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Task-Based Language Teaching

Daniel O. Jackson

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TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract: This Element is a guide to task-based language teaching (TBLT), for language instructors, teacher educators, and other interested parties. The Element first provides clear definitions and principles related to communication task design. It then explains how tasks can inform all stages of curriculum development. Diverse, localized cases demonstrate the scope of task-based approaches. Recent research illustrates the impact of task design (complexity and mode) and task implementation (preparation, interaction, and repetition) on various second-language outcomes. The Element also describes particular challenges and opportunities for teachers using tasks. The epilogue considers the potential of TBLT to transform classrooms, institutions, and society.

This Element also has a video abstract: www.cambridge.org/dojackson

Keywords: pedagogic task design, curriculum development, language education, classroom research, teacher education

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Contents

1 What Is TBLT?	1
2 The Task-Based Curriculum	12
3 Task-Based Approaches in Context	22
4 Research into TBLT	30
5 Teachers and Tasks	50
6 Epilogue: The Potential of TBLT	53
Appendix: Discussion Questions	57
References	58

1 What Is TBLT?

1.1 A Framework for Language Teaching

As an approach to communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching (TBLT) originated in the mid-1980s. It has grown to become one of the most widely recognized options for designing and implementing language instruction today. As a field of academic inquiry, TBLT has achieved a number of milestones, including the inauguration of the International Conference on TBLT in 2005, since organized every two years under the auspices of the International Association for Task-Based Language Teaching (IATBLT), a book series published by John Benjamins since 2009, and the launch of *TASK: Journal on Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning* in 2021. In terms of its implementation, TBLT has matured from an alternative approach to a mainstream educational policy initiative encouraged or adopted in schools in Belgium, Hong Kong, and New Zealand, among other regions. Increasingly, it is offered as a subject in language teacher education programs, featured at teaching conferences and in professional workshops, and is carried out by teachers with students, during face-to-face or online lessons.

Thus, TBLT is a way of teaching languages and a robust area of inquiry. In practice, language educators around the world use tasks to coherently frame their teaching. This coherence can be seen from various perspectives. First, ‘task’ provides a useful concept for framing the reasons *why* languages are taught, *what* to teach (the particular content), and *how* to teach (the classroom procedures). Second, in a practical sense, the literature on TBLT offers guidance on using the concept of task to link elements of curriculum design such as materials, teaching, and testing. Lastly, and most importantly, TBLT epitomizes the notion that classroom instruction should be responsive to learners’ needs for using language in the real world.

Tasks enable learners to acquire communicative abilities and to participate in social activities relevant to their present or future goals. There has been much discussion and debate regarding the proposal that real-world tasks should form the basis of language teaching, beginning with Long (1985). The appeal of TBLT is that it seeks to identify and utilize activities valued by learners as the impetus for curriculum development. How the use of tasks facilitates acquisition of language and fosters participation in society is a matter of considerable theoretical and practical interest. It furthermore involves reconsideration of the teacher’s role, which in TBLT

contrasts with traditional educational practices. According to [Long and Ahmadian \(2022, pp. xxvi–xxvii\)](#), TBLT is growing in popularity because it is:

1. perceived by adult learners as clearly designed with their specific needs in mind;
2. preferred by students and teachers to traditional approaches to language teaching;
3. supported by evidence from comparison studies, which demonstrate its benefits over traditional approaches to language teaching;
4. compatible with other contemporary approaches, such as bilingual education, content-and-language-integrated learning, and English medium instruction;
5. consistent with findings from second language acquisition research on linguistic development and learner factors.

1.2 The Aim and Organization of This Element

It is relevant here to briefly note my background within the TBLT community, as well as my approach and aim. I earned my MS in Education at the University of Pennsylvania, where I first encountered the notion of tasks in language teaching in the late Teresa Pica's stimulating classes and seminal publications. Upon graduating, I served in the English Language Program at J. F. Oberlin University, where I often employed tasks in teaching and assessment. Later, as I completed my PhD in Second Language Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, I had the honor of studying with John Norris, Lourdes Ortega, and Peter Robinson, whose important contributions to TBLT are described in this Element. In my research, I adopt a cognitive-interactionist stance on language learning that emphasizes tasks as a valuable means of providing learners with opportunities for input, output, and feedback. I have also advocated a range of theoretical views on tasks in classroom research ([Jackson & Burch, 2017](#)) and conducted studies on preservice teacher psychology within tasks ([Jackson, 2021](#); [Jackson & Shirakawa, 2020](#)). In my current role as a professor in the English Department and the MA TESOL Program at Kanda University of International Studies, I have found that, although excellent, authoritative accounts of TBLT have been published (e.g., [Ellis et al., 2019](#); [Long & Ahmadian, 2022](#); [Van den Branden, 2022](#)), the need exists for a short, practical guide to the main concepts and issues in task-based language education. My aim is to make this field accessible to a wider audience of teachers.

As just noted, this Element offers a concise guide to the main concepts and issues in TBLT. It can be used by teachers individually or in groups, perhaps as a resource in preservice or in-service teacher education courses and workshops.

The present introductory section orients readers to TBLT and provides key definitions and examples, as well as offering commentary on communication task design. [Section 2](#) guides readers through the familiar elements of a language curriculum (needs analysis, sequencing of content, materials development, teaching, testing, and evaluation) to illustrate how each can be informed by tasks. [Section 3](#) then adopts a case study approach to demonstrate how teachers of diverse languages have found TBLT useful in their particular contexts. The longest section of the Element is [Section 4](#), which presents a review of recent empirical studies divided into two distinct aspects that concern practitioners: task design (i.e., complexity and modality) and task implementation (i.e., preparation, interaction, and repetition). [Section 5](#) then provides an overview of some of the central issues faced by teachers in understanding and using tasks. In the epilogue in [Section 6](#), I offer a brief critique of the potential of TBLT to bring about positive change in classrooms, institutions, and societies. The Element concludes with an appendix of questions designed to facilitate discussion after each of the aforementioned sections has been read.

Why use tasks in the first place? There are many answers, which will become apparent throughout this text. In this opening section, the following rationales will be presented. In short, among the clearest benefits of using tasks are that they can be designed to offer students:

- opportunities for meaningful communication in their second language (L2), which can lead to the acquisition of new language through comprehensible input, feedback, and modified output;
- practice to attain fluency and utilize specific features of language that may be challenging to learn;
- choices regarding lesson content and procedures and thus more meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

As described in this section, tasks are compatible with a wide range of teaching approaches. Subsequently, from [Section 2](#) onwards, further advantages gained from entirely task-based approaches will be considered.

1.3 Definitions

There is a difference between *target tasks*, or real-world activities learners ultimately aim to accomplish in their target language, and *pedagogic tasks*, which are instructional activities derived from target tasks. During engagement in pedagogic tasks, learners “use language, with an emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective” (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001, p. 11). This basic

definition incorporates many others that have been offered over the years. According to it, the following practices would not fittingly be described as tasks: (1) learning about the target language without actually using it, such as when listening to an explanation of it in one's first language; (2) using the language mechanically rather than meaningfully, as in the memorized dialogues or choral repetition associated with the audio-lingual method; and (3) using language meaningfully but without any overt goal, as in free conversation. Of course, one might benefit minimally from such activities, but they also illustrate an essential categorical distinction.

Besides the disregard for learners' needs in these examples of what is *not* a task, it is worth briefly considering how each of Bygate and colleagues' criteria is compatible with recent assumptions regarding learning and language. Namely, the specification that tasks must involve language use acknowledges that learning accrues gradually through practice in comprehending and producing oral and written discourse. The prioritization of meaning is supported by various functional theories of language, which view it as a tool for communication. Lastly, establishing objectives helps fuel learner engagement and clarify expected outcomes. A wide range of theoretical support for TBLT, often sharing an emphasis on learning by doing, has been described elsewhere (see [Ahmadian & García Mayo, 2018](#); [East, 2021](#); [Ellis et al., 2019](#); [Jackson & Burch, 2017](#); [Long, 2015](#); [Norris, 2009](#); [Samuda & Bygate, 2008](#)).

Moving from theory to practice, a crucial aspect of using tasks involves the difference between the *task-as-workplan* and the *task-in-process* ([Breen, 1987](#)). Importantly, the design of a task can predict neither entirely how it should be implemented for a given group of learners nor its outcomes. The original plan for the task, including its stated objective and procedures, unfolds according to the teacher's implementation and learner responses. The potential of the task to shape learning emerges from psycholinguistic and social activity during this task-in-process. The terms *retask* and *detask* ([Samuda, 2015](#)) have been used to refer to how teachers, as well as students, may alter plans during instruction. Further useful distinctions include those between *written* versus *oral* tasks, as well as *monologic* (narrative) versus *dialogic* (interactive) tasks. The examples in [Section 1.4](#) are oral, dialogic tasks.

1.4 Task Types

How can education be linked to relevant, real-world activities while also promoting meaningful language use with a clear objective in sight? For instance, having determined through personal observation and consultation with colleagues that a group of young learners would value the ability to sing

popular songs in their L2, a teacher might consider how this target task could be modified for them in a way that fosters learning through interaction. One possibility is to distribute two sets of lyrics for a given song wherein missing words in each set are present in the other, have the students exchange information verbally to complete the lyrics, and then practice singing the song together. In this example, the underlying task type is called a jigsaw task. Pedagogic *task types* are accounts of classroom tasks in terms of abstract categories (e.g., Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993; Prabhu, 1987; Robinson, 2001; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996). Typological descriptions are helpful to researchers, designers, and teachers because they may be used to classify tasks, discern their similarities and differences, and rank them according to their learning potential, among other uses.

This section offers examples of each type of task in the typology put forth by Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993). Being one of several possible choices, this typology was selected for the following reasons. First, Pica and colleagues covered five pedagogic task types, thereby incorporating earlier discussions that are helpful but made fewer distinctions (e.g., Prabhu, 1987). Second, rather than mainly describing the activity associated with tasks (e.g., Willis, 1996), their stated purpose was to present a “typology which can be used to differentiate tasks according to their contributions to language learning” (Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993, p. 10), for both teachers and researchers. Third, related to this goal, even though recent frameworks offer more fine-grained detail regarding the psycholinguistic demands of tasks and are augmented by task sequencing principles (e.g., Robinson, 2015), Pica and colleagues’ application of their typology to previously published teaching and research materials demonstrates its feasibility for designing, modifying, or understanding a wide range of materials. It is therefore a good starting point for understanding how task design may contribute to providing comprehensible input, negative feedback, and opportunities for modified output during learner–learner interaction.

Table 1 summarizes the descriptions in Sections 1.4.1–1.4.5 and illustrates how the five task types differ by interactional activity (i.e., information flow and interaction requirement) and communication goal (i.e., goal orientation and outcome options). To briefly gloss the table headers, information flow concerns whether there is only one speaker or more than one speaker (1 vs. 2 way). Interaction requirement refers to whether it is necessary or optional (+/- Required) for learners to interact. Goal orientation describes whether the task orients learners to the same goal or not (+/- Convergent). Lastly, outcome options include a single, fixed outcome (e.g., a math problem), a single, variable outcome (e.g., an election), or can be nonspecific.

Table 1 Pedagogic task types (adapted from Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993)

Type	Information flow	Interaction requirement	Goal orientation	Outcome options
Jigsaw	2 way	+ Required	+ Convergent	1 fixed
Information gap	1 or 2 way	+ Required	+ Convergent	1 fixed
Problem-solving	2 or 1 way	- Required	+ Convergent	1 fixed
Decision-making	2 or 1 way	- Required	+ Convergent	1 variable
Opinion exchange	2 or 1 way	- Required	- Convergent	Any or none

The following subsections present and discuss examples of each type. As described later (Section 2.1), TBLT is based on needs. This point is demonstrated by using the running example of nutrition, although TBLT, like most education, often caters to less basic and more psychological needs. All five examples form a unit of lessons for US-based adult learners whose needs include understanding English concerning proper nutrition. Specifically, they aim to support learners' ability to understand the nutritional value of food, make healthy choices, share preferences, and so on. Each subsection provides a brief definition, followed by the sample task, and a discussion of its potential for classroom language acquisition, based on Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun's (1993) study. Though the examples describe pair work, these task types can also be the foundation for group work.

1.4.1 Jigsaw

In a jigsaw task, learners engage in a two-way exchange of information. The exchange leads to completing some type of puzzle, hence the name. In the jigsaw and information gap tasks (see Section 1.4.2), interlocutors have clearly defined roles as information provider and/or information requester. In the case of the jigsaw task, both roles are held by each speaker. Because they each have only a portion of the information needed, they must take turns to gather all of it. The example here unfolds in two stages, which are called the input stage and communication stage (Anderson, 2019). During the input stage, the teacher gives pairs of students two different nutrition facts labels for sandwich bread (see Figure 1), asking them not to show their information to their partner. The teacher then asks the students to read their labels silently and checks understanding of the language with the whole class. As soon as they are ready to begin the communication stage, the students cooperate to find out which product is more nutritious and why (i.e., it has more fiber, protein, and vitamins and less

White		Wheat	
Nutrition Facts		Nutrition Facts	
14 servings per container		14 servings per container	
Serving size	1 slice (50g)	Serving size	1 slice (50g)
Amount per serving		Amount per serving	
Calories	130	Calories	130
% Daily value		% Daily value	
Total Fat 1g	1%	Total Fat 1.5g	2%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%	Saturated Fat 0g	0%
<i>Trans</i> Fat 0g		<i>Trans</i> Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%	Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 230mg	10%	Sodium 120mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 26g	9%	Total Carbohydrate 26g	9%
Dietary Fiber 1g	4%	Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 4g		Total Sugars 4g	
Includes 4g Added Sugars	8%	Includes 4g Added Sugars	8%
Protein 4g		Protein 6g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%	Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 30mg	2%	Calcium 50mg	4%
Iron 1mg	6%	Iron 1.8mg	10%
Potassium 50mg	0%	Potassium 125mg	2%

Figure 1 Two nutrition facts labels: white versus wheat bread (amounts are a composite based on actual products)

fat, sodium, and sugar). To reach this conclusion, the learners verbally share their information.

The main advantage of the jigsaw task derives from the need for both participants to interact in order to converge on one solution. To compare all of the data, participants must sustain their interaction over multiple turns, incorporating lexical items that may be new or unfamiliar. They may also engage in further discussion to weigh the importance of any differences uncovered. For these reasons, Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993, p. 21) claimed the jigsaw to be, “the type of task most likely to generate opportunities for interactants to work toward comprehension, feedback, and interlanguage modification processes related to successful SLA [second language acquisition].” This claim has been supported by face-to-face studies as well as those involving text-based computer-mediated communication (Blake, 2000).

1.4.2 Information Gap

Like jigsaw tasks, information gap tasks also require messages to be exchanged. However, they need only involve a one-way exchange: one person requests the information while the other provides it. A two-way exchange can happen if the listener actively seeks confirmation of the information received, or if the listener

and speaker alternate roles. The goal of each person in the interaction is the same (+ Convergent) and there is one fixed outcome according to the input provided. As an example, the teacher could first have students write down their favorite recipe. This can follow a simple formula: the name and origin of the dish, the ingredients, and a list of steps. Once this material has been prepared, the first student in the pair describes their recipe to a partner, who takes notes. Then, they switch roles and repeat the task. Having students write down each other's recipes would benefit their interaction, as that can prompt them to seek clarification and confirmation. Doing so would also allow the students and teacher to check the accuracy of the exchange.

Alternatively, if the teacher rather than the students prepares the input, it is possible to design information gap tasks drawing attention to specific language features that are difficult to acquire due to low salience. Research on such tasks by Pica, Kang, and Sauro (2006) found a strong association between interactional processes and the noticing of specifically targeted forms. For example, while working in pairs to complete tasks requiring them to discuss and make choices about English articles, pronouns, determiners, and verb morphology, intermediate-level learners' interactions often showed evidence of noticing these targeted forms. In Schmidt's (1990) account, noticing, or conscious registration of language, is necessary for the acquisition of an L2. Although many tasks do not require such close attention to language input, Pica and colleagues assumed on the basis of their evidence that task-based interaction can prompt learners to notice. Maps, drawings, texts, and other materials can provide content for information gap tasks.

1.4.3 Problem-Solving

In a problem-solving task, learners are expected to interact to find a single solution to a given problem. As an example, consider a lesson where the teacher asks students to sit in pairs. The task input (Figure 2) is then displayed to the whole class. The teacher explains that these items are all popular snack foods, which differ in their calorie content, then instructs the students in pairs to discuss each example with the goal of ranking them from the least to most calories. The outcome of these discussions can be checked easily by having a student or students write the answer on the chalkboard: carrot < apple < banana < frozen yogurt < croissant < pizza slice. Then, any discrepancies in the ranking among pairs can be dealt with and follow-up discussions on the topic can be conducted.

Pica, Kanagy, and Faldoun (1993) noted some problems with problem-solving tasks. Namely, as seen in Table 1, the information should flow in two

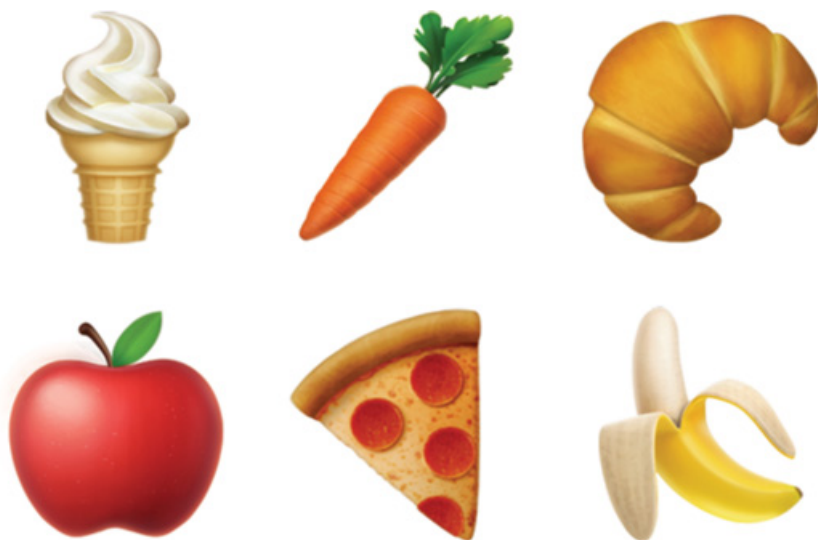


Figure 2 Popular snack foods

directions, but if either student does not possess the requisite confidence, knowledge, or skill, then the other may lead throughout the discussion. Because the information requester versus provider roles are unspecified, the design does not strictly require interaction. These problems also apply to decision-making and opinion exchange tasks (see [Sections 1.4.4](#) and [1.4.5](#)). In the example, it may turn out that only one individual dominates the discussion. To promote more equal participation, the teacher might instruct students to take turns giving their answers and provide reasons for them. However, the fact remains that the amount and quality of interaction may be limited in comparison to jigsaw tasks, in which the discourse is more predictable. On the other hand, this design, like the previous two, has an advantage because its shared, fixed goal provides a clear direction and endpoint for the discussion.

1.4.4 Decision-Making

The decision-making task encourages learners to discuss a given topic and agree upon one of a finite number of acceptable outcomes. Other possible outcomes suggested by the input may be unacceptable. To illustrate, the teacher could provide the class with copies of a restaurant menu ([Figure 3](#)) to read. The task involves a scenario in which students are at lunch with a friend who needs assistance to understand the menu. This friend would prefer a meal that contains protein and vegetables, but no dairy. The teacher asks pairs of students to look over the menu in order to help choose a suitable option. Based on the criteria

<i>Menu</i>	
<i>BAKED MACARONI & CHEESE served with garden salad.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>SMOKED CHICKEN served with mashed potatoes & string beans.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>CHEESEBURGER on a toasted bun served with French fries.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>GRILLED SALMON served with brown rice & steamed carrots.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>GARDEN SALAD with fresh lettuce, tomatoes, & cucumber.....</i>	<i>10</i>

Figure 3 Menu

provided, two menu options can be eliminated immediately (those containing cheese) and a third (the salad) would not satisfy the need for protein. This leaves two choices, either of which constitutes an acceptable suggestion. The students agree on one of these and explain their choice to the class.

As already noted, the interactional activity in decision-making tasks is the same as in problem-solving tasks. The information on which the decision is based is shared among the students, who are expected to talk in order to reach a common goal, though there is no built-in requirement to interact. The distinguishing feature of this task is that while it requires an outcome, that outcome may vary (Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993). This brief example leaves room for only two options, but more could be added by increasing the number of items on the menu. Indeed, doing so might lead to more substantial discussion. Samuda and Bygate (2008) presented a task they called ‘Things in Pockets,’ in which students given a number of objects found in someone’s coat pockets are asked to reach a consensus on the owner’s identity. These authors made the point that the discourse emerging from such tasks has important qualities such as the potential for social engagement and collaborative thinking.

1.4.5 Opinion Exchange

In an opinion exchange task, learners are expected to share their opinions in order to discuss or debate a topic. Continuing with the diet and nutrition theme, the instructor could pair students up to have them discuss which locally produced foods they enjoy eating. Based on Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun’s (1993) study (see Table 1 of this Element), the flow of information would presumably be two-way, but if either student is unfamiliar with the food sourced locally, then it will become one-way. Interaction is possible, but not required. The communication goal of opinion exchange tasks poses unique challenges. This design

does not provide an inherent goal for the discussion to converge on. If students express disagreement, their goal orientation would be considered divergent. Besides, the goal is relatively simple: state any local food product or combination thereof, or none at all. For all of these reasons, exchanging opinions is unlikely to guarantee learners equal opportunities for conversational interaction to the extent seen in jigsaw and information gap tasks. Nonetheless, opinion exchange would be appropriate for different aspects of L2 development (Skehan, 1998). In fact, divergent tasks, in which learners produce additional clauses to support their arguments, have been shown to generate more syntactically complex discourse than convergent ones, in face-to-face (Duff, 1986) and computer-mediated (Jackson, 2011) settings. To communicate effectively in an L2, one must share opinions. Tasks that promote this ability also provide valuable opportunities for students to raise issues or concerns that might not otherwise come to light.

1.5 Additional Perspectives on Task Design

The previous section focused on how task design may shape classroom discourse to bring about favorable conditions for L2 acquisition (i.e., comprehensible input, negative feedback, and opportunities for modified output). Before going further, it is worth briefly noting two additional perspectives on the design of tasks. These views lead to broader understandings of the value of tasks in language education.

First, learning opportunities in TBLT have been viewed in terms of the task-essentialness (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993; Ortega, 2007) of certain language items, which may be challenging to acquire under more naturalistic learning conditions. According to this perspective, tasks vary in terms of whether they make the comprehension or production of specific grammatical constructions essential, useful, or natural. It is easier to design one-way tasks that make comprehension of certain features essential to successful performance, although two-way tasks, such as those just described, can also be evaluated in terms of the essentialness of language features. As for grammar, in the problem-solving task (Section 1.4.3), comparatives are highly useful (e.g., *carrots have fewer calories than apples, frozen yogurt has more calories than a banana*). The concept of essentialness has also been extended to pronunciation (Solon, Long, & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2017). The jigsaw task in Section 1.4.1 makes the use of the schwa essential because this sound occurs in several words (e.g., *sodium, calcium, potassium*) that learners can be expected to use. Teachers might leverage these opportunities to draw attention to language, or promote increased fluency.

Second, more recently, the learners' level of engagement has been recognized as a major consideration in task-based learning. Philp and Duchesne (2016) described engagement in terms of its cognitive (e.g., attention), behavioral (e.g., time on task), social (e.g., affiliation), and emotional (e.g., feelings) facets. Researchers have measured engagement in various ways. With regard to task design, findings suggest that key dimensions of engagement are enhanced when using learner-generated as opposed to teacher-generated content (Lambert, Philp, & Nakamura, 2017; Phung, Nakamura, & Reinders, 2021). In other words, giving learners some control over the content appears to make tasks more meaningful and engaging. Among the examples provided, the information gap task in Section 1.4.2 does this by inviting learners to exchange their favorite recipes. It is sometimes easy to make minor adjustments to existing tasks in order to allow creativity and promote engagement. For example, the decision-making task (Section 1.4.4) could be redesigned so that learners first write down menu items individually, pool them to create their own menu, and then discuss which ones would make appropriate choices based on certain dietary restrictions.

These views are helpful for understanding the value of tasks, though in a broader sense, TBLT offers even more than conversational interaction, language practice, and learner engagement. As the following sections demonstrate, the outcomes can extend far beyond even these important goals.

2 The Task-Based Curriculum

Tasks are the building blocks for the development of task-based language curricula.¹ The components that define a curriculum and its development include needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials, and teaching, as well as ongoing evaluation of each of these elements (Brown, 1995). The design of task-based curricula (Long, 2015; Long & Norris, 2000; Norris, 2009) is similar, albeit distinguished by a focus on tasks at each stage. In terms of the learner's contribution, strictly task-based syllabi differ from those of traditional language teaching because they are *analytic*, rather than *synthetic* (Wilkins, 1976, as cited in Long & Crookes, 1992). That is, students *analyze* and perform tasks under the assumption that they will use their own abilities and knowledge to learn new, developmentally appropriate language, instead of being taught from a prescribed list of disconnected grammatical structures, presented piece-by-piece, which they must themselves recombine for use in later communication. To supplement learners' own analysis of the language used in tasks,

¹ As a reviewer helpfully pointed out, 'curriculum' has the same meaning as 'syllabus' in some parts of the world.

teachers can provide a focus on form. As described by Long and Robinson (1998), focus on form involves a momentary shift of attention (via recasts, clarification requests, and so on) to learner language produced during task performance. Another way in which task-based curricula potentially differ from traditional approaches is that learners are given a wider range of options for negotiating content and procedures (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000).

The view of tasks outlined in the preceding paragraph has aptly been described as uppercase Task-Based Language Teaching by Long (2015). Contrary to this scenario, it should be noted that, in practice, tasks are often viewed as “simply a context for learners to experience language in a range of ways” (Bygate, 2000, p. 188). Indeed, the acronym TBLT may be adopted as an umbrella term for any use of tasks in language teaching. Fully task-based programs are outnumbered by task-supported implementations, which put less emphasis on the overall role of tasks. Given that hybrid or task-supported options are described elsewhere (e.g., Ellis, 2018; Samuda & Bygate, 2008), this section will focus on the practicalities of orienting to tasks at each stage in a language curriculum, as in an uppercase or strong version of TBLT. The perspective offered here acknowledges that without a commitment to the coherent integration of tasks throughout programs, the maximal effectiveness of TBLT cannot properly be evaluated (Norris, 2009).

2.1 Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the process of identifying the needs that a given learner group aims to fulfill through their education. The assumption is that it is more efficient, particularly in the case of adults, to tailor instruction to the specific academic, professional, or vocational domain in which the learners intend to use language. Language curriculum developers who undertake needs analyses utilize a wide range of sources (e.g., literature reviews, learners, and experts) and methods (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, and observations) (Long, 2005). Long argued that adopting tasks as the focal point avoids a bottleneck in such analyses. Experts typically possess considerable knowledge regarding their professional domains, but are untrained in linguistic description. This situation makes it challenging for curriculum designers to filter out relevant language from the wealth of information domain experts can provide. Ultimately, the needs analysis should accurately reflect the domain and spotlight how language is used within it. Therefore, collaboration between outside experts and applied linguists is recommended to provide valid and useful information about both the content and the language taught and assessed throughout the curriculum (Long, 2015).

Several examples of needs analyses illustrate its potential to foster TBLT. First, [Park \(2015\)](#) examined the needs of English as a foreign language (EFL) students in an urban middle school in Korea. The sources included students, teachers, and relevant documents. Descriptive analyses of survey data indicated students' perceived needs and their preferences regarding participation styles, learning strategies, and conversation topics, which were compared with teacher results to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. Both groups valued preparation for examinations, as well as communication, which has implications for implementing tasks in this context.

Second, [Malicka, Gilabert Guerrero, and Norris \(2019\)](#) conducted a study with hotel receptionists in Barcelona, Spain, including both experts (those with three to five years' work experience) and novices (tourism students interning at hotels). Based on interviews and on-site observations, they identified a variety of *target task types* (e.g., greeting and saying farewell to clients, providing directions, and solving problems) and their frequency. The interviewees were also asked to assess the relative ease/difficulty of the tasks. These results were used to design a task-based unit on handling overbooking, which was perceived as a difficult task, comprising simple, complex, and +complex task versions.

Third, [Oliver \(2020\)](#) documented the needs of Aboriginal students at a vocational high school in Western Australia. Various sources were used, including classroom observations and student, as well as teacher, interviews. Examination of these sources revealed that school teachers focused on meeting students' needs related to occupational, social, and life skills. The author describes how these needs were met through authentic, culturally appropriate tasks. Other recent examples have focused on the language needs of medical students using isiZulu ([Gokool & Visser, 2021](#)) and Syrian refugee parents using Turkish ([Toker & Sağıç, 2022](#)).

Needs analysis is one of the features distinguishing a strong version of TBLT from its weaker variants. Indeed, considering that L2 learning can be a choice or a necessity, some argue that general approaches to curriculum development, as often seen in commercial English as a second language (ESL) and EFL textbooks, are "particularly detrimental" ([Serafini, 2022](#), p. 75) when learners need assistance in integrating into society. The nature and scope of learner needs are highly differentiated, as these three studies illustrate. In Park's study, they included academic and social needs, in Malicka's study, they involved highly specific occupational duties, and in Oliver's study, they encompassed workplace and social skills. Detailed knowledge of the sectors relevant to learners' future success is the first step in selecting and sequencing appropriate tasks for instruction.