

Exploring EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching: A Case Study of Korean Secondary School Classroom Practice

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Bio Data

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in a Korean secondary school context. The data for this study were collected through questionnaires from a total of 228 teachers at 38 different middle and high schools in Korea. The survey was conducted from August through October of the 2005 academic year, and the data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The overall findings of the survey show that the majority of respondents have a higher level of understanding about TBLT concepts, regardless of teaching levels, but that

there exist some negative views on implementing TBLT with regard to its classroom practice. Additionally, some useful implications are proposed based on research findings in order to help teachers and teacher trainers to construct and implement TBLT more effectively.

Key words: Task-based language teaching (TBLT), teachers' perceptions, classroom practice, task-based activities, task performance, small group work

Introduction

With the advent of the communicative language teaching approach in the early 1980s and much emphasis on learners' communicative abilities over the last two decades, the term task-based language teaching (TBLT) came into prevalent use in the field of second language acquisition in terms of developing process-oriented syllabi and designing communicative tasks to promote learners' actual language use. Within the varying interpretations of TBLT related to classroom practice, recent studies exhibit three recurrent features: TBLT is compatible with a learner-centered educational philosophy (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2001); it consists of particular components such as goal, procedure, specific outcome (Murphy, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1998); it advocates content-oriented meaningful activities rather than linguistic forms (Beglar & Hunt, 2002; Carless, 2002; Littlewood, 2004).

Given the fact that language acquisition is influenced by the complex interactions of a number of variables including materials, activities, and evaluative feedback, TBLT has a dramatic, positive impact on these variables. It implies that TBLT provides learners with natural sources of meaningful material, ideal situations for communicative activity, and supportive feedback allowing for much greater opportunities for language

use. Specifically, in an Asian EFL environment where learners are limited in their accessibility to use the target language on a daily basis, it is first of all necessary for language learners to be provided with real opportunities to be exposed to language use in the classroom. In his study based on interviews with teachers, teacher educators, and ministry officials, Nunan (2003) indicates that TBLT emerged as a central concept from a study of curriculum guidelines and syllabi in the Asia-Pacific countries including Japan, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Korea and Malaysia.

Unfortunately, however, a quick review of task-based literature shows that despite its pedagogical benefits surrounding the participatory learning culture, TBLT has not yet been sufficiently researched or proven empirically in terms of its classroom practice in school foreign language learning contexts (Carless, 2004; In-Jae Jeon, 2005). In light of this, this study's aim is to explore Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of task-based instruction based on investigating their understandings of TBLT concepts, positions 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 facilitating EFL teachers' practical use of TBLT techniques, thereby improving the learners' communicative abilities.

Theoretical Background: A Brief Review of Task-based Pedagogy

The task-based view of language 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). 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, has developed into a detailed practical framework for the communicative classroom in which learners perform task-based activities through cycles of pre-task preparation, task performance, and post-task feedback through language focus (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.

Despite the prevalent use of tasks in language pedagogy, some significant challenges behind designing proper task-based syllabi and constructing authentic task-based materials, both of which have been considered crucial factors in determining the effectiveness of TBLT in communicative classrooms, still remain unresolved. In response to these challenges, many SLA 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.

The Notion of Task as a Central Unit 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, in this paper, it is suggested that the central components of task-based framework include *goals, input data, classroom settings, activity types, and assessment*.

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 specific ones (e.g., making a hotel reservation or making a travel plan in the target language). Of key importance, among other things, are the explicit statements used in directing task participants to manipulate given materials, and imply what the results of a certain experience will be. Another point worth noting is that goals should properly reflect learners' needs and interests in order to stimulate their potential motivation for language use.

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. 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 short, input data, which task participants are supposed to comprehend and manipulate in the language learning process, should reflect the learners' needs and interests, thereby positively

encouraging the use of the target language.

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. In an experimental study of language learning settings, on the other hand, 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, and that roles for the teacher should be dynamic in order to control class modes.

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. For the most helpful activity in facilitating L2

learning, on the other hand, 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.

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. For one thing, 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.

In conclusion, despite its educational benefits in language learning contexts, a task in itself does not necessarily guarantee its successful implementation unless the teacher, the facilitator and controller of the task performance, understands how tasks actually work in the classroom. It also suggests that TBLT as an instructional method is more than just giving tasks to learners and evaluating their performance. More importantly, 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.

Research Design and Method

The Research Questions

In an attempt to investigate Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of TBLT, the present study examined three related domains including teachers' understanding of TBLT concepts, teachers' views on TBLT implementation, 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 aspects of teachers' views on TBLT implementation?
3. For what practical reasons do teachers choose, or avoid, implementing TBLT?

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument, a three-page questionnaire, was devised to measure Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of TBLT in classroom setting. The questionnaire, composed of 15 Likert-type items and two open-ended items, was divided into four 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 understandings 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 disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Finally, in the fourth 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.

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%).

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' understandings 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). 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. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 11.0 for Windows was used to analyze the data.

Analysis Results

Teachers Have a Higher Level of Understanding of Task and TBLT

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).

Table 1

Teachers' Understandings 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 score, SD=standard

deviation

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.

Teachers Have Some Negative 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 level. 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%). 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.

Table 2
Teachers' Views on Implementing TBLT (n=228)

Questionnaire Items		Strongly disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	M	SD
		/ Disagree (%)	(%)	/ Agree (%)		
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 score, SD=standard deviation

Teachers Like to Use TBLT for Its Group Work Basis and Motivational Traits

In response to whether or not teachers implement TBLT in the classroom, while 117 teachers (51.3%) among a total of 228 respondents answered they were currently using task-based methods or techniques in their classrooms, 111 teachers (48.7%) responded negatively. Table 3 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, controlling large classes, and so on.

Table 3

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

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 aspects in high school settings.

The Biggest Reason Teachers Avoid TBLT Lies in Lack of Confidence

Table 4 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, taking too much preparation time, etc.

In response to the specific reasons teachers avoid using task-based methods in the classroom, it is noticeable that there existed a clear feature 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 4
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

Discussion

The findings of items 1 through 7 showed that teachers had a comparatively clear understanding of the linguistic features of task, thus approving of the pedagogical benefits

of task in second language learning classroom. 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.

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. This may result from the fact that most Korean EFL teachers still use the traditional lecture-oriented methods, which they are accustomed to, and more than that, they have the psychological pressure of facing some new disciplinary problems in using TBLT. In relation to task participants' roles and classroom arrangements, it might be true that Korean EFL teachers have become accustomed to working in teacher-centered classrooms, thus adopting a one-way instruction method rather than two-way interaction. A teacher, however, 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.

The findings of the two open-ended items revealed that teachers may have different reasons for choosing or avoiding the implementation of TBLT. While some teachers decided to use task-based methods as a basis for group work, or because of its

motivational potential, others had fears of being confronted with problems on account of a lack of knowledge and confidence. Yet many problems that teachers face in implementing TBLT can be successfully reduced when teachers make an effort to understand its pedagogical benefits and increase positive attitudes toward TBLT as an instructional method. In light of this, it is first of all necessary for teachers to have the opportunity to learn both the strengths and weaknesses of a task-based methodology, and understand its basic principles, as well as its various techniques.

Now let's turn to the challenges teachers may encounter in trying to use task-based methods. Given the fact that difficulty in assessing learner's task-based performance is one of the major reasons teachers avoid implementing TBLT, attention needs to be given to performance assessment. In relation to assessment for 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.

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 to be in accordance with the principles of promoting interaction and collaborative learning.

Finally, 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.

Conclusion and Implications

In the Korean EFL context, 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 easily 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.

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 also turned out that teachers had their own reasons to use or avoid implementing TBLT. Based on the overall findings, three important implications for teachers and teacher trainers are proposed. First, since teachers' views regarding instructional approach have a great impact on classroom practice, it is necessary for the teacher, as a practical controller and facilitator of learners' activities in the classroom, to have a positive attitude toward TBLT in order for it to be successfully implemented. Second, 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. Third, when taking into account that one of the major reasons teachers avoid implementing TBLT is deeply related to a lack of confidence, much consideration should

be given to overcoming potential obstacles that teachers may come across in a task-based classroom. It is also recommended that teachers consider alternative solutions for classroom management such as leveled tasks, peer assessment, and a variety of various task types including two-way information gap activities as well as one-way activities, such as simple asking and answering.

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Appendix

Teacher 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

Teaching level	<input type="checkbox"/> elementary school	<input type="checkbox"/> middle school	<input type="checkbox"/> high school
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> male	<input type="checkbox"/> female	
Age	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 30-39	<input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 +
Total number of years teaching English	<input type="checkbox"/> less than 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 9 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 to 20 years <input type="checkbox"/> more than 20 years

Section II. Teachers' Understandings of Task and TBLT

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.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. A task has a clearly defined outcome.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learner.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

5. TBLT is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. TBLT is based on the student-centered instructional approach.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. TBLT includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section III. Teachers' Views on Implementing TBLT

The following statements address teachers' views on implementing TBLT in the classroom. Please answer by putting \checkmark 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.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. TBLT activates learners' needs and interests.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. TBLT pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. TBLT gives much psychological burden to teacher as a facilitator.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
14. TBLT is proper for controlling classroom arrangements.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
15. TBLT materials should be meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section IV. 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.

(_____)
