Task-Based Language Teaching in Hong Kong English Education

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Abstract. Task-based language teaching, which is a language teaching approach where tasks constitute the bedrock of planning and instruction, is a learner-centred and experiential pedagogy popular in the field of second language acquisition and promulgated to second and foreign language classrooms all over the globe in recent decades. This paper elucidates influences of three forces— central agencies, textbook publishers, and teachers—on implementation of such pedagogy originated from the West in English language education in Hong Kong. It is discovered that the intended English language curriculum in Hong Kong is in favour of such pedagogy and highly advocates incorporation of communicative tasks into the implemented curriculum albeit partial realization of the essence of task-based language teaching in locally produced instructional materials, which comprise more integrated tasks than form-focused tasks. Moreover, English teachers in Hong Kong may not be receptive to such pedagogy out of their concern about the examination-oriented education system in Hong Kong as well as worry about plausible occurrence of disciplinary problems in task-based lessons. Suggestions targeting those three prominent forces influencing curriculum decisions on teaching methods are eventually put forward to illuminate and facilitate implementation of task-based language teaching in Hong Kong English language education.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching; Hong Kong English language education.

1 Introduction

Being a hyponym of communicative language teaching (CLT) (see Richards, 2001a), task-based language teaching (TBLT), which is highly learner-centred and experiential, has gained credence in the field of second language acquisition and been promulgated to second and foreign language classrooms all over the globe in recent decades out of globalization, which denotes compression of time and space (Bauman, 1998; Choudhury, 2011). With the advent of TBLT, teachers' roles in second and foreign language classrooms are presumed to have been revolutionized from controllers to facilitators of students' learning (Harmer, 2001). All the same, it is a no-brainer that only can pedagogy be adapted in lieu of being directly transplanted to any educational context by virtue of multifarious one-of-a-kind contextual factors. For all presence of attributes of TBLT in the intended curriculum as well as locally produced instructional materials, by no means is the praxis of such pedagogy in the implemented curriculum of Hong Kong English language education free from challenges or obstacles.

2 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

On the whole, TBLT entails a language teaching approach where tasks constitute the bedrock of planning and instruction (Richards, 2001a). As a matter of fact, barely is conceptualization of a "task" unanimous in the academia albeit a widespread agreement that "tasks" can be capitalized upon to refer to any activities or goals carried out using language (Richards, 2001a). In this vein, TBLT can be construed as a pedagogical approach in which classroom activities are tasks necessitating students' accomplishment of particular goals by means of language. TBLT being an analytic approach to language instruction, which is largely top-down, it is unequivocally incumbent upon teachers to select tasks relevant to students' needs and interests whilst students are expected to communicate or transmit information with one another in the course of learning (Evans & Green, 2006; Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2013).

The entirety of the pedagogy is grounded upon the interactionalist perspective to second language acquisition, the crux of which is the revised Interaction Hypothesis put forward by Michael Long (1996), as well as second language learning motivation (Gardner, 2001). In accordance with Long's proposal, environmental contributions to acquisition, which are integral to second language learning, are brought together during negotiation for meaning, which denotes performative sentences performing some kind of speech act when the utterance is produced, such as confirmation checks, clarification requests, and comprehension checks (Austin, 1971; Hurford, Heasley, & Smith, 2007; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). Exchanging information or solving problems in the course of completion of tasks, students are certainly provided with myriads of opportunities to negotiate for meaning with one another, produce comprehensible output, and even discover constituent parts of language (Yule, 2014). Moreover, recognizing motivation as a determinant of second language achievement, TBLT provides opportunities for authentic language use as well as collaboration and possesses well-defined dimensions as well as diversified formats in a bid to enhance students' second language learning motivation (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013; Richards, 2001a). Zeroing in on negotiation for meaning and students' learning motivation, TBLT eventually aims at gradually developing students' communicative competence, which comprises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence.

TBLT is most prevalently exploited as grammar and vocabulary pedagogy for development of students' grammatical competence. Pinpointing accurate production of language forms at distinct levels of the grammatical hierarchy, ranging from segmental and suprasegmental attributes of speech sounds to extended discourse, grammatical competence can be developed through form-focused tasks, a so-called "weak version" of TBLT (Nelson, 1998; Roach, 2009). Meaning-focused tasks, a "strong version" of TBLT, is situated at the experimental dimension of the communicative continuum, which lays emphasis on conveyance of messages, subconscious learning, and correctness of spontaneous language, and possesses no focus on grammar forms; in contrast, form-focused tasks are situated at the analytical dimension of the continuum, which stresses form-meaning mappings, conscious learning, and automaticity of correct language, and engages learners in using language for communication with a grammar focus (Boston, 2010; Littlewood, 2011; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Form-focused tasks can either be planned, implying that predetermined grammatical structures are elicited, or incidental, signifying that attention to form occurs on the basis of students' linguistic needs as the task proceeds (Ellis, 2006); they can be employed in both grammar and vocabulary instruction in second and foreign language classrooms. For instance, metalinguistic awareness tasks, such as error correction tasks (see Appendix A), are planned form-focused tasks that can play an indispensable role in heightening students' language awareness, which entails explicit knowledge on language as well as conscious percept and sensitivity in language learning (Prtic Soons, 2008; Sze & Leung, 2014). In addition, eliciting meaning-focused output from students, communicative tasks with written output are also planned form-focused tasks that can be profitable for instruction of predetermined target lexical items (Schmitt, 2008). It is no question that these two concrete instances provide conclusive evidence for feasibility of implementation of form-focused tasks for grammar and vocabulary instruction.

Not only grammatical competence but sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence can also be developed via TBLT. Concerned about pragmatics and communication strategies respectively, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence can undoubtedly be developed using integrated tasks involving integration of receptive and productive language skills. In particular, having read a text, students may engage in a writing task or speaking task in response to the text, such as compiling a written summary of the text or deliberating upon main ideas of the text with other students (Grellet, 1981). Not only do such tasks enable students to integrate their language skills, they also possess clear communicative goals; more importantly, they are capable of developing students' strategic competence in that communication strategies can be acquired in the course of language production, be it written or spoken. Another instance of integrated tasks is process drama. Despite pervasively deemed to be a form of literature written primarily to be performed on stage, drama can take multiple forms in practice, and process drama accentuates a collective construction of authentic drama contexts for learning in lieu of one-off theatre performances (Chan & Lam, 2010; Mays, 2013). Immersed in dramatic contexts with fictional purposes for authentic communication in tasks such as *Story Whoosh* ad *Still Image*[1], students

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[1] *Story Whoosh* and *Still Image* are prevalent strategies in process drama. In *Story Whoosh*, teacher narrates a story whilst students enact spontaneously key scenes of the story in front of the class (Chan & Lam, 2010). In *Still Image,*

partaking in process drama possess well-defined communicative goals and manage to develop their sociolinguistic competence when confronting with hidden rules of distinct cultures in various dramatic contexts (Chan & Lam, 2010). It can thereby be observed that scarcely does TBLT possess fixed or standardized procedures; on the contrary, it possesses many plausible variations for development of distinct respects of students' communicative competence.

Designed on the basis of TBLT, a task-based syllabus specifies tasks to be carried out throughout a learning programme (Richards, 2001a). Unlike conventional structural syllabi, which focus on the "what" in lieu of "how" dimension of learning, a task-based syllabus is categorized as a type of procedural syllabus and places stress on learning processes and pedagogical procedures in lieu of instructional content (White, 1988). Task-based syllabi are usually designed in accordance with the central or backward model. Possessing no predetermined grammatical syllabus, meaning-focused tasks are definitely intended to develop students' general language ability, so the central model can be adopted to design the syllabus with pedagogical tasks constituting the basis for instruction and content as well as outcomes negotiated with learners (Richards, 2013). In contrast, a backward model can be utilized in design of a task-based syllabus comprising form-focused tasks which possess grammatical foci. Such a design commences with a needs analysis, which investigates learners' necessities, lacks, and wants in language learning, followed by a task analysis, which explores requisite behaviours, knowledge, or cognitive processes for mastery of particular topics or skills, and eventually design of specific tasks (Ormrod, 2014; Richards, 2013; West, 1994). Seldom is the language-centred and teacher-centred forward model applied to design of task-based syllabi.

Concerning pedagogical procedures, a lesson structured on the basis of TBLT is expected to comprise three stages: pre-task, task, and post-task. Having been introduced to the topic and the task in the pre-task phase, students will carry out the task and subsequently report results of the task or appreciate some sample performance of the same task in the post-task phase (Richards, 2001a). Should the task be a form-focused task, the post-task stage will largely be devoted to analysis and practice of the language focus for the sake of hooking students' attention to any language structures expected to be acquired (Richards, 2001a). Suffice it to say that the aforementioned pedagogical procedures will lay the basis for implementation of TBLT in second and foreign language classrooms.

From the above, it is evidently observed that TBLT possesses strong theoretical tenets as well as concrete pedagogical design and procedures; that said, disparities may exist between the aforementioned delineation and actualities of implementation of the pedagogy in Hong Kong on account of an array of factors. Hong Kong being Asia's world city, its education system is molded by both Chinese and western cultures thanks to habitation of the Chinese community and its status as an antecedent British colony respectively (Lee & Ng, 2007; Ng, 1984); in particular, curriculum decisions on teaching methods have been discovered to be most substantially fashioned by central agencies, videlicet curriculum developers, textbook publishers, and teachers (Morris & Adamson, 2010). Influences of such three forces on implementation of TBLT, a pedagogy originated from the west, in English language education in Hong Kong, which possesses deep-rooted Chinese culture, will undeniably be elucidated at length by means of meticulous examination of any attributes of TBLT in the intended curriculum, realization of traits of TBLT in locally produced instructional materials, and teachers' percepts of implementation of TBLT in English language classrooms.

3   TBLT in the Hong Kong English Language Curriculum Guide

Providing general advice and recommendations on curriculum and instructional design, official curriculum documents are intended curricula laying the foundation for implemented curricula in the classroom designed by individual teachers and surely exerting far-reaching impacts on pedagogy capitalized upon by teachers. The *English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 6)* (Curriculum Development Council [CDC], 2017a), which is the latest English language curriculum guide in Hong Kong presenting the most updated curriculum framework,

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students are required to create a still image of what is happening at one particular moment of a scene of a story (Chan & Lam, 2010).

will be analyzed here to uncover the officially delineated role of TBLT in English language education in Hong Kong.

First and foremost, TBLT is highly advocated in the intended curriculum. Zeroing in on the interconnection between language learning and language use in everyday life, the curriculum guide suggests engaging students in communicative tasks, where "language skills and other language elements are interwoven", in the course of learning with the hope of enabling students to "interact naturally in and appreciate the richness and complexity of language" as in their everyday language use (CDC, 2017a, p.58). Conceptualized as "contextualized activities in which students are required to draw together a range of elements in their framework of knowledge and skills to convey meaning and achieve the desired outcomes", tasks are delineated as avenues for provision of meaningful contexts facilitating purposeful communication amongst students; more specifically, five attributes of a task, videlicet possession of a purpose, possession of a context, students' engagement in a mode of thinking and doing, possession of a process involving integration of language knowledge and skills, and possession of a product, are elucidated in the curriculum document (CDC, 2017a, pp. 64-65). It is beyond the doubt that such a conception of a "task" concurs with that in the academia elucidated in the antecedent section at large, for elements such as "language use" and "product' are present. Supplementing delineation of TBLT, the curriculum guide elucidates the concept of TBLT using some sample tasks, one of which is entitled "Inviting a Friend to a Food Festival" (see Appendix B). Targeting students at Key Stage 3,2 the task requires students to construct a letter of invitation to a friend by drawing upon relevant language knowledge and skills, videlicet knowledge on the text type of personal letters and grammar knowledge on prepositions of time (CDC, 2017b). Not only does the task involve integrated language use for purposeful communication, it also possesses an end product, which is a written letter. Delineated at length and elucidated with concrete instances, TBLT is said to be embraced by the curriculum guide.

In spite of primacy of TBLT as a pedagogical approach in the intended curriculum, hardly does the notion of task-based syllabus retain in the curriculum guide in its entirety. Being building blocks of thematically or conceptually organized units and modules, tasks are cornerstones of the suggested organization of the English language curriculum (CDC, 2017a; see Appendix C); this unquestionably complies with the concept of task-based syllabus, where tasks constitute core units of curriculum planning. That said, the underlying design of the suggested curriculum framework violates principles of a task-based syllabus in that the entirety of the curriculum is content-oriented in lieu of process-oriented, and neither is the central nor backward model exploited in the course of curriculum design. Recommended to assist students in "[achieving] … purposes set out in the learning targets and objectives", which embody language forms, communicative functions, language skills, language development strategies, and attitudes specific to English language learning, tasks serve as an avenue for students' acquisition of content specified in a syllabus predetermined prior to the course in lieu of constituting the syllabus themselves (CDC, 2017a, p. 65). For instance, in the sample task in Appendix B, the task has been purposefully designed to assist students in "[mastering] … language items and structures that they have learnt", which are prepositions of time (CDC, 2017b, p.84). This exhibits that a forward model of curriculum design is employed in that the syllabus has been determined in advance of decisions on methodology and learning outcomes (Richards, 2013). It is thereby observed that a task-based syllabus is absent in the curriculum guide in its pure form albeit its proposal of TBLT as the overriding pedagogy in English language classrooms.

Regarding pedagogical procedures, suggested pedagogical stages of TBLT in the intended curriculum deviate significantly from pedagogical procedures of TBLT put forward by scholars outlined in the antecedent section. Notwithstanding presence of the three prominent stages of TBLT, videlicet pre-task, while-task, and post-task, in the curriculum guide, the essence of the three phases is assuredly absent. In accordance with Richard's (2001a) task cycle, only are students introduced the topic as well as the task in the pre-task stage, yet teachers are advised by the curriculum guide to prime students for the task linguistically prior to the task through identification of and explicit instruction on requisite language items and structures for the task (CDC, 2017a). For instance, students engage in controlled practice of target structures, videlicet prepositions of time, in the pre-task stage in the sample task in Appendix B.

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2 There are altogether four key stages in Hong Kong basic education, each of which possesses its own learning targets. Key Stages 1, 2, 3, and 4 denote Primary One to Three, Primary Four to Six, Secondary One to Three, and Secondary Four to Six respectively.

Requiring students to draw upon language knowledge and skills to complete the task, the while-task stage delineated in the curriculum guide is akin to that of Richard's (2001a) task cycle (CDC, 2017a). All the same, the post-task stage in Richard's (2001a) task cycle aims at hooking students' attention to the language focus whereas that in the curriculum guide is intended to engage students in extended tasks or projects providing new contexts for consolidation of target language items (CDC 2017a). In short, learners focus on meaning in both pre-task and while-task stages and focus on form merely in the post-task stage given that Richard's (2001a) task cycle is operationalized; in contrast, they are expected by the curriculum guide to focus on form in all three stages of TBLT. This further corroborates that TBLT delineated in the curriculum guide is language-centred and content-driven in lieu of process-based.

All in all, akin to the intended English language curriculum in other contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language, such as Singapore (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2010), the intended English language curriculum in Hong Kong is in favour of the pedagogy of TBLT and highly advocates incorporation of communicative tasks situated within meaningful contexts and promoting purposeful communication into the implemented curriculum. It goes without saying that by no means is TBLT directly transplanted from western contexts to Hong Kong in its entirety in that pedagogical design and procedures have been localized and appropriated into the local context with some modifications; that said, the essence of TBLT is argued to have been largely retained in the curriculum guide.

4   TBLT in Hong Kong English Language Textbooks

Not only the intended curriculum but locally produced instructional materials also exert moderate, if not strong, influence on pedagogy adopted by teachers, in particular those contingent heavily upon those resource materials. Methodology being one of the yardsticks against which textbooks are evaluated, commercial textbooks are expected to be assessed in the domain of methodology in terms of alignment to the language teaching approach advocated by the intended curriculum and appropriateness of the approach taken to the context (Brown, 2001; Richards, 2001b). With TBLT embraced by the intended curriculum, it is doubtlessly of vital importance to analyze whether such pedagogy is realized in locally published textbooks. Three textbooks, videlicet *Primary Longman Elect 1A* (Jones, Gray, & Gordon, 2009), *Longman Elect JS 1A (Second Edition)* (Harfitt, Potter, Rigby, & Wong, 2012), and *Longman Elect New Senior Secondary Theme Book* (Potter, Rigby, & Wong, 2009), all of which were published by the same textbook publisher in Hong Kong, have been selected for analysis owing to two reasons. Attributed to distinct target levels, ranging from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4, analysis of all three textbooks allows for a more comprehensive picture of realization of TBLT in textbooks. Furthermore, receiving positive comments from the Textbook Committee such as "compatible with the aims and objectives of the curriculum guide" and "core elements of the subject curriculum appropriately dealt with" (Textbook Committee, Education Bureau, 2017), all three textbooks can be considered as highly congruent with the curriculum guide and worthy of scrutiny.

To begin with, integrated tasks involving integration of receptive and productive language skills are found in all three textbooks to develop students' sociolinguistic and strategic competence; one task has been selected from each of the three textbooks on a random basis for elaborated elucidation (see Appendix D). Leading toward written end products, which serve certain communicative functions, all three tasks possess clear communicative goals. Warranting students' reading comprehension of sample personal descriptions followed by written production of personal descriptions of themselves and their class, Task 1 requires students to integrate reading and writing skills to produce a short text performing the communicative function of introduction (Jones et al., 2009); integration of solely two skills in the task is probably attributable to the fact that students at Key Stage 1 are still situated at the preoperational period of cognitive development, which is characterized by a lack of abstract thinking or complicated mental operation (Piaget, Green, Marguerite, & George, 1971). Having proceeded to subsequent stages of cognitive development, students at Key Stages 3 and 4 are presumed to have mastered more complicated mental operations, so more language skills are integrated in Tasks 2 and 3 in that both involve a collaborative dialogue, be it an interview between pairs or a discussion amongst interlocutors, in advance of the ultimate written production task (Harfitt et al., 2012; Potter et al., 2009); opportunities for oral communication are intended to facilitate development of sociolinguistic and

strategic competence. What is more, with students managing to think abstractly, Tasks 2 and 3 provide students with clearer contextual background, videlicet publication in a class magazine in Task 2 and entrance to a radio play competition in Task 3, for more purposeful communication. Possessing meaningful contexts, well-defined goals, and concrete products, engaging students in proactive cognitive processing as well as language production, and enabling students to integrate language knowledge and skills, all three integrated tasks in the three textbooks absolutely fulfill the five criteria for a task delineated in the intended curriculum.

For all presence of integrated tasks in the three textbooks, rarely is TBLT utilized in grammar and vocabulary instruction in the three textbooks for development of grammatical competence. Even though a multiplicity of language items is taught in each unit of the three textbooks, only are those items taught via form-focused tasks in one of the textbooks. In the unit where Task 2 in Appendix D is situated, a host of grammar items, videlicet personal pronouns, the present simple, yes/no interrogatives, and adjuncts of frequency, and a multitude of vocabulary, videlicet adjectives delineating personality, school clubs, school facilities, and classroom duties, are covered, and the interview of a new friend embedded within the integrated task is regarded as a planned form-focused task with an authentic communicative context as well as clear goals and eliciting student' production of all those target structures (Harfitt et al., 2012; Richards, 2015). All the same, hardly can such form-focused tasks be identified in the two remaining textbooks. For instance, it can be observed from Task 1 that use of the demonstrative 'this' to introduce people at school is the language focus of the unit, yet planned form-focused tasks providing meaningful contexts for students to produce such a predetermined language form purposefully are absent; instead, a mechanical practice of the target structure, which denotes a controlled practice activity without understanding, is provided for students to practise producing the structure antecedent to the integrated task (Jones et al., 2009; Richards, 2015). In the book where Task 3 is situated, meaningful practice, which exerts a considerable amount of control on students' language production yet provides students with some meaningful choices, such as gap-filling with choices and discourse completion is incorporated into grammar and vocabulary instruction (Potter et al., 2009; Richards, 2015); that said, lacking genuinely meaningful contexts for communication, never can such practice be perceived to be form-focused tasks. Needless to say, integrated tasks are much more ubiquitous than form-focused tasks in the three textbooks under examination.

As for structure of the textbooks, all three are generally compatible with the intended curriculum in terms of overall organization of the curriculum framework albeit presence of a gap between the two in pedagogical procedures of TBLT. All three textbooks are organized on the basis of modules, under which several thematically or conceptually linked units are subsumed, and each unit or module comprises a task, which is the end product of a unit or module as well as the building block of the entirety of the curriculum. Additionally, akin to suggested pedagogical stages of TBLT in the curriculum guide, pre-tasks in the textbooks are largely devoted to linguistic priming as well as explicit presentation of language items. In particular, integrated tasks in the three textbooks being written tasks, the pre-task stage comprises mechanical or meaningful practice of grammar and vocabulary items associated with the task as well as modelling of the target text type (Harfitt et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2009; Potter et al., 2009). Tasks 2 and 3 in Appendix D being as more complicated tasks, more scaffolding, such as context building and brainstorming of ideas, is irrefutably incorporated into the pre-task stage to prime students for completion of the main task (Harfitt et al., 2012; Potter et al., 2009). The overarching disparity between the three textbooks and the intended curriculum in terms of pedagogical procedures lies in absence of post-tasks in the textbooks. The post-task stage is delineated in the curriculum guide with the aim of providing new contexts for consolidation of target language items, yet only do tasks in the three textbooks culminate at the while-task stage without any annex (CDC, 2017a). In this vein, only are recommended pedagogical procedures of TBLT in the curriculum guide are partially realized in the three textbooks.

On the basis of the aforementioned analysis, only is the essence of TBLT partially realized in locally produced instructional materials in that integrated tasks, which involve integrated use of language knowledge as well as skills, are omnipresent in locally published textbooks whilst only are there sporadic form-focused tasks, which engage learners in purposeful communication in meaningful contexts with a language focus. Pre-task and while-task stages of TBLT are generally present whereas the post-task stage is obviously absent; the task cycle in those textbooks can thereby be argued to be incomplete. Textbooks being profoundly influential in pedagogical practices of certain teachers, such an

inconsistency between textbooks and the intended curriculum can exert counterproductive impacts on the implemented curriculum.

5 Hong Kong English Teachers' Percepts of TBLT

Despite delineated as estranged labourers at times, teachers are professionals expected to possess authority and make professional judgments in reality (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008; Marx, 1995); they are thereby indisputably key players in the field of education and exert frightfully strong influence on pedagogy applied in the classroom. Carless (2004, 2007) has examined implementation of TBLT in primary and secondary English language classrooms in Hong Kong and unveiled some challenges as well as obstacles confronted by teachers on the basis of his interviews with in-service teachers as well as classroom observations.

One pitfall confronted by local English teachers in implementation of TBLT in the classroom is an examination-oriented education system in Hong Kong. The value of education is highly instrumental in Hong Kong in that only do numerous people value the use of education to themselves, and examination results, as opposed to knowledge and skills, are apparently reckoned by many to be of highest instrumental value (Peters, 1973); the public's excessive emphasis on examinations has effectuated a highly examination-oriented culture in the Hong Kong education system. The entirety of the situation has been even compounded since the education reform in 2000, when multifaceted novel assessment initiatives, videlicet Territory-wide System Assessment and school-based assessment, were implemented and possessed a tendency to drive the learning ecology in the classroom into even more examination-oriented (Cheng, 2009). Confronting with an enormous amount of standardized assessment in the education system, local English teachers have externalized their perceived difficulty in implementation of TBLT under such an examination-oriented context: "Even if the classroom teaching may be approaching the TBLT, students are still given traditional tests" (Carless, 2007, p.602), "… students are not given enough grammatical input" (p.601), "… task-based approaches put too much emphasis on oral work" (p.603). They predominantly hold a sentiment that TBLT, which is process-oriented, fails to holistically prime students for conventional written examinations, which lay emphasis on grammar. In spite of capable of developing students' communicative competence, TBLT possesses low non-monetary cost-benefit, which entails a ratio between the amount of return in terms of students' academic achievement and that of teachers' investment, to teachers (Lee, 2000); this makes teachers less receptive to such pedagogy, especially when selection ought to be made amongst infinite pedagogical options with limited instructional time (Poincare, 2001). For such a reason, preparation for examinations probably takes precedence over TBLT by reason of an examination-oriented education system.

Besides an examination-oriented education system, problems with classroom management constitute another difficulty confronted by local English teachers in implementation of TBLT. Three chief categories of pitfalls correlated with maintenance of classroom discipline may occur in the course of implementation of TBLT; the first category is students' performance of unproductive behaviour. Warranting students' proactive engagement in tasks, TBLT may evoke students' excitement at ease and effectuate some undesirable behaviours. For instance, Carless (2004) reported that "the activity [provoked] a lot of noise and excitement, particularly form the boys" when observing a task-based lesson (pp. 650). TBLT being communicative in nature and intended to motivate students, it is reasonable for noise and excitement to be generated from the process, yet communication of information between teachers and students as well as that amongst students may be hindered given that students' noise level or energy level becomes exceedingly high. The second category of pitfalls is students' resort to the mother tongue in the course of completion of tasks. Some students have been observed to converse with one another in Cantonese, which is their mother tongue, in a presumably Anglophone context when asked by teachers to engage in a task (Carless, 2004). Barely should use of the mother tongue necessarily be opined to be disciplinary problem since students' language choice may be attributable to their inability to express certain ideas in the target language. That said, resort to the mother tongue will incontestably deprive students of opportunities to produce comprehensible output and negotiate for meaning in the target language; this will in turn detract from pedagogical efficacy of the pedagogy. Added to the above, exceptional learners, who possess special educational needs, may also pose a threat to classroom management in a task-based lesson. For instance, possessing persistent deficits in social

communication and interactions, students with autism spectrum disorders may be reluctant to engage in communicative tasks, which warrant oral exchange with other students (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2014). Disfavouring communicative tasks, such exceptional learners may even disrupt the discipline of the class. Plausibly confronting with the aforementioned intractable pitfalls as well as students, some local English teachers appear reserved about implementation of TBLT in their classrooms.

In conclusion, English teachers in Hong Kong manifestly possess knowledge on and recognize the pedagogical efficacy of TBLT yet may not be receptive to such pedagogy as a result of the examination-orientated education system in Hong Kong as well as plausible occurrence of disciplinary problems in task-based lessons. Rarely do teachers hold a pejorative attitude towards the pedagogy, yet only when the aforementioned pitfalls are overcome will they be more receptive to and willing to operationalize TBLT in the implemented curriculum.

6   Implications and Suggestions

By and large, it is in evidence that TBLT is present in the intended English language curriculum in Hong Kong as well as locally produced English language instructional materials whilst local English teachers also possess knowledge on such pedagogy; all the same, challenges and obstacles of implementation of TBLT incontrovertibly exist at all three levels of intended curriculum, instructional materials, and teachers. Hardly can all the aforementioned challenges and obstacles be resolved at ease, but some suggestions targeting at those three prominent forces influencing curriculum decisions on teaching methods are put forward by the author in this section to provide future directions for and facilitate implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong English language education.

First of all, in response to local English teachers' concern about TBLT being incommensurate with the examination-oriented education system in Hong Kong, it is plainly suggested that in-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge be enriched. Having probed into implementation of TBLT in secondary English language classrooms in Hong Kong, Carless (2007) suggested establishing more direct links between TBLT and examinations, yet the two have still been conceived by teachers to be dissociated from each other to date; one plausible reason is teacher's insufficient pedagogical content knowledge to comprehend or put such a suggestion into practice. In accordance with the Generic Teacher Competencies Framework developed by Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (2003), curriculum and pedagogical content knowledge constitutes one of the teacher competencies within the teaching and learning domain. Not only are English teachers expected to master a range of areas underpinning literacy, videlicet verbal and nonverbal, reading, visual, genre, structure, grammar, spelling, and information technology, they are also expected to enrich their knowledge on pedagogy and adaptation of pedagogy to fit specific contexts by means of engagement in some professional development activities such as professional learning communities on a regular basis (Penn-Edwards, 2010). In particular, should they be more familiar with TBLT, it will be more likely for them to manage to operationalize Carless' (2007) suggestion and incorporate the essence of TBLT into practice of requisite language skills for standardized examinations.

Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge can be enriched by means of engagement in some professional development activities on a regular basis; such activities can be organized by both formal and informal means. On one hand, formal professional development seminars or workshops can be organized by central agencies and/or tertiary institutes to enrich teachers' pedagogical content knowledge on TBLT. In particular, fundamentals of the pedagogy, videlicet its definition, theoretical underpinnings, and pedagogical procedures, as well as exemplars of its practical application in local classrooms ought to be introduced to teachers, for only through possession of accurate and comprehensive knowledge of a pedagogical method can teachers master the pedagogy and adapt it to fit their own educational contexts. On the other hand, informal professional learning communities can be established amongst English teachers so that they can share desirable practices of implementation of TBLT through collaborative lesson planning, peer lesson observation, and reflective meetings; such practices can also enrich their pedagogical content knowledge on TBLT.

Apart from enrichment of teacher's pedagogical content knowledge, it is recommended that potential problems with classroom management in the course of implantation of TBLT envisaged by local English teachers be shunned through direct communication between teachers and students. Every human being

possesses distinct levels of needs to be satisfied, the ultimate of which is self-actualization (Liu, Holosko, & Lo, 2009; Maslow, 1954). Should students feel that they are enabled to fulfill their needs and actualize their own potentials at school, they will probably be better behaved and more cooperative. It is unreasonable to expect English teachers to assist students in satisfying all their needs; that said, conversing with students in a genuine, accepting, and empathetic fashion, English teachers can infallibly make an attempt to better understand their needs and provide opportunities for them to fulfill their needs in English lessons (Rogers, 1961). For instance, some students may engage in off-task behaviours or resort to Cantonese in the course of completion of tasks due to their failure to comprehend instructions of the activity or convey their ideas in English; having deciphered students' needs, teachers may attempt to conduct more instruction checks and detract from the linguistic demand in subsequent tasks for provision of more successful experience for students. As regards exceptional learners, teachers ought to recognize their cognitive and social capacities as well as natural dispositions and tailor-make some pedagogical tasks for their individualistic learning needs (Crain, 2000). Only by showing concern about and respecting students' needs can teachers genuinely create a classroom environment conducive to implementation of TBLT.

Added to the above, at the level of instructional materials, it is proposed that design of textbooks be aligned with guidelines in the intended curriculum in a bid to provide in-service teachers with a more precise picture of pedagogical procedures of TBLT. Even though it is incumbent upon English teachers to exert their professional judgments and design lessons on their own, it is decidedly not uncommon to observe that plentiful in-service teachers hinge heavily upon commercial textbooks for pedagogical ideas against a backdrop of their heavy workload and a lack of time for lesson planning; it is thereby vital that pedagogical design and procedures in locally published textbooks be quality and accurate. Lacking a post-task stage, the three textbooks analyzed in the antecedent section may provide teachers with a misconception that TBLT terminate at the while-task stage; this may adversely impact both teaching and learning, so a post-task stage is proposed to be added to complement the task cycle. On the other hand, even though scarcely is the purpose of the pre-task stage delineated in the curriculum guide in sync with that of Richard's (2001) task cycle, it is reasonable for the pedagogy to be localized and slightly modified when introduced to a foreign educational context; for this reason, it is appropriate for textbooks to retain their language focus in the pre-task stage.

Last but surely not the least, it is advised that central agencies, videlicet Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, align learning with assessment via incorporation of task-based assessment into standardized examinations for the sake of promotion of TBLT. Assessment and learning being inextricable from each other, changes in one necessitates a turnaround in another, so task-based assessment is efficacious in encouraging TBLT in the classroom (James, 2006). In point of fact, task-based assessment, which is criterion-referenced, involves integration of language skills, possesses a componential scoring system, and derives directly from pedagogical tasks implemented in the classroom, has already been implemented in the component of school-based assessment of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, which is a public examination taken by all secondary six students in Hong Kong (Ke, 2006). For instance, in Part A of the school-based assessment, which is an assessment administered at school, marked by students' own teachers, and accounting for 15% of the total score of the HKDSE Examination, having read or viewed a text, students deliver an individual presentation on or engage in a group interaction with classmates to deliberate upon the text (CDC & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority [HKEAA], 2007); not only are such assessment tasks integrated tasks warranting integration of receptive and productive skills, they are also criterion-referenced, componentially scored against the four assessment criteria of the public speaking examination, and likely to resemble speaking tasks conducted in the classroom (CDC & HKEAA, 2007). It is advised that more portions of conventional timed written examinations be superseded by such task-based assessments; in this vein, TBLT is presumed to be capable of gaining more popularity even in an examination-oriented education system.

All said and done, delineated at length in the latest English language curriculum guide, TBLT is expected to prevail and predominate in English language education in Hong Kong in coming years albeit in relation to the emergence of some other pedagogical initiatives such as text grammar and e-learning. All the same, only do central agencies constitute one of the many forces influencing curriculum decisions on teaching method in Hong Kong, and neither can the impact of textbook publishers nor that of the teachers themselves be kept out of consideration. In light of existing gaps amongst delineation of TBLT

in the curriculum guide, realization of TBLT in locally published textbooks, and teachers' actual implementation of TBLT in the classroom, it is imperative for all three parties to take action collaboratively to overcome the noted pitfalls in implementation, bridge the gap between curriculum guide and instructional materials, and better align learning with assessment with the hope of ensuring more successful implementation of a localized and modified version of TBLT in Hong Kong English language education.

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Appendix A. An Example of a Metalinguistic Task

Source: Sze, P., & Leung, F. F. L. (2014). Enhancing learners' metalinguistic awareness of language form: The use of eTutor resources. *Assessment & Learning, 3,* 79-96.

Appendix B. A Sample Task in the Intended Curriculum

Task

Invitation

Our school is going to hold a food festival. Every student should write a letter to invite a friend to join the event.

Details of the food festival:

Date:	15th November 20XX (Sunday)
Time:	10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Venue:	School Hall
	Progressive Secondary School
	116 Tai Hang Road
	Causeway Bay
	Hong Kong
Number of stalls:	15
Food variety:	Japanese, Chinese, American, Mexican
Types of food served:	sushi, green tea noodles, dim sum, fried noodles, spring rolls, hot dogs, burgers, sandwiches, tacos, burritos, desserts and many more

Pre-tasks

Exercise - Prepositions of Time

Complete the sentences with the following prepositions - at, by, from, to, on or until

A birthday party
- I would like to invite you to my birthday party ____ 18 May. Please send back your reply ____ 18 April.
- The party will be held ____ 6:00 p.m. ____ 1:00 a.m.
- The dance will be ____ 8:00 p.m. ____ midnight.
- ____ midnight everyone will eat dumplings.
- I have arranged a coach to take you home ____ 12:30 a.m.
- You are welcome to stay ____ 1:00 a.m.

A Christmas wedding
- Christmas is ____ Saturday this year.
- The wedding banquet will start ____ eight o'clock in the evening.
- The invitations must be sent out ____ 5:00 p.m. ____ Tuesday.
- The wedding presents will not be opened ____ Boxing Day.

Complete the following letter with appropriate prepositions

10 November, 20XX

Dear Jack,

We would like to invite you to Suki's 14th birthday party. It is a surprise party so please do not tell her. The party is ____ 18 November.

We have rented a room at the Oasis Hotel in Wanchai. There will be food, drinks, music, dancing and karaoke. We think everyone will have lots of fun.

The party is ____ six o'clock ____ nine o'clock. However, if you arrive ____ 5:45 pm, you will be able to shout out "Surprise" when Suki comes in the door ____ 6:00 pm. So arrive early if you can.

Please let us know ____ 15 November if you can come. Phone us on 9678 9678.

Sincerely,

(Suki's Parents)

Source: Curriculum Development Council. (2017b). *Examples [in support of the English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 6) 2017]*. Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/ELE%20KLACG%202017_Examples%201-28.pdf

Appendix C. Organization of Modules, Units, and Tasks in the Intended Curriculum
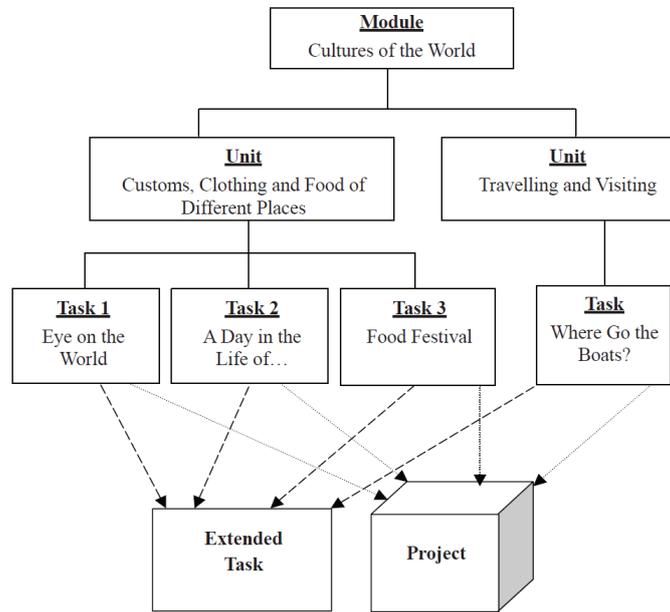
Source: Curriculum Development Council. (2017a). *English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 6)*. Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/ curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/Curriculum%20Document/ELE%20KLACG_2017.pdf

Appendix D. Task-Based Language Teaching in Locally Published Textbooks

Task 1
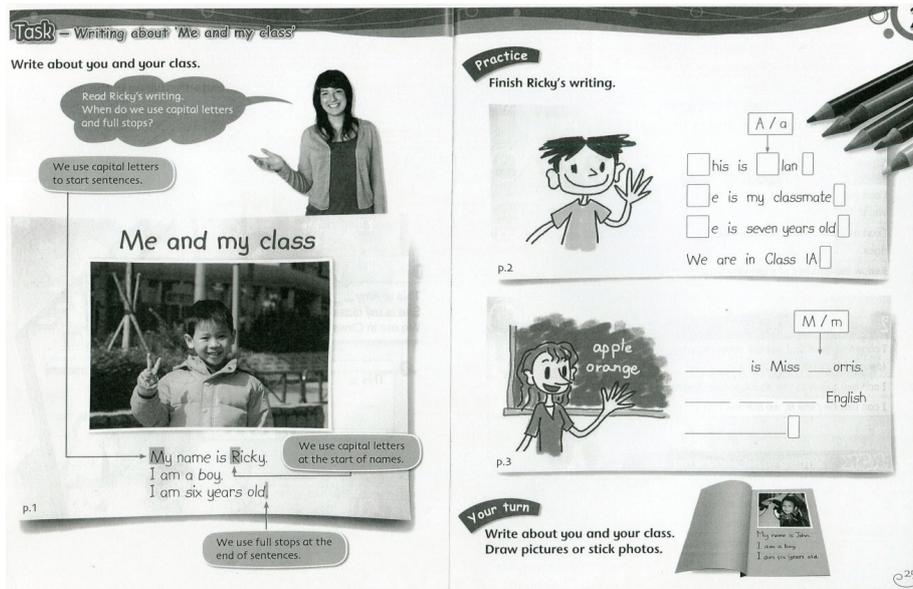
Source: Jones, R., Gray, C., & Gordon, T. (2009). *Primary Longman elect 1A.* Hong Kong: Pearson Hong Kong.

Task 2

Source: Harfitt, G., Potter, J., Rigby, S., & Wong, K. (2012). *Longman elect JS 1A* (2nd ed.). Hong Kong: Pearson Hong Kong.

Task 3

SK 1

STUDENT RADIO   Unit 1

In this task, you will:
- read the second scene of a radio play.
- discuss your ideas for the final scene of the play.
- write the script for the scene.

A Rachel wants you to enter the SRfm.com radio play competition. She has printed out the competition information from the website for you. Read the printout to find out what you need to do.

SRfm.com radio play competition

Every year, Student Radio holds a radio play competition. To enter, you need to write the script for the final scene of a play. We'll perform and webcast the entries, and our listeners will vote for the winner. This year's play is called *No Face on Facebook*. We've written the first two scenes, but how it ends is up to you …

▶ Now read Scene 1 of 'No Face on Facebook' on pages 4 and 5 again. Then read and listen to Scene 2 below.

Scene 2: Bedroom

Narrator: In our last scene, Angie talked with her dad about Facebook. Now she's in her room facebooking her friend Tony. Her brother Kevin comes in. [*typing sounds, then a door opening*]

5 **Kevin:** What are you up to, Angie?

Angie: I'm just facebooking Tony. I'm doing a quiz and I need to know what the biggest ice-skating rink in Hong Kong is. *You* don't know, do you?

Kevin: Me? When have you ever known me to go ice-skating? I have no idea.

Angie: Oh, never mind. Anyway, Tony knows just about everything … ['*ding*' sound]
10   Oh look, here's his answer. He says it's the rink at Megabox in Kowloon Bay.

Kevin: [*bored*] How interesting … Well, I'll leave you to it. See you in a couple of hours.

Angie: Come on, I'm not going to be online for that long. Anyway, I told Dad I only spend five minutes a day on Facebook.

Kevin: Five minutes? You mean five hours, don't you? You're *always* online.

15 **Angie:** But it's so much fun! Like today, I found this new Facebook application where you answer questions about your fashion style and then compare your answers with your Facebook friends'.

Kevin: [*unimpressed*] Sounds like an application I can live without.

Angie: [*getting louder*] You don't understand, it's … ['*ding*' sound interrupts] Hey, look,
20   Tony's sent me another message. Let's see … [*reading*] 'Have you seen Principal Lee's Facebook profile? It's really weird.'

Kevin: [*surprised*] Principal Lee? Our school principal? I didn't know he was on Facebook. Man, I'd like to see that! Show me later — I'm off to football practice. [*the door closes*]

25 **Angie:** [*to herself*] Principal Lee? Hmm. I'll enter his name and search for his profile … Ah, here it is. [*shocked*] Oh no, what a terrible picture! He looks so fat! I wonder what his profile information is like … Age: older than the dinosaurs … Interested in: eating … Looking for: more food … Hang on, this isn't a real profile. It's a fake! Somebody's playing a trick on the principal. I wonder if
30   I ought to do something about it … [*softly*] But what can I do?

Narrator: So Angie has found out that bad things can happen online. But now the question is, what will she do about it? We'll find out in the next scene …

End of Scene 2

B Work in groups of three. Discuss your ideas about how the radio play should end. Choose the best ideas and write them down on the note sheet on page 18. You can begin like this.

> Where do you think the scene should take place?

> I think it should take place in Angie's room, because she needs to think about what to do.

> That's a great idea! Angie could be talking to one of her teachers …

> I'm not sure that's such a good idea. A new location would be more interesting. How about Angie's school?

For a Speaking exercise on **making and responding to suggestions,** *go to http://nss.elect.ilongman.com/themeu1.*

17

No Face on Facebook Scene 3

- What is the setting of Scene 3?
  _____

- Who are the characters in the scene? (*Include at least three.*)
  _____

- What does Angie decide to do about the fake profile?
  _____
  _____

- What happens as a result of Angie's decision?
  _____
  _____

- How does the scene end?
  _____
  _____

C Work in your group. Write the script for the final scene of 'No Face on Facebook', using the ideas from Part B. Use a separate sheet of paper.

▶ When you have finished, exchange your scene with another group and give each other some feedback. Use the checklist below to help you.

Checklist

		Well done	Satisfactory	Needs improvement
1	The scene has a clear setting.	☐	☐	☐
2	The scene follows logically after Scenes 1 and 2.	☐	☐	☐
3	The scene has an interesting plot.	☐	☐	☐
4	The scene has a satisfying ending.	☐	☐	☐
5	The characters' speech is natural and informal.	☐	☐	☐
6	Different types of stage directions are included appropriately.	☐	☐	☐
7	How can the scene be improved? _____			

▶ Now make improvements to your script if necessary.

Source: Potter, J., Rigby, S., & Wong, K. (2009). *Longman elect new senior secondary theme book.* Hong Kong: Pearson Hong Kong.