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Challenges of Task-Based Language Teaching: With Reference to Korean EFL Teachers' Beliefs*

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The purpose of this study is to explore challenges of task-based language teaching (TBLT) with reference to Korean EFL teachers' beliefs. This survey is based on four related domains: teachers' understanding of TBLT concepts, teachers' views of implementing TBLT, teachers' preferences of classroom settings and activity types, and the practical reasons teachers choose or avoid TBLT. The data for this study was collected through questionnaires from a total of 228 teachers at 38 different middle and high schools in Korea. The data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The overall findings of the survey show that the majority of respondents have a high level of understanding about TBLT concepts, regardless of teaching levels, but some mixed views exist in regard to implementing TBLT and selecting classroom settings and activity types in classroom practice. It also revealed that teachers like to use TBLT for its group work basis and motivational traits, but the biggest reason they avoid TBLT lies in a lack of confidence. More importantly, some useful implications are proposed based on research findings in order to help teachers and teacher trainers to construct and implement TBLT more effectively.

[task-based language teaching (TBLT)/teachers' beliefs]

I. INTRODUCTION

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become one of the commonly used terms in the field of second language learning since the 1980s, having an impact on curriculum design, material development, and instructional approach. The task-based view of language

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teaching, based on the constructivist theory of learning and communicative language teaching methodology, has evolved in response to some limitations of the traditional PPP approach, represented by the procedure of presentation, practice, and performance (Ellis, 2003; Long & Crookes, 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Thus, it has the substantial implication that language learning is a developmental process promoting communication and social interaction rather than a product acquired by practicing language items, and that learners learn the target language more effectively when they are naturally exposed to meaningful task-based activities. Such a view of language learning led to the development of various task-based approaches in the eighties (Breen, 1987; Candlin & Murphy, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Prabhu, 1987), and during the nineties, developed into a detailed practical framework for the communicative classroom (Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996). Specifically, Ellis (2003) indicates that TBLT has been re-examined in recent years from different perspectives including oral performance, writing performance, and performance assessment.

Given the fact that language acquisition is influenced by a number of variables, TBLT has a positive impact on these variables. It implies that TBLT provides learners with natural sources of meaningful situations for communicative activity and supportive feedback, allowing for much greater opportunities for language use (Lee, 2007; Suh, 2006). In regard to stressing the communicative principles and the actual use of target language in English education, for example, the Korean Ministry of Education (2000) has strongly encouraged teachers to use learner-centered and task-based approaches. Furthermore, it was suggested that the entire English class should be taught using English on the premise that task-based approach will provide learners with much more opportunity to use the target language.

Despite the prevalent use of task in language pedagogy, however, some significant challenges behind designing communicative tasks and implementing effective TBLT in foreign language classrooms still remain unresolved (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2003). In response to these challenges, many second language researchers are currently moving their attention from conceptualizing tasks to sequencing and implementing tasks based on observation of the practical utilities of TBLT methodology in classroom practice. Specifically, in Korean EFL environment where learners are limited in their accessibility to use the target language on a daily basis, it is necessary for language learners to be provided with real opportunities to be exposed to language use in the classroom. In light of this, this study's aim is to explore the challenges of task-based instruction based on investigating their understanding of TBLT concepts, views on TBLT implementation, and reasons they choose, or avoid, implementing TBLT in the classroom. This will provide insight for teachers to design and implement any real communicative tasks, which are critically important for EFL learners in order to experience meaningful language use. It will also

contribute to seeking some implications and solutions to the challenges teachers may encounter, thereby facilitating their practical use of TBLT techniques in the classroom.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. The Notion of Task for Designing Communicative Classroom

In order to construct useful tasks for communicative classrooms, it is first of all necessary to draw a proper definition of 'task' with reference to capturing its major features and elements. Within much discussion and varying interpretations as to the definition of tasks, Nunan (1989) suggests that tasks can be conceptualized in terms of the specific goals they are intended to serve, the input data, which forms the point of departure for the task, and the related procedures, which the learners undertake in the completion of the task. Willis (1996) defines a task as an activity in which the target language is used for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome. Skehan (1998) also represents the core features of tasks within four defining criteria: there is a goal to be worked towards; the activity is outcome-evaluated; meaning is primary; and there is a real-world relationship. Candlin and Murphy (1987) assert that tasks can be effectively organized based on systematic components including goals, input, setting, activities, roles, and feedback. Briefly, goals refer to the general aim for the task and input represents verbal or non-verbal materials that learners can manipulate. Setting refers to the environment in which the task is performed and activities involve the things participants will be doing in a given setting. The roles for teacher and learner are closely related to the successful implementation of the task, and feedback concerns the task evaluation. The framework of task components provides second language acquisition researchers with some meaningful insights in a task-based syllabus design and authentic material development, for it can serve as the beginning point for designing task-based activities. Thus, the term TBLT in this paper is meant to refer to L2 classes where the teacher uses tasks as the unit of language teaching during class time and therefore the learner is expected to participate in task-based activities.

2. Task Components to Consider for Implementing TBLT Successfully

Goals serve as a guideline in the overall process of task performance and provide a point of contact between the task and the broader curriculum (Nunan, 1989), involving a variety of perspectives based on communicative, socio-cultural, and cognitive awareness (Clark, 1987). Thus, they may cover a broad range of pedagogical objectives from general

outcomes (e.g., improving learners' communicative competence or developing language skills) through to specific ones (e.g., making a hotel reservation or making a travel plan in the target language).

Input data refers to verbal or non-verbal materials, which task participants have to deal with when performing a task. While verbal materials may be spoken or written language, non-verbal materials include pictures, photos, diagrams, charts, maps, etc. Actually, input data can be derived from a wide range of sources in a real world context. For instance, Hover (1986) provides a long list illustrating all kinds of written sources which exist around us, and Brosnan, Brown, and Hood (1984) point out the richness and variety of texts that learners will need to face in real life situations.

Classroom setting refers to a certain environment, in which every task is performed. In relation to classroom arrangements, Wright (1987) suggests the different ways in which learners might be grouped physically based on individual, pair, small group, and whole class mode. For the relationship between task participants' roles and each setting, Anderson and Lynch (1988) advocate the effectiveness of group work compared to that of individual work for general pedagogic reasons (e.g., increasing the cooperation and cohesiveness among learners), and Pica and Doughty (1985) mention the positive role of group work in promoting a linguistic environment likely to assist L2 learning.

The literature review of task-based research shows that many studies have concentrated on exploring *activity types* that best stimulate interactive language use in real world or classroom situations. One of the most general classifications was proposed by Prabhu (1987), based on three principal activity types including information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap activities. While Clark (1987) suggested seven broad communicative activity types derived from communicative task goals in real world context, Pattison (1987) proposed seven activity types focused on classroom practice: questions and answers; dialogues and role-plays; matching activities; communication strategies; pictures and picture stories; puzzles and problems; discussions and decisions.

Assessment of task-based performance, one of the challenges related to successful task-based instruction, is quite different from traditional formative tests in that it involves either the observation of behavior in the real world or a simulation of a real-life activity in a pedagogical setting (Bachman, 2002; Norris, Hudson, & Bonk, 2002; Weigle, 2002). Using tasks for assessment, however, does not simply mean replicating real-life activities, but rather represents an attempt to get an accurate picture of learners' communicative abilities.

3. Previous Findings of Task Components in Classroom Practice

Of key importance, among other things, are the explicit statements used in directing task

participants to manipulate given materials, and task goals and rationale should be expressed in explicit statements so that they can encourage the learner's positive motivation for activities (Nunan, 2004). For verbal materials, Brown and Yule (1983) indicate that dialogue texts containing description or instruction, all other things being equal, are much easier for learners to comprehend and manipulate than non-dialogue texts, which include arguments or abstract concepts.

In an experimental study of language learning settings, Li and Adamson (1992) indicate that advanced students preferred individual work to group or whole class work based on their beliefs that group activities would not be helpful in improving their academic grades. As mentioned above, the research results of classroom settings show some mixed findings. Thus, it suggests that classroom arrangement should be flexible rather than fixed, allowing task participants to make use of different settings in different learning situations.

For the most helpful activity in facilitating L2 learning, there exist various findings among researchers. Pica and Doughty (1985), for instance, found that so-called two-way information gap games (e.g., all learners in a group discussion have unique information to contribute) stimulated significantly more modified interactions than one-way information gap activities (e.g., one member of the group possesses all the relevant information). Crookall and Oxford (1990) indicated that the effective use of role-plays added variety to the kinds of activities students were asked to perform by encouraging them to develop and practice new language and by creating the motivation and involvement necessary for real learning to occur. Grellet (1981) proposed that learners could develop flexible communication strategies through matching activities based on inferring the meaning of unknown elements. In short, researchers' findings revealed that each activity type had its own strengths in facilitating language learning, thereby helping learners to develop their own specific strategies.

For the task performance, a carefully designed peer assessment is believed to develop learners' communication skills with their group members by providing support as well as challenging their group members to realize their potential (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). For the criteria used to select an assessment task, Bachman and Palmer (1996) suggest a well-specified target language use domain which refers to a set of specific language use tasks that the test taker is likely to encounter outside the test itself. In short, task-based assessment involves many variables affecting test scores, and therefore, teachers are required to start with a clear purpose and proper steps. Thus, the authenticity of the tasks, among other things, is a critical quality in order to ensure the fairness and generalization of evaluation scores.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. The Research Questions

In order to investigate Korean EFL teachers' challenges of TBLT, the present study examined four related domains including teachers' understanding of TBLT concepts, teachers' views on TBLT implementation, teachers' preferences of classroom settings and activity types, and practical reasons teachers choose or avoid implementing TBLT in the classroom. In light of the goal of the study, the following research questions were posed:

1) How well do teachers understand TBLT concepts?
2) What are the teachers' views on TBLT implementation?
3) What classroom settings and activity types do teachers prefer in implementing TBLT?
4) For what practical reasons do teachers choose or avoid implementing TBLT?

2. The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument, a three-page questionnaire, was devised to measure Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of TBLT in classroom practice. The questionnaire, composed of 23 Likert-type items and 2 open-ended items, was divided into five sections. The first section contained demographic questions in order to gain information about the teacher's teaching level, gender, age, and teaching experience. The second section (items 1-7) dealt with the basic concept of task and principles of task-based instruction in order to review teachers' practical understanding of TBLT. The third section (items 8-15), related to teachers' positions on classroom practice of TBLT, was partly adapted and modified from Nunan's (2004) checklist for evaluating communicative tasks. In the second and third section, teachers were asked to answer each question using a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. The fourth section (items 16-23) explored teachers' perceived preferences of classroom settings and activity types. Finally, in the fifth section, teachers were asked to rate their own reasons for choosing or avoiding the implementation of TBLT, with reference to a total of 11 qualitative statements.

3. The Participants

The population for this study was Korean EFL teachers working at the secondary school level. From the 38 different schools, a total of 228 teachers participated in this survey. Specifically, the 228 participants were composed of 112 middle school teachers (49.1%) and 116 high school teachers (50.9%). All of the participants have had at least two or more

year's experience teaching English as a foreign language. 153 teachers were female (67.1%) and 75 teachers (32.9%) were male. The teachers ranged in age from their twenties to fifties and 51.8% of them were in their thirties and forties. The number of years they had taught English varied, ranging from less than 6 years (15.4%), 6 to 10 years (19.7%), 11 to 19 years (43.0%), and more than 20 years (21.9%).

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Two different methods were used for data collection. First, while visiting 17 different middle and high schools for seven weeks in August and September of 2005, the researcher contacted 69 middle and 78 high school teachers who have taught English, explained the pedagogical goal of the survey, and asked them to answer the questionnaire. A total of 141 teachers, including 65 middle and 76 high school teachers, completed the survey giving a response rate of 94.2%, 97.4% respectively. Next, written questionnaires were mailed to 120 middle and 130 high school English teachers. Out of 250, a total of 87 questionnaires from 47 middle and 40 high school teachers were returned, giving a response rate of 39.2% and 30.8% respectively. The large gap of response rates in data collection may be the result of the two different approaches for data collection, namely visiting or mailing.

The data analysis process consisted of two methodologies, Likert-type and open-ended item analysis. The Likert-type items, which were designed to identify teachers' understanding of TBLT conception and teachers' views on TBLT implementation, were given a numerical score (e.g., strongly disagree =1, disagree =2, neutral=3, agree=4, and strongly agree=5). SPSS version 11.0 for Windows was used to analyze the data. Open-ended items, which were constructed to capture the reasons teachers choose or avoid implementing TBLT in their classrooms, were first categorized and then coded by the researcher in terms of the teachers' responding rates.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Teachers' Understanding of TBLT Concepts

Table 1 presents a percentage comparison of teacher responses to each of the seven items on the key concepts of task and TBLT. For the convenience of comparison, the five-point scale responses were merged into a three-point simplified scale (strongly disagree & disagree, neutral, agree & strongly agree). In responses to item 1 through 3, which asked for some key concepts of task, the vast majority of respondents understood that task has a communicative purpose (MT 72.3%, HT 68.1%), a primary focus on meaning (MT 63.4%,

HT 70.7%), and a clearly defined outcome (MT 67.9%, HT 70.2%). In response to item 4, most teachers (MT 61.6%, HT 63.8%) considered task as a kind of activity in which the target language is used by the learner. This implies that most Korean EFL teachers generally agree with the definition of task as discussed in the section on theoretical background. In response to item 5, a clear majority of teachers (MT 71.4%, HT 67.2%) reported that they believed in the relevance between task-based instruction and communicative language teaching. This partially indicates that teachers approving of the communicative approach are likely to adopt the basic nature of TBLT in their own language classrooms. The findings in items 6 and 7, related to the instructional philosophy and stages of task-based learning, suggest that most teachers (MT 66.1%, HT 68.1%) held a conviction for student-centeredness, and that more than half of the teachers (MT 57.1%, HT 55.2%) recognized three different stages including pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.

TABLE 1

Teachers' Understanding of TBLT Concepts (n=228)

Questionnaire Items		Strongly disagree / Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree / Agree (%)	M	SD
1. A task is a communicative goal directed.	MT	9.8	17.9	72.3	3.81	0.34
	HT	10.3	21.6	68.1	3.76	0.36
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.	MT	11.6	25.0	63.4	3.57	0.43
	HT	7.7	21.6	70.7	3.71	0.37
3. A task has a clearly defined outcome.	MT	10.7	21.4	67.9	3.55	0.31
	HT	6.1	23.7	70.2	3.65	0.34
4. A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learner.	MT	5.4	33.0	61.6	3.45	0.35
	HT	3.4	32.8	63.8	3.56	0.37
5. TBLT is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching.	MT	6.3	22.3	71.4	3.74	0.36
	HT	6.9	25.9	67.2	3.64	0.39
6. TBLT is based on the student-centered instructional approach.	MT	10.7	23.2	66.1	3.69	0.42
	HT	7.8	24.1	68.1	3.65	0.45
7. TBLT includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.	MT	10.8	32.1	57.1	3.48	0.28
	HT	9.5	35.3	55.2	3.51	0.31

Note: MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher, M=mean sore, SD=standard deviation

The findings of items 1 through 7 showed that about 60% of teachers had a comparatively clear understanding of the linguistic features of task, even though between 8% and 45% of them might not fully understand basic concepts and principles of TBLT.

More importantly, it is believed that teachers, regardless of teaching levels, convey a considerable amount of practical understanding about the key concepts of TBLT. This could result from the fact that the current Korean national curriculum for English, which was first introduced and applied within secondary schools in 2001, has been characterized by a definite shift toward the application of task-based learning and activity-oriented language use aimed at improving learners' communicative competence.

2. Teachers' Views on Implementing TBLT in the Classroom

Table 2 presents the aspects of teachers' positions toward implementing TBLT in their language classrooms. First, in response to item 8, unlike a higher level of teachers' understandings of TBLT concepts, about half of the teachers (MT 49.1%, HT 55.2%) responded negatively when questioned about implementing TBLT in the classroom. This indicates that teachers' conceptual understandings of TBLT do not necessarily lead to the actual use of task in the classroom. Items 9 through 11 explored teachers' beliefs in TBLT as an instructional method. While less than half of the teachers responded that TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use (MT 44.6%, HT 46.7%) and therefore activates learners' needs and interests (MT 47.8%, HT 43.1%), more than half of the teachers (MT 51.8%, HT 53.4%) showed some negative responses regarding TBLT's pursuing the development of integrated skills in the classroom. This suggests that EFL teachers who want to implement task-based instruction successfully are required to have some knowledge of the integration of the four language skills based on the principles of social interaction. The findings of items 12 and 13, which explored the teacher's role and preparation time in implementing TBLT, revealed a common feature regardless of teaching levels. More than half of the teachers believed that TBLT will give teachers an undue psychological burden as a facilitator (MT 50.9%, HT 56.9%) and that it would require much more preparation time (MT 52.7%, HT 54.5%). This finding may be deeply related to the fact that most Korean EFL teachers still use the traditional lecture-oriented methods. Further, it proves that many teachers generally have a negative attitude toward implementing TBLT in the classroom, chiefly because of the psychological pressure of facing some new disciplinary problems in using TBLT. The findings for item 14 indicate that few teachers (MT 22.3%, HT 31.0%) believed TBLT is proper for controlling classroom arrangements. For item 15, most teachers (MT 56.3%, HT 55.2%) answered that TBLT materials in textbooks are meaningful, purposeful, and based on the real-world situations. In short, the findings of items 8 through 15 indicated that despite the comparatively higher-level understanding of TBLT concepts, many teachers actually hesitated to adopt TBLT as an instructional method in classroom practice.

TABLE 2

Teachers' Views on Implementing TBLT (n=228)

Questionnaire Items		Strongly disagree / Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree / Agree (%)	M	SD
8. I have interest in implementing TBLT in the classroom.	MT	49.1	31.3	19.6	2.78	0.53
	HT	55.2	29.3	15.5	2.86	0.57
9. TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.	MT	19.7	35.7	44.6	3.12	0.45
	HT	22.4	30.9	46.7	3.16	0.48
10. TBLT activates learners' needs and interests.	MT	30.3	21.9	47.8	2.98	0.66
	HT	23.3	33.6	43.1	3.07	0.61
11. TBLT pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom.	MT	51.8	32.1	16.1	2.65	0.32
	HT	53.4	27.6	19.0	2.68	0.34
12. TBLT gives much psychological burden to teacher as a facilitator.	MT	24.1	25.0	50.9	3.25	0.36
	HT	19.8	23.3	56.9	3.31	0.31
13. TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.	MT	19.6	27.7	52.7	3.17	0.43
	HT	20.5	25.0	54.5	3.23	0.39
14. TBLT is proper for controlling classroom arrangements.	MT	33.1	44.6	22.3	2.57	0.55
	HT	29.4	39.6	31.0	2.53	0.58
15. TBLT materials in textbooks are meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context.	MT	14.2	29.5	56.3	3.28	0.41
	HT	18.1	26.7	55.2	3.23	0.38

Note: MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher, M=mean sore, SD=standard deviation

3. Teachers' Preferences of Classroom Settings and Activity Types for TBLT

Table 3 presents teachers' responses to four different questions about classroom arrangement implied in the task-based activities. In response to item 16, which asked about the most commonly used classroom setting, while more than half of the middle school teachers (MT 53.4%) answered group work, more than half of the high school teachers (51.3%) responded pair work. The findings of items 17 and 18, which explored the teacher's perceived preferences of classroom setting for specific activities, revealed a common feature regardless of the teaching level. The majority of teachers believed that pair work was most helpful in the case of pattern drills and dialogue practices (MT 60.7%, HT 63.5%) and that more than half of the teachers considered group work to be most useful for discussions and decision-making processes (MT 56.7%, HT 52.5%). When it

comes to the teacher's help and guidance for each classroom setting, a meaningful contrast was revealed: while the majority of middle school teachers believed that group work was most likely to require teachers' guidance (56.9%), high school teachers' opinions varied ($p<.01$); individual work (43.9%), pair work (39.5%), and group work (16.6%).

The findings of items 16 through 19 indicate that different learning situations require different classroom settings, which should be accompanied by different teachers' roles. In case of doing pattern drills during class time, for example, the teacher needs to consider that too much individual or pair work is likely to take some of the positive attributes of exercises away from task participants by making the activities monotonous or tedious. While students performing tasks in group work, the teacher as a facilitator of classroom activities also needs to provide some explicit explanations about performing given tasks so that task performers can exchange information, ideas, and opinions. In summary, given a language classroom composed of students with mixed levels of language proficiency and different linguistic experience, the roles of teachers should be dynamic in encouraging task-based activities by arranging proper settings for the difficulty level of tasks.

TABLE 3

Teachers' Perceived Preferences of Classroom Settings (n=228)

Questionnaire Items		Individual work (%)	Pair work (%)	Group work (%)	(p)
16. The most commonly used classroom setting while implementing TBLT	MT	20.3	26.3	53.4	*(.021)
	HT	24.5	51.3	24.2	
17. The most effective setting for sentence pattern drills and dialogue practices	MT	15.4	60.7	23.9	(.462)
	HT	13.6	63.5	22.9	
18. The most useful setting for discussions and decision-making processes	MT	11.6	31.7	56.7	(.437)
	HT	14.2	33.3	52.5	
19. The setting which is most likely to need teacher's help and guidance	MT	22.3	20.8	56.9	**(.008)
	HT	43.9	39.5	16.6	

Note: MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher, *p<.05, **p<.01

Table 4 presents teachers' opinions about four principal activity types, which include matching audio-visual material, role-play, information-gap games, and problem solving. Item 20 explored teachers' preference of activity types. Role-play, among the four major activities, was the most preferred activity (MT 35.2%, HT 37.7%), followed by information-gap games (MT 26.4%, HT 28.1%), matching audio-visual material (MT 27.6%, HT 11.9%), and problem solving activities (MT 10.8%, HT 22.3%). In response to item 21, many teachers selected information-gap games and problem-solving activities are

difficult activity types for students to perform (MT 37.6%, HT 42.4%; MT 42.1%, HT 39.4%, respectively). Items 22 and 23 explored teachers' perceived preference of activity types to improve students' spoken abilities and creative thinking. While the majority of teachers responded that role-play is most beneficial for enhancing students' spoken abilities (MT 61.4%, HT 63.8%), many teachers answered that information-gap games and problem-solving activities are most helpful to improve students' creative thinking (MT 41.7%, HT 36.5%; MT 38.4%, HT 40.2%, respectively).

The findings of items 20 through 23 shows that the activity types that teachers prefer might be quite different from the ones that students feel are helpful in promoting communicative competence. This suggests that communicative task designers should be careful to take into account the strengths each activity type carries so that task performers may be more actively involved in language use. In sum, each activity type has its own strengths to help task participants develop their own communication strategies. Therefore, a variety of activity types ranging from simple communicative acts such as asking and answering to more complicated ones involving interaction processes need to be provided proportionally so that students can accumulate a wide range of experiences for the actual use of target language.

TABLE 4

Teachers' Perceived Preferences of Activity Types (n=228)

Questionnaire Items		Matching Audio-visual material (%)	Role-play (%)	Information gap games (%)	Problem Solving (%)	(p)
20. Activity type that teachers prefer most while implementing TBLT	MT	27.6	35.2	26.4	10.8	(.343)
	HT	11.9	37.7	28.1	22.3	
21. Activity type that is most difficult for students to perform	MT	4.0	16.3	37.6	42.1	(.398)
	HT	6.7	11.5	42.4	39.4	
22. Activity type that is most beneficial for enhancing students' spoken abilities	MT	13.9	61.4	17.5	7.2	(.405)
	HT	11.5	63.8	13.6	11.1	
23. Activity type that is most helpful to improve students' creative thinking	MT	8.3	11.6	41.7	38.4	(.457)
	HT	10.2	13.1	36.5	40.2	

Note: MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher, *p<.05, **p<.01

4. Practical Reasons Teachers Use or Avoid TBLT

Table 5 presents the aspects of teachers' responses to the open-ended question asking them to identify some reasons why they decide to use TBLT in classroom practice. Data analysis revealed that the three major reasons teachers used task-based methods concerned

appropriateness to small group work (70.1%), improving learners' interaction skills (67.5%), and encouraging learners' intrinsic motivation (54.7%). In contrast, few respondents agreed that TBLT creates a collaborative learning environment (39.3%) and promotes learners' academic progress (27.4%). The "others" category (11.1%) concerned classroom arrangements, promotion of target language use and controlling large classes.

In response to the specific reasons teachers gave for using task-based techniques in the classroom, there were some meaningful differences according to the teaching level. While most middle school teachers, for instance, valued its appropriateness to small group work, most high school teachers placed an importance on improving interaction skills and encouraging intrinsic motivation. This partially implies that as an instructional method, TBLT is currently preferred for its group work potential in middle school settings, and its motivational strengths in high school settings.

TABLE 5

Reasons Teachers Use TBLT in the Classroom (n=117)

Statements	Frequency	Total (Percent)
TBLT is appropriate for small group work.	MT 48 HT 34	82 (70.1)
TBLT improves learners' interaction skills.	MT 42 HT 37	79 (67.5)
TBLT encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.	MT 36 HT 28	64 (54.7)
TBLT creates a collaborative learning environment.	MT 21 HT 25	46 (39.3)
TBLT promotes learners' academic progress.	MT 17 HT 15	32 (27.4)
Others	MT 8 HT 5	13 (11.1)

Note: MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher

Table 6 presents teachers' responses to the open-ended question that asked them to pick out their own reasons for avoiding the implementation of TBLT in their classrooms. Data analysis showed that lack of knowledge of task-based instruction (75.7%), among a total of six plausible reasons, is the main reason teachers are reluctant to implement TBLT. Their self-perceived inability to use the target language (73.0%) was the second major reason, followed by difficulty in assessing learners' task-based performance (64.0%) and finally, the problem of dealing with learners who are not used to task-based learning (45.9%). Materials in textbooks not properly designed and large class size were less frequent reasons given (30.6% & 21.6%, respectively). Other responses (10.8%) involved ineffectiveness in grammar instruction, holding bright students back and taking too much preparation time.

In response to the specific reasons teachers avoid using task-based methods in the classroom, a common feature existed, regardless of teaching level: more than 70% of the teachers among a total of 111 respondents believed that they had little knowledge of task-based methods and limited target language proficiency.

TABLE 6

Reasons Teachers Avoid TBLT in the Classroom (n=111)

Statements	Frequency		Total (Percent)
I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.	MT 45	HT 39	84 (75.7)
I have limited target language proficiency.	MT 38	HT 43	81 (73.0)
I have difficulty in assessing learner's task-based performance.	MT 35	HT 36	71 (64.0)
Learners are not used to task-based learning.	MT 24	HT 27	51 (45.9)
Materials in textbooks are not proper for using TBLT.	MT 13	HT 21	34 (30.6)
Large class size is an obstacle to use task-based methods.	MT 9	HT 15	24 (21.6)
Others	MT 5	HT 7	12 (10.8)

Note: MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher

The overall findings of the open-ended items revealed that 117 teachers (51.3%) among a total of 228 respondents were currently using task-based methods in their classrooms, but 111 teachers (48.7%) responded negatively. This implies that about half of the respondents, regardless of their understanding of TBLT concepts or principles, had fears of being confronted with problems in implementing TBLT in classroom practice. It also suggests that TBLT as an instructional method is more than just giving tasks to learners and evaluating their performance. Therefore, the teacher, who wants to try implementing TBLT successfully, is required to have sufficient knowledge about the instructional framework related to its plan, procedure, and assessment.

Specifically, the majority of the teachers who avoid implementing TBLT responded that they had little knowledge of task-based instruction (75.7%) and limited target language proficiency (73.0%). This finding means that a task in itself does not necessarily guarantee its successful implementation, unless the teacher understands how tasks actually work in the classroom. Thus, the teacher needs to acknowledge many problems he or she may face in implementing TBLT. More importantly, teachers are required to make an effort to understand the pedagogical benefits of TBLT as an instructional method and improve their English language proficiency.

In conclusion, most Korean EFL teachers have become accustomed to working in teacher-centered classrooms, thus adopting a one-way instruction method rather than two-way interaction. They might have different reasons for choosing or avoiding the implementation of TBLT, especially on the basis of their perceptions about implementing task-based approach. In light of this, the teacher needs to be flexible and dynamic in controlling the language learning environment, because the nature of language learning substantially demands that learners actively participate in language use activities.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The overall findings of this study revealed that despite a higher level of understanding of TBLT concepts, many Korean EFL teachers retain some fear of adopting TBLT as an instructional method because of perceived disciplinary problems related to classroom practice. It was also revealed that teacher's role should be flexible or dynamic in arranging classroom settings in order to help students to actively participate in performing task-based activities, because each setting has its own strengths and weaknesses in classroom practice. Regarding activity types, the analysis results represented that the task designer needs to consider presenting a variety of communication related activity types, because each activity type is believed to have its own strengths to help task participants develop their own communication strategies. More importantly, in response to the reasons teachers use or avoid implementing TBLT, the findings provide teacher and educator with some important implications with regard to the challenges that they may encounter in trying to use task-based techniques in the classroom.

First of all, given the research finding that teachers lack practical application knowledge of task-based methods or techniques, teachers should be given the opportunity to acquire knowledge about TBLT related to planning, implementing, and assessing. To this end, it is suggested that teacher education programs, which aim at in-depth training about language teaching methodologies, should properly deal with both the strengths and weaknesses of TBLT as an instructional method ranging from basic principles to specific techniques. In relation to assessment for task-based group work, for example, awarding equal grades to all members of the group may serve as one of the crucial weaknesses for ensuring a level of fairness in assessment, particularly in high achieving learner groups. Therefore, the teacher needs to consider both inter-group and intra-group evaluations together in terms of enhancing the participation and quality of involvement in task-based cooperative work (Lourdusamy & Divaharan, 2002). While the inter-group assessment involves using the group's products as part of the course evaluation and thus giving equal grades to all members of the group, the intra-group assessment involves individual evaluation.

Second, when taking into account that one of the major reasons teachers avoid implementing TBLT is deeply related to the variables such as learners not trained in task-based learning, task-based materials and class size, much consideration should be given to overcoming potential obstacles that teachers may come across in a task-based classroom. For learners not trained in task-based learning, one of the reasons they avoid participating in task-based activities may be related to a lack of confidence in performing tasks. This is why it is necessary for the teacher to help learners build confidence by encouraging them to learn how to deal with tasks and use collaborative skills in task-based performance. Once task participants realize that learning in tasks is only one of several ways of learning

in the class, they will be able to overcome such challenges as fear of assessment, competition, and the difficulty of the task. Thus, the improved confidence of less assertive learners may lead to more equal participation and sharing of the workload (Burdett, 2003). For task-based materials, few teachers answered that materials in textbooks were one of the reasons they avoid using task-based techniques in their classrooms. This partially indicates that the current EFL textbooks in Korean secondary school settings, all of which allegedly follow the principles of the communicative theory of language learning, properly reflect the task-based syllabus which chiefly concerns communicative skills and social interaction. It also reveals that teachers are often required to redesign individual work-oriented materials in textbooks in accordance with the principles of promoting interaction and collaborative learning. For large classes, which have often been considered to be problematic with regard to disciplinary situations in task-based group work, the teacher needs to take group formation and presentation procedure into consideration. Basically task-based techniques can be used the same way in large classes as in small ones, except that large classes need more time and preparation.

Finally, since teachers' views regarding instructional approach have a great impact on classroom practice, it is necessary for the teacher, as a facilitator of learners' activities in the classroom, to have a positive attitude toward TBLT in order for it to be successfully implemented. In the Korean EFL environment, in which learners don't have much contact with native speakers of English, the focus of language teaching has been placed on changing the classroom practice from the traditional passive lecture to more active group learning so that learners can be more frequently exposed to target language use. Thus, many teachers have had an increasing amount of interest in using TBLT as an instructional method, chiefly because they believe task-based learning has specific benefits for increasing learners' communication skills and interaction. In light of this, it is recommended that future studies consider alternative solutions for effective classroom management such as leveled tasks and performance assessment.

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APPENDIX

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to examine Korean EFL teachers' beliefs of task-based language teaching with reference to classroom practice. Please answer all of the questions as best as you can. Your answers will be kept confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

Section I. General and Demographic Information (please put ∨)

Teaching level	□ middle school		□ high school	
Gender	□ male		□ female	
Age	□ 20-29	□ 30-39	□ 40-49	□ 50 +
Total number of years teaching English	□ less than 5 years		□ 5 to 9 years	
	□ 10 to 20 years		□ more than 20 years	

Section II. Teachers' Understanding of TBLT Concepts

For each of the following statements, please answer by putting ∨ in a box, according to the following scale: SA (strongly agree), A (agree), U (undecided), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. A task is a communicative goal directed.	□	□	□	□	□
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.	□	□	□	□	□
3. A task has a clearly defined outcome.	□	□	□	□	□
4. A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learner.	□	□	□	□	□
5. TBLT is consistent with the principles of CLT.	□	□	□	□	□

6. TBLT is based on the student-centered instructional approach.	□	□	□	□	□
7. TBLT includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.	□	□	□	□	□

Section III. Teachers' Views on Implementing TBLT

The following statements address teachers' views on implementing TBLT in the classroom. Please answer by putting ∨ in a box that matches your position most, according to the following scale: SA (strongly agree), A (agree), U (Undecided), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
8. I have interest in implementing TBLT in the classroom.	□	□	□	□	□
9. TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language.	□	□	□	□	□
10. TBLT activates learners' needs and interests.	□	□	□	□	□
11. TBLT pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom.	□	□	□	□	□
12. TBLT gives much psychological burden to teacher as a facilitator.	□	□	□	□	□
13. TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.	□	□	□	□	□
14. TBLT is proper for controlling classroom arrangements.	□	□	□	□	□
15. TBLT materials should be meaningful based on the real-world context.	□	□	□	□	□

Section IV. Teachers' Preferences of Classroom Settings and Activity Types for TBLT

The following statements address teachers' preference of classroom settings while implementing TBLT in the classroom. Please answer by putting ∨ in a box that matches your position most.

Questionnaire Items	Individual work	Pair work	Group work
16. The most commonly used classroom setting while implementing TBLT	□	□	□
17. The most effective setting for sentence pattern drills and dialogue practices	□	□	□
18. The most useful setting for discussions and decision-making processes	□	□	□
19. The setting which is most likely to need teacher's help and guidance	□	□	□

The following statements address teachers' preference of activity types while implementing TBLT in the classroom. Please answer by putting ∨ in a box that matches your position most.

Questionnaire Items	Matching materials	Role-play	Information gap games	Problem Solving
20. Activity type that teachers prefer most while implementing TBLT	□	□	□	□
21. Activity type that is most difficult for students to perform	□	□	□	□
22. Activity type that is most beneficial for enhancing students' spoken abilities	□	□	□	□
23. Activity type that is most helpful to improve students' creative thinking	□	□	□	□

Section V. Reasons Teachers Choose, or Avoid, Implementing TBLT

Do you use TBLT in your teaching? □ YES □ NO

If yes, please put ∨ any reasons that you decide to implement TBLT.

□ TBLT promotes learners' academic progress.
□ TBLT improves learners' interaction skills.
□ TBLT encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.
□ TBLT creates a collaborative learning environment.
□ TBLT is appropriate for small group work.
If you have other reasons, please write them down. ( )

If no, please put ∨ any reasons that you avoid implementing TBLT.

□ Students are not used to task-based learning.
□ Materials in textbooks are not proper for using TBLT.
□ Large class size is an obstacle to use task-based methods.
□ I have difficulty in assessing learner's task-based performance.
□ I have limited target language proficiency.
□ I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.
If you have other reasons, please write them down. ( )

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary

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