objects (without photos of the objects), students’ backpacks containing their school-related objects.**Content****Vocabulary (Examples of some of the words used)****Un lápiz- a pencil una silla- a chair****Un libro- a textbook una mesa- a table****Un cuaderno- a notebook una pizarra- a chalkboard** |
| **Pre-task**During this phase, the teacher will tell the students the topic for the lesson and share the objectives. After that, she will explain the instructions clearly to students about how to complete the tasks during the task stage. Furthermore, the teacher will:**Step 1:** introduce the lesson with a song titled ‘¿Qué es esto? (5 minutes) |
| **During-task**This phase consists of three tasks for the students to complete. These tasks will be completed collaboratively, in pairs and individually subsequently.**The teacher will:****Task 1:** place students into groups of two and give them the flash cards with the names of classroom items and corresponding pictures. They will be instructed to sort the cards into two categories: items that can be found in their backpack and other classroom objects that cannot fit into a bag. After that, students will be asked to practice the words using the flash cards with each other in the same group.**Task 2:** instruct students to do another word sort. This time the flash cards do not include the pictures. Again, students will be instructed to sort the cards into two categories: items that can be found in their backpack and other classroom objects that cannot fit into a bag. After that, students will be asked to practice the words using the flash cards with each other in the same group. **Task 3:** Students will be given a list of common school objects and asked to poll their classmates to find out how many have the specific items in their backpack. Once the polling has taken place, the class will calculate what percentage of students carry each object in their backpack. |
| **Post-task**The post-task is the final stage of the lesson. During this phase, the teacher will encourage students to evaluate their task performance and share their challenges. Moreover, based on their responses, the teacher will help students practice new words, learn words that they are missing, refine pronunciation, etc. The teacher can assign more tasks or repeat certain tasks as needed. |

*Figure 3.* Example of a modified lesson plan into TBLT. This figure illustrates a *modification of the model lesson plan into TBLT with the use of the three-phase task*

**ALM versus TBLT.**

Educators tend to use specific teaching methods to teach, which in my case was the Audiolingual Method (ALM). According to Vance (2013), the audio-lingual method was used in the army and developed in the 1960s for use in classrooms (para. 6). The behaviourist theorist B. F. Skinner influenced this method because he created a theory of positive and negative reinforcements. His view was that positive habits should be rewarded, and negative habits should be opposed in order to prevent repetition of errors. For example, in my L2 classroom in the past, I would give gifts to students who answered questions correctly in the target language while I would reject the incorrect answer subtly but encouraged the students to try again instead of commending them for even attempting to answer in the target language. This made students very shy to participate in class and or even use the target language. However, Chomsky (1997) believed that language is not a habit structure and rejected the behaviourist foundation of Skinner and the ALM method (Vance, 2013, para. 11). Ausbel also rejected the method and highlighted the importance of the deductive approach for L2 academic achievement (as cited in Vance, 2013, para. 12).

While the ALM was influenced by behaviourist theory, TBLT was influenced by cognitivist theories. For instance, Nunan (2004) dicussed the role of Stephen Krashen, a cognitivist who claimed that acquisition and learning are two dissimilar psycholinguistic processes in L2 education. As a result, learning is considered a conscious process while acquisition is considered subconscious, which is similar to L1 acquisition and may be activated when students use language for communication (as cited in Ahmed and Hussnain, 2013, p.451). This implies that when students are learning language consciously with the ‘focus on form,’ they will not be able to acquire their L2 for use in communicative contexts. As a result, TBLT does not just focus on form but also involves using the target language, which results in students achieving both learning and acquisition. Lockyer Willis (1996) stated that tasks are activities that allow students to use the target language to achieve a communicative purpose or to achieve an outcome (p. 23). Therefore, the ALM and TBLT have different theoretical origins and consequently they produce different learning outcomes for students.

The ALM method was developed specifically to develop the oral skills which would be learned by students through repetition drills and oral activities. In my seventh and eight grade classes, my students enjoyed repeating words or phrases and singing songs in the target language. While this captured my lower grades students, it was difficult for students in the upper grades to follow this repetition. Although there were other creative ways of teaching the oral skills, it was challenging to find interesting activities based on this approach. Furthermore, I would include other activities that aim towards developing students’ writing skills so that they were able to excel on the written exam papers. This approach did not just take time to develop but was also difficult to assess as I had to use a few hours after school to continue assessment. For instance, I taught grades seven, eight and nine classes Spanish, English and English literature. Each class contains a maximum of 59 students and a minimum of 48 students. It took time every month to administer listening activities and time to listen to every child read and answer given questions without any teacher assistant. This did not include time marking papers for every grade and subject area. It was quite stressful; thus, most teachers did not focus on assessing the oral skills until the second exam in the final semester. However, the TBLT approach is very different from the ALM because it does not just focus on one skill but includes all skills depending on the teachers’ objectives. Moreover, these skills are displayed in the types of task designed for students. For example, Willis and Willis (2007) stated that tasks are valuable learning activities in themselves and by proving a context, can make the written or oral skills into meaning focused activities (p. 33). As a result, the aim of the ALM approach is to develop the oral skills while TBLT focuses on all areas of communication in the target language; thus, the activities can be organized in different ways to develop all four L2 skills or just focus on one skill in a TBLT lesson.

The ALM approach is seen as a teacher-centered approach while TBLT is more student-centered. Hence, the TBLT approach can motivate students to learn their L2 better than the ALM approach. The activities used in the ALM classroom are teacher-centered because the teacher is the orchestra leader who is conducting, facilitating and directing the students’ behavior in the target language. Hence, the repetition drills are led by the teacher, who models and controls all the activities so that the objectives are met. For example, when I was teaching, I guided my students so that they would respond in accordance to the topic of the lesson. This did not give students the freedom to use and explore the language, which prevented them from connecting other topics to the lesson as well as using the language outside of the classroom. On the other hand, the TBLT approach gives students the ability to use the language through authentic tasks. This means that tasks are based on real-world situations or problem-solving activities. For instance, Long (2014) stated that a task must be based on real-world activities (p. 6). As a result, students can use the target language without restraint, and activities are guided by the teacher but not controlled. This allows students to communicate freely in the target language, thereby developing L2 fluency. Overall, the ALM can assist in L2 oral fluency but has its limitations based on certain aspects of the method. The TBLT approach allows students to express themselves more freely in the target language due to the flexibility of the method, which can lead to L2 acquisition.

**Challenges anticipated from TBLT**

As a teacher for many years who was trained during my Diploma years to implement the audio-lingual method in the classroom and as a new teacher to TBLT, there are a number of factors that I can foresee would pose challenges for implementing it in my L2 classes. First and foremost, it would be challenging to implement a new method that I have never used in the past or which I had never experienced personally. This would not only create nervousness but would also lead me to question how the benefits of TBLT outweigh this challenge. It would take time and practice to implement this method accurately as well as to visit other educators who have been implementing it in their classrooms in order to observe their classes and to examine the reactions of their students. This would not only aid in my understanding and expectations but also allow me to have vicarious experiences with TBLT.

Secondly, the school environment or the school culture can pose another challenging factor. For example, in Jamaica, some schools where I worked in the past did not allow the use of the target language as a way of instruction in the L2 classroom. Instead, I was told to teach Spanish in English. Therefore, some schools would prevent the accurate implementation of TBLT. Nonetheless, there are other schools that support their teachers and would assist with the application of this methodology.

Finally, I would need to develop numerous tasks that are based on Ellis’ criteria and implement them in the classroom accurately. This can take time, which can cause teachers to return to their previous methodology in order to make planning easier. However, it also takes time to plan a lesson; thus, it would be more important to spend time planning a lesson that will facilitate students’ learning and real-life application of their knowledge that would be beneficial to their personal growth and the society overall.

Every teaching method can pose challenges in the classroom, especially when it is new to the teacher. However, with much practice over time, TBLT can become familiar to educators and students alike, as well as to aid in students’ L2 acquisition as well as educators’ professional growth.

**Recommendations**

Educators value knowledge and should seek to enhance learning by increasing their repertoire of methods and using the approach which best suits their students’ learning needs. Based on my own experience of learning to use TBLT, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Ensure that you are familiar with TBLT and understand how to apply it within the second language classroom.
2. Design tasks accurately according to Ellis’s criteria for tasks.
3. Situate tasks within a three-phase lesson sequence: pre-task, during-task and post-task.
4. Confirm that the tasks designed are in accordance with the students’ learning level and language skill. Tasks should be neither too simple nor too complex, but rather should challenge the students.
5. Tasks should be developed based on real-life experiences with meaningful activities that reflect students’ interests as well as one or more of the four foreign language learning skills so that they can apply what they have learned.
6. Be creative with the implementation of tasks. You can use technology as well as props and other learning aids.
7. If TBLT is the only methodology that you will use for a specific period, you should also use task-based assessments in order to achieve a more accurate outcome. See Ellis (2003) for example.
8. Time is very crucial and should be monitored wisely. Good classroom management is also important especially when students are very excited to do activities.
9. Own TBLT by incorporating it into your teaching repertoire and appropriating as your own.

**Significance of the project**

This study has increased my knowledge of TBLT and its effectiveness as well as its limitations; hence, it will aid in my professional growth as a L2 educator when I apply this effective and holistic approach in my classroom. Likewise, based on the evidence provided through research along with the examples of tasks and TBLT lesson plans, it will be an effective guide for L2 educators to gain knowledge and insights as well as to develop a better understanding of the approach so that they can adapt and/or apply it in their classroom and improve L2 learning. Moreover, this study will be beneficial to my secondary students as it will help to improve their L2 learning through the application of authentic tasks that will help them communicate in actual language-use situations. Likewise, as Rutherford (1984) agreed, young students are not just capable of learning a second language innately because of their stage but also will be able to interact with others and develop relationships through the target language (p. 37).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is essential for educators to examine their teaching methods and make changes where necessary in order to address their students’ L2 learning acquisition and for their own professional development. Based on research done, TBLT has proven to be an effective and holistic methodology that was derived from and contains important aspects of previous communicative approaches; it requires time for planning as a task must meet specific criteria. Moreover, TBLT has been implemented in various countries and has proven to be successful in motivating students, encouraging real-world application of the target language and most importantly, enhancing the development of fluency in L2. This approach will not only solve the issue of non-fluency in secondary students who are at an advantage of learning a second language efficiently based on their age but also aid in the development of a country through the creation of jobs as well as contributions to global affairs because languages help to shape the universe through the interconnection of cultures and relationships among diverse groups of people.

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