Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Relating to the Use of Tasks in Tertiary English as a Foreign Language Classrooms in China

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Abstract—**Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been recommended in the new College English Curriculum Requirement in China (Ministry of Education, 2017) for students learning English as a foreign language. Teachers might not, however, implement these concepts in their classes. This study aims to investigate whether the concept of TBLT has made its way into EFL teachers' theoretical beliefs and the degree to which TBLT is being put into practice. By using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, this study investigated the beliefs and practices of three tertiary English teachers in China and their use of tasks in their language classes. The results show that although these teachers had positive attitudes toward TBLT, only some activities in their classes could be classified as tasks. The teachers' use of tasks seemed to be influenced by web-based textbooks and their own reflective practices. This study provides recommendations for developing language teacher education programmes based on TBLT in China.**

Index Terms—**task-based language teaching (TBLT), tasks, teachers' beliefs**

I. INTRODUCTION

Task-based language teaching as an encouraging innovative approach has appeared in government educational policies in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region and has been advocated for inclusion in curricula and commercial syllabuses as a central teaching method (Nunan, 2003). In Nunan's survey of educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region, officials are reported to have claimed that TBLT was the chief principle in their English language curricula. In China, the Chinese national curriculum has been revised because of the socioeconomic reform and high-speed economic development that China is experiencing in the context of a globalized world. English, as a global language, is widely believed to play a vital role in promoting international exchange and facilitating economic progress (Wang, 2007). Students are therefore required to achieve a high degree of English language proficiency, especially communicative proficiency. In this environment, it is believed that TBLT could be an approach that will help improve students' communicative proficiency by engagement in language use tasks. At the tertiary level, TBLT is recommended in the new College English Curriculum Requirement as a means to support a shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The job of syllabus designer now falls to teachers, who have to design tasks that best suit their students' needs and abilities, in line with curriculum expectations. However, understandings of what TBLT is and how it can be implemented effectively differ among teachers. Candlin (2001) contends that when it comes to the implementation of the task-based approach, "there are numerous possibilities that the intended curriculum leaves open to teachers" in terms of pedagogical decision-making (p. 241). It is highly possible that teachers may not necessarily translate these innovative ideas into their classrooms.

It is therefore timely to investigate how teachers in China are implementing the newly introduced curriculum. Previous studies in the Chinese context have focused on the beliefs and practices of school teachers and issues that prevent the successful implementation of curriculum innovation at the school level in Hong Kong and some highly developed cities in mainland China (Deng & Carless, 2010; Zheng, 2013). However, little research has been conducted on tertiary English teachers' beliefs about the implementation of TBLT. A limited range of articles has centred on the advantages and disadvantages of TBLT and the description of specific task steps in authentic classrooms aiming to develop students' listening, speaking, reading or writing skills (Li, 2013).

This research explored tertiary teachers' beliefs and practices as a starting point for providing practical implications for future teacher training programmes. East (2012) has emphasized that investigating teachers' beliefs and practices can ultimately challenge theoretical beliefs and promote teachers' practices in this area.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Two areas of the literature are reviewed in this section: TBLT principles, and empirical studies into teachers' beliefs and practices related to TBLT in China.

A. Four Criteria Used to Evaluate a Task

TBLT has been developing over several decades as a learner-centred and experiential pedagogical approach which enables learners to engage in authentic communicative language use, leading to language acquisition during task performance. It has two essential features and strengths: a primary focus on meaning, and attention to language forms arising from communicative interaction (East, 2015). These features of TBLT compensate for the shortcomings of the traditional language teaching approach where grammar is taught in an explicit, teacher-fronted and systematic way, with teaching based on the assumption that learning is a linear process and that what is learned is what is taught.

The notion of 'task' is central to TBLT (Ellis, 2009), and I have borrowed the four criteria proposed by Ellis to evaluate tasks in the participants' classes. Ellis (2009) claims the task criteria are based on a detailed study of a number of previous definitions. The criteria are:

1. The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (… learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).

2. There should be some kind of 'gap' (i.e., a need to convey information, to express an opinion or infer meaning).

3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.

4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right) (Ellis, 2009, p. 223).

Ellis and Shintani (2013) explain that these criteria can be used to distinguish tasks from 'grammar exercises' and they present examples to demonstrate the difference (p. 9). They point out that while a situational grammar exercise may satisfy criteria 2 and 3, it cannot satisfy criteria 1 and 4. Take this example: Student A is given a shopping list and Student B plays the role of the shop owner. Student B has a different list, showing all the goods in their shop. Student A is required to ask Student B questions to find out which items they can buy from the shop. Student B must also identify the items that the shop does not stock. The outcome is the items purchased by A, and the items B identifies as not being in stock. However, Ellis and Shintani explain that if both students are given the following dialogue to imitate, and use the list of items they are given to fill the blank space, it would be an exercise, and not a task:

Student A: "Good morning. Do you have any___ "?
Student B: "Yes, I have some". Or, "No, I don't have any".

Ellis and Shintani (2013) argue that this exercise is not a task. This exercise requires learners to attend to the forms "any" and "some" and to use structured replies, rather than having a primary focus on meaning. There was no information gap to be closed and students did not rely on their own resources because they were given sentence models to imitate. There was no clearly defined outcome as they were focusing on practising the language forms.

Ellis' (2009) four criteria have therefore been chosen as the means to evaluate and identify tasks in this study.

B. Empirical Studies Into Teacher Beliefs and Practices Related to TBLT in China

TBLT is an essentially Western notion, but since its first appearance in China, the number of studies investigating the practicability of TBLT in Chinese classrooms at the school level has grown (Carless, 2009; Hu, 2013; Luo & Xing, 2015; Zheng, 2013). However, considerable difficulties and concerns were uncovered in the studies that drew on interviews, classroom observations and questionnaires in authentic classrooms in Chinese schools. In a country as large as China, the findings are diverse, although it was found that most teachers' practices appeared to diverge from TBLT principles.

The widely reported constraints relate to the Chinese educational system: its grammar-oriented examinations, limited teaching resources, tight instructional time, classroom management and conflict with students' learning styles and preferences (Lai, 2015). Furthermore, teachers' deep-rooted views of the transmission of language knowledge and their lack of competence and confidence prevent them from using TBLT in their classrooms (Luo & Xing, 2015). Deng and Carless (2010) investigated the impact of examinations on TBLT innovation and concluded that teachers' misconceptions may be a more powerful barrier to pedagogic innovation.

Similarly, Ellis (2015) notes that some reported constraints are not real problems and that the real problem is how to carry out a well-designed education programme to inform teachers of TBLT in a systemic way. Furthermore, researchers reiterate the complicated situation whereby TBLT is supposed to be implemented and highlight the importance of having flexibility in adopting a specific teaching approach (East, 2017). A carefully designed task-based programme requires a clear understanding of teachers' current perspectives and practices in relation to TBLT. This study serves as a point of departure towards understanding the implementation of TBLT in current tertiary EFL classrooms and highlights implications for a future task-based programme for teacher development.

III. The Study

This study attempted to address three research questions:
1. What do teachers know, understand and believe about TBLT?
2. In what ways do teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practice?
3. What factors might affect teachers' realization of their beliefs in TBLT?

Three EFL teachers at two tertiary institutions in China were selected as participants because they were experienced teachers and claimed to use tasks in their classrooms.

Semi-structured interviews of at least 60 minutes were conducted to gather the teachers' background information, general teaching methods, and beliefs and perspectives about TBLT, and then classroom observations were done. Questions arising from the observations were asked during the class break or after classes to elicit comments on key issues or for clarification about their task uses.

Observations lasted a minimum of three hours per teacher. Teachers' instructions and actions and the classroom activities at different stages were the focus. Interviews, teachers' instructions and lectures were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Emerging themes about TBLT theories and the criteria were highlighted.

The classroom activities were classified into different instructional stages. Each stage was then evaluated according to the four task criteria to identify the activities that seem to align most closely with the criteria. This analysis was tested for coder reliability until an agreement was reached on the use of the criteria. The teacher's reported beliefs about TBLT were then compared with their actual classroom practices to analyse their task implementation.

IV. RESULTS

An outline of the observed classroom activities, including task-like activities or tasks observed in the classes, is described in this section. An analysis of task implementation is presented after comparing each teacher's beliefs with their observed practices.

A. Teacher Participant Grace

Grace's observed reading and writing class focused on reading a passage from a unit entitled *Icy Defender,* in the web-based textbook *New Horizon College English, Reading and Writing, Book 4* (Zhen, 2011b). Two activities were observed in this class. In the first, a pre-reading activity, each student contributed one sentence to a whole-class discussion on the differences and similarities between Hitler and Napoleon and their experiences on the same battlefield. Grace responded to each student by repeating or rephrasing their sentences. The second activity was to learn new words and phrases from the reading passage, and this occupied two-thirds of the class time. The teacher asked students to read through each paragraph, and then she picked out words and phrases to explain. She explained the different word meanings and made sentences using them. She then asked students to translate the sentences and introduced more words related to the selected words and phrases. She also started conversations with her students based on certain new words.

Grace's reading and writing class was mostly teacher-fronted learning of the new words and phrases in the passage from the textbook, with Grace highly in control of all the activities. The aim of the classes was to practise the language forms from the textbook rather than focusing on meanings, although there were some interactions related to the new words. After evaluating against the four criteria used in this study, no evidence of TBLT was found in her classes.

When asked about TBLT in the interview, Grace said that "tasks should play the leading role in my approach where language used for the communicative purpose was the emphasis". In her understanding, the core principle of TBLT was to use language for communication. However, she accentuated that she used an "eclectic approach" in her classes in order to cater to her students' needs.

Observation of Grace's classroom provided evidence of her "eclectic approach". She hardly used tasks in her classes and most of the class focused on the textbook language points. She justified this approach by saying she believed the teacher was the authority, as "students may not know the important language points in the reading passage," and students' understanding of vocabulary improved after she had explained it. She believed that some group members cannot benefit from communicating with each other because of their weak English. This might also have explained why she devoted more time to teacher-controlled activities. Grace also pointed to the students' long-established habit of learning language forms from their teachers. She said her students had developed since high school a belief that they were not learning anything substantial if she did not express words and phrases. She said they cared how many words they learned in her class; they would take notes "fiercely" when she expressed words and grammar. Grace took this student's need into consideration when planning her classes.

Although no tasks were observed in Grace's class, Grace described some examples of tasks that she had used. She had asked students to use English to interview students from other countries on their campus about their countries' symbols and to record a video of this interview. Grace also engaged her students in a performance, such as a drama, chosen, prepared, rehearsed and presented in English by groups of students once a week.

The other self-reported example was a weekly speaking activity in her listening and speaking class. Students, in groups, exchanged opinions on hot issues related to the textbook topic. They recorded and transcribed their discussions before submitting them to Grace, who provided feedback on the overall ideas and how they were expressed. Although the second task appeared to be only a general discussion with no clearly defined outcome, these two self-claimed tasks, based on her descriptions, appeared to be task-like activities according to the four criteria for evaluation of a task. Grace also categorized some communicative activities as task examples because she understood 'tasks' as being mainly activities to promote communication.

Grace also explained what she saw as the advantages of using these activities. Grace held positive attitudes towards tasks, even about some of the constraints reported in the literature (Carless, 2009). For example, she did not agree with

the view that TBLT conflicted with the role of the College English test (Deng & Carless, 2009), or that some teachers in China were not proficient enough in English to implement TBLT in their classrooms. Although she admitted this was a shortcoming, she felt it was not significant enough to influence task implementation. She claimed that teachers and students had access to up-to-date listening and reading materials from English-speaking countries, which, along with technology use, can assist non-native English teachers in task implementation and also English learning overall. She said she taught students to explore knowledge by themselves, rather than just receiving knowledge from her. She downloaded listening and reading materials from the Internet for them to explore. This approach was also influenced by the limited time available in class.

Grace also pointed out that teachers in China have increasing autonomy over classroom activities and the content of the final examination, which, in her view, means they can also implement tasks. She said she was not required to follow the textbooks completely in class, which gave her freedom in designing communicative activities and tasks for her classes. Universities provided her with opportunities to attend seminars focusing on language teaching theories, including TBLT and how to include tasks. She saw the advantages of using these tasks in students being actively involved, and teachers and students enjoying the communicative language learning process. She felt through the communicative activities she could "change the introvert students' attitudes by always encouraging them and helping them to build their confidence in speaking English boldly".

Grace did point out that some students complained that they could not benefit because of the limited oral English of other group members during the task. Another barrier was the limitations of the textbook on her task uses; she stated that it was difficult to design communicative activities or tasks, seeing the themes and styles imposed by the texts as constraining. Although Grace had encountered these problems in the implementation of tasks, she appeared to be positive about TBLT overall.

Based on her explanation of the key principles of TBLT, the examples she gave of tasks and task-like activities, her rejection of the constraints mentioned in the literature as well as her affirmation of the engaging role of tasks for her students, it can be concluded that, at least as far as the evidence in her self-report, tasks had become a part of Grace's teaching. She has some understanding of TBLT. However, owing to her apparently incomplete understanding of what constituted a task (that a task is just a focus on communication), some of the tasks she described seemed to be highly task-like activities rather than tasks. That few tasks were noted may also be due to the limited time for classroom observations. There is some self-reported evidence, therefore, that Grace was incorporating tasks in her practice, although tasks were not observed as being implemented in her actual practice.

B. Teacher Participant Gloria

The class observed was designed to be a reading and writing class, although in practice more listening and speaking activities were observed. Gloria started her classes with a review activity; she asked students to write a passage using dictated words and phrases. After this revision, there was a teacher-led class brainstorm on the words and phrases related to the lesson topic: cars. A free writing exercise followed, where the students were divided into two groups and recorded opposing views on driving cars in China. Students then debated in pairs, followed by a teacher-led class debate. The last activity was to skim read a passage on Smart Cars and discuss their key features. The majority of lesson discussion time was allocated to debating whether or not students should drive cars in China, with students required to give their opinions. After evaluating against the four criteria it was determined that a debating task satisfied all four criteria.

Gloria's beliefs about language teaching and tasks appeared to be consistent with her observed practices. Gloria claimed she used TBLT in her classes, but said she also included other approaches, believing that TBLT does not cater to all the classroom needs. She pointed out that she had been "exploring TBLT" for some years. When asked about the definition of 'task', she described it only briefly: "Students were given a task to perform and they were required to present the outcome at the end of tasks, such as a presentation", giving a debate as an example.

Just as Gloria had described in the interview, she was observed using tasks in her reading and writing classes. She included one task with other approaches: a topic-based debating task, a major classroom activity, which occurred before a skim reading of the text and after a group discussion and a writing activity. She did not devote her class time to the explicit expression of language forms from the textbooks, but she was observed extending students' vocabularies by building on their utterances. A series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities were observed in both her reading and writing class, and the listening and speaking class. Her classes appeared to be highly communicative.

She said she included tasks into her classroom programmes because of her principle of engaging students in language learning. This was apparent during the debating activity in which students actively negotiated meanings. Gloria also explained that she used this approach because she saw the classroom as a community where every student participant and community member communicates and learns from one another rather than the classroom being "a platform for a teacher to pass on knowledge". This was evident as students communicated their differing viewpoints.

Gloria mentioned several major factors that influenced her implementation of tasks. She stated that she first gained knowledge of TBLT when completing her diploma in Singapore; subsequently, she further developed her understanding through reading journal articles, through her study during the completion of a PhD degree and the professional development opportunities offered by her university, such as a seminar given by Ellis. She argued, however, that the examples provided by Ellis were not appropriate for her students, being more suitable for elementary students. She

complained about the lack of resources, for instance, examples of tasks to use in her teaching, and that she had to design tasks by herself based on the textbook topics.

As well as these factors influencing her task implementation, she emphasized that her current teaching approach, including the use of tasks in her classes, was mainly determined by her characteristics. She described herself as "an especially self-motivated person", who sought to continually improve her approach through reading and study, and she made changes in response to any problems arising from the application of the theory into her practice.

If students were highly involved in an activity, Gloria would continue to use and refine it. This seems to reflect her general approach to teaching language, which is to engage her students. She further justified her different approach by saying that the need to pass the higher entrance examination in their high schools had necessitated the very traditional, teacher-dominated approach to learning grammar. She said the students "wanted their college life to be different". Her perception of students' expectations of their college life led her to use tasks in her classes. Rather than catering to their long-established learning habits, she viewed students' needs from a different perspective, in contrast to the other two participant teachers.

Gloria's attitudes towards TBLT were positive; she said that some negative reports of TBLT in the literature were not necessarily barriers to implementation. She believed non-native language-speaking teachers can apply TBLT if they prepare their classes thoroughly and have a deep understanding of the topic from the text. Nonetheless, she admitted that giving feedback to the students was challenging, especially when questions arose spontaneously during communication. She also disagreed with claims that exams hindered task implementation, saying that their universities recruited excellent students who did not have difficulty in passing the College English Examinations. Further, she did not see Asian students as passive learners, saying that they may seem to be introverted, but are longing to be involved in using language to communicate in her classes, and this requires a process, guided by the teacher.

Lastly, she mentioned that the use of textbooks also supports her to use tasks and that she extended the topics from the textbooks. She also supplemented the textbooks with a large amount of authentic material from other resources.

In summary, my study found that Gloria's task implementation appeared to concur with her beliefs. The key principle guiding Gloria's language teaching was to ensure that students are actively engaged in language learning, which is consistent with one of the task criteria. This may account for the convergence of her beliefs and task practices in her classes. Her definition of classrooms also helped to support the use of tasks. Gloria said she supplemented TBLT in her reading and writing classes with other listening, speaking, reading and writing activities, because she believed a task-based approach cannot cater to all the needs in the classroom. She asserted that her pursuit of perfection and her students' needs are the major factors influencing her task implementation. She was positive about TBLT and advocated the use of TBLT despite the arguments in the literature.

C. Teacher Participant Susan

One of Susan's observed reading and writing classes focused on reading a passage about death in the web-based textbook *New Horizon College English, Reading and Writing, Book 3* (Zhen, 2011b)*,* and her speaking and listening classes were based on the companion book. Three major activities were observed in Susan's reading and writing classes: two movie clips and epitaphs of four famous people, employed to elicit the ideas related to the theme; a focus on new words and phrases from the reading passage; an analysis of the writing style and students' completion of a piece of writing. Following these activities, Susan listened to two students' writing and read her sample writing. All these activities were based on the reading passage in the textbook. This class was teacher-dominated, with the majority of class time devoted to the explicit presentation of the language points from the textbook.

The second observed class was a listening and speaking class, with the topic of business negotiation and ideas on how to start a business. Three listening activities were included: watching and listening to a video and completing a table based on the video, and two listening passages, followed by multiple-choice questions. There were two speaking activities: one in which students created and presented a business talk; and one where students matched qualities and skills with different occupations and justified their choices to their partners. All the activities were from textbooks or courseware.

After evaluating against Ellis's four criteria, no evidence of TBLT was found in Susan's classes. Although the two spoken activities were highly communicative, they were not tasks as there were no clearly defined outcomes. The first was a role-play of a business talk. In the second activity, Susan asked her students to talk about and justify their decisions but did not instruct them to reach an agreement on at least one choice, which, if included, would have indicated a clearly defined outcome.

Susan's observed classroom activities did not correspond to her claims that her current classes were task-based, possibly as a result of her misunderstandings about tasks. She equated tasks with common activities. When implementing what she claimed were tasks, she excluded explicit explanations of language forms. She stated that the explicit explanation of language forms was at the "while reading stage", emphasizing that in this stage she did not use tasks. Susan claimed she benefited from the textbooks and that they had led her to employ tasks. It was obvious that she regarded the general activities as tasks, apart from the expression of the language forms in classes.

Susan stated in her interview that she depended heavily on the textbook. All the activities, including the observed task-like activity, were selected from the textbook and its courseware. She used the teachers' reference book and its accompanying materials as her teaching guide.

Susan's misunderstandings about tasks appeared to lead her to choose communicative activities from the courseware, rather than real tasks, for her observed listening and speaking class. This courseware consisted of a PowerPoint, based on the textbook, which seemed to include three highly task-like activities along with a variety of other activities. One of the tasks required students to work in small groups to rank ten occupations from the most to the least stressful and give reasons for their group's choices. Another task required students to try to sell something to their partner by using negotiation strategies and to report their results to the whole class. The third task was a group discussion about job application skills, to inform the design of a handbook for graduates. In the PowerPoint, however, these activities are not called "tasks".

In Susan's observed listening and speaking classes, she chose the two spoken activities from the courseware rather than the three highly task-like activities: developing business dialogue with given words and phrases, and a matching activity, and a discussion with peers about their choices. The communicative activities she selected were not true tasks. Susan's reason for not choosing the three task-like activities may relate to limited class time, which she had emphasized was a barrier to the implementation of tasks. Also, her preference for focusing on language forms enabled her to choose activities which demanded less time and to include more targeted language forms. For instance, she chose the activity of role-playing, using given phrases, in a business dialogue, but then omitted the follow-up task-like activities which required students to create their dialogue.

Susan also may have been constrained by other factors she believed hindered her implementation of tasks, such as the negative influence of other students in the activities, the large classes and pressure from the demands of national College English text and final exams. These possible constraints on task implementation in China have been identified previously in the literature (Butler, 2011). Susan also explained that she devoted time to the explicit teaching of language forms owing to her students' need to pass the exam and to improve their writing.

To sum up, Susan's claim that she taught task-based classes was not confirmed by observations of her practice. The discrepancy is most likely due to her misunderstandings of tasks; she regarded general activities as tasks. She had learned about tasks from the textbook-related training; this, she claimed, had the greatest influence on her. She was observed also to depend on the textbooks and claimed that tasks could motivate her students in their language learning. The barriers to task implementation that she identified were consistent with some of the constraints reported in the literature.

V. DISCUSSION

Drawing on data from the interviews and classroom observations, I investigated three research questions. The first question examined the extent to which TBLT had found its way into teachers' beliefs. All three teachers appeared to be positive about TBLT and considered that they used tasks in their classrooms. They all acknowledged that tasks can arouse students' interest and engage them in language learning. The teachers reported positive attitudes towards concepts congruent with TBLT even though they seemed to have limited knowledge about TBLT. Grace claimed that tasks should play a leading role in language classrooms, and Gloria emphasized that she had been exploring tasks for many years. Moreover, neither Grace nor Gloria agreed with some of the factors preventing the implementation of TBLT in Asian countries, as articulated in the literature. However, the 'tasks' claimed by Susan were not real tasks due to her misunderstanding about tasks.

Grace and Gloria provided examples of classroom activities which seemed to correspond to task criteria (Ellis, 2009). Susan, however, appeared to have some misunderstandings about tasks. While reporting that she used 'tasks' from the textbooks and courseware (mainly Powerpoints) from the textbook-based website, she chose only what were activities. She equated general activities, such as listening exercises, spoken activities, a summary of each paragraph of a text, and writing activities, with 'tasks'.

Teachers also took an eclectic attitude towards tasks. Gloria embraced TBLT, as it was in line with her teaching principles, but acknowledged it was not her only teaching approach. Similarly, Grace acknowledged using an eclectic approach in her classes because she had to focus on learning of language points from the textbooks. East (2012) also found that in some cases task was interpreted as simply a synonym for "activity".

The findings of this study are congruent with those of East (2015) who, referring to studies on teachers' perspectives by Andon (2009), Carless (2009), East (2012), Van den Branden (2009), and Van den Branden et al. (2009), concluded that teachers "hold a range of interpretations and understandings of TBLT", ranging from relatively comprehensive descriptions of TBLT theories to limited explanations (p. 415). My findings also suggest that, although the Chinese teachers appeared to have positive attitudes towards tasks, they seemed uncertain about the definition of tasks and task criteria.

The second research question asked how teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practices. Although all the teachers' descriptions of tasks seemed to demonstrate an apparent enthusiasm for using tasks, in practice (at least in the observed lessons) they were less enthusiastic about using tasks. Two major characteristics were identified in the three teachers' use of tasks. Firstly, two teachers (Susan and Grace) preferred to integrate spoken task-like activities into a series of listening activities, but only in their listening and speaking classes. Their reading and writing classes were still teacher-dominated classes with the focus being on language forms from the textbooks. This finding is in line with the study by Peng (2018) who investigated eight teachers' cognitions and practices related to

TBLT at the tertiary level in China (these were teachers of Chinese as a second language). Peng found that the teachers used "a combination of the traditional approach and TBLT, with the traditional approach predominating" (p. 197). One teacher (Gloria) in my study, however, was observed to implement a task deliberately into her reading and writing class with a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities.

Further, Susan chose task-like activities that did not prioritize a particular task feature, which had a non-linguistic outcome at the end of the task. In choosing these activities, she may also have been influenced by limited class time. Teachers may find it difficult to understand how a non-linguistic outcome fits into a language-teaching classroom. Having a non-linguistic outcome is one of the key criteria that distinguish TBLT from the traditional approaches, which have a major focus on teaching language forms. Long (2015) also pointed out that TBLT is so fundamentally different from a traditional approach, and is therefore a challenge to teachers' deep-rooted traditional ideas of teaching language in their classrooms.

In seeking to answer the third research question about the factors that affect teachers' task implementation, my study identified several similar issues to those reported in the literature, including the use of textbooks and students' established learning habits (Butler, 2011; Deng & Carless, 2010; Ellis, 2015). In contrast to other studies, it was found that teachers' reflections, their personalities and education around using tasks played a vital role in task use. However, it should be acknowledged that it is difficult to uncover factors that influence teachers' beliefs and practices as this is largely tacit knowledge.

The first factor claimed by the three Chinese teachers to influence task implementation is the use of textbooks. Researchers have found that teachers in China rely on textbooks. This constrains them from using tasks (Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011). The three Chinese teachers in this study, however, claimed that textbooks, their associated multimedia and their web-based resources supported them in using tasks.

For Susan, the textbook was the authority and she chose two task-like activities from the textbooks even though she had misunderstandings about the tasks. Similarly, for Gloria and Grace, the textbook seemed to be the foundation from which they designed their tasks. Grace reported that she designed task-like activities based on the topics of the passages. She explained that she always gave her students a topic to discuss and they submitted the recording of the discussion to her in the spoken and listening classes. Another task she mentioned was to ask students to make a video based on the topics of the textbook. While Gloria used all these resources creatively and selectively, she referred to the textbooks and courseware to design real tasks. In the observed classes, Gloria referred to only one of the warm-up questions on one PowerPoint slide, which she turned into a debate. She did not spend much class time on the expression of the new words and phrases, but devoted most of the time to the debate task.

From the descriptions of interviews and the observed classes, it could be seen that textbooks exerted influence on the three Chinese teachers' task implementation to different extents. The current textbooks used by the three teachers are dramatically different from the traditional textbooks. Various language carriers, such as websites, CDs and apps, have extended the original (one) paper textbook to provide both students and teachers with more resources. Teachers claimed that they now have increased autonomy due to the variety of web and multimedia-based resources. All three teachers were observed to make decisions about what should be incorporated into their classroom activities based on these various resources, as it would be impossible to include all in the limited class time. Furthermore, Gloria and Grace pointed out that students could access the language points easily through the websites and apps, and so there was no need to focus excessively on this aspect during class. Teachers could devote more time to communicative activities and tasks. Gloria and Grace, unlike Susan, appeared to take advantage of the freedom and inspiration provided by the varied and plentiful teaching resources attached to the textbooks to design tasks and integrate them into their classes.

Despite there still being a culture and tradition of reliance on textbooks for Chinese teachers, the considerable number of resources they now have available to choose from in the web-based textbooks allows greater freedom in the selection of their classroom activities, which includes tasks. Although the use of web-based textbooks can play a facilitating role in task implementation for Chinese teachers, the textbooks also constrained the teachers in their task design, and Grace noted it was difficult for her to design tasks based on some of the topics.

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

The second influencing factor from my study relates to learning cultures and Chinese students' learning habits. Two teachers (Susan and Grace) pointed out that they explained language points from the textbooks to cater to perceived students' needs and habits for learning language forms as presented in the textbook. Grace stated that her students saw the language points as items of knowledge they could take home with them. In contrast, Gloria viewed students' habits and needs differently, saying that students had different expectations for their college study compared with their teacher-dominated and examination-oriented learning in high school. Rather than catering to students' long-established habits of receiving knowledge from teachers, Gloria preferred the approach of engaging her students in using language to communicate.

All the teachers in this study agreed that tasks can motivate and engage students in language learning, as also reported in earlier literature (Van den Branden, 2009). East (2017) reported, "teachers drawing on TBLT ideas report increased confidence, enjoyment and motivation among learners" (p. 421). Ellis (2015) also points out that "the so-called passive nature of Asian students is not a reason for rejecting TBLT". TBLT can be applied to "re-socialize" these students because "Asian students are not inherently passive but may only appear to be so because they have been socialized into passivity in the classroom" (p. 384).

The Chinese teachers' reflective practices and personalities seemed to play a role in whether, and how, they used tasks. Gloria emphasized that it was the continuous reflection on her own efforts that led her to explore TBLT in practice. Similarly, Grace argued that it was her personality that played a decisive role in the task implementation. She aimed to continually improve her teaching approaches through her reading and ongoing study, and she made changes according to the issues raised from her readings, and from her students' challenges and responses. Her attitude seemed to echo the argument in the literature that teachers' analytical thinking about their past and current teaching beliefs, experience and practice can bring about change to their beliefs and practices (Borg; 2011; Farrell & Ives, 2015).

Grace stated that her personality influenced her acceptance and implementation of tasks; she said she was an open-minded person who was willing to accept new approaches and try different activities, including TBLT. Although Grace was not observed using tasks in her classes, the task examples she described appeared to be in line with the task criteria.

Chinese teachers' reflective practices seemed to play an important role in task implementation. This echoes the findings in the literature that education programmes grounded in reflective practice which embody "an understanding that facilitating critical thinking about past and present beliefs alongside actual experiences in the classroom will enhance the likelihood of changes both to beliefs and to future practice" (East, 2017, p. 414).

Gloria and Grace described factors within their university in China which may also account for the implementation of task-like activities or tasks being observed in their classes and reported in their statements. Factors include teachers' increasing autonomy over the content of the final examination, professional development opportunities around the latest language learning and teaching theories, the role of new technologies, and strong levels of support from their university in implementing tasks.

To conclude, the use of textbooks, student factors, examinations, teachers' reflections and personalities, education programmes, as well as a number of other favourable conditions at the tertiary level, are found to have an influence on teachers' implementation of tasks. Although there are likely to be other factors influencing task implementation, these were the factors observed in teachers' classes and elicited from the interviews.

VI. Conclusion

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

A key recommendation of this study is a greater emphasis on appropriate teacher education initiatives. More research should be conducted into educational programmes to improve teachers' understanding of TBLT. Furthermore, teacher educators should carry out follow-up studies to examine teachers' use of tasks in their natural contexts, such as East's (2017) investigation of teachers' perspectives and use of tasks three years after initial teacher education. Research with teachers could also investigate why teachers accept some aspects of TBLT while resisting others. Teachers would benefit from assistance in designing tasks with task outcomes and encouragement to reflect on how this concept should be interpreted and enacted.

The results of this study also suggest that TBLT-focused teacher education, perhaps related to web-based textbooks and grounded in reflective practice, would be an effective way to promote the implementation of tasks by Chinese teachers. It would also be effective and feasible for tasks to be integrated into textbooks in order to help overcome the lack of task resources reported by teachers.

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