

Exploring Challenges in Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) at a University in China

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Abstract

Teachers are crucial in implementing new methods or approaches in English language education. However, teachers may face various challenges when implementing the new method in the classrooms. This study aims to explore the challenges teachers faced in implementing Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) at one university in China. In this context, TBLT was the new approach teachers applied to teach a core course for Year 1 and 2 students. The study explored the complex challenges that teachers faced when integrating TBLT principles into their instructional practices. Data were collected by conducting interviews and online reflections with teachers and students. Findings revealed several key challenges teachers encountered when executing TBLT in the classrooms. These challenges can be categorized into four main areas: teacher-related challenges, student-related challenges, challenges related to teaching resources, and challenges related to departmental support. Implications for the design and implementation of task-based pedagogies in tertiary education contexts are discussed.

Keywords: *Challenges, Implementation, Language, Task-Based, Teaching.*

INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential means of communication in today's globalized world, facilitating interactions between nations. Nevertheless, the English communication skills of citizens in many Asian countries are a concern for their governments (Butler, 2011; Lam et al., 2021). Therefore, enhancing English oral communication skills has become crucial in English education in various Asian countries, including China. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach that emphasizes the completion of communicative tasks as the main focus of instruction. The focus is on the practical use of language skills in real-life situations. As a top-down approach, TBLT has been advocated in China since 2001 (Hasnain & Halder, 2021; Wang, 2020). TBLT is often suggested as an effective teaching approach for enhancing students' linguistics and communicative abilities in real-life situations (González Lloret & Nielson, 2015; Huang & Xia, 2013; Huang, 2018; Li & Thoms, 2023; Xie & Chen, 2019).

It is important to consider the perspective of teachers when it comes to teaching methodologies. If teachers are not convinced of the effectiveness of a new approach, they are unlikely to put in the effort to implement it in the classroom (Hasnain & Halder, 2021). Teachers are responsible for designing the lessons, creating the tasks, and taking into account the students' needs and interests (Van den Branden, 2016). In the implementation of TBLT, teachers play the crucial role of remaining actively engaged, closely monitoring, and providing support to students as they work in the target language. Hence, it is crucial to consider teachers' perceptions of TBLT when evaluating TBLT practicality in the classroom (Hasnain & Halder, 2021).

In contrast to the promotion of TBLT in the policy, there is little fundamental change in pedagogical practices in many Chinese EFL classrooms, especially in some socio-economically less developed regions, such as the places inside mainland China and rural areas (Hu, 2004; Xie & Chen, 2019). Additionally, the tertiary education curriculum provides insufficient guidance on the implementation of TBLT in the classroom (Xie & Chen, 2019). Consequently, the teachers apply the TBLT approach based on their own understanding. When teachers design and implement TBLT, issues related to the design and implementation of TBLT arise in real classrooms. These problems include teachers' misunderstanding of TBLT, the discrepancies between teachers' perceptions

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of TBLT and their practical application in English classes, and the constraints from the contexts in different schools (Butler, 2011; Chen, 2015; Cheng, 2014; Xie & Chen, 2019). Consequently, teachers, especially those in tertiary education, had problems designing and implementing TBLT in English classes (Dong, 2016; Liu & Xiong, 2016; Tang et al. 2016; Wu, 2013). Hence, the aim of the study is to explore the challenges teachers faced when designing and implementing TBLT at a university in southwest China. By thoroughly exploring the difficulties faced by teachers in a specific setting, we can derive implications and suggestions to assist them in successfully implementing TBLT in their classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background of TBLT in Tertiary Language Education in China

The ‘Double First-Class Initiative,’ also known as the World First-Class Universities and First-Class Academic Disciplines Construction, was launched in 2015 (Liu et al., 2019). This Initiative, a significant step in China’s educational development, aims to enhance the quality and global competitiveness of Chinese universities and academic disciplines (Liu et al., 2019). Consequently, China’s higher education institutions have devised comprehensive plans for the development and advancement of disciplinary specializations, marking a new era in Chinese academia.

Under the ‘Double First-Class’ initiative, local governments were obligated to participate and provide matching funds for developing local universities and colleges. In 2017, the Guizhou Provincial Education Bureau announced its opinions on implementing First-Class Universities and Disciplines in the region. As part of this initiative, the Comprehensive English (CE) course, a core course for English majors at Guizhou Education University (GEU), was selected as one of the 100 key courses for construction (Retrieved from http://jyt.guizhou.gov.cn/xwzx/tzgg/201712/t20171206_2924431.html. 21 Nov 2019). The course reform, a beacon of hope for English education majors, was designed to develop their integrated language ability, enhance their communication ability, and equip them with English teaching skills. This reform paves the way for them to become qualified secondary school English teachers after graduation, contributing to the improvement of English education in China.

Additionally, the College English Teaching Guide (2017) and Teaching Guide for English Undergraduate Majors in Colleges and Universities (2018) have significantly impacted English education at the tertiary level in China. These guides recommend TBLT as a student-centered approach to improve students’ communication abilities, as outlined in both the guides for non-English majors and English majors in English learning. TBLT emphasizes engaging students in tasks that require the practical application of English, which can enhance students’ language acquisition and develop their communication skills in authentic contexts (Ding et al., 2021).

In light of the objectives of English education majors’ development in the program of CE course reform, the series of English textbooks ‘Communication English for Chinese Learners (Integrated Course)’ (CECL) were selected as they were specifically tailored for university English majors. The textbook CECL provides a structured framework for implementing TBLT principles, offering a variety of communicative tasks and activities that promote language acquisition in authentic contexts (Fu, 2015; Cheng & Cen, 2020). Using this textbook, teachers can design lessons that prioritize meaningful communication and active participation, aiming to enhance undergraduates’ English communication abilities (Song & Perry, 2023). The CECL textbooks were the school-based textbooks at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS). TBLT has been extensively utilized in language classes with CECL at GDUFS to enhance students’ language proficiency and communication ability (Wei & Xie, 2014; Ding et al., 2021). Hence, The CECL series of textbooks was selected to enhance English education majors’ integrated language abilities, specifically improving their reading and oral communication skills at SFL, GEU (Cen, 2018).

Furthermore, compared with other teaching methods used in current English classrooms at the universities and colleges in China (e.g., Grammar Translation Method, Audio-lingual Method, and PPP teaching), TBLT was more suitable for use in achieving the goals of the course reform. TBLT focuses not only on the form of the language students have learned but also on the meaning of the language that they can use the language to do

things in the real world (Huang, 2016; Nunan, 2010; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2007; Zhao, 2018). Consequently, teachers who taught CE courses changed the textbooks and teaching approaches to TBLT at the beginning of 2018. However, understanding an approach is one aspect, yet putting it into practice in an educational setting presents challenges. Teachers frequently encounter challenges when departing from the conventional approach and introducing a new one (Hasnain & Halder, 2021). As a newly introduced approach in the context, teachers would face challenges when implementing TBLT in the classrooms.

Challenges Teachers Faced in the Implementation of TBLT

Despite its popularity at the policy level in English teaching, implementing TBLT presents numerous challenges for teachers across diverse educational contexts. Studies from various countries (e.g., China, Indonesia, Korea, and Vietnam) have highlighted the shared challenges and similar concerns encountered by language teachers when implementing TBLT in their classrooms. The challenges teachers shared include 1) teacher knowledge and training in TBLT (e.g., Li & Thoms, 2023; Liu et al., 2018; Liu & Xiong, 2016; Wang, 2020; Zheng & Borg, 2014); 2) task design and materials development difficulties (e.g., Li & Thoms 2023; Liu et al., 2018; Liu & Xiong, 2016; Kim, 2019; Thi et al., 2022); 3) classroom management concerns (e.g., Liu & Xiong 2016; Zheng & Borg, 2014); 4) assessments that may not align with TBLT objectives (e.g., Liu & Xiong, 2016; Liu et al., 2018; Wang, 2020); and 5) pressure from the current examinations (e.g., Liu et al., 2018; Zheng & Borg, 2014). These factors make the implementation process of TBLT challenging.

However, many studies focused on teachers from primary and secondary schools (e.g., Deng & Carless, 2009; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Lin & Wu, 2012; Wang, 2020; Zheng & Borg, 2014), with a smaller number from universities (e.g. Liu & Xiong, 2016; Xie & Chen, 2019). In particular, there is a lack of research conducted at universities in Guizhou province. The need for such research was the impetus for the current study to explore teachers' challenges in implementing TBLT at one university in Guizhou in-depth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, a case study is chosen to conduct a thorough investigation of a particular group of individuals. The aim of the case study is to explore in-depth the challenges teachers faced in implementing TBLT by using the CECL textbook at GEU (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2014). According to Creswell (2007), a case study is a qualitative method that involves thorough data collection from various sources to examine a phenomenon. The approach entails reporting a detailed case description of challenges teachers faced in implementing TBLT teaching CE courses at GEU.

It is advisable to employ multiple research instruments to validate the data or achieve triangulation in the case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Eleven teachers were involved in this study to obtain the challenges they faced when applying TBLT in teaching CE. The researcher employed focus group interviews (FGI) with eight teachers, individual interviews (II) with three teachers, online reflections with six teachers, and document analysis related to the implementation of TBLT in CE courses. The six teachers who shared their reflections online were the teachers who also participated in focus group interviews and individual interviews. The reflections they shared online corroborated the responses in FGIs and IIs. By triangulating data from multiple sources—group focus interviews, individual interviews, online reflections, and documentary analysis—the researcher aimed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The convergence of data from different sources allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and experiences of teachers implementing TBLT in English teaching. Additionally, it facilitates the cross-illumination of responses to enrich the depth and breadth of the study's insights.

To safeguard the participants' privacy, the researcher utilized pseudonyms instead of their real names (Allen & Wiles, 2016). T refers to the teachers who participated in the focus group and individual interviews. Each participant was given a number (T1 - T11). All the responses in FGIs and IIs were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then shared with the participants to allow them to review and amend any information provided during their interviews as needed. Then, the responses provided by the interviewees were carefully analyzed and categorized into themes.

FINDINGS

The findings were collected, analyzed, and organized into emerging themes to discuss the challenges that the teachers faced in designing and implementing TBLT. The challenges are classified into four categories: challenges related to teachers, challenges related to students, challenges related to the teaching resources, and challenges related to faculty support. The data is presented in Figure 4.1 below.

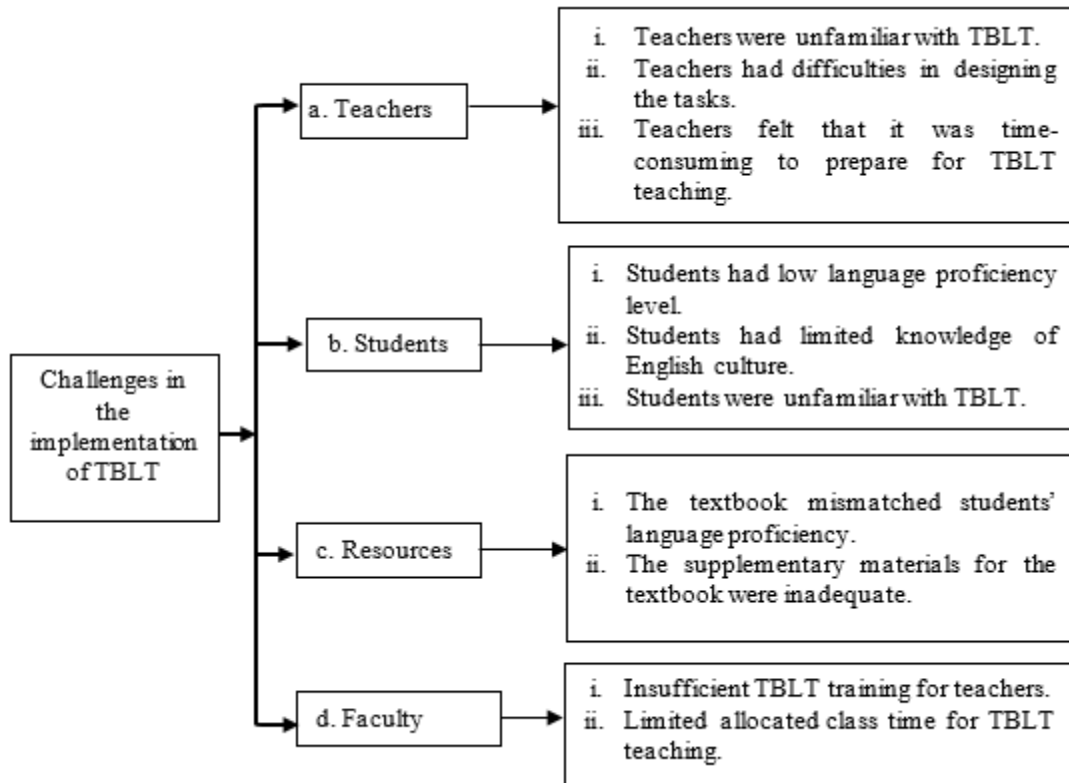


Figure 4.1. Challenges the teachers faced in the implementation of TBLT in the CE course.

Challenges Related to the Teachers

Based on the feedback provided by the teachers in the FGIs, IIs, and online reflective notes, they faced three challenges related to themselves when implementing TBLT in CE class. Initially, they were unfamiliar with TBLT from both theoretical and practical aspects. Then, they had difficulties designing suitable tasks for English education students at GEU. In addition, preparing TBLT lessons was time-consuming and stressful for them.

Teachers were Unfamiliar with TBLT

When the textbook “CECL” was first introduced in the CE course at GEU, most teachers found it challenging to apply the TBLT approach to teaching English education students. Most of them stated that they were unfamiliar with TBLT from both theoretical backgrounds and practical implementation. They applied TBLT because they were required to in the CE course. However, they did not know how to implement it in the classroom.

“I know little theories about TBLT. Also, I lack TBLT application in practice, for this is the first time I have used TBLT to teach students.”

(T1, FGI)

“At the beginning of teaching CE, I had no idea about how to apply TBLT in teaching. We were just required to do so. I didn’t understand tasks well.”

(T9, II)

The responses gathered during the interviews were consistent with the information provided by teachers in their online reflective notes. They explicitly stated their lack of clarity regarding TBLT, both in terms of theory and practice.

“To be frank, I am not familiar with TBLT. I don’t know what the task is. I just try doing TBLT in my class.”

(T6, ORN)

“I can find the task definitions online, but I am not clear about the task. I am still trying TBLT in my class.”

(T10, ORN)

Teachers’ lack of clarity regarding TBLT may stem from a potential gap in their pedagogical and TBLT education during their undergraduate and master’s studies. Most teachers mentioned they had not learned TBLT before, even though they had heard about it from some of their senior students.

“I majored in Foreign linguistics and applied linguistics in my master’s study. I didn’t learn TBLT before.”

(T1, FGI)

“... I first heard about TBLT from my senior students, for some of them chose it as their research topic in their theses. Definitely, I would use it as I was requested to do so.”

(T5, FGI)

Without a clear understanding of TBLT, teachers may struggle to design and implement tasks that align with its principles. This could result in ineffective instruction that fails to promote students’ language learning effectively.

Teachers Had Difficulties in Designing the Tasks

When creating and implementing the tasks in class, teachers encountered a challenge in designing appropriate tasks that matched students’ language proficiency. Despite the given tasks in the textbook, teachers found that not all were appropriate for their students in the classroom. However, it was difficult for them to create suitable tasks for students within the given context. Therefore, they had to follow the tasks listed in the textbook or choose the tasks they deemed appropriate from the textbook. Usually, they find these unsuitable tasks too difficult for students to complete successfully.

“...Once I remember, I asked students to discuss the differences between traditional Chinese and Western wedding procedures after watching a video. For one of my classes, I found it difficult for students to complete the task. I still used the same task in another class because I didn’t have any better choice or idea to adapt to the task and match my students’ language proficiency.”

(T10, II)

The teachers indicated their challenge in adapting the tasks provided in the textbook to meet the needs of the English education students. Furthermore, despite recognizing that students are becoming bored with repetitive tasks such as answering reading questions and participating in discussions, the teachers faced the challenge of designing alternative tasks that would capture students’ interest.

“I feel they might be bored of doing the same tasks, like answering the questions and discussing. What’s more, students can’t discuss the topic in depth as I expect them to in class. But I don’t know how to design more types of tasks to motivate students.”

(T4, FGI)

The teachers realized that some of the tasks provided in the textbook did not match the students’ proficiency level or interests. As most teachers relied on the repetitive tasks supplied in the textbook, they felt limited by the constraints of the textbook. They were afraid that students might disengage due to potential boredom or

lack of stimulation of the tasks. However, the problem is that they need help to create various tasks to capture their students' attention and interest.

Teachers Felt That it is Time-Consuming to Prepare for TBLT Teaching

The time to prepare TBLT lessons was another issue. Teachers highlighted the extra time they spent preparing for TBLT lessons, including searching for authentic materials and designing the activities to engage students' participation. One of the teachers indicated the stress of the lesson preparation due to the extra time she spent on TBLT.

"It is time-consuming for me to prepare for the lessons using TBLT. I need much more time to search for authentic materials and design tasks to engage students in the class."

(L3, FGI)

The findings from the online reflective notes further strengthen the statements made by the teachers in interviews. They specified searching for materials online to prepare for TBLT is time-consuming.

"I find the process of searching for resources to be demanding and time-consuming. Sometimes, I spend hours scouring online for authentic and useful materials for my students, but only to come up empty-handed. I feel frustrated for nothing I get."

(L10, ORN)

Some relevant studies have also reported the particular concern of preparation time on applying TBLT (Liu & Xiong, 2016; Hima et al., 2021). Liu and Xiong (2016) conducted a questionnaire on twenty-six university teachers in China. The results showed that 34.62% of the teachers believed that TBLT required much more preparation time than other teaching approaches. Similarly, Hima et al. (2021) found it was challenging for English teachers in Indonesia to apply TBLT, for it was time-consuming for teachers to design task sequences to facilitate students' language learning. However, in this study, most teachers highlighted that they spent much more time on resource searching and task designing. Hence, there is a clear need for assistance and resources to simplify the process of preparing lessons.

Challenges Related to the Students

Teachers also mentioned the challenges associated with students as another aspect. One of the challenges they encountered was their students' low language proficiency, which impeded their ability to complete tasks successfully. Furthermore, certain students had limited familiarity with English culture, which impacted their ability to understand texts or materials originating from English-speaking countries. This lack of cultural familiarity posed an additional barrier to understanding the reading texts and engaging with the tasks by using the language. Additionally, the students displayed a lack of familiarity with TBLT.

Students Had Low Language Proficiency Level

Teachers believed that one of the major factors negatively affecting the implementation of TBLT was the students' low English proficiency. When doing oral tasks in the class, teachers were not satisfied with students' oral or written performance due to their limited vocabulary and inadequate grammar.

"Actually, students didn't quite meet my expectations when it came to completing the task. You know our students' language proficiency wasn't that good."

(L1, FGI)

"Students have difficulties in oral and written tasks because their limited vocabulary and grammar make it difficult for them to speak or write clearly in the class."

(L5, FGI)

In addition, one of the teachers stated that students' pronunciation was another issue that hindered their oral communication with others in the class. Some students' poor pronunciation made it hard for them to express

themselves effectively and interact verbally with other students and the teacher during class discussions or activities.

“When doing tasks in class, I noticed some students pronounced words wrongly...It always took me time to understand them.”

(L10, II)

The online reflective notes strengthen the negative effect of students’ low language proficiency on task performance in class.

“The problem for students to do tasks in class is their scant vocabulary. I mean they seldom tried to use the words or expressions in the reading context to do the tasks. ... Also, they made many grammar mistakes when they gave oral presentations in class.”

(L7, ORN)

Teachers realized that students’ language proficiency level emerged as a significant factor hindering their performance in completing tasks during class. This outcome might be attributed to a mismatch between the tasks outlined in the textbooks and the students’ actual language proficiency level at GEU. Therefore, it is crucial to consider how to modify the tasks or provide support to match students’ language proficiency levels, guaranteeing their suitability for the tasks described in the textbooks.

Students Had Limited Knowledge of the English Culture

Understanding the written content is the top priority in reading. Students’ understanding and ability to interpret a reading text rely heavily on their knowledge of linguistics and cultural knowledge. Teachers illustrated that it was challenging for students to comprehend some texts or materials that came from English-speaking countries in the textbook. Due to students’ limited familiarity with the cultural knowledge of the reading texts in the textbook, they faced challenges in fully comprehending and engaging with the content. This lack of exposure to English culture especially presented challenges for students when encountering texts, audio, or other materials that rely heavily on cultural references or assumptions specific to English-speaking societies. As a result, it could impede their task performance in making comparisons and contrasts between Chinese and English cultures on some topics listed in the textbook.

“So, when I brought up the topic of Chinese and English names, the students didn’t really go into much detail. Their responses were pretty short, usually just a sentence or two. Well, the thing is, they didn’t really have a lot of knowledge about where English names come from and the cultural significance behind them. So, uh, it’s hard for them to go into more detail or really get into the nitty-gritty of the subject, you know?”

(L8, FGI)

The responses about the students’ lack of English cultural knowledge are supported by the online reflective notes made by the teachers as follows:

“Personally, I think many students lack a solid understanding of English cultural background, making it challenging for them to comprehend reading texts fully. This would hinder students’ grasp of the context and nuances presented in the reading materials.”

(L7, ORN)

Students were Unfamiliar with TBLT in the Class

Teachers expressed difficulty in implementing TBLT due to students’ unfamiliarity with the approach in the classroom. Students were not accustomed to actively engaging in tasks, collaborating with peers, and taking responsibility for their learning. The students were used to traditional teacher-centered instruction, where the teacher directed the learning process. Therefore, students might find it challenging to transition to a more student-centered approach.

“So, when I told the students to work together on the tasks, they were a bit lost on how to talk to their partners and get the tasks done. It seems like they might not be familiar with the TBLT procedure.”

(L6, FGI)

Additionally, students lacked practical communication skills and strategies when completing tasks, which hindered their ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with their peers.

“So, you know, sometimes students just didn’t discuss with their partners after reading, even when I especially asked them to do so. It’s like they ignored my instructions or something. I think some of them were a bit confused about their roles in the TBLT class. I mean they didn’t know how to communicate with each other in doing tasks, particularly discussion.”

(L4, FGI)

Challenges Related to the Resources

With the reformation of the CE course in the department, the course textbook had been changed to “Communication English for Chinese Learners (Integrated Course)” (CECL). This was the first time teachers used textbooks to teach CE courses. CECL is the textbook designed using the TBLT approach. The book's frame is a series of tasks related to each other for each unit (Ding et al., 2021). The teachers’ challenges in using the textbook can be divided into the following two sub-themes.

The Textbook Mismatched Students’ Language Proficiency

The teachers’ feedback underscored the significant challenge posed by the complexity of the textbook content, particularly in books 3 and 4, for English major students at Guizhou Education University (GEU). Several factors contribute to this difficulty, including lengthy reading texts, English cultural background information embedded within the texts, and the presence of advanced vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures. These elements collectively hindered students’ reading comprehension and impede engaging with the material fully.

“The reading texts in the textbooks are difficult for my students because almost all the texts are authentic resources that delve into various aspects of English culture. It is challenging for students to comprehend the texts from the English culture aspects.”

(T1, FGI)

“The reading texts in Books 3 and 4 are very long. The longer the reading texts were, the more new words, idiomatic expressions, and grammar they didn’t know. They felt it’s difficult to comprehend them.”

(T3, FGI)

The CECL textbooks were utilized to support teachers in implementing TBLT at GDUFS with the aim of enhancing students’ language proficiency and communication skills (Ding et al., 2021). However, the potential effectiveness of TBLT in conjunction with CECL textbooks at GDUFS may not be as successful at GEU due to a discrepancy in language proficiency among English major students at the two universities. Specifically, most teachers highlighted that the textbook series was tailored for students possessing advanced language proficiency levels, whereas the English education students at GEU demonstrated intermediate to low advanced language proficiency. Hence, the content of the textbooks did not align well with the language proficiency levels of the students at GEU.

“So, the textbook we use here is the one that students at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) use. All the editors are actually the teachers at GDUFS, you know? These textbooks may work well for students at GDUFS, but they're just not the right fit for our students, you know?”

(T9, FGI)

The teachers’ responses indicated that the reading texts were difficult for English major students at GEU. Most of the teachers in the interview mentioned that the reading materials in the textbook were complex for the students at Guizhou Education University (GEU) because the textbook was written for the English major students who have advanced levels of English proficiency at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS), a top university in another province. The English proficiency levels of English major students at GEU were intermediate to low advanced. Hence, the teachers needed more comprehensible reading materials tailored to their students’ proficiency levels and needs. Figure 4.2 shows the rankings of two universities in

2021. The level of English majors at GDUFs was A+, ranking No. 10 among the universities in China. However, the level of English majors at GEU was B+, ranking No. 248 among the universities in China. It shows the level gap between the English majors in the two universities. Hence, the textbook suitable for English majors at GDUFs may need to be adapted to meet the language proficiency of English majors at GEU.



Figure 4.2. Rankings of English majors at two universities in China in 2021.

Source: <https://www.shanghairanking.cn/rankings/bcmr/2021/050201>.

The Supplementary Materials for the Textbooks Were Inadequate

Teachers implementing TBLT often relied on textbooks and teachers' handbooks for guidance. However, they frequently encountered insufficiencies in the supplementary materials provided when preparing for their lessons. These materials, including reference slides, extra reading materials, and videos related to the reading topics, were quite inadequate for meeting their instructional needs.

"When using the textbooks, my sole resource for lesson preparation was the teacher's handbook. The problem was that I needed more supplementary materials, like supplementary reading materials and videos, to help my students do the tasks in the class effectively."

(L1, FGI)

The field notes support the statements about teachers' need for resources to teach CE using the TBLT approach.

"I need the resources like TBLT lesson plans and slides for the textbooks I use in the class."

(T6, ORN)

"When I took my training in GDUSF, I hoped to get the TBLT slides from the teachers. But they didn't share the slides with us."

(T7, ORN)

Accordingly, the supplementary resources for teachers to design and implement TBLT in the CE courses were limited. Many texts in the textbooks originated from foreign resources. It was time-consuming for the teachers to search for related materials for the students in the School of Foreign Languages (SFL). In addition, teachers did not know or use the online video resources made by the School of Foreign Languages (SFL).

"I have heard about the videos related to the content of the textbook. But I never watched them online. Coz I didn't know how to find the resources online. Nobody in our faculty told me about this."

(T1, FGI)

It was interesting that teachers did not know about the videos or did not use the videos. The teachers in charge of the video-making mentioned that the videos were already provided online. However, some teachers argued that they did not get the website or any video resources made by the faculty. Most teachers mentioned it was better if they could get some supplementary videos related to the teaching content and reading topics. These supplementary videos could help them prepare lesson plans as well as students comprehend the reading materials in the textbooks. Hence, the teachers should get the video resources online and share the website with the students at Guizhou Education University.

Challenges Related to the Department's Support

The implementation of TBLT was promoted as a project in the School of Foreign Languages (SFL) at GEU. However, faculty support for the project was lacking. The faculty organized training sessions for teachers on TBLT, but these sessions only occurred twice in 2017. Despite the training, many teachers still did not fully comprehend TBLT. Additionally, the allocated time for students to learn the CE course by applying the TBLT approach was insufficient. The challenges related to the department support could be divided into two subcategories: i. insufficient training; ii. time constraint.

Insufficient Training

Since 2017, the faculty at GEU organized only two training sessions for teachers to learn about TBLT. This limited number of sessions was insufficient for teachers to gain a thorough understanding of tasks and the TBLT approach. Additionally, one of the training sessions held in Beijing was not focused explicitly on TBLT. As a result, some teachers still did not understand tasks or TBLT after training.

"I have joined the training twice. One lasted for two days in Beijing, and another lasted for five days in Guangdong. However, the training was insufficient."

(T1, FGI)

Additionally, one of the training sessions held in Beijing was not focused explicitly on TBLT. As a result, some teachers still did not understand tasks or TBLT after training. Figure 4.3 shows that the training theme was smart teaching design in teaching English in colleges and universities.

Smart Teaching Design Seminar for Foreign Language Classrooms in Colleges and Universities

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for your participation in "Smart Teaching Design Seminar for Foreign Language Classrooms in Colleges and Universities" held in Beijing between 28th and 29th Oct. 2017. The aim of the seminar is to help participants to explore the smart teaching design concepts, principles and methods of foreign language courses and improve teachers' abilities to design smart teaching in colleges and universities.

Figure 4.3. Invitation letter of training in Beijing (English version).

Teachers' online reflective notes also confirmed their inadequate training in the TBLT approach.

"I need more training in TBLT to help me learn the theories and the design of TBLT lessons in the CE course."

(T4, ORN)

Teachers need comprehensive professional training on TBLT to effectively apply it in their CE classes. However, feedback from teachers indicates that they had limited opportunities for such training, leading to a lack of understanding of TBLT and tasks. This insufficient training, compounded by the absence of institutional support, left teachers feeling ill-equipped to utilize methods they were unfamiliar with. However, implementing TBLT requires a high level of understanding of task-based instruction and evaluation of task performance; this lack of training has made it challenging for teachers to implement TBLT in teaching CE.

Time Constraint

Furthermore, limited allocated time is another issue for the teachers to apply the TBLT approach in the class. Their perception is derived from the teachers' interview responses:

"The passages I taught in the class are long. The time was not enough for students to read the passages in the class. So I usually assign a jigsaw reading task for students to read part of the passage and exchange the information they have got through reading." (L3, FGI).

Time Constraint) Department Constraint

"Our teaching time is inadequate for organizing the students to do tasks well in class. I hope the faculty can make a new plan to increase teaching time for us."

(T1, FGI)

According to the teaching time allocated in the syllabus, students take part in CE class for 4 classes, namely, 3 hours per week. The total allocated time is 64 classes in 16 weeks. However, the time allocated by the textbook is 6 classes, namely, 4.5 hours per week. The teaching time allocated in the syllabus is much less than the time suggested in the textbook. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show the allotted time for CE in the syllabus and the textbook, respectively.

Semester 1

I Course information

Course	Comprehensive English I	Course code	A021311
Department	School of Foreign Languages	Semester	First
Course type	Professional Education Course	Compulsory/ Elective course	Compulsory
Allocated time	64 classes/semester 4 classes/week (Each class is 45 minutes)	Assessment	Test
Major	English education majors	Time to apply the syllabus	September, 2020
Editor	Guo Juan	Examiner	Cen Yanlin, Tu Guoyong, Zhang Haitian

Figure 4.5. DA: Allocated time for CE I (English version).

Source: CE syllabus.

教学建议

本教材共四册，以每周6个学时计，每册可用一个学期，四册可供学生使用两个学年。

Teaching suggestions (English translation)

There are four volumes of the series of the textbook. Each volume is used for one semester. Four books are used for English majors for the first two years. It is suggested 6 classes per week

Figure 4.6. DA: Suggested allocated time per week in the textbook (English version).

Source: CECL textbook.

CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings regarding teachers' challenges in implementing TBLT encompass four main aspects: constraints originating from the teachers themselves, constraints related to the students, constraints associated with teaching resources, and constraints stemming from the department. These findings align with previous research, which identified multiple reasons why teachers hesitate to adopt TBLT (Liu & Xiong, 2016; Liu et al., 2018). These reasons include limitations in resources, administrative barriers, constraints related to teachers' abilities, and challenges arising from student factors. It is crucial for teachers to receive training and support in TBLT implementation to address these challenges. Professional development workshops, ongoing coaching, and access to resources such as lesson plans and task design guidelines can help teachers develop the knowledge and skills necessary to incorporate TBLT effectively into their language teaching practice. Additionally, providing opportunities for collaboration and peer learning can facilitate the sharing of best practices and innovative ways to implement TBLT. The textbook materials were not appropriately matched to the students' language proficiency levels at GEU. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the materials and tasks in the textbooks to suit the students' needs better. The adaptation could involve simplifying the language, providing more contextual explanations for cultural references, breaking down complex sentences, and gradually introducing more advanced vocabulary and grammar concepts to students. Additionally, supplementing the textbooks with supplementary materials, such as simplified readings or multimedia resources, could help bridge the gap between the students' current proficiency levels and the demands of the textbooks. Teachers might also benefit from providing targeted support and scaffolding during instruction to help students navigate the challenging content more effectively.

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