Adoption and Avoidance of Task-Based Language Teaching: Evidence from Malaysian University Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has strong theoretical appeal for fostering communicative language skills. However, a persistent theory–practice divide exists in contexts with exam-oriented education systems. This study investigates the complex factors influencing Malaysian ESL instructors' adoption and avoidance of TBLT. A survey of 48 university English instructors combined quantitative descriptive analysis with qualitative thematic coding of closed-ended responses. Findings reveal that while 89.6% of instructors reported using TBLT due to its promise of improving students' interaction and communication skills, significant challenges impede full uptake. Instructors highlighted TBLT's ability to create collaborative, motivating learning environments, yet pointed to heavy exam preparation pressures, practical classroom management issues, and resource and preparation demands as key barriers. Thematic analysis yielded three overarching tensions: (1) *communicative promise vs. exam pressures*, (2) *collaborative ideals vs. practical classroom constraints*, and (3) *preparation demands and resource gaps.* The study contributes empirically to understanding how contextual factors, especially an exam-driven curriculum, limit TBLT in practice, despite teachers' enthusiasm. It offers actionable implications: teacher development should focus on designing assessment-aligned communicative tasks, and institutional support is needed through better TBLT-oriented materials, training, and curricular adjustments. These findings emphasise the need to bridge the gap between TBLT theory and classroom reality in exam-oriented settings.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching, communicative language teaching, ESL instruction, exam-oriented education.

INTRODUCTION

TBLT emerged from the communicative approach to language teaching and is rooted in constructivist learning theory. It is often described as an extension of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), aiming to address CLT's shortcomings (such as teacher-centeredness and students' low proficiency) by focusing on meaning-based interaction. Numerous studies have noted TBLT's positive impact on the quality of language teaching and learning. Unlike traditional methods that prioritize form, TBLT centres instruction around meaningful tasks that simulate real-life language use. For example, learners apply grammatical knowledge while completing communicative tasks, rather than through isolated drills. This approach has been shown to significantly improve learners' English proficiency. According to Willis's (1996) influential framework, TBLT lessons consist of a pre-task stage (introducing topic and useful language), a while-task stage (students planning, performing, and reporting on the task), and a post-task stage (language analysis and practice). During tasks, students work towards an objective by interacting and negotiating meaning, often in small groups, which inherently promotes

collaborative learning. TBLT is a learner-centred approach: instructors design lessons tied to real-world situations, allowing students to use authentic language for genuine communication.

Accordingly, the first objective of the study is to examine the factors that encourage Malaysian ESL instructors to adopt Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), with a focus on its perceived communicative and collaborative benefits. The second objective is to explore the contextual challenges that hinder the effective implementation of TBLT in Malaysian university classrooms, particularly in exam-oriented settings.

The research questions are as follows,

1. What are the key reasons Malaysian ESL instructors in higher education systems choose to adopt Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in their teaching practices?

2. What are the external factors that prevent Malaysian ESL instructors from fully implementing TBLT in exam-oriented classrooms in the higher education system?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite TBLT's theoretical strengths, implementing it successfully depends greatly on instructors' perceptions and the teaching context. Teacher cognition and beliefs influence whether and how a given approach is adopted in the classroom. Even instructors who conceptually agree on communicative, student-centred principles may deviate in practice due to external factors. Prior research indicates that many English teachers—especially in Asian contexts—lack full awareness of how to implement TBLT effectively, leading to a gap between knowing and doing. Barrot (2017) notes that some instructors possess only superficial understandings of TBLT principles and thus struggle to apply them in practice. For instance, Jeon and Hahn (2006) found that while Korean secondary school teachers generally understood the concept of TBLT, they expressed concerns about its practical application in actual classrooms. These teachers lacked confidence in managing task-based lessons due to issues like large class sizes, discipline management, limited time, and the pressure of preparing students for exams. Instructors who are unsure of TBLT's tangible benefits for their learners may revert to more familiar, traditional teacher-centered methods or a mixture of TBLT and traditional approaches (Musazay, 2017). Indeed, it is not uncommon in exam-driven educational systems to see language skills taught in isolation (e.g. grammar rules and reading comprehension for tests) rather than through communicative use, which results in students rarely conversing in English outside the classroom.

There is a well-documented tension between TBLT's theoretical advantages and the practical realities faced by teachers. This gap is especially pronounced in contexts like Malaysia that have highly exam-oriented curricula. While TBLT is glorified for developing communicative competence, instructors operate within systems that prioritize examination performance, creating a conflict of priorities. Existing studies in various Asian settings highlight this conflict: for example, many teachers are torn between focusing on meaningful communication and meeting the demands of high-stakes tests. In Vietnam, university lecturers generally welcomed TBLT in principle but reported that its use was constrained by large class sizes, heavy curricula, and exams still dominated by grammar and vocabulary testing (Lam, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2021). In Korea, teachers have reported that rigid exam preparation schedules and concerns about maintaining classroom control with large student numbers lead them to hesitate in fully embracing TBLT (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Likewise, Chinese university instructors often employed a weaker, task-supported form of TBLT rather than fully task-based teaching, citing curricular constraints, public exam pressures, and resource limitations as barriers, despite shifting toward more student-centred classroom roles (Liu & Ren, 2021). In Vietnam, TBLT implementation at the tertiary level has also been hindered by exam-focused learning programs and limited resources (Cao, 2018; Nguyen, Newton, & Crabbe, 2015), with some instructors skipping communicative activities to drill grammar for exams. Similar challenges were echoed in Indonesia, where teachers considered TBLT the "right method" for motivating students and aligning with national curriculum goals, yet found it time-consuming to prepare, difficult to scaffold, and poorly aligned with exam requirements (Saputro, Hima, & Farah, 2021). In Malaysia, too, English education remains largely test-driven (Ambigapathy, 2002), and instructors may feel pressure to "teach to the test" by emphasizing grammar and rote practice over interactive tasks. However, few studies have deeply explored how these contextual pressures shape Malaysian ESL instructors' own reasoning for either adopting or avoiding TBLT.

Hence, to address this gap, the present study investigates the perspectives of Malaysian university English instructors, revealing the possible reasons behind their pedagogical choices regarding TBLT in an exam-oriented environment.

In sum, while TBLT has been promoted across Asian contexts, evidence from Vietnam, China, Indonesia, Korea, and Malaysia consistently shows that teachers' positive perceptions are undermined by systemic barriers, particularly exam-driven curricula, resulting in a persistent gap between theoretical endorsement and practical adoption. This regional pattern emphasized the need to examine how Malaysian ESL instructors themselves deal with these pressures in shaping their pedagogical choices.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a survey-based design, quantitative data from English language instructors. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who were likely familiar with TBLT through their academic background. A total of 48 ESL instructors (41 females, 7 males) from University Technology MARA (UiTM) were surveyed. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 50 and came from TESL or related fields (Applied Linguistics, English Language Studies, Literature), ensuring they had relevant pedagogical training.

The primary research instrument was a questionnaire adapted from Dao (2016). The questionnaire contained four sections (Parts I–IV). The present study focuses on Part IV, which started with one close ended single-choice question (YES or NO) to specifically elicit instructors' choices in using TBLT for their teaching. Then, a set of 14 closed ended questions with multiple selection items regarding their reasons for choosing and avoiding implementing TBLT items was also asked. The items require respondents to choose various possible reasons provided for implementing TBLT (e.g., "TBLT improves learners' interaction skills") and reasons for avoiding TBLT (e.g., "TBLT is not useful for exam preparation"). This section has a strong internal reliability of Cronbach's alpha of 0.813.

Data were analysed using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitatively, response items were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) via SPSS 23.0. Qualitatively, a thematic content analysis was conducted on the responses. All responses from the 43 instructors who reported using TBLT ("adopters") and the 5 instructors who reported not using TBLT ("avoiders") were coded. An inductive coding process was used to identify recurring themes and patterns in the justifications instructors provided. Initial coding was done by grouping similar ideas related to exams, class size, student engagement, materials and teacher knowledge, which were then refined into broader themes. These themes allow for in- depth discussion on the instructor's choice of accepting and avoiding TBLT to identify the underlying issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 48 ESL instructors surveyed, 43 (89.6%) indicated that they do use TBLT in their teaching, whereas 5 instructors (10.4%) indicated that they avoid using TBLT (Table 3.0). This high adoption rate suggests generally positive attitudes toward TBLT among the sample, but the subsequent analysis reveals important subtleties in their reasoning.

Table 3.0: Instructors' choice of using or avoiding of TBLT in classroom

Do you use task-based language teaching in your teaching?	Frequency (N=48)	Percent (%)
Yes	43	89.6
No	5	10.4
Total	48	100.0

Part IV of the questionnaire comprises 14 sets of questions pertaining to the reasons for choice or avoidance in employing TBLT in the English language classroom. Referring to Table 3.0, it should be noted that 43 participants claimed to use TBLT in their classroom. Table 3.1 reveals that 42 (87.50%) participants agree that

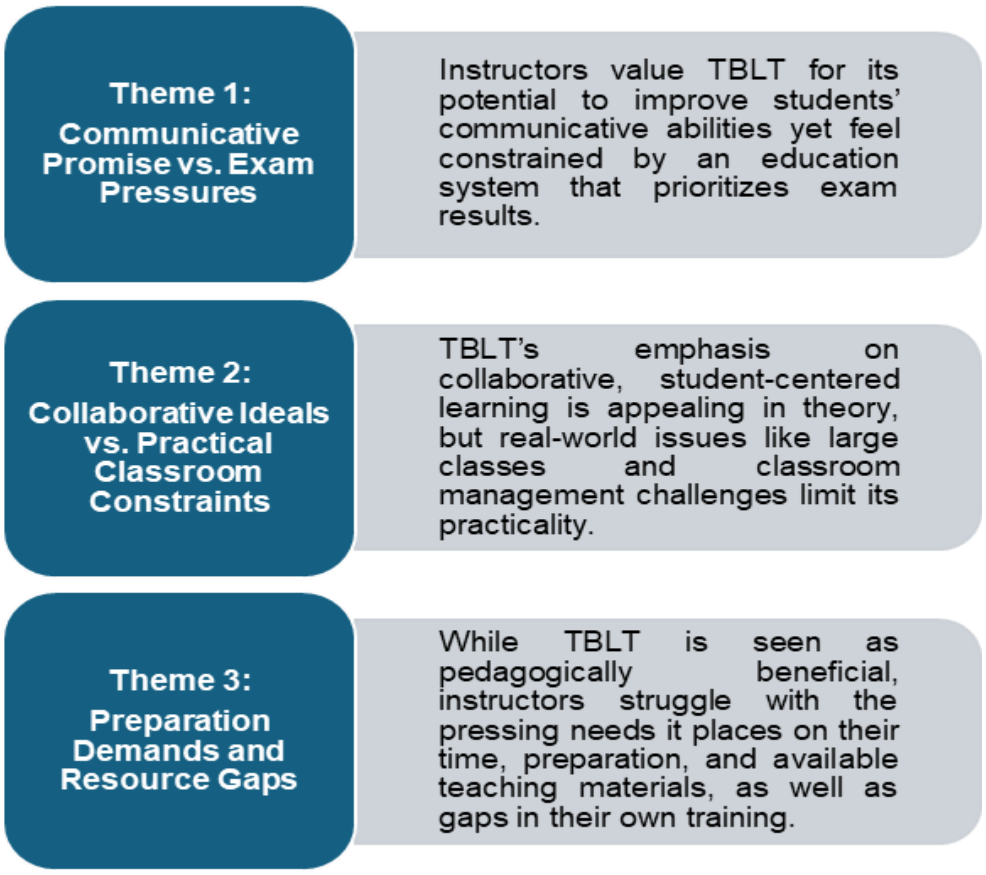
task-based teaching improves learners' interaction skills, while 37 (77.08%) believe that it creates a collaborative learning environment. Other reasons are that it encourages learners' intrinsic motivation and promotes learners' academic progress respectively 33, (68.75%) and 29 (60.42%) participants. However, only 23 (47.92%) participants thought that TBLT was suitable for small group work. Overall data imply that the instructors agree that, due to the practicality of some of the reasons, they carry out TBLT in their classrooms.

Table 3.1: Frequency of reasons for teachers to implement TBLT

Reasons	N=48	Percentage (%)
Task-based language teaching promotes learners' academic progress.	29	60.42
Task-based language teaching improves learners' interaction skills.	42	87.50
Task-based language teaching encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.	33	68.75
Task-based language teaching creates a collaborative learning environment.	37	77.08
Task-based language teaching is appropriate for small group work	23	47.92

Based on the responses derived from 5 participants, there were two main issues that can be identified based on Table 3.3 which are that TBLT was irrelevant for exam preparation (4=8.33%) and much time was allocated to prepare tasks (3=6.25%). Although participants did not regard the style of teaching and level of language proficiency as the reasons to avoid TBLT, 2 participants (4.17%) admitted that they had little knowledge of teaching using TBLT. For both textbook materials and large class size, 2 (4.17%) participants agreed that the former was not helping teachers in TBLT classrooms, and another 2 (4.17) participants thought that the latter hindered TBLT from being applied.

Table 3.2: Reasons for teachers to avoid implementing TBLT



Reasons	N=48	Percentage (%)
TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches	3	6.25
TBLT gives much psychological burden for teachers as facilitators	0	0
Materials in the textbook are not proper to use TBLT	2	4.17
Large class size is an obstacle to use TBLT	2	4.17
I have difficulties in assessing learner task-based performance	1	2.08
I have limited target language proficiency	0	0
I have little knowledge of TBLT	2	4.17
I would rather use my own style of teaching	0	0
TBLT is not useful for exam preparation	4	8.33

Hence, three major themes emerge from the findings, with each highlighting a pressure between the idealized benefits of TBLT and the contextual realities that teachers faced.

Each theme is discussed below, combining quantitative survey results, qualitative insights from participants, and interpretation from relevant literatures.

Theme 1: Communicative Promise vs. Exam Pressures Communicative benefits of TBLT

A clear majority of instructors in this study embraced TBLT for its communicative promise. Among the 43 adopters, 42 instructors (87.5% of all respondents) agreed that "task-based teaching improves learners' interaction skills," making this the most frequently endorsed reason for using TBLT (see Table 3.1). This finding aligns with TBLT's core goal of prioritizing meaningful communication; as Nunan (1989) and others note, a genuine communicative task focuses learners on exchanging meaning rather than on form. When students collaborate on tasks (like solving a problem or creating a dialogue), they must negotiate meaning and practice real-life communication strategies, leading to improved oral interaction skills. Several instructors also mentioned increased student motivation as a benefit: 33 out of 48 (68.8%) agreed that TBLT "encourages learners' intrinsic motivation" (Table 3.2). Such intrinsic motivation is critical; when learners find tasks enjoyable and relevant, their willingness to invest effort in using English grows (Gardner, 2010). In short, our instructors recognized that TBLT can transform the classroom dynamic: students become active communicators rather than passive recipients of knowledge. This promise of enhancing communicative competence and engagement is a primary driver for instructors who choose to implement TBLT.

Exam-oriented pressures

On the other side of this subject lies a powerful counterforce: the pressure to prepare students for exams. In Malaysia's exam-driven education system, teachers are acutely aware of the need to cover tested content and train students in examination skills. Even instructors who value communication skills feel compelled to ensure their students excel in standardized tests, which historically emphasize discrete language knowledge (grammar rules, reading comprehension, etc.) over spontaneous communication (Ambigapathy, 2002). In our survey, nearly all the instructors who avoided TBLT cited exam preparation as a key concern. Specifically, 4 out of the 5 "avoiders" (80%) indicated that TBLT is "not useful for exam preparation," making this the most common reason for not using TBLT (see Table 3.2). This response exemplifies the backwash effect of testing, also known as backwash in testing and assessment, which means "the positive or negative effects of a test on classroom teaching or learning" (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 634). Implying that teachers feel pressure to align classroom activities with assessments. Also, instructors may perceive a trade-off between time spent on communicative tasks and time spent covering examinable content. TBLT tasks, being more open-ended and focused on fluency or meaning, do not always map neatly onto the multiple-choice and written questions that dominate exams. Thus, even teachers who appreciate the communicative value of TBLT can have a sense of reluctance to fully commit to it, fearing it might undermine their students' exam performance (Jeon & Hahn, 2006).

These findings reveal an issue between educational ideals and demand from the system. The instructors' responses reflect what Jeon and Hahn (2006) observed in Korea: despite understanding TBLT's benefits, teachers often rejected or scaled back its use due to external pressures like exams and limited time (Loi, 2020). Examinations are the "ultimate goal" that haunts both teachers and students, shaping what happens in the classroom. Our participants' responses resonate with other Asian contexts where teachers commonly prioritize grammar instruction and test-taking practice at the expense of communicative activities, specifically to help students succeed in exams. For example, in a Vietnamese study, one teacher remarked that while communicative tasks were beneficial, they "are just good for improving speaking skills" and "not really useful for students to do well in the exam" (Dao & Newton, 2021).

In the Malaysian context, the dominance of exam preparation is likewise seen as a barrier to TBLT. Ambigapathy (2002) famously noted that Malaysian students often emerge from an English education that prioritizes grammatical accuracy for exams but lack the ability to communicate in the language. The result, as several pointed out, is that TBLT can be deemed "impractical" for exam-oriented teaching, even if it is pedagogically sound. Some instructors attempt to reconcile this tension by blending approaches—integrating short task-based activities but then teaching "to the test" in the same course (Musazay, 2017).

In summary, Theme 1 highlights a critical insight: The hypothetical communicative promise of TBLT strongly attracts teachers, but the pressures of an exam-oriented system act as a significant deterrent to its full implementation. Addressing this divide requires changes not only in instructors' mindset but in a broader sense, among policymakers.

Theme 2: Collaborative Ideals vs. Practical Classroom Constraints Ideal of collaborative learning

Another key reason many instructors favour TBLT is due to its promotion of collaborative, student-centred learning. In our survey, 37 out of 48 instructors (77.1%) agreed that TBLT "creates a collaborative learning environment" (Table 3.1). In the TBLT classroom, students often work in pairs or groups to accomplish tasks, which can foster teamwork, peer learning, and a sense of community. This reflects one of TBLT's pedagogical ideals: learners collaborating to negotiate meaning and jointly solve problems, which not only improves language skills but also builds confidence and social skills. Such experiences align with findings by Meng and Cheng (2010) that working in groups can increase learner satisfaction and involvement. From the teachers' perspective, these are highly desirable ideal outcomes: a lively classroom where students are active, engage with one another in English, and learn cooperatively.

Furthermore, TBLT's collaborative approach corresponds with constructivist principles in education, where knowledge is constructed through social interaction. By having students use the target language to accomplish meaningful tasks together, TBLT implements Vygotskian ideas of learning through interaction in the "zone of proximal development" known as ZPD, where peers can scaffold each other's learning. The instructors in our study valued this aspect; 33 respondents (68.8%) agreed that TBLT "encourages learners' intrinsic motivation" (see Table 3.1), which suggests that working in groups on interesting tasks keeps students motivated in class. The ideal scenario imagined by these teachers is one of active, collaborative learning: students in groups practicing real communication, motivating one another, and taking responsibilities of their own learning process while the instructor facilitates, when necessary, in the background. This vision is very much in line with the learner-centred, collaborative ideals promoted in modern TESL training and literature (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Classroom realities and constraints.

In practice, however, realizing these collaborative ideals is not always straightforward. Teachers must contend with various classroom constraints that can hinder the smooth implementation of group tasks. One significant issue mentioned was class size. Several instructors pointed out that conducting interactive group tasks is challenging in large classes – a common scenario in public universities. Indeed, when asked about TBLT's suitability for their context, only 23 instructors (47.9%) agreed that "TBLT is appropriate for small group work" (Table 3.1). This is considered a low percentage which also insinuates contradiction, as many teachers are unsure if they can effectively manage group tasks, especially if "small group work" is hard to achieve due to a large

classroom. On this note, it highlights common classroom management challenge, which is executing tasks with large group work can be difficult as instructors not only have to maintain control but also ensure the participation of each group member. Such concerns echo Jeon and Hahn's (2006) findings that the need for discipline and control in large classrooms made Korean teachers hesitant about TBLT.

Classroom realities like these can dampen instructors' perceptions of collaborative learning via TBLT. Even in contexts where teachers are "optimistic" about TBLT, factors such as large class size, mixed abilities, and insufficient class time lead to concerns that TBLT's objectives might not be met (Shin & Kim, 2012). Shin and Kim, studying Korean high school teachers, noted that while teachers valued tasks, they often felt constrained by practicalities – e.g., lack of time to implement tasks fully, difficulties with existing textbooks, and the challenge of catering to varying proficiency levels (as cited in Kim, 2019). Our study's responds mirror those concerns. This experience is common in task-based lessons, with their multiple stages (pre-task preparation, task performance, and post-task sharing). These stages require more time than a traditional lecture or drill which complies with the timing of the syllabus schedule.

In summary, Theme 2 compares the ideal collaborative environment that TBLT can create with the practical constraints of real classrooms that teachers must navigate. These findings reinforce the idea that context matters greatly in TBLT implementation. Success with TBLT not only requires teacher willingness but also feasible class conditions – a sentiment echoed in the literature on TBLT in Asia (Carless, 2007; Littlewood, 2007). To bridge this gap, teachers may need training in classroom management strategies specific to task work (e.g., how to efficiently brief and debrief tasks, how to form groups, how to monitor multiple groups) and possibly support in terms of smaller class policies or teaching assistants for large classes.

Theme 3: Preparation Demands and Resource Gaps Demanding lesson preparation and implementation

The third theme centres on the significant preparation and resource demands that come with TBLT, which can deter instructors from using it despite recognizing its benefits. Compared to more traditional, textbook-driven approaches, TBLT often requires teachers to invest extra time and effort in planning. In our survey results, 3 of the 5 instructors who avoided TBLT (60% of avoiders, or 6.3% of the total sample) admitted that they do not use TBLT because "TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches" (Table 3.2). Designing task-based lessons often means creating custom tasks or adapting materials, anticipating potential student difficulties, and preparing any necessary task prompts or aids. During implementation, the teacher must facilitate rather than giving direct instruction, which can be more mentally taxing as they monitor and guide multiple groups. All of this can be seen as extra workload on top of the usual duties of teaching, grading, and administrative tasks, especially if the curriculum is not already task-based.

Our findings reinforce observations from other research that pinpoint lack of time and extensive preparation requirements as common teacher concerns with TBLT. Jeon and Hahn (2006) noted that Korean teachers felt TBLT would consume too much class time and preparation time. Similarly, in a more recent case, Kim (2019) reported that identifying and designing suitable target tasks can be challenging in EFL contexts. Teachers have to imagine what "real-world" tasks their learners might use English for and then create classroom tasks to simulate those situations, which is a creative process that not all educators feel confident or prepared to do. This daunting part of creating tasks that aligned with syllabus goals and student needs can lead to burnout, what one might call innovation fatigue, simply because the "extra work" done goes unacknowledged. Several studies confirm that designing tasks that are both pedagogically sound (East, 2012; Van den Branden, 2009) and aligned with external syllabus demands (Valli & Buese, 2007) places a significant cognitive and time burden on teachers. Consequently, instructors stick to more familiar teacher-centred methods because they do not have the capacity to constantly develop task materials. This echoes what Musazay (2017) found: if teachers feel unsure about how to effectively implement TBLT or find it too burdensome, they may revert to their comfort zone of traditional pedagogy. Indeed, it is not a mere resistance to change among the instructors; it is often a rational response to an unsustainable workload as well as potential burnout.

Resource and knowledge gaps.

Alongside time and effort, teachers also highlighted insufficient resources and support for TBLT. A prominent

issue is that many textbooks and curricular materials are not TBLT-friendly. In our survey, 2 out of 5 avoiders (4.2% of total respondents) agreed that "materials in the textbook are not proper to use [for] TBLT" (Table 3.2), as the prescribed textbooks often contain mainly structured exercises and present-practice-produce activities, which are a far cry from authentic tasks. This observation aligns with Cao's (2018) report that in many Asian universities, commercial textbooks do not adequately support TBLT. They tend to follow a synthetic syllabus or PPP approach (Present–Practice–Produce), representing a weak form of communicative teaching that still centres on specific language forms (Viet, 2014). As a result, instructors who wish to implement TBLT must exercise substantial creativity and adaptation, in which they should be able to instinctively repurpose textbook activities into more open-ended tasks or develop new materials altogether. Ellis (2003) pointed out that many textbook "tasks" lack interactional authenticity, meaning they are not truly communicative in nature. This represents a resource gap: the curricular tools teachers are given are misaligned with TBLT methodology. Unless institutions provide task-based modules or additional task resources, the burden falls on individual teachers to solve this, contributing to the preparation overload discussed earlier.

Another crucial resource gap is in teacher training and knowledge. Implementing TBLT requires not only time and materials but also a solid understanding of task design and facilitation. In our study, 2 avoiders (4.2% of respondents) admitted they have "little knowledge of TBLT" (see Table 3.2), suggesting that lack of expertise was a reason they steered away from the approach. While our sample was intentionally chosen from TESL and linguistics backgrounds (where one might expect exposure to TBLT), it appears some instructors still did not feel well-prepared to use it. Barrot (2017) contends that many ESL teachers, even if aware of TBLT in theory, do not fully grasp how to implement it effectively in their classrooms. Without hands-on training or experience, teachers might fear misapplying TBLT or not achieving desired outcomes, thus avoiding it altogether. Clearly, teacher expertise and belief are a pivotal factor: enthusiasm for TBLT must be matched with sufficient knowledge and skills to implement it; if not it can give ways to frustration.

Although only one respondent among the avoiders ticked the item "difficulties in assessing learner task-based performance" (see Table 3.2), it is worth investigating the underlying issue. This can be related to task-based assessment, known as TBA, in which learners are expected not only to demonstrate their ability to use the language but also to understand its usage with regard to topical, social and pragmatic knowledge (Norris,2016). Hence, it allows the students to engage in meaningful oral interactions. However, it poses difficulties to the instructors as traditional assessment does not value communicative performance, and it also implies the need for assessment literacy for TBLT.

It can be stipulated in Theme 3 that the approach, for all its benefits, demands investment of time, materials, and teacher training that many instructors in our context struggle to afford. These findings agree with the comprehensive literature on TBLT implementation. For example, a review by East (2017) notes that insufficient resources and support are commonly cited constraints by teachers across various countries implementing TBLT. Our study adds specific evidence from Malaysia: without structural support (such as TBLT-aligned textbooks, reasonable class sizes and teaching loads, and targeted training), even willing instructors find it challenging to practise TBLT consistently. Addressing these preparation and resource gaps is essential for bridging the divide between TBLT as a promising contemporary approach with common classroom practices.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to examine why Malaysian ESL instructors choose to implement or avoid TBLT. The findings revealed that an overwhelming majority of instructors recognize TBLT's educational merits mainly its power to boost student interaction, communication skills, and collaborative learning. This reflects a positive orientation toward communicative language teaching principles within our context. At the same time, the study brought to light the factors that mitigate this enthusiasm, which are the prevalent exam-oriented culture, practical classroom management issues, as well as significant time and resource demands related to TBLT. Consequently, instructors are caught between applying innovative teaching approaches in the classroom and fulfilling roles in exam-oriented settings. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on TBLT by providing empirical evidence from the Malaysian context that contextual constraints, especially the exam-driven educational system which are perhaps the primary barrier to TBLT implementation, rather than teacher attitudinal resistance.

From a practical standpoint, the study yields several actionable implications for bridging the gap between TBLT's promise and classroom practice:

Aligning Teacher Training with Contextual Needs

Professional development programs should go beyond simply advocating TBLT's benefits and address how to implement TBLT within an exam-oriented system. This means training teachers in designing assessment-compatible tasks – task activities that build communication skills while also helping students review content likely to be tested. Workshops could focus on creating task materials that target the same curricular objectives as exams (e.g., task-based approaches to practicing grammar points or reading skills that will appear in tests) so that teachers feel tasks are not at odds with exam preparation. Additionally, training should include concrete classroom management strategies for tasks (handling large classes, mixed proficiency grouping, timing, etc.) and techniques for informal assessment of task performance. By equipping teachers with these practical skills, teacher educators can increase instructors' confidence that TBLT can be done effectively under real-world constraints.

Provide Institutional Support and Resources

Educational authorities and administrators should recognize the extra demands of TBLT and support teachers accordingly. One implication is the need for TBLT-oriented teaching materials. Curriculum designers and textbook publishers ought to incorporate more authentic task-based activities into official teaching materials or at least provide supplementary task modules that teachers can readily use. If instructors have access to ready-made communicative tasks aligned with the syllabus (for example, a task bank accompanying each textbook unit), it will reduce their preparation burden. Another support mechanism is allocating sufficient curriculum time for task work. Rather than a syllabus crammed with content to "cover," curricula should be restructured to allow iterative task-based learning, acknowledging that such learning, while time-intensive, yields deeper skill development. School administrators can also encourage a more balanced assessment approach – for instance, by including project work or oral tasks as part of continuous assessment, which would benefit classroom use of TBLT. Finally, reducing class sizes or providing teaching assistants in large classes can greatly help teachers manage collaborative tasks. In short, institutional policies should strive to create an environment where the extra effort required for TBLT is recognized and supported (through resources, time, and possibly reward structures for teachers who innovate), rather than leaving individual teachers to single-handedly overcome systemic hurdles.

By implementing these implications, stakeholders can help close the distance between TBLT as supported in theory and its execution in practice. The ultimate beneficiary will be the students, who can enjoy a more communicative, engaging language education without sacrificing exam performance. Our study indicates that instructors are willing and eager to adopt approaches that benefit learners, provided the conditions enable them to do so. Thus, a collaborative effort is needed – from teachers, teacher trainers, material developers, and policymakers – to adapt the ecosystem of language teaching so that task-based pedagogy and exam preparation are not seen as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary. When communicative tasks become an integral, supported part of the curriculum rather than an "extra" that teachers squeeze in, the full potential of TBLT can be realized even in exam-oriented contexts.

Limitations and Future Research

It should be noted that this study was conducted within a specific institutional context and with a relatively small sample of 48 instructors. The number of TBLT "avoiders" was particularly small (N = 5), which, while reflective of the generally positive attitudes among the sample, means that the perspectives of resistant teachers are less represented. Future research could target a larger or more diverse sample, including those who may have stronger reservations about TBLT, possibly through qualitative case studies or interviews to delve deeper into their reasoning. Additionally, since our data relied on self-reported questionnaires, observational studies could complement these findings by examining how teachers implement or adapt TBLT in vivo under various constraints. Despite these limitations, the present study provides valuable insights that can inform both practice and further inquiry. It highlights that addressing the "last mile" of TBLT implementation – where teachers

translate an innovative method into their daily teaching – is crucial. Linking theory and practice requires understanding and addressing teachers' realities, a principle that extends beyond TBLT to other educational innovations as well.

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