

Teachers' Dual Vision from a Culturally Bound Angle: Student-teachers' Voices

Dr. Khaled M. El-ebyary

Curriculum and Methods of Instruction Dept.

Faculty of Education

Damanhour University, Egypt

Abstract

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) has become a well-known practice within different levels of language teaching in various parts of the world. However, research has generally acknowledged challenges in adopting TBLT in many foreign language teaching / learning contexts. Besides, there has been little interest in finding out whether the use of certain approaches (TBLT in our case) is compatible with the views that student teachers in the Egyptian context might have about teaching and learning. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of intensive TBLT training on student teachers' views (acceptability) and teaching practice (usability). It also focused on the extent to which intensive TBLT training would/would not alter any pre-conditioning state towards foreign language teaching. In addition to the training course, the current study involved the use of surveys, interviews and classroom observation. TBLT training led to positive views toward TBLT as an approach, but further findings revealed that participants' previous experience with English language learning still influence their use of the approach. Analysis of classroom observation during the practicum showed a paradox as tasks as work-plans aligned with TBLT, but tasks-in-process (implementation) were geared more towards traditional teaching approaches.

Keywords: task-based - language teaching - student teachers -acceptability - usability

Introduction

The relatively short history of language teaching and learning research has certainly seen rapid development over the last few decades. Such development has tended to be in the changing nature of question(s) researchers in the field have posed over the years. One of the early moves in this field of study was in search for the appropriate language teaching method (Klapper, 2001) and this more or less resulted in a gradual move away from traditional methods that focused on forms towards more communicative approaches to language teaching. A legitimate development of such a move was Task-based Language Teaching (henceforth TBLT), now a well-established approach in its own right. In this respect, Klapper (2003) states that TBLT is one version of communicative language teaching (CLT), i.e. it represents one aspect of development within the CLT theory. This viewpoint has often been re-stated by various researchers in different teaching/learning contexts (e.g. Esfandiari et al., 2012).

Background

Although TBLT has become a well-established approach in terms of syllabus design, classroom teaching and other aspects of teaching/assessment practices, there is no universally adopted definition of the approach. To Van den Branden et al. (2009), TBLT is

a model of second language education that (a) derives originally from various principles (e.g. holistic, learner-driven and communication-based), (b) places communication at the centre of teaching procedures, and (c) involves the performance of meaningful functional tasks using meaningful language. TBLT literature has witnessed considerable debate over, among other issues, the nature of tasks and, consequently, their intended focus. Such an issue has been the subject of heated discussions among researchers in the field. One major result has been what came to be known as focus on form vs. focus on meaning. Proponents of meaning (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1989; Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1998; Swan, 2005; Willis, 1996) criticized traditional form-focused approaches for being inefficient in meeting students' needs, leading to boring lessons, having unrealistic samples of language in use, ignoring language learning processes derived from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and producing failed beginners who would be demotivated. Advocates of this viewpoint believed that language teachers should focus on meaningful communication first even though pupils make language errors during their communication. Given that tasks can be designed to be as simple as doing a puzzle or as demanding as making a telephone airline booking. Willis (1996), therefore, refers to tasks as "activities where the target language is used by the learners for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (p.24). So, it has been suggested that by concentrating on meaning, learners are provided with opportunities to use the language that they have been taught in a natural

environment, i.e. their only concern being to complete the task with the language that they already know. In this respect, Willis & Willis (2007) state that “Our ultimate goal [in using TBLT] is to end up with a task that engages learners and generates as much meaningful use of language as possible” (p.156).

Similarly, Bygate et al. (2001) state that - in a task - learners are required to use language, with their emphasis on meaning, in order to achieve certain objective(s). Ellis (2003) therefore, suggests that TBLT is compatible with the predominant learner-centered philosophy in language teaching. Here, Ellis (2003) explains further by stating:

A task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world (p. 16).

Consequently, in order for a task to be successful, it has to be blurring the lines between the classroom and the actual language use in real world.

Yet, focus on meaning has been criticized for leading to ungrammatical errors and being insufficient for second language learning. For instance, Seedhouse

(1999) suggests that students often lower their language ability in order to complete the task. He further suggests that the language that they speak is similar to a pidgin. Subsequently, students would tend to lose focus on the language that they were using and concentrate on the meaning they were trying to convey to complete the task. Furthermore, if students do not have the skills to communicate or complete the task in the target language, this could hamper future inspiration to continue studying languages for these students. Focus on form is therefore described by Long and Crookes (1992) as using pedagogic tasks in a way that would raise students' awareness of the 'target language code' (p.71). This stance suggests that if pupils master grammar rules, they could communicate successfully when they have a chance to do so. Yet, the general criticism directed to TBLT has generally described the approach as being unsuitable for low-level learners (Bruton, 2002; Swan, 2005), lacking both theoretical and empirical support (Bruton, 2002; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005) and lacking sufficient focus on form (Burrows, 2008; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005).

However, development in understanding TBLT has led some researchers such as Ellis (2003) to distinguish between 'unfocused' and 'focused' tasks. In unfocused tasks, there is no attempt to entrap language learners into using specific linguistics elements, while focused tasks try to stimulate language learners to 'process, receptively or productively, a predetermined linguistic feature'. Nevertheless, focused tasks would encourage

communi- cative language use and “target the use of a particular, predetermined target feature in meaning-centered communication” (p.65).

It is worth mentioning however, that a consensus definition of task and task focus remains unsettled. The literature has a diversity of definitions in which each draws attention to specific aspect(s) of TBLT (Johnson, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 1993). In this respect, Long (1997) states that focus on form and focus on meaning have problems, which, as Long (1997) describes, often lead to further pendulum swings, as supporters of one side erroneously perceive defects in the opponent position as rationalization for their own. Despite the heated debate between proponents and opponents, none of them can deny that it should be clear to language learners that both meaning and form must be central priorities in the instruction process.

Task Design and Implementation

Task design characteristics have been linked to a number of frameworks in the literature. One important framework is Willis’s (1996), which consists of three major stages: pre-task, task cycle and post task. The pre-task (also called priming stage) “prepare[s] students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition” (Ellis 2003, p.244). This can be through introducing useful and necessary lexis and preparing students for the content of the task to come. The task cycle, the main section of the lesson, facilitates second language acquisition as activities are designed to provide opportunities to negotiate for meaning (NfM)

and notice formal features of the input and the gap between the input and interlanguage (fluency, accuracy and complexity). This stage consists of the task itself, planning and reporting to small or large groups in the classroom. This stage involves what Prabhu (1987) describes as the 'process of thought', which is "cognitive thought stimulated by the task" (Prabhu, 1987). It is meant to get the students to connect given instruction and information they already know from the real-world. Planning and reporting to whole class (or strategic planning as described by Ellis, 2003) aims at reducing the cognitive load learners experience during the task, as result of making more use of their memory-based system, and thus, Skehan (1998) explains, allowing them to focus on fluency. To Nunan (2004), TBLT should have the right balance between accuracy and fluency. Thus, TBLT does not neglect the importance of teaching grammatical structures and hence the final stage of Willis's (1996) framework, i.e. language analysis. In this stage, the teacher focuses on the relevant parts from the lesson for the students to analyse. S/he might urge students to notice certain language forms. The teacher would explicitly highlight the language that the students used during the report phase. Form, explains Klapper (2003), is therefore taught through communication rather than in isolation. Here, Nunan (2004) points out that TBLT strengthens authentic content-oriented language learning rather than focuses on linguistic forms.

However, various studies in the literature (e.g., Van den Branden, 2006) have illustrated the extent to which previously designed tasks might change in classroom contexts. Such research refers to contexts where teachers and/or learners modify tasks once such tasks are used in specific classroom settings (e.g. Coughlan & Duff 1994; Ellis 2000; Samuda 2009). Using Breen's (1987) terminology, instructors might convert 'task-as-work plan' into 'task-in-action' when they are in the classroom (Breen 1987:24-25). At the design level, a task is often considered a mere work plan. From a psycholinguistic perspective, task-as-work plan is seen as having the potential to determine opportunities for language use and learning (Ellis, 2000). According to such claims, tasks should be designed to allow opportunities for negotiation for meaning (Long, 1983 and 1996), output (Swain, 1985 and 1995) or production of fluent, accurate or complex language (Skehan, 1998). A workplan, describes Breen (1989), is only ever an "idealisation" that will be reconstructed by the students and led by the teacher in the classroom. Such reconstruction is known as task-in-process. This is the dialogic processes learners engage in while performing a task and such processes work on shaping language use and learning (Ellis, 2000). This highlights, ever more so, the need for a dual vision (Van Lier, 1996) and that the necessity for teachers to think on their feet is paramount. Of key importance here is the idea that learners will interpret the task each in his/her own way and hence (a) language produced

collaborative-ely is acquired (Lantolf, 2000) and (b) one speaker can assist (or scaffold) another in performing a task he/she cannot perform alone (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). In this regard, Scrivener (2005) states that although this is likely to increase the amount of stress a teacher may feel in class, stress levels are likely to decrease with experience and the acquisition of alternative strategies.

Previous Studies

Various research studies have shown interest in evaluating CLT in general and TBLT in specific in non-western contexts. Some of the studies were concerned with examining the beliefs, attitudes and motivation of either/both teachers or/and students while others looked at the impact of using such approaches on students' language performance and yet other studies focused on the constraints that emerged in teaching, learning and assessment. Such studies were carried out in various contexts including, but not limited to, Japan, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Korea and Malaysia. Examples are Sato's (2010) study in Japan, Beibei and Xueping's (2007) study in Russia, and Carless's (2003) in Hong Kong. Although some of the studies found in the literature have given controversial results, many still emphasized the potential within TBLT. Researchers such as Ho and Wong (as cited in Littlewood, 2007, p. 246) report that teaching approaches such as TBLT, which originated Western educational contexts was generally perceived as incompatible with the demands of public assessment and sometimes in conflict with

certain educational values in the non-Western contexts. Other studies reported contextual constraints as the main impediments to the success of approaches such as TBLT. In this respect, Xiongyong and Samuel (2011) conducted a study which focused on identifying challenges and possibilities in TBLT implementation in China. The researchers examined EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and the impact on their classroom practices. Results of the study revealed a higher level of understanding of TBLT concepts among those teachers and that most teachers involved in the study held positive attitudes toward TBLT implementation. However, large-sized class and difficulty in evaluating students' task-based performance were the major impediments to the use of TBLT.

Adopting an Action Research approach, Ruso (2007) examined applying TBLT to a traditional EFL classroom context in Turkey with the aim of finding answers to certain problems such as poor learner motivation. In the study, learners' views about TBLT were examined through a question-naire, diaries and semi-structured interviews. Results showed that implementing a TBLT approach in such EFL classes created variety for the students. Moreover it improved their learning, as the TBLT tasks used in the study were seen to be encouraging student participation and leading to significant developments concerning their language performance. Participants revealed that they did not prefer teacher-directed lessons where enough opportunities to express themselves in the target language were unavailable.

Similarly, Ismaili (2013) carried out a study to examine the effectiveness of the task-based learning approach on the development of students' speaking skills in academic settings. Results indicated that task-based teaching offers 'variety' for learners as the approach can improve learning. The research also referred to the positive attitudes of the students towards TBLT. They were also able to acquire new linguistic knowledge. The author concludes that TBLT was found to be very beneficial in mixed ability classrooms as it supports cooperative learning.

The Current Study

Research Context and Problem

Having established a highly examination-oriented system under Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798, successive education systems in Egypt have maintained the same orientation, be it for military, political or supremacy purposes (Hargreaves, 2001). Despite such orientation, the Egyptian Ministry of Education has embraced CLT in teaching English as a foreign language. Schools have less freedom, generally, on the selection of materials either at the provincial or the municipal levels, i.e. course books (students' books and teachers' guides) are provided at a national level. While the content of such textbooks cater for the four language skills as well as the language system, at the practical level teachers tend to teach to the test whether inside the classrooms or in their private tutoring as pupils' progression to any subsequent educational stages is often determined by achievement.

In alignment with the policy of the Ministry of Education, the EFL student teacher training programme at Damanhour Faculty of Education trains student teachers in diverse pedagogical innovations and, as a part of their training, the teaching methodology course for third year EFL students teachers provides a general background of some teaching methods (i.e. starting with grammar translation and ending with CLT) and some skills that they will use in the future (e.g. lesson planning and classroom management). Similarly, the course for fourth year EFL student teachers is intended to focus on the use of CLT in teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar. Although the course familiarized the students with CLT and enables them to plan and micro-teach lesson accordingly, it enhances a weak version of CLT. The training course designed in the current study gave particular attention to TBLT. Students were required to use TBLT to peer teach in microteaching sessions, and to teach actual pupils in the practicum. Junior staff members at the faculty supervise the microteaching sessions and Ministry of Education supervisors supervise the practicum. As the current researcher claims that the voices of EFL student teachers generally go unheard and their perception and use of approaches enforced by the Ministry of Education is often under-researched, this study examines the impact of an intensive TBLT training on student teachers' views (acceptability) and teaching practice (usability). It also focuses on the extent to which intensive TBLT training

would/would not alter any pre-conditioning state of student-teachers' views of how foreign language should be taught.

Research questions

This study examined the following main question:

- What is the impact of intensive TBLT training of EFL student teachers on its acceptability and usability?

In order to provide answers to such a question, three sub-questions were formulated. These were:

1. What are the student teachers' views of how English is best taught prior to TBLT training?
2. How far do student teachers' views of how English is best taught change after TBLT training?
3. How far do student teachers use TBLT after the training?
4. How far do student teachers' tasks-in-process conform to/differ from their original views of how English should be taught?

Participants and Study Delimitations

As the current study was delimited to fourth year student teachers studying EFL methodology course at Damanshour Faculty of Education, the participants involved in this study were 88. At the time this study was carried out, the students' age varied between 20 and 22. Females comprised 98% of the cohort and such gender-biased cohort was not deliberate, but it is a true representation of the actual student teachers population. However, gender was not dealt with as a

variable in this study. When asked about their pre-university schooling, 92% of the participants attended large classes at governmental schools (average between 30 and 50) some of which were located in rural areas (41%) and others in urban ones (59%) (See figure 1).

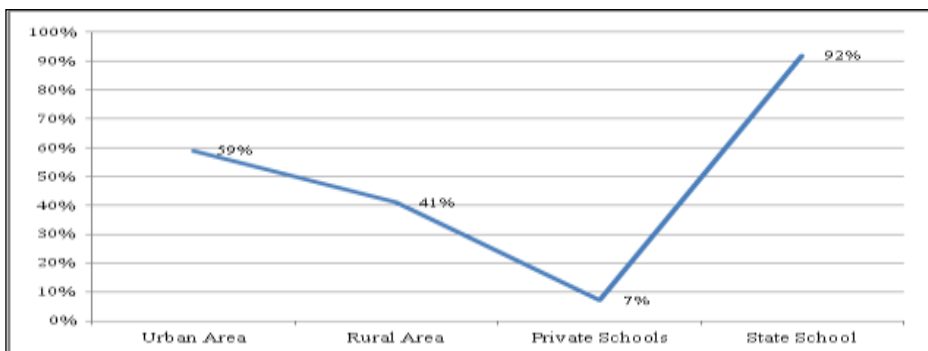


Figure 1. Participants Previous School Settings

Table 1. Participants ' Marks in the Teaching Methodology Course

		Frequency	Per cent
Result of Teaching Methodology Course	Distinction	10	11.4
	Very Good	51	58.0
	Good	26	29.5
	Pass	1	1.1
	Total	88	100.0

The majority of participants (85%) started learning English at the age of 6. Furthermore, none of the sample involved here has ever studied in or travelled to an English speaking country. Likewise, none ever took any internationally recognized language tests such as TOEFL or IELTS, but all scored highly at English at the secondary school certificate exam in

which 42% of participants scored 45 out of 50, and the rest scored even higher. Similarly, when asked about their scores at the teaching methodology course in the previous year, participants maintained high scores as 51% scored 'very good' and 26% scored 'good' (see table 1 above). Hence, the sample was homogenous in ways more than one.

The TBLT Course

Studying teaching methodology at the faculty of education occurred at third and fourth years. TAs mentioned earlier in this study, third year course generally aimed to introduce teaching methods (e.g. grammar translation, audio lingual, suggestopedia ... etc.) in addition to classroom management strategies and lesson planning skills. At fourth year, student teachers study the use of CLT in teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar. The intensive TBLT course designed for this study aimed at enabling student teachers to a) recognize the relationship between CLT and TBLT, b) identify major TBLT frameworks and c) plan and teach lessons using TBLT. The content of the course included (a) a critical view of the different teaching methodologies, (b) communicative competence, (c) weak vs. strong version of CLT, (d) TBLT overview and research, (e) TBLT design and planning, (f) TBLT and interaction patterns, (g) Task-based language assessment and (h) evaluation of TBLT lessons. Course teaching was undertaken through a combination of full group lectures and microteaching sessions providing opportunities for

critical reading and discussion, and for preparation of task materials. Each session lasted for 2 hours and was followed by 1-hour microteaching session in which students split into non-concurring microteaching session groups. Readings were provided week by week and students were expected to prepare these before coming to class. The course textbooks were mainly Willis (1996) and Ellis (2000). Based on Unit 16 (Tourism Today) in second year secondary student book, the student teachers were assigned a task in which they were required to plan, design and implement a 30-minutes task-based lesson. A student teacher would teach his/her task twice: once at a microteaching session (in which opportunities for peer feedback is available) and another at the practicum (which involves actual pupils at school and feedback from a supervisor). They were asked to demonstrate the task in three stages: task-as-work plan, task-in-process, and task outcomes.

Design, Techniques and Data Collection

The study aimed to examine the impact of intensive TBLT training on student teachers' views (acceptability) and teaching practice (usability). It also focused on the extent to which intensive TBLT training would/would not alter any pre-conditioning state towards how English is best taught. As seen in Table 2, the study adopted a qualitative approach that involved the following procedures:

- a. a pre-training questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to collect data about student-teachers' views of how English is best taught,

- b. the TBLT training course,
- c. classroom observation of tasks being implemented at the practicum, and
- d. post training questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Table 2. The Study Data

Instrument	No of Respondents
Pre-treatment semi-structured interviews	15
Pre-treatment questionnaire	88
Task-as-work plan for microteaching sessions	88
Task-as-work plan for practicum lessons	88
Practicum observations (task-in-process)	10
Post treatment semi-structured interviews	15
Post treatment questionnaire	84

It is worth mentioning here that no tasks were filmed for ethical reasons. Having lived in small villages, most of the participants (being females) preferred not to appear in the video when the researcher sought their consent to video recording. As a result, classroom observation was employed, which turned out to be beneficial to the feasibility of this study because interviews (as well as informal discussions) with observed student teachers were undertaken immediately after the lessons.

Results

This paper mainly examined the main question “What is the impact of the intensive TBLT training on EFL student teachers?”. In order to do so, four sub-questions were formulated. In this section, results obtained to such questions are respectively presented.

Q1. What are the student teachers' views of how English is best taught?

In examining participants' past experience with English language learning, it was obvious that the participants' previous experience generally aligned with traditional approaches to language teaching (see table 3 below). Out of 88 participants, 71% labeled language instruction as generally form-oriented and 20% thought that teachers targeted communication. Similarly, 65% disagreed that teachers explained grammar rules only when necessary for communication. The majority (84%) described the language of instruction in their English classrooms as mainly Arabic. Furthermore, 70% showed that accuracy, rather than fluency, was targeted by teachers. While participants referred to the constant correction of grammatical errors (81%), less attention was given to pronunciation errors (54%). Attention given to grammar, rather than pronunciation, mainly aligned with the needs to prepare students to do well in the final examinations, which tested knowledge of grammar and not pronunciation, i.e. the aim was not language accuracy as such, but it was responding accurately to the questions of grammar in the final test. Following the same line of thought, participants thought of their roles as learners in terms of memorizing grammar rules (87%) and vocabulary lists (92%). On the other hand, few participants (20%) agreed that their English language learning experiences focused on communication and slightly more participants (32%

and 33%) thought teachers created such communicative and interactive learning atmosphere. Data collected also showed awareness of the significance of 'communication' as the intended outcome of the process of language learning and teaching. Even though 89% of participants thought communication was important, in the interviews this was not mentioned as an aspect of the good teaching they had experienced themselves.

Table 3. Participants' past experience with language learning

	Item	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't Remember (%)
a	English teaching in my school focused mainly on grammar rules and this helped us communicate.	71	28	1
b	The language used in the classroom by my English teacher was mostly Arabic.	84	15	1
c	Our focus in class was on communication, and the teacher would explain grammar when necessary.	20	65	15
d	My English teacher often designed activities to mainly have us interact in English even if we made errors.	33	54	13
e	Our pronunciation errors were often corrected on the spot throughout the lesson.	54	38	8
f	Our grammatical errors were often corrected on the spot throughout the lesson.	81	9	10
g	It was important for us to memorize grammar rules.	87	13	0
h	It was important for us to memorize vocabulary lists.	92	8	0
i	My English teacher often created an atmosphere for us to communicate in English.	32	59	9
j	Our focus in class was on accuracy rather than fluency.	70	16	14
k	The aim of teaching English was to help us communicate.	100	0	0

These issues were investigated further in the interviews. In terms of teachers' roles, the conventional roles of teachers were emphasized. It was also revealed that those students still considered role-playing with pre-defined language as being communicative and interactive activities. Such perception would probably justify why 32% and 33% of participants thought of their classroom as communicative and interactive. When prompted about what they could remember about their own best teacher, they indicated that such teachers were those who helped them get higher marks in high stakes tests. Those teachers focused most on grammar and vocabulary plus some aspects of reading and writing. It was even revealed that those learners were given previously written paragraphs to memorize. Such paragraphs addressed topics that were likely to be included in final tests. As plan B, one interviewee mentioned that when she was a pupil at school, her teachers were even keen to train pupils to memorize generic simple mistake-proof sentences that can be used in writing a paragraph on whatever topics in the exam regardless of what teaching writing is all about. Examples of such sentences were:

It's a worldwide fact that ... [pupils insert the topic given in the prompt]... is so important and can play a vital role in our life as individuals on one hand and can change the shape of life all over the world on the other hand. First of all, it has a lot of good effects and advantages which if well-exploited, will change and modify our life completely to the best so we should do our best to develop it by all possible means. In my opinion, it's the golden key to a happy life full of peace and success. If it has any bad effects or disadvantages, they will be of no

importance, if outweighed by its marvellous merits and benefits.

As for participants' reflection on their experience as student teachers, the data collected examined their views of how language is best taught. In this respect, it was obvious that although many participants thought that learning a language is learning to communicate in this language, considerable numbers highlighted the extreme importance of mastering forms. In this respect, 66% still thought that focusing on forms would lead to communication if the chance arises. 66% of participants also believed that Arabic should be frequently used in class to assure comprehension. Therefore, more than 70% emphasized the importance of memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary lists. This was reflected in their rating of the significance of accuracy (84%) over fluency (16%) (See table 4).

Table 4. Participants' current experience with language teaching

	Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not Sure (%)
a	If pupils master grammar rules, they can communicate successfully when they have a chance to do so.	76	24	0
b	I believe Arabic should be frequently used in English class for better understanding of the lessons.	70	19	11
c	EFL teachers should focus on communication first even though pupils make language errors during their communication	73	27	0
d	EFL teachers should help their pupils get their messages across even though they make language mistakes.	73	9	17
e	It is important for the teacher to immediately correct students' grammatical errors in class.	89	11	0

	Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not Sure (%)
f	It is important for the teacher to immediately correct students' pronunciation errors in class.	70	30	0
g	I believe the more grammar rules pupils memorize, the better they are at learning English.	77	23	0
h	I believe the more vocabulary pupils memorize, the better they are at learning English.	79	20	0
i	Teachers should create an atmosphere for pupils to communicate in English.	74	26	0
j	Teaching EFL should focus on accuracy rather than fluency.	84	16	0
k	The aim of teaching English is communication.	100	0	0

Overall, data analysed to answer the first research question indicated that, as student teachers, views of how English should be taught were very much consistent with how they were taught English at schools. Such experiences fostered forms because of the nature of high stakes examinations and the pressure such examinations had over the teaching/learning context.

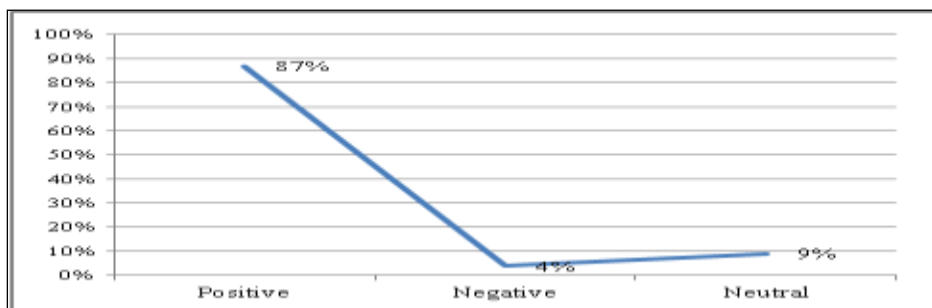
Q2. What are the student teachers' views of how English is best taught after TBLT training?

The second research question also examined whether or not student teachers' views on how language should be taught would change as a result of TBLT training. Data collected from the post-training questionnaire (see table 5) showed no change in relation to student teachers' views about the significance of 'communication' as the intended outcome of the process of language teaching/ learning. This was supported by 84% of the participants who

thought teachers should design activities that would help pupils to practice English in real-life or real-life like situations. Although emphasis on the importance of grammar mastery and memorization of vocabulary lists had been stated by 77% and 79% respectively in the pre-training questionnaire, there was a significant alteration in views among participants concerning other issues. Data obtained from the post treatment questionnaire revealed that a considerable number of participants (49% and 37% correspondingly) disagreed to the absolute significance of grammar mastery and memorization of vocabulary lists shown in their earlier responses prior to training. More student teachers also started to move away from traditional views to consider focus on meaning as opposed to focus on forms. Clear examples of this were that 27% showed agreement that EFL should focus on accuracy, as compared to 59% disagreement prior to TBLT training, and that 57% thought that communication should be targeted even though this would involve students' making grammatical mistakes during communication.

Table 5. Post treatment questionnaire

	Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not Sure (%)
a	EFL teachers should focus on grammar as mastery of grammar rules can eventually lead to communication.	41	49	10
b	EFL teachers should encourage pupils to memorize vocabulary lists.	47	37	16
c	EFL teachers should focus on communication first even though pupils make language errors during communication.	57	29	14
d	Teaching EFL should focus on accuracy rather than fluency.	27	59	14
e	The formal study of grammar is essential to eventual mastery of EFL.	46	19	35
f	I believe my English improves most quickly if I study and practice the grammar rules.	55	34	11
g	Grammar rules should be explicitly explained in class.	65	23	12
h	Learning English by practicing the language in communicative activities is essential to eventual mastery of a foreign language	94	1	5
i	A teacher should create an atmosphere in the classroom to encourage interaction as a class or in groups.	97	1	1
j	Teachers should design activities that would help pupils to practice English in real-life or real-life like situations	84	14	2
k	The aim of English language teaching is communication	100	0	0

**Figure 2. Participants' Attitudes towards TBLT**

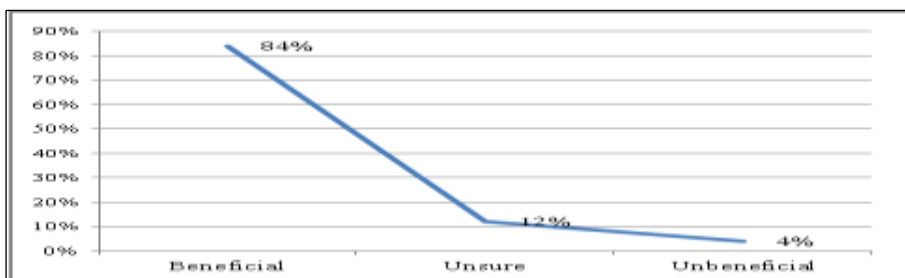


Figure 3. Participants' Perception of the Benefit of TBLT

It is worth mentioning that this research question also focused on student teachers' attitudes, particularly towards TBLT after the training, as well as their perception of the benefit of such an approach. The data elicited to address such an issue was obtained from the post-training questionnaire and the interviews. This data was meant to examine the extent to which student teachers accepted TBLT and this, at that point, might be indicative of the likelihood of using it. The majority of participants (87%) showed positive attitudes towards TBLT and a similar percentage (84%) saw such an approach as beneficial. Interviews with participants ascertained such positive attitudes. Many interviewees expressed understanding that it is imperative for EFL teachers to have the necessary knowledge and develop the required skills needed to use TBLT efficiently.

Q3. How far do student teachers use TBLT after TBLT training?

The third research question in this study aimed to examine whether or not student teachers actually used TBLT and if so, the extent they used it in the microteaching sessions and the practicum. As mentioned earlier in this study, participants were

required to 'demonstrate the capability of designing and implementing a 30 minutes long TBLT lesson' for the microteaching and for the practicum at schools. Initially, in the post-training questionnaire students were asked about their use of TBLT, as compared to other approaches. Data showed that the majority of student teachers (81%) used TBLT in their microteaching. Although the result might seem impressive, this was interpreted as a logical result as designing and implementing a TBLT lesson was a course requirement. Nonetheless, 5% of participants used TPR and 13% specifically used grammar translation rather than any of the other less traditional approaches (e.g. PPP) (see figure 4). As for the microteaching task, most student teachers were resourceful adapting an elementary task from One Stop English (see <http://www.onestopenglish.com>). The lesson procedures followed the lesson plan suggested on the website and the researcher could not determine whether the student teachers actually wanted to use TBLT.

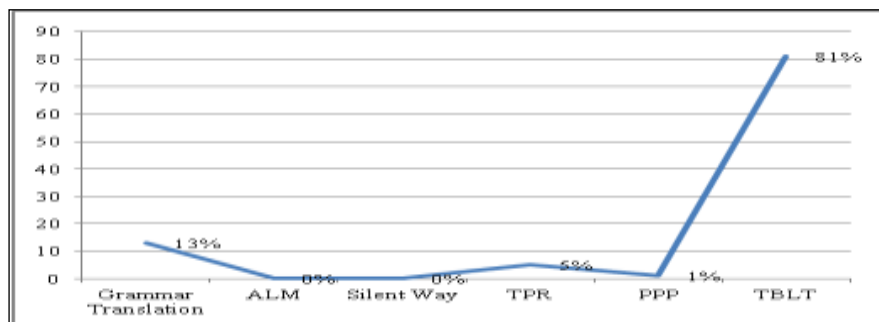


Figure 4. Participants' Use of Teaching Methods in Microteaching

However, the finding obtained here was seen as significant by this researcher because it would be symptomatic of whether or not TBLT use would extend beyond the microteaching, i.e. practicum data collected from participants about the use of teaching approaches at schools (during teaching practice) was interesting. TBLT shifted to be extremely unpopular among the majority of student teachers as only 12% reported use of TBLT in the practicum. This result was significant in itself as these student teachers were a few months away from graduation and obtaining full time teaching jobs. Surprisingly, PPP and grammar translation were adopted by a considerable number of student teachers. It was obvious that 56% of student teachers preferred to use PPP and 24% used the grammar translation approach. A small number of student teachers (5%) used TPR and none of them used audio lingual or the silent way (see figure 5).

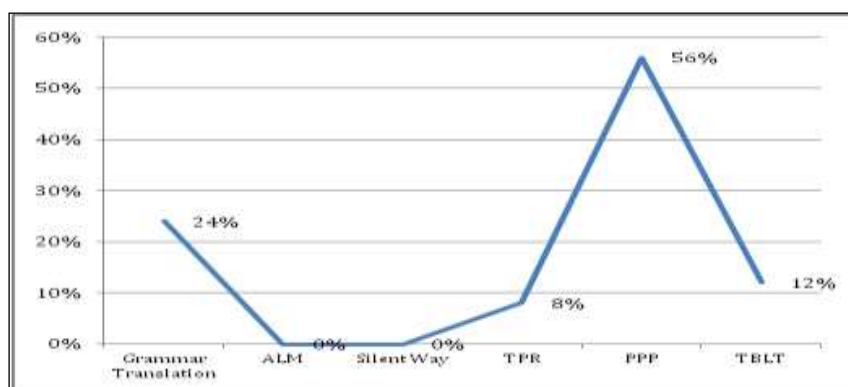


Figure 5. Participants' Use of Teaching Methods in TP

Further investigation of such a paradox was sought in the interviews, which were informative to this researcher. It was interesting that one participant related teaching approaches used during the practicum to what can be literally translated as 'safety'. According to this participant, specific teaching approaches such as TBLT were seen as 'unsafe'. To this particular participant, full time teachers are generally not concerned with developing pupils' communicative ability as much as their concern with the consequences on pupils' future, i.e. scoring high in final examinations. Another interesting issue elicited from the interviews with another participant was the idea of 'familiarity' and 'the fear of change'. Data revealed that participants believed that their pupils were used to the more traditional approaches, which seem to be capable of preparing them for the final examinations. Another dimension brought to the interviews was what one participant referred to as 'the danger' of adopting approaches to language teaching that can be considered generally untried specifically with particular pupils. Another concern pinpointed during the interviews was the unknown reaction on the part of parents and the community to the use of an approach that might/might not fulfil their desired objective (high scores). According to this interviewee, most language teachers do private tutoring after school and such teachers would risk their reputation should they adopt 'untested' and 'less-trusted' approaches that might not produce the desired performance in summative tests. In

fact, the exam-oriented context forced various student teachers in this study to consider the traditional approaches risk-proof. For them, there are possible risks when adopting TBLT as the approach. Other participants however, discussed concerns similar to those raised in several studies undertaken in similar EFL context. One student teacher stated:

I tried hard, but being a teacher of a monolingual classroom, the students consistently use their L1 instead of the L2 when working in pairs or groups, thus not benefiting from the opportunities to practice the L1. Many pupils in my class are conscious about their errors. Just like in other classes, the English class is about getting the "right" answer rather than communicating.

Another student teacher put forward the following statement:

Most tasks depend on group or pair work, but how would such tasks be implemented in my class which had 46 pupils?

A typical concern was :

I think that most of my students become afraid to lose face when it comes to communicating in English. They therefore become shy by choice or prefer to be considered so by their teacher as this would be an acceptable excuse for many of them. As a student teacher, I find it difficult to ask them to communicate in English and keep the flow of the interaction goin'.

So, results of this question suggested that student teachers used TBLT in the microteaching and did not use it in the practicum. Participants by and large adopted defensive attitudes during the interviews when they wanted to justify the fact that they preferred more traditional approaches, which would align with the summative assessment system, and also that they were still influenced by the way their own teachers used to teach them.

Q4. How far do student teachers' tasks-in-process actually conform to the views of participants towards how English should be taught?

Students involved in this study, as mentioned earlier, were each assigned a task in which they were required to design and implement a task-based lesson. The lesson would be taught in the microteaching session and then again in the practicum at school. They were asked to demonstrate the task in three stages: task-as-work plan, task-in-process, and task outcomes. Previous findings in this study revealed that TBLT was out of favour among the majority of student teachers because only 12% reported use of TBLT in TP as compared to 56% of student teachers preferring PPP and 24% preferring grammar translation. The fourth research question in this study aimed to examine whether or not intensive TBLT practice (task-in-process) among those who reported using such an approach in the practicum would really conform to

whatever views those students held towards how a foreign language should be taught. In answering the fourth research question, this section presents a sample of students' lessons prepared for the practicum. Data collected and analysed to answer this question came from the observation of 10 tasks taught during practicum lessons. However, this study will report results on only 3 student teachers. The number of observations discussed here took into consideration the time and space limits allowed in this paper. Observations discussed here were among the small percentage (12%) who reported use of TBLT (see results section on research question 3). Randomization in selecting observations aligned with students' scores in the teaching methods course in the previous year (see table 6). As mentioned earlier, only one student out of 88 obtained a 'Pass' and therefore the student was not considered for observation.

Table 6. Some participants' observed tasks in TP

No. of participants	Scores in previous year	Observed tasks in TP	Total Observations
1	*Distincti on	1	3
1	*Very Good	1	
1	Good	1	

Analysis of students' tasks as work-plans showed some structured communicative tasks, although not necessarily authentic. Task design followed the Willis and Willis (1996) framework for all students. Some of

the designed tasks showed participants' concern regarding pupils' learning profile (e.g. age, interests and language proficiency levels). Although this was interesting, it was unsurprising as the materials adopted in the lessons were mainly based on Ministry student books developed for a certain age and stage. Hence, textbooks played a dominant role in the design of tasks. Preliminary analysis of the work-plans therefore gave this researcher an impression that there would be a high degree of focus on meaning. In the remaining part of this section results on tasks-in process are presented.

Participant 1

The student teacher of this class was a female whose score was 'Distinction' in the teaching methods course in the previous year. Participant 1 was an interesting case because, as revealed in the interview, a) she had good self-image as a teacher-to-be due to her high scores in most of the subjects she was studying and b) she repeatedly expressed her passion towards teaching English. In her task, this student teacher adapted the elementary task from One Stop English to prime her class about the lesson (see <http://www.onestopenglish.com>). However, a preliminary examination of her work-plan showed an unbalanced time allotment. The 30 minutes were skewed in one direction. She distributed time so that pre-task and task cycle would engage 9 minutes of the task time while 19 minutes were devoted to the language focus stage. Observation of actual teaching

revealed that even priming at the pre-task, as seen by this researcher, was dominated by teacher talk. The following excerpt explains how such priming discouraged interaction and communication.

T: Tourism is considered eh...one of the most important (not audible) in Egypt...because eh it provides eh us with a lot of eh money which eh provide our economy eh our education, our eh transport eh. Let's eh let us eh to go to another point in our lesson...eh...is there any eh problem which face tourism in Egypt? Yes (pointing at one student)...who can answer?

S: Nowadays there are...there is a political condition...

T: No (interrupting) I do not want you to tell us the reasons. I..I ask you to answer...yes or no

S: Yes

T: Thank you.

Analysis of task-in process for this participant showed that negotiation of meaning rarely occurred in class because teaching time was obviously skewed towards form rather than meaning. In fact, the pupils were not given the opportunity to reach the task outcome on their own, but rather all the information was found in some written samples made available by their teacher. However, the reason for this participant planning her pre-task and task cycle to engage only 9 minutes of the lesson was explored in the interview. During the interview with participant 1, she explained some of her views about what EFL pupils in general

expect teachers to do and what teachers should do. This participant stated:

Generally pupils follow my instructions in doing activities, but they're always waiting for the rule. The teacher should get their full attention when s/he explains grammar.

She also indicated that pupils by and large feel that forms are more relevant to language learning and that they actually expect it. She also thought that the task was successful as outcome was achieved by her pupils. Another emerging issue in the interview with participant 1 was her level of acceptance of TBLT. Having lived the exam-oriented context herself, this participant felt that pupils feel they need to focus their attention on “formal knowledge of the language in order to achieve highly in the exam”. She revealed that attempts to enforce language use or communication over what is actually involved/expected in final examinations (i.e. mainly form) would weaken pupils' involvement and enthusiasm to participate in tasks.

Participant 2

The student teacher of this class was also a female whose score was ‘Very Good’ at the teaching methods course in the year preceding this study. The microteaching lesson was again based on the same materials adopted from One Stop English. As for her practicum lesson, although observation initially suggested that the task involved was performed and the task outcome was achieved, it was also noticed with

this participant that the class was highly controlled by the teacher or rather by the language structure targeted. Too many linguistic structures and related vocabulary were actually given to students while they were performing the task, which constrained real involvement and creativity on the pupils' side. At the pre-task stage, the student teacher elicited some vocabulary, but provided quite a few herself. She also underlined 2 structures, which suggested that pre-defined language was being presented in a PPP lesson. Participant 2 was keen to be at the center of the teaching/learning process. She also appeared to be fussy about accepting errors. It was noticed that she resorted to repeated error correction from the beginning of the task to the very end and no room was given to pupil recast or peer correction. The following is an excerpt of her lesson:

T: Good morning

Ss: Good morning

T: How're you today?

Ss: Fine

T: Our lesson today is about tourism (writes "tourism" on the white board) [kh: she did not elicit or test Ss prior knowledge]

T: Tourism is considered one of the most important sources in Egypt. It is very important for ...(barely audible). Who can tell me which the places do tourists generally go to?

The place tourists...

T: (Interrupting) the places...

- S1:** *The places tourists go to are Luxor, Aswan...*
- T:** *(Interrupting) Thank you.*
- T:** *Places like (writing on the board) pyramids, citadel, Luxor and Aswan. (Facing students) We all know that there is a very big importance for tourism in Egypt. Who can tell me one of these importance? (Repairing) Who can tell me the importance of tourism in Egypt?*
- S1:** *It is the main source of national economy in Egypt (with a rising intonation)*
National income.
It is the main source of national income in Egypt (with a rising intonation)
- T:** *Thank you. Who else?*
- S2:** *It tells us about the civilization of other countries.*
- T:** *Thank you. Who else?*
- S1:** *The most important aspect for developing countries (with a rising intonation)*
- T:** *Sank you.*

This class, of course, impinged pupils' opportunities to communicate meaningfully and resulted in a sort of disappointment when they made mistakes. It was observed with this participant that errors were not just linguistic, but it was obvious that a different way of achieving the task was seen off point rather than opportunities for negotiation and creativity. This resulted in a teacher-centered task and communication breakdown, which eventually made task fulfillment superficial and frustrating. Although a few groups did fulfill the task in their own way, the rest

of the class followed instructions and somehow copied off each other. Interviews with this participant revealed that she believes that the power should predominantly rest with the teacher in the classroom. To this researcher, the participant followed a teaching style in which a teacher would have the ownership for decision-making and the students need only to follow instructions. It is worth mentioning that when prompted about the compatibility of such classroom orientation with TBLT, she suggested that she was setting the scene for the task and making sure her students understand the task. This was very possibly influenced by the way she was taught at school as she very often referred to her favorite teachers who managed to help her 'learn', i.e. pass examinations successfully. Nevertheless, this researcher believes that being a novice teacher, she believes such teaching behavior is justifiable and would diminish should she get more experience and once her belief in the benefits of TBLT to her students were substantiated.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was also a female whose score at the teaching methods course was 'Good'. Although there were still some problems in her task design and gradation, aspects of classroom management influenced the success of this lesson. Observation of her task-in-process revealed that her lesson was another typical teacher-centered classroom in which pupils never had the chance to play a leading role even when fulfilling the task. Observation of the class revealed that she

spent most of her class time preparing for the pre-task rather than carrying it out. For example, part of priming was as follows:

T: Good morning

Ss: Good morning

T: How're you all?

Ss: Fine, thank you.

T: Good. (facing board she starts writing the day's date and unit number and title)

(Facing pupils) Today's lesson is about tourism (points at the lesson title on the board)

T: What places do tourists visit in Egypt? (underlining 'tourists visit' and then pointing at this part of the sentence and choosing one of the pupils asking her to answer)

S1: Tourists visit the pyramids.

T: Excellent, thank you. (Copying S1's answer under 'tourists visit' and then point at 'tourists visit' again and chose another pupil.

S2: Tourists visit the Sphinx in Cairo

T: Excellent. She copies more answers about 'citadel in Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Sinai...etc.

Similar question/answer procedures continued for about 14 minutes. So, in the task cycle stage the pupils lost interest. A lack of clear instruction and task fulfillment criteria was often felt among pupils in this class. This student teacher was very much occupied with getting through the stages rather than ensuring negotiation of meaning and interaction. She was clearly interested in the language focus stage and she often

drew pupils' attention to related linguistic issues they might encounter in the test. So, it was important in the interview to find out more about this student teacher's opinions/beliefs regarding TBLT. Her idea of a successful language TBLT classroom was connected to the extent to which pupils execute the roles assigned in pair and group work rather than how well they do such roles in the light of a TBLT philosophy.

To sum up, all 3 participants could design communicative work plans, but there were severe problems with task implementation, i.e. task as work-plan was often compatible with the TBLT framework adopted in this study, but task-in-process was compatible with/ conformed to participants own views about how language should be taught, these views originating from their past experiences as EFL pupils. Although such tasks were intended to focus on meaning, there was a preoccupation with the language forms involved on the side of student teachers. To this researcher, the tasks of participants 1, 2 and 3 were less successful because there was a minimum focus on negotiation of meaning. Thus, the ability to design TBLT lessons does not necessarily entail implementation. In addition, teachers tend to skew task-in process towards their own beliefs or towards what contextual constraints might impose.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was interested in finding out the impact of intensive TBLT training on student teachers' views (acceptability) and practice (usability) and hence, four

research questions were formulated. Question one of this study examined student teachers' views of how English is best taught. The answer was sought in terms of participants' past experiences as language learners as opposed to their current experiences as EFL student teachers. Results revealed that participants' previous experience with English language learning mainly focused on forms and that teaching styles emphasized achievements in the final examinations. Nevertheless, various participants in this study believed that their teachers had still targeted communication. Results also indicated that as student teachers, views of how English should be taught were very much consistent with how they were taught English at schools. Such experiences still fostered forms. The second research question looked at whether or not the student teachers' views of how English is best taught would change after TBLT training. The greater part of participants showed positive views and attitudes towards TBLT and that such an approach is beneficial. Many expressed understanding that it is imperative for EFL teachers to have the necessary knowledge and to develop the skills needed to use TBLT efficiently. The third research question investigated the extent to which student teachers actually used TBLT, as compared to other approaches, in their microteaching and the practicum. While findings showed that the majority of student teachers used TBLT in their micro-teaching, it turned to be particularly out of favour among the majority of student teachers in the practicum. According to participants, specific teaching approaches (such as

TBLT) were deemed 'unsafe' as they do not cater for the knowledge and skills involved in final examinations (i.e. forms). Yet, a small number of participants still used TBLT in practicum. Hence, the fourth research question focused on whether or not student teachers' tasks-in-process (for those who used TBLT in the practicum) actually conform to whatever views those participants held with regard to how English should be taught. Observations of participants showed they could design communicative tasks, but they had some problems with task implementation. Although such tasks were intended to focus on meaning, there was an obsession with the language form involved on the side of student teachers.

Reflecting on the need for a dual vision as a concept that emerges from teachers' need to keep long-term sense of direction and to make online decisions, results obtained in this study showed a distorted version of such an idea in the sense that participants in this study had a pre-defined dual vision. Such vision involved offline decisions on the part of student teachers in the practicum. This was reflected in participants' positive views with regard to TBLT, as well as in an awareness of the benefit of such an approach, and yet the choice is between either using TBLT only at the design level (task as work plan) or using a version of TBLT adapted to personal views about context and how language should be taught. For example, time allotted to different phases of Willis's (1996) framework was manipulated to suit personal views on language teaching, i.e. the language focus stage

generally occupied more time than the actual task cycle. Observations of the lessons and interviews emphasized a preoccupation with understanding linguistics features of the language. There was an inherent correlation between pupils' mastery of forms and students teachers' self-image as prospective EFL teachers. Some participants did not put into practice their work-plans mainly resulting in a minimum focus on negotiation of meaning and un/conscious form orientation derivatives of their past experiences as EFL learners. In fact, a socio-cultural impact imposed in the study context influenced those student teachers. They felt that although TBLT would help student use the language, adopting the approach may well put full time teachers (engaged in private tutoring) and pupils at risk. This was because a full time teacher's income is often dependent on private tutoring and this, in turn, is subject to parental satisfaction with students' achievements. In the study context, pupils' achievement in summative assessments puts immense pressure on teachers. For instance, participants in this study had experiences with their own teachers who often aimed to develop a good reputation in preparing the pupils for the school final examination. Hence, participants in this study thought the task of getting his/her pupils to score highly in such summative assessments would meet intense parental expectations for their children, and would result in a decent income from private tutoring.

On the other hand, previous studies have documented a number of factors that often impeded the use of TBLT such as a) individual teacher factors, b)

textbooks' limitations, c) time constraints, d) large numbers, e) language proficiency levels...etc. According to participants in the current study other classroom related issues were found influential on task implementation in practicum. An interesting element was the interaction patterns needed for TBLT. To participants, group work and pair work were more of hurdle to lesson progression. Teacher-centred education is a mere reflection of certain social phenomena, which are beyond the focus of this study.

Based on the results obtained in this study, one may suggest that it is of little use to assign all barriers to adopting/rejecting certain teaching approaches to the external contextual constraints (e.g. large classes, student demotivation...etc.). The current study showed that the teaching practices of student teachers are not necessarily consistent when it came to classroom procedures even though their views reflect consistency. This was particularly true with the student teachers involved here. They had positive views and valued TBLT (they accepted it), but their teaching practices in real classrooms were either manipulated or non-existent (usability). Therefore, it is necessary for decision-makers (be those head teachers or the Ministry of Education) to identify the in/consistencies between views at the theoretical levels and practice. Results of this study also indicated that teachers and their past experiences with language are of paramount importance as these factors influence the actual implementation of a task-based approach. Thus, while student teachers' ability to design tasks does not

necessarily mean the ability to implement/use TBLT seems a reasonable statement, one can insinuate here that accepting TBLT as an approach does not necessarily mean using such an approach. Furthermore, the often-mentioned link between culture and critical reflection in education should be mentioned here. This research suggests that our teacher education programs in Egypt suffer a lack of critical reflection in teaching practice, either in theory or in practice. The practice of critical reflection becomes of paramount importance especially when policy makers take decisions (e.g. to adopt or reject certain ideologies) and when teachers' views of, and attitudes towards, such decisions are just incompatible. This often confines acceptance and implementation and hence, compatibility should be assured before the actual enforcement of such ideologies. Moreover, in order to make sure the benefits of pedagogical innovations can be attained, there is a need for further investigations of how student teachers' views and past experiences can help appraise the pedagogical value of the concept and implementation of the communicative language learning method because such value would be, to a great extent, connected to actual teaching practices in classrooms.

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