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A STUDY OF THE USE OF TASKS IN TERTIARY ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMME IN NEW ZEALAND AND CHINA: TEACHERS’ BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AND STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Auckland, 2019
Abstract

Tasks are the central elements of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and are used to engage learners in authentic language use in classrooms. TBLT has recently been recommended to be included in the new College English Curriculum Requirement in China (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2017) for students learning English as an Additional Language. However, little research has been conducted on English teachers’ understandings and practices related to TBLT in China, other than in Hong Kong and some developed areas of mainland China. Furthermore, there are few comparative studies across two or more countries related to TBLT at tertiary level.

To address the research gap, this study investigated six tertiary English teachers’ beliefs of, and practices related to, using tasks in language classes, three in New Zealand and three in China; it also investigated the cognitive and contextual factors influencing these teachers’ beliefs and practices. Additionally, the study elicited the attitudes of twenty Chinese as L1 speaking students in these teachers’ classes towards tasks, eight in New Zealand and twelve in China, as previous reports on Asian students’ attitudes towards TBLT in the literature have reported contradictory findings (Adams & Newton, 2009; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007).

This study was situated within a qualitative paradigm, using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations in both classroom contexts. The findings from both interviews and observations were coded and categorized based on theoretical frameworks that inform TBLT and theories concerning teachers’ beliefs. Data from the individual student interviews were coded to establish any patterns in the attitudes of students towards tasks in these teachers’ classes. The findings reveal that teachers have differing understandings of tasks. Moreover, few tasks, evaluated against criteria for a task, were observed to be part of teachers’ classroom
activities. Teachers, however, appeared to adapt a range of task-like activities to fit into their teaching approaches, based on their beliefs and the contexts in which they were teaching. Teachers in China and New Zealand appeared to differ in the way they integrated tasks or task-like activities within other approaches even though their tasks and task-like activities were strongly associated with communicative activities. A further apparent difference between the Chinese and New Zealand teachers was that, in China, teachers’ use of tasks was influenced by web-based textbooks and their own reflective practices, whereas in New Zealand teachers’ pre-service education programmes appeared to have a strong influence on teachers’ practices. In addition, the findings suggest that, despite little experience with tasks in their classrooms, Chinese students in both contexts have positive attitudes towards tasks or task-like activities because they believe that tasks can satisfy their learning needs.

This study contributes to TBLT research by firstly extending our understandings of teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT in two contrasting contexts, and identifying the factors influencing their use (or otherwise) of tasks. Secondly, the study identifies the most common features of tasks used by these teachers, as well as the features that appear to be absent in teachers’ practices. Finally, it provides information for the development of language teacher education programmes based on TBLT, in particular in the China context. Implications of the study and recommendations for further research are also reported.
Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to all the people who helped me to accomplish this study.

My heartfelt and sincere appreciation firstly goes to my supervisors, Professor Martin East and Dr. Constanza Tolosa, for their continuous and invaluable support and guidance throughout the study and for their encouragement and motivation during the whole process. They are always available for meetings, prompt in replying to my emails and giving insightful feedback on my writing. They inspired me to continue with my study while I was experiencing difficult times in my life. Without them this research would not have been possible. My deep gratitude to them is far beyond words.

I would like to thank the Deans and Heads of the English Language Departments in the three institutions in both New Zealand and China who offered me the opportunities to approach their teachers and students. I am especially thankful to all the teachers and students who voluntarily participated in the studies, whose passions, confusions, pains and endless efforts in language teaching and learning gave me the impetus and reasons to continue with my research.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and love to my friends in my church, special thanks to David Wood and Lynette. I also extend my grateful thanks to all my friends. I especially owe a great deal to my family members: my parents, my husband Houyong, my son Lele, and my niece Ying. The thesis would not have been possible without their unconditional support and love.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BANA</td>
<td>Britain, Australasia and North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELTA</td>
<td>Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET-4</td>
<td>College English Test Band 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>Communicative Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSL</td>
<td>Chinese as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELTA</td>
<td>Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZCEL</td>
<td>New Zealand Certificate in English Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZQA</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualification Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-P-P</td>
<td>Present-Practice- Produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBLT</td>
<td>Task-based Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSLT</td>
<td>Task-supported Language Teaching</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis reports on research that investigated tertiary English language teachers’ beliefs and practices related to the use of tasks, and the factors influencing pedagogical choices, in two contexts, China and New Zealand. It also explored Chinese as first language (L1) speaking students’ attitudes towards tasks or task-like activities in both contexts. This introductory chapter starts with the background to the study, followed by the purpose of the study and the specific questions that guided the research. After the context of the study is provided, an overview of the thesis is presented.

1.1 Background

Task-based language teaching (hereafter TBLT) is a language teaching approach which is believed to promote language acquisition by engaging students in authentic language use through tasks (East, 2012b). It has been argued that TBLT assists students to learn a language more effectively than other approaches as it focuses on meaningful communication rather than systematically focusing on grammar rules. In TBLT, the primary focus is on meaning, where language learners use the target language with a communicative purpose in order to achieve the outcome of a task (East, 2012b; Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). In TBLT language learners attend to grammar (language forms) on the basis of what Long (2000) describes as a focus on form approach, in which learners’ attention is drawn to language forms when they arise incidentally from communicative interactions (refer to 2.3.3). TBLT is “a learner-centered and experiential pedagogical approach” (East, 2015, p. 7). The belief underpinning TBLT is that the process of becoming aware of language forms via meaning negotiation enables learners to notice the gap between their current understanding and a higher level of proficiency, and thus promote language acquisition (Schmidt, 1990) (refer to 2.2.1). A decade ago, Ellis (2009b) observed that TBLT “has progressed well beyond theory into actual practice” (p. 222). TBLT
has gained considerable popularity around the world and has come to be viewed as a “new orthodoxy” over the last two decades (Ellis, 2003; Littlewood, 2004), resulting in a large body of research and publications (e.g., Bygate, Van den Branden, & Norris, 2009; 2018; East, 2012b; 2018; Ellis, 2003; 2018; Long, 2015; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 1996; 2007).

TBLT as an encouraged approach has appeared in government educational policies in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region and has been advocated for inclusion in curricula and commercial syllabuses as a central teaching method (Nunan, 2003). Nunan (2004) contends that “if official documents are to be believed, TBLT has become a cornerstone of many education institutions and Ministries of Education around the world” (p. 13). In Nunan’s (2003) survey of educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region, officials are reported to have claimed that TBLT was the chief principle in their English language curricula.

In China, the Chinese national curriculum has been revised because of the socioeconomic reform and high-speed economic development in a globalized world that China is now experiencing. English, as a global language, is widely believed to play a vital role in promoting international exchange and facilitating economic progress (Wang, 2007). Therefore, students are required to achieve high English language proficiency, especially communicative proficiency. In this environment it is believed that TBLT could be an approach that will help to improve students’ communicative proficiency through being asked to engage in language use tasks. In the revised English Curriculum Standards for both primary and secondary school levels in China (Ministry of Education, 2015), TBLT is recommended as a teaching approach. These documents suggest that teachers are expected to employ TBLT principles in order to create an environment in which students are encouraged to complete activities by using English (Ministry of Education, 2015). At tertiary level, TBLT is also recommended in the new College English Curriculum Requirement as a means to support a shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2017).
What is expected to be done by the syllabuses’ designers now falls on the shoulders of teachers who now have to design tasks that best suit their students’ needs and abilities in line with curriculum expectations. However, understandings of what TBLT is, and how it can be implemented effectively, differ among teachers (Littlewood, 2004). Candlin (2001) contends that “when it comes to pedagogical decisions regarding the actual implementation of the task-based approach to language teaching and learning, there are numerous possibilities that the intended curriculum leaves open to teachers” (p. 241). East (2012b) writes that “it is one thing for researchers and theorists to investigate TBLT…it is another for teachers, the recipients of innovative ideas, to translate these ideas into their own classrooms” (p. 2). East further states that investigating teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT can ultimately challenge theoretical beliefs and promote teachers’ practices in this area.

It is therefore timely to investigate how teachers in China are implementing the newly introduced curriculum based on policy initiatives. Previous studies in the Chinese context have focused on the beliefs and practices of school teachers and issues that prevent the successful implementation of curriculum innovation at school levels in Hong Kong and highly developed cities in mainland China like Beijing and Shenzhen (Carless, 2002; 2003; 2004; 2008; 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; 2009; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zheng, 2013). However, little research has been conducted on tertiary English teachers’ beliefs on the implementation of TBLT. A limited range of articles has centred on the advantages and disadvantages of TBLT and the description of specific task steps in authentic classrooms aiming to develop students’ listening, speaking, reading or writing skills (Cai, 2001; Fang, 2003; Li, 2013; Zhang, 2007). In addition, there is only one comparative study across two or more countries related to TBLT at tertiary level (Wang, 2009). Wang’s (2009) research investigated the process of tertiary English language teaching and learning experienced by teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), and English as a second language (ESL), and their Chinese EFL and ESL
students in two contexts (China and New Zealand) in terms of six aspects of classroom practices: instructional approaches, language pedagogy, use of textbooks, student modalities, error correction and classroom tasks. However, Wang (2009) did not specifically focus on tasks as understood within TBLT and her definition of classroom tasks included all activities in the classroom. One of her conclusions was that both EFL teachers in China and ESL teachers in New Zealand were in the process of transition, moving towards the implementation of TBLT. Building on Wang’s study, it is useful to take a closer look at teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT in the two contexts.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The research reported in this thesis aimed to investigate tertiary English teachers’ beliefs of, and practices related to, using tasks in language classes, by drawing on data gathered from interviews and observations in two contexts, China and New Zealand. The opportunities and challenges arising from the implementation of TBLT in both contexts are investigated. Additionally, I compared teachers’ beliefs and practices, alongside influencing factors, in the two contexts. The students’ attitudes towards tasks in these teachers’ classrooms were also investigated.

This study of the two contexts is built on the assumption that New Zealand teachers may be more advanced in the use of tasks than their Chinese counterparts. The New Zealand context for the study has been selected for the following reasons. Firstly, TBLT is believed to have become more firmly established in English-speaking countries because, as Andon (2009) says, “recent approaches to language teaching, and in particular CLT [Communicative Language Teaching] and TBLT are widely seen as originating in the more privileged BANA (Britain, Australasia and North America) context” (p. 14). Thus, New Zealand teachers are more likely to implement TBLT in this favourable environment. Furthermore, New Zealand is a country
which is abundant in research into various aspects of TBLT (e.g., Adams & Newton, 2009; East, 2014a; 2017; 2012b; Ellis, 2003; Philp, Walters, & Basturkmen, 2010). Specifically, ten principles of instructed second language (L2) acquisition proposed by Ellis (2005) have been made available on-line by the New Zealand Ministry of Education to all language teachers at school level and “have been used as a reference point for approaching TBLT” (East, 2012b, p. 4). In New Zealand, various curriculum related on-line support materials for language teachers have made specific reference to the use of tasks in additional language classrooms even though the curriculum does not explicitly endorse a task-based approach (Ministry of education, 2007a; 2007b; 2010). TBLT has become very influential in schools in New Zealand.

The study further aimed to establish students’ attitudes towards TBLT with a view to contributing to a deeper understanding of TBLT in practice. Students’ attitudes towards TBLT were reported based on data from observations and interviews. Research has shown that students’ reactions can influence teachers’ decisions about classroom activities both positively and negatively. Van den Branden (2006), for example, working in the European context, found that students’ motivation to perform language use tasks encouraged teachers to incorporate TBLT into their practices. He writes that “the majority of the teachers were charmed by the students’ enthusiasm” about the language tasks in the empirical studies he undertook in Flanders (p. 233). Data from the assessment of Chinese students’ attitudes towards TBLT, as derived from this study, is relevant if teachers in China are to be motivated to apply TBLT in their classrooms.

Students’ voices are included as they are clear stakeholders in the implementation of the curriculum. However, few studies have reported Chinese students’ attitudes towards TBLT at tertiary levels. Some recent studies (which I outline later in Section 3.4) have reported that Asian students are favourably inclined to participate in communicative activities and TBLT,
although others have reported different outcomes (Iwashita & Li, 2012; Nguyen, Newton, & Crabbe, 2015; Takeda, 2015). These are discussed in the Literature Review, Chapter 3.

The following research questions are addressed in this thesis:

1. What do the six teachers know, understand and believe about using tasks in the two contexts: China and New Zealand?

2. In what ways do the six teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practices?

3. Which factors lead to observed differences between the teachers’ beliefs and practices in the two contexts?

4. What are Chinese as L1 students’ attitudes towards different tasks in both China and New Zealand?

1.3 The Context of the Study

1.3.1 The Chinese EFL Context

The Chinese educational system is highly centralized; the Ministry of Education issues the curriculum for all public schools and universities (Hu, 2005b). English as a foreign language is mandated by the Ministry of Education as a compulsory course starting from primary school in most areas of China. Students are taught mainly in the traditional grammar translation approach based on integrated reading courses that cater to the needs of the college-entrance examination (Li, 2012). This traditional language teaching approach is believed to be greatly influenced by the Confucian norms which emphasise the teachers’ transmission of knowledge residing in books (Hu, 2002a; 2002b).
However, the newly issued College English Curriculum (2007; 2017) emphasises that the major objective of the college English course is to develop students’ ability to use English, to improve their cross-cultural awareness and communicative competence. TBLT is recommended as one of the language teaching approaches in the curriculum. Nevertheless, TBLT represents a radical shift from a teacher-centred practice to a student-centred approach.

Also, an increasing number of studies report that there are a wide range of barriers to the use of TBLT in English classrooms in the Chinese context (Carless, 2002, 2003, 2004; Chen, 2008; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zheng, 2013). Most research has focused on teachers’ task implementation at school levels. The present study shifts the focus onto tertiary level English programmes.

In China, two universities were chosen, one in the middle and the other in the south of China, from which three experienced Chinese teachers who teach English as a foreign language to the freshmen of different majors (two from one university, the third one from another university), were selected to take part. Both universities are well-known top universities where teachers are often provided with opportunities and resources to access new theories about language teaching approaches, such as through attending international conferences and seminars related to language teaching or studying and visiting abroad in English speaking countries. Furthermore, the two universities are representative of the general characteristics of comprehensive universities in China.

Twelve students from the three teachers’ classes in the two universities were selected as the participants in the current study, with four students from each teacher’s class. The selection of the students was based on the criteria that they shared a similar linguistic, cultural and educational background (refer to Section 4.2.2). To continue with their education in a university after five or six years of study in primary schools and six years of study in the secondary school, students have to pass a college entrance examination. All college students
who are non-English majors are required to have compulsory college English courses for two years, with two terms of 18 weeks in each year. The students are required to have at least three hours of college English courses per week, which are divided usually into a reading and writing English course, and a listening and speaking English course, according to the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). The curriculum sets the specific requirements and goals for three levels, that is, basic, intermediate and advanced requirements in terms of five skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. All the undergraduate students (non-English majors) should at least fulfil the basic requirements and pass the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) organized by the Ministry of Education. In addition to CET-4, the students’ assessment also includes final examinations at the end of each term given by their own universities. All the college students have to pass the CET-4 to obtain their degree certificate. The CET-4 is composed of five components: speaking, reading, writing, listening, and translation. However, teachers have authority in deciding the content of the final examinations at the end of each term. The final examination consists of a classroom performance including the students’ attendance, their involvement in the classroom activities and the quality of their homework, and a final examination paper which includes the five components.

Both universities can select their own textbooks from those approved by the Ministry of Education. Previously used textbooks have experienced dramatic reform and are now web and multimedia-based textbooks with abundant teaching and learning resources to cater for a change from the traditional teacher-fronted approach to a student-centered approach based on the new College English Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2017). The new textbooks are designed to improve students’ ability to use language, and especially to develop listening and speaking skills, according to the new Curriculum.
1.3.2 The New Zealand ESL Context

New Zealand is a part of the BANA sector (that is, Britain, Australasia and North America) where some of the recent English language teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and TBLT were believed to have originated (Andon, 2009). Andon (2018) argues that the acquisition-rich and well-resourced BANA context has “optimal conditions for TBLT” in that teachers are highly proficient in target language and are well-informed about TBLT and about language learning and teaching; their motivated language learners have different first languages and similar language proficiency levels within small classes without focusing excessively on grammar-oriented examinations at the expense of communicative abilities (p. 131). Therefore, Andon (2009; 2018) suggests that qualified teachers in the BANA sector are more likely to learn about TBLT and experiment with the use of tasks. In the New Zealand context, three teachers at one tertiary institution in New Zealand were selected as participants because they are qualified and experienced teachers and claimed that they used TBLT in their classrooms.

Furthermore, the English courses in this institution are similar to courses taken by the Chinese students in the Chinese context. The courses in both contexts are for students at the intermediate level, consisting of reading and writing, and listening and speaking classes. Eight Chinese as L1 students were selected from the three teachers’ classes because they had similar cultural, academic and language backgrounds to the students in the Chinese context. Of the eight students, four students were from one teacher’s class and four were from the other two teachers’ classes (two from each class). The three teachers taught English for Academic Purposes to these intermediate level students. The aim of these classes was to enable students to become proficient in reading and writing academic English for further tertiary level study.

There are six levels of English course in this institution, with a New Zealand Certificate in English language (NZCEL) awarded on the completion of each level. Of the three participating
teachers, two teach academic level four and the third teaches level three. The teachers are provided with documents from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to guide the NZCEL courses. The NZQA is a government organization providing leadership in assessment and qualifications. These documents, however, are not guides for teaching and learning; programme and assessment task/activity design are the responsibility of the education organization. Unlike the Chinese context, teachers are not provided with a centralized curriculum and have the authority and freedom to design classroom activities for their students.

The NZCEL guiding document mainly provides guidance to support assessment and specifies the objectives for each level, which are similar to the three level requirements in the Chinese curriculum. In particular, the objectives of NZCEL level four are similar to the intermediate requirements set in China by the New College English curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

For students at both level three and four there are two types of English classes similar to those for the Chinese freshmen in the two Chinese universities: reading and writing classes and listening and speaking classes. The New Zealand institution chooses the textbooks for the teachers. The teachers teach at least three-hour classes each day for four days a week and each level’s study lasts for 16 weeks in a year. The assessment for the courses is an examination designed by the teachers, taken at the end of the 16 weeks of study, which includes listening, speaking, reading and writing.

As described in the above section, the present study is based on the assumptions that New Zealand teachers may be more advanced in using tasks than their Chinese counterparts, and that their use of tasks may therefore provide insights for task implementation for the Chinese context. By comparing the beliefs and practices of the six participant teachers (three teachers in New Zealand and three teachers in China) as well as the contextual factors that influence ESL and EFL teachers’ implementation of tasks in their classrooms in the two contexts, and
their Chinese students’ attitudes towards tasks in their classrooms, the study aimed to obtain insights which may assist in promoting the successful implementation of TBLT in China.

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

This chapter has introduced the background, purpose and context of the study. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 present the theoretical frameworks of TBLT (Chapter 2) and theories regarding teachers’ cognitions (Chapter 3). Chapter 3 also summarises empirical research into teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT as well as students’ attitudes towards tasks, and identifies research gaps after reviewing relevant research.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the present study’s research design and methodology. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 present the findings regarding the six teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT, based on interviews and transcripts from classroom observations. Chapter 7 reports findings on the twenty Chinese students’ attitudes towards tasks in these teachers’ classes from data elicited from interviews with them.

The discussion in Chapter 8 compares the six teachers’ beliefs, practices and influencing factors to address the research questions formulated for this study. It also discusses the students’ attitudes towards tasks. Research findings are interpreted with reference to the theoretical frameworks and in relation to previous research as presented earlier in the literature review.

Chapter 9 draws conclusions based on the findings and discussion. The chapter draws out some implications that arise from these, identifies limitations of the study, and discusses recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2 Literature Review 1: Task-based Language Teaching Theories

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the key theoretical perspectives on which TBLT is based, including: the interaction hypothesis; the cognitive approach; and the socio-cultural approach. This is followed by an account of the background and development of TBLT where I discuss criticisms of traditional teaching methods and CLT that TBLT has aimed to address. Next, the features and strengths of TBLT are presented. In the third section I present key terms related to defining tasks which include frameworks for evaluating a task, task phases, and task types. Finally, I introduce objections to TBLT and suggestions to deal with these.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on TBLT

TBLT is informed by two contrasting theoretical perspectives: psycholinguistic views and a socio-cultural approach (Ellis, 2000). With respect to the psycholinguistic view, language acquisition is seen as the product of processing input (i.e., language learners receive language) and output (i.e., language learners produce language) via engaging in task completion; whereas, according to socio-cultural theory, interactants construct language learning via collaboration or scaffolding and feedback, while completing a task. Two models related to the psycholinguistic perspective are presented below: Long’s (1983a; 1983b) Interaction Hypothesis, and Skehan’s (1998) cognitive approach. This is followed by an introduction to socio-cultural theory.

2.2.1 The Interaction Hypothesis and TBLT

As an extension of Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis which stated that learners can acquire a second language when they are exposed to comprehensible input suitable for the learners’ level
of proficiency, Long (1983a; 1983b) went on to propose the Interaction Hypothesis. Long (1983a; 1983b) emphasises that meaning negotiation arising from communication breakdowns can promote comprehensible input. In Long’s (1996) later version of the Interaction Hypothesis, the definition was reformulated by drawing learners’ attention to linguistic forms in meaning-focused contexts and thereby promoting language acquisition. To be specific, students respond to feedback in the communicative process and modify their language in order to make their utterances comprehensible. According to the Interaction Hypothesis, meaning negotiation provides learners with opportunities for both the provision of comprehensible input and the production of modified output (Edwards & Willis, 2005). Furthermore, meaning negotiation helps to promote language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Ellis (2003) concludes that “the more opportunities for negotiation of meaning and content, the more likely acquisition is” (p. 80).

The claim that meaning negotiation promotes acquisition forms a foundation for using tasks (Ellis, 2003). Ellis (2003) writes that “tasks that stimulate negotiation and through this provide comprehensible input and feedback and push learners to reformulate are the ones that will work best for acquisition” (p. 80). It is assumed that the ‘best’ task will aim at promoting optimal meaning negotiation.

Drawing on theories informed by the Interaction Hypothesis, some researchers have conducted studies on how different tasks promote meaning negotiation (Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994; Foster, 1998; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Mackey, 1999; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Pica, 1994). Mitchell and Myles (2004) assert that “the studies have taught us a good deal about the types of task that are likely to promote extensive negotiation of meaning” (p. 168). Ellis (2000) argues on the basis of a range of studies that different task designs can elicit interactions from the perspective of the Interaction Hypothesis. He states that information exchange tasks (that is, tasks that require participants to request and supply information), two-way tasks (that is,
where there is a mutual bi-directional relationship of requests and the supply of information) and tasks with closed outcomes (which require a single outcome) can impact more positively on language acquisition than optional information exchange tasks, one-way tasks and tasks with open outcomes.

Ellis (2003) points out a problem with the Interaction Hypothesis, that is, a lack of empirical evidence that negotiation promotes acquisition. In spite of problems with testing this theory, Ellis argues that it does appear to serve as “a theoretical basis and a set of clearly defined discourse categories for analysing the interactions that arise in the performance of a task” (Ellis, 2003, p. 83). In the next section, I introduce the cognitive approach.

2.2.2 The Cognitive Approach and TBLT

The cognitive approach was proposed by Skehan (1996a; 1998). It is based on L1 speakers’ dual-mode system, which is an exemplar-based system and a rule-based system. In an exemplar-based system, “learning is interpreted as the accumulation of chunks”; in a rule-based system, “it is assumed that what is learned consists of underlying rules which have been induced from the stimulus material and then become the basis for generalization and transfer” (Skehan, 1998, p. 53). The exemplar-based mode suggests that language users can retrieve lexical chunks easily and quickly from their memory system, which requires fewer mental resources in order to meet the needs of real-time communication. On the other hand, in a rule-based system, language users resort to grammar and structures to produce innovative language by employing the rule-based grammatical processing system (Skehan, 1996a; 1996b; Widdowson, 1989).

Ellis (2000) further explains the exemplar-based system as “ready-made formulaic chunks of language”. It is employed to support opportunities that require fluent language performance. The rule-based system is an “abstract representation of the underlying patterns of the language,
and this system requires more processing and thus is best suited for more controlled, less fluent language performance” (p. 202). Ellis points out that the distinction between the two is now widely recognized in cognitive psychology.

These two systems are related to three stated pedagogic goals for a task-based approach, that is, fluency, accuracy and complexity (Skehan, 1996b). He explains that accuracy and complexity are related to the rule system of the target language, while fluency makes use of the exemplar system. More specifically, accuracy and complexity relates to how well language is produced, i.e., how good is the learner’s capacity to perform in line with target language norms; and fluency is concerned with the learner’s capacity to produce language in real time without inappropriate pausing or hesitation (Skehan, 1996a; 1996b). The three different goals, according to Skehan (1996a), cannot be met concurrently, because learners have insufficient cognitive resources of memory and attention to deal with the need for accuracy, fluency and complexity at the same time. As a result, Skehan (1998) argues that, because of students’ limited attentional capacities, learners should be provided with different opportunities to influence the three aspects of language acquisition (i.e., fluency, accuracy and complexity). For instance, Skehan (1998) proposes that learners’ attention can be drawn to communicating meaning or language forms respectively via three task phases (pre-task, during-task and post-task phase) to cater to the three different goals (fluency, accuracy and complexity), as illustrated in Section 2.4.2.

Accordingly, research has explored what effect task feature variables and task implementation factors have on production with respect to fluency, accuracy and complexity (e.g., Bygate, 1996; 2001; Foster & Skehan, 1996; 1997; Gilabert, 2007; Javad Ahmadian, Tavakoli, & Vahid Dastjerdi, 2015; Lee, 2018; Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993; Pinter, 2006; Plough & Gass, 1993; Robinson, 2005; 2011; Shintani, 2012; 2016; Skehan, 2003; Skehan, Xiaoyue, Qian, & Wang, 2012). For instance, Skehan (2003) summarised the following research findings: clearly
structured tasks promote greater fluency and, to a lesser extent, accuracy; tasks which require learners to justify outcomes lead to greater complexity; post-task activities promote great accuracy. Furthermore, a number of studies have shown that repeating the same tasks resulted in more fluent, and complex language production (Bygate, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Pinter, 2006; Shintani, 2012; 2016). Ellis (2009a) found that rehearsal, pre-task planning and within-task planning can promote fluency (see Section 2.4.2 different task phases). Ahmadian, Tavakoli and Vahid (2015) revealed that the participants who performed the clearly structured task under the careful online planning condition produced more complex, accurate and fluent language. Different task types were found to have a great influence on the effects of task complexity, however, the most complex versions of tasks could not lead to the most complex language production (Lee, 2018). Skehan (1998) points out that diverse task variables can potentially interact in complex ways to influence learner production.

2.2.3 Socio-cultural Perspective and TBLT

Research into TBLT from the psycholinguistic perspective has investigated the influence of features of tasks and task implementations on learners’ language development. However, there are some problems related to the Interaction hypothesis and cognitive approaches. Ellis (2000) asserts that “there is no direct relationship between task-design and L2 acquisition” (p. 207). Furthermore, many other factors such as individual differences, teachers and settings are not taken into consideration in these approaches (Ellis, 2000).

Some researchers (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Appel & Lantolf, 1994; Frawley & Lantolf, 1986; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2001) have attempted to explore TBLT from the perspective of sociocultural theory. This theory was developed by Vygotsky (1978), Leontiev and James (1981) and others. Lantolf (2000) states that the central and distinguishing concept of sociocultural theory is that higher forms of human mental activity
are mediated through physical and symbolic tools such as music, art and especially language. Moreover, Lantolf (2000) explains that “sociocultural theory incorporates mediation as a core construct in theorising about language learning” (p. 79). He also emphasises that the mediation in language learning would be useful for individuals or groups only after understanding their zone of proximal development (that is, the assessment of the full extent of development of an individual or a group) (Lantolf, 2000).

Lantolf (2000) suggests that the following three categories of mediation are involved in second language learning: mediation by others in social interaction; mediation by self through private speech; mediation by artefacts (i.e., physical and symbolic tools) (p. 80). From this perspective, language development is “about the appropriation by individuals of the mediational means made available by others in their environment in order to improve control over their own mental activity” (p. 80). From the sociocultural point of view, language learning is seen as a process that is enhanced by these mediational means. Ellis (2003) says that “the essence of a sociocultural theory of mind is that external mediation serves as the means by which internal mediation is achieved” (p. 176). For example, a novice language learner might be given assistance by an expert or may draw on artefacts such as computers to perform a given linguistic function, or a learner will use his or her own resources to achieve control over a function.

Task-based research from the perspective of sociocultural theory is mainly concerned with how the participants co-construct the activity in a task, and how the activities work as a form of mediation to promote learning (Ellis, 2003). Appel and Lantolf (1994) explain that task performance is determined largely by the interaction of the individual and the task rather than because of the inherent properties of the task itself. According to research by Coughlan and Duff (1994), the same task will bring about different activities by the same learners at different times, and, in the same manner, the same task can result in different activities when performed by different learners. This research suggests that “the activity a task generates will be unique”
(Coughlan & Duff, 1994, p. 191). Brooks and Donato (1994) have shown that students interpret a task and use unique ways to complete an activity in terms of their motives and goals (Brooks & Donato, 1994).

According to sociocultural theory, social interaction can mediate learning (Ellis, 2000). Task-based research has explored how tasks serve as a form of mediation that can bring about learning. Ellis (2003) explains that the research “involves detailed analyses of the way new linguistic forms and meanings arise out of the social or intrapersonal linguistic activity that learners engage in while they are performing a task” (p. 176). The role of different activities that facilitate participants’ task performances, such as scaffolding, metatalk, and private speech, have been studied by a number of researchers (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Appel & Lantolf, 1994; Frawley & Lantolf, 1986; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). Scaffolding is the “process of interaction between two or more people as they carry out a classroom activity, and where one person (e.g., the teacher or another learner) has more advanced knowledge than the other (the learner)” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 28). Metatalk means that participants talk about linguistic form by focusing explicitly on language during task performance (Ellis, 2003). Private speech takes the form of questions directed to the self when learners are encountering problems in the context of a challenging task (Ellis, 2003). Research findings show that scaffolding can create situations in which learners can produce new language forms, and this can also promote language acquisition; Metatalk can mediate language learning and facilitate the process of internalization; and private speech shows how learners achieve self-regulation when faced with a difficult task (Ellis, 2003). However, Ellis (2003) notes that research in this area is still scarce.

To sum up, socio-cultural perspectives focus on the ways that language learning arises out of task performance carried out by teachers and students in different contexts, whereas researchers in the psycholinguistic paradigm study how inherent task properties affect language
acquisition. Ellis (2000) claims that social-cultural concepts should be combined with cognitive ideas on the basis that learners, teachers and settings are as significant as the task itself. He writes that “in accepting that learners co-construct task-based activity, it is not necessary to reject entirely the claim that task design impacts on that activity” (p. 211). Therefore, he argues, a general theory that incorporates both the cognitive approach and the socio-cultural approach should be developed (Ellis, 2003).

Task-based research from both the psycholinguistic perspective and a sociocultural point of view can inform classroom practices. Research into the psycholinguistic perspective provides information concerning the selecting and grading of tasks in order to cater to the needs of various learners and to achieve different goals. For example, familiar tasks can reduce attentional demands and enable learners to focus on fluency and accuracy (Skehan, 2007). Research informed by sociocultural perspectives focuses on individual differences, the classroom settings and social or intrapersonal linguistic activities in the classroom. This differs from specific task designs based on a psycholinguistic viewpoint. Sociocultural theory can help teachers to understand that students may interpret the task in unique ways, and, accordingly, teachers should help students construct the activity as they carry out the task. As Skehan (2007) points out, “research results provide, for teachers, interesting suggestions that can feed into their decision making as to which tasks to use, when and how” (p. 294).

Van Lier (1996) suggests a balanced combination of planning and improvisation in a lesson (i.e., the actual behaviours that arise during the process of a lesson which have not been planned for). Van Lier regards both as important factors for teachers’ practices in their class rooms (p. 200). This distinction can be pertinent to TBLT classroom practices (Ellis, 2000, p. 215). Psycholinguistic theory is closely related to the planning of a class because tasks are designed and selected in advance; while sociocultural theory is concerned with the improvisation used by teachers in making decisions to construct activity from tasks in ways that help students to
perform a task in the classroom. Teachers thus play a key role in the implementation of tasks through improvising practice to meet students’ goals and determining the activities to support their students to accomplish tasks. This suggests that more studies are needed to investigate teachers’ perspectives and practices related to TBLT.

The above section has explained theoretical perspectives that inform TBLT. In the following section, I describe how TBLT has been developed.

2.3 The Background and Development of Task-based Language Teaching

In this section, I discuss the critiques of traditional teaching methods and the origin and introduction of Communicative Language Teaching. After that, I discuss how TBLT has been developed, alongside its strengths and limitations.

2.3.1 Criticism of Traditional Teaching Approach and Origin of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

For some time, grammatical competence, taught through traditional approaches with the emphasis on “accuracy through drill and practice in the basic structures and sentence patterns of the target language” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 73) was regarded as the basis of language proficiency. These approaches were based on behaviourist principles in which language forms and structures are taught through imitation and repetition in teacher-dominated classes (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

There have been two major criticisms of these top-down, teacher-led, grammar-based approaches. First, the theoretical assumptions underlying the traditional teaching approaches have been questioned (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Richards (2006), for example, argues that traditional teaching approaches “assumed that language learning meant building up a large repertoire of sentences and grammatical patterns and learning to produce these accurately and
quickly in the appropriate situation” (p. 6). Doubts have been expressed as to whether teaching of language forms can really promote language acquisition by a number of researchers (e.g., Skehan, 1996b; Ellis, 2003). Skehan (1996b) argues that “the belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology” (p. 18). Ellis (2003) also writes that second language acquisition research has shown that learners do not acquire language “sequentially as accumulated entities”, and “L2 acquisition is incompatible with teaching seen as the presentation and practice of a series of products” (p. 29).

Furthermore, these approaches cannot engage learners in the learning process as they are boring. And there has been lack of success in students learning results especially in terms of communicative competence (Skehan, 1996b; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Skehan (1996b) asserts that, in the traditional approaches, “most language learning is associated with relative failure” in that “students commonly leave school with very little in the way of usable language” (p. 18). Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2014) explain that students’ learning experience with these approaches was boring and unsatisfying, and they were unable to apply the skills acquired in their classrooms in real communication.

Since it would seem that traditional language teaching approaches do not bring about language acquisition, and the functional and communicative potential of language is not adequately addressed in these approaches, linguists “saw the need to focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 84). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) developed as a major response to the problems associated with traditional language teaching approaches such as Grammar-Translation.
2.3.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT was first developed in the 1970s because of the increasing communication demands in a globalized world (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In contrast to the focus on grammatical competence in the traditional approaches, CLT aims to develop learners’ communicative competence by promoting language use for communicative purposes (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Spada, 2007). Kumaravadivelu (2006) explains that CLT “sought to move classroom teaching away from a largely structural orientation and toward a largely communicative orientation” (p. 61). Language learners were provided with opportunities to use the target language for communicative purposes rather than merely focusing on language structures, because as Nunan (2004) emphasises, “learners learn to communicate by communicating” (p. 8). CLT has thus attracted wide popularity owing to its learner-focused and communication-oriented characteristics. Savignon (1991) notes that CLT “has become a term for methods and curricula that embraces both the goals and the processes of classroom learning, for teaching practice that views competence in terms of social interaction and that looks to further language acquisition to account for its development” (p. 263).

Even though communication is the central characteristic of CLT, Savignon (1991) argues that communicative competence requires attention to grammar as well. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2014) state that, in CLT approaches, “language and communication are interdependent” in that “language must serve the purpose of communicating the speaker’s objectives (p. 86). In CLT classrooms, teachers are therefore encouraged to use activities for accuracy either before or after fluency work to support fluency activities (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Spada (2007) also claims that a balance between an emphasis on communicative activities and attention to language structures and grammar should be maintained.
However, grammar has been a major concern in CLT, in particular with regard to when and how it should be attended to (Nunan, 2004). This has been reflected in the two polarisations of CLT. Howatt (1984) distinguishes between a strong and weak interpretation of CLT. The strong version of CLT “advances the claim that language is acquired through communication” (p. 279). In this strong version, classroom activities are fundamentally focussed on communication, where learners work out the structural system by themselves during the process of learning how to communicate (Ellis, 2003). The underlying belief is that language learners should be exposed to maximum meaningful target language to promote language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). The problem with the strong version of CLT is that language learners are unlikely to develop sufficient grammatical or formal competence by purely focusing on meaning (East, 2012a).

The “weak” version of CLT “stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use (the target language) for communicative purposes and attempts to integrate such activities into a wider programme of language learning” (Howatt, 1984, p. 279). This weak version of CLT recognizes the essential communicative purpose of language learning, while the pre-selected language structures are taught systematically in teacher-dominated classrooms (East, 2012a). This weak version of CLT employs a procedure consisting of Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) (Klapper, 2003). In the stage of Presentation, learners’ attention is drawn to the targeted language item presented by their teachers. Then in the second stage of Practice, this particular language item is practised in a controlled manner via grammar practice exercises, language exercises such as mini-dialogues with a partner, or simple question and answer exercises. Learners subsequently move to the last stage of Production where they use the language item in open practice without being controlled by teachers. In distinction from the strong version of CLT, the weak version promotes the grasp of language structure through the pre-teaching of grammar. Spada (2007) points out that the essential difference between the two
versions “seems to be the presence or absence of attention to language form” as teachers would not provide explicit instruction on language forms in the strong version of CLT (p. 272).

However, Klapper (2003) argues that this typical lesson structure of PPP does not guarantee the taught linguistic items become part of learners’ interlanguage capability as theorised. East (2012a) likewise argues that the problems with the weak version of CLT are that the systematic and explicit teaching of grammar by teachers resulted in “linguistic grading, simplification of language and functionally restricted and impoverished input” (p. 8). It also led to the reduction of students’ learning interests and motivation. These problems have also been confirmed by Long (2000).

The diverse ways of dealing with grammar add flexibility to the characteristics of CLT because Klapper (2003) confirms that owing to the flexibility of communicative principles, CLT has been a durable phenomenon for many years. On the other hand, the flexibility of CLT principles has led to different interpretations, which has resulted in the adoption, adaption, even distortion of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Harmer (2003) agrees with Klapper and says that “the term (CLT) has always meant a multitude of different things to different people” (p. 289). Further, Richards and Rodgers (2014) write of CLT that “its comprehensiveness makes it different in scope and status from any other approaches”, and “there is no single text or authority on it, nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative” (p. 86). Spada (2007) asserts that “there is confusion in the definitions and interpretations of CLT and this confusion has resulted in a variety of myths and misconceptions regarding CLT” (p. 284). Littlewood (2012) likewise writes that “uncertainty in the realm of principles carries itself over into the realm of classroom practice”. He continues that CLT has been implemented in various ways “with the term almost meaning different things to different English teachers” (p. 350). This flexibility and various interpretations of CLT principles ultimately leads to problems in
its implementation. TBLT was developed based on CLT, which is introduced in the following section.

2.3.3 Development of TBLT

TBLT is regarded as a development of CLT. It draws on the general principles of CLT (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2012; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Just like CLT, in TBLT activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning; Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning; Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 174). East (2017) points out that “TBLT has been developing over several decades as a learner-centred and experiential pedagogical approach arising from the tradition of communicative language teaching” (p. 412). Richards (2006) regards CLT as a continuously evolving method and states that TBLT is the “extension of the CLT movement”, which takes “different routes to achieve the goals of communicative language teaching---to develop learners’ communicative competence” (p. 29). Littlewood (2012) agrees that “TBLT is viewed as a development within CLT, in which communicative tasks have special roles and special prominence as a focus for planning, learning and teaching. Similarly, Klapper (2003) says that TBLT “can thus be seen as an offshoot from or a development of CLT” (p. 35).

As is shown above, many scholars hold the opinion that TBLT is a useful development of CLT. The reasons for this may be attributed to two essential features of TBLT: the primary focus on authentic language use or meaning, and attention to language forms arising from communicative interaction (East, 2015; Ellis, 2003; Klapper, 2003, Long, 1985). These two essential features of TBLT are also regarded as its strengths, which enable TBLT to overcome the limitations of both strong and weak CLT mentioned in the above section (East, 2012a).
The first feature of TBLT lies in its emphasis on real communication in classrooms where the aim is that language is used in authentic contexts. Ellis (2003), Long (1985) and Skehan (1998) emphasise the positive role of tasks in creating contexts for natural language use. Willis and Willis (2007) claim that “the most effective way to teach a language is by engaging learners in real language use in the classroom” (2007, p. 7). Ellis (2003) says that “what is perhaps central to all versions of TBLT is that language is treated as a ‘tool’ for achieving the outcome of the task rather than as a set of ‘objects’ to be studied” (p. 383).

TBLT enables learners to engage in authentic communicative language use, theoretically leading to language acquisition during task performance (see earlier). This feature of TBLT compensates for the shortcoming of the weak version of CLT where grammar is taught in an explicit, teacher-fronted and systematic way, with language teaching based on the assumption that learning is a linear process and that what is learned is what is taught. However, this idea has been challenged in current second language acquisition theories (Skehan, 1996a) and TBLT has been regarded as an approach distinguished from this systematic and linear way of learning, as Ellis (2009b) argues:

TBLT challenges mainstream views about language teaching in that it is based on the principle that language learning will progress most successfully if teaching aims simply to create contexts in which the learner’s natural language learning capacity can be nurtured rather than making a systematic attempt to teach the language bit by bit. (p. 222)

In TBLT opportunities are also provided to attend to language forms, even though the chief emphasis is on meaningful communication in TBLT. The second feature of TBLT is what has come to be known as ‘focus on form’ (Ellis, 2013; Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Long, 2000; Skehan, 1998), described by Long (2000) as follows:
Focus on form refers to how attentional resources are allocated and involves briefly drawing students’ attention to linguistic elements (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patterns, etc.) in context, as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication. (p. 185)

Long (1991) argues that focus on form is used to deal with language forms in the context of performing a communicative task. According to Long (2000), focus on form is considered optimal for learning grammar in that it is determined by the learner’s developing language system (p. 185). The underlying theory is to push learners towards “noticing” the gap between learners’ current understanding and standard forms and what they do not yet know in order to promote meaning negotiation (Schmidt, 1992) (refer to Section 2.2.1). Focus on form can also be done outside of TBLT as an approach (Long, 1991). Long (1991) distinguished focus on form from focus on forms in that the latter involves the systematic teaching of the predetermined specific linguistic features in an explicit and direct way. The procedure of Presentation-Practice-Production used in the weak version of CLT (refer to the previous section 2.3.2) is a good example of focus on forms (Ellis, 2016). Long (2000) also proposed focus on meaning in that learners’ focus is more or less entirely on meaning with emphasis on incidental and implicit language learning which contrasts with focus on forms. The strong version of CLT is a way of focusing on meaning.

With focus on form used in TBLT, learners’ attention is drawn to forms while they are engaged in an activity where the primary focus is on meaning. Ellis (2013) contends that TBLT’s strength “lies in the fact that attention to form is contextualized in learners’ own attempts to make meaning” (p. 4). This feature of attention to language forms arising from communicative interaction addresses problems associated with both the strong and weak version of CLT (East, 2012a). In the weak version of CLT, grammar is pre-determined and taught in a teacher-centred way, while in the strong version of CLT, there is no space made for attention to language forms
TBLT (in particular weaker versions), as an approach mainly focusing on meaning, provides a way to develop learners’ linguistic competence by focusing on form, rather than focusing on forms as in weak version of CLT or merely focusing on meaning as in strong version of CLT (refer to Section 2.3.2).

Ellis (2003) points out that TBLT is not a narrowly prescribed set of techniques to be used. Rather, there are different versions of TBLT: task-based language teaching (TBLT) and task-supported language teaching (hereafter TSLT) (p. 4). He expresses the different roles of tasks in TBLT and TSLT: in TBLT “tasks provide the basis for an entire language curriculum”, whereas, with TSLT, tasks are used as “a way of providing communicative practice for language items that have been introduced in a more traditional way” (p. 28). Similarly, Skehan (1996a) identifies strong and weak forms of TBLT. Skehan (1996a) argues that, in the strong form of TBLT, tasks are “the unit of language teaching”, and everything else should be secondary, whereas in a weak form, tasks are “a vital part of language instruction”, and they are used within a more complex pedagogic context (p. 39). For instance, Skehan (1996a) says that the weak form of TBLT can be incorporated into a traditional presentation, practice and production sequence, in which the production phase is based on tasks. The weak form of TBLT is, however, different from the weak form of CLT through the use of three task-stages. These differences are illustrated in Section 2.4.2.

To conclude, TBLT is seen as “a logical development to the CLT paradigm that might address some of the apparent weaknesses of CLT” owing to strengths brought by two features: that is, a primary focus on language use and occasions for focus on form (East 2012a, p. 22). Two forms of TBLT are identified which are respectively strong TBLT and weak TBLT, or TSLT (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1996a).
In the following section, I introduce the key terms related to tasks: three frameworks to evaluate tasks, different task stages, and task types.

2.4 Key Terms Related to Tasks

2.4.1 Frameworks for Evaluating Tasks in Practice

The notion of ‘task’ is central to TBLT (Ellis, 2003). However, there is a variety of definitions of tasks in the literature (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 1998; Van den Branden, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007). Ellis (2003) proposed that, while there is no agreement as to what exactly constitutes a task, it is necessary to aim at “a generalized definition that can serve to identify the essential commonalities in tasks” (p. 9). In this thesis I have borrowed the three frameworks used by East (2012b), which include: the four criteria of a task proposed in Ellis (2009b); the definition of a task put forward by Samuda and Bygate (2008); and the six questions to evaluate whether an activity is task-like as offered by Willis and Willis (2007). I chose these three frameworks because of the following three reasons. To start with, Ellis (2009b) puts forward the task criteria on the basis of a detailed study of a number of previous definitions, such as those given by Long (1985), Prabhu (1987), Nunan (1989) and Skehan (1996). Secondly, the Ellis (2009b) and Samuda and Bygate (2008) frameworks propose theoretical definitions of tasks. Samuda and Bygate (2008) present a holistic definition, rather than providing separate features of a task, as Ellis (2009b) does. Willis and Willis (2007), by contrast, analyse tasks from the practitioner’s perspective by offering six questions as means for teachers to evaluate the task-likeness of given tasks. Also, I chose these three frameworks on the grounds that there are studies that employ one or two of the three frameworks. For instance, Erlam (2016) and Andon (2009) use Ellis’s criteria to evaluate tasks in their studies, and Widodo (2015) employs Willis and Willis’s six questions as the framework to design tasks.
Despite different ways of defining tasks for the purposes of TBLT, a careful examination of the three definitions above reveals some commonalities. In the following section, I describe these three frameworks and present three corresponding examples that meet all the features of a task from the perspective of these three frameworks. I then summarise their similarities.

The first framework (Ellis, 2009b) proposes that a task must satisfy these criteria:

1. The primary focus should be on ‘meaning’ (by which is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).

2. There should be some kind of ‘gap’ (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).

3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.

4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right). (p. 223)

Ellis and Shintani (2013) explain that these criteria can be used to distinguish tasks from ‘grammar exercises’. They point out that while a situational grammar exercise also may satisfy criteria two and three it cannot satisfy criteria one and four. Ellis and Shintani present examples to differentiate tasks from exercises (p. 9). One example of a task is: Student A is given a shopping list and Student B plays the role of the owner of a shop. She is given a different list of items from Student A for all the goods in his/her shop. In the task, Student A is required to ask Student B questions to find out which items he/she can buy from Student B’s shop. Student B is also required to identify the items that he/she does not stock. The outcome is the items purchased by Student A, and the items Student B identifies as being out of stock. However, Ellis and Shintani explain that if both students are provided with the following dialogue to
imitate by using the list of items they are given in the blank space, it would be an exercise (and not a task):

Student A: “Good morning. Do you have any___ (the name of the items)”?

Student B: “Yes, I have some”. Or, “No, I don’t have any”.

Ellis and Shintani (2013) argue that this exercise does not meet all the criteria for a task because of the following reasons. This exercise requires learners to attend to forms - “any” and “some” in questions - and structured replies rather than having a primary focus on meaning. There was no information gap to be closed since students were asked to substitute items in sentences they were given and to respond with the given sentences. Students did not rely on their own resources because they were provided with sentence models to imitate. There was no clearly defined outcome as they were focusing on practice of the language forms.

Samuda and Bygate’s (2008) framework can be used to evaluate whether an activity is more or less task-like. They suggest: “A task is a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning through process or product or both” (p. 69).

Samuda and Bygate (2008) provide an example that meets the above definition of a task. The main task is to identify a person’s identity according to objects found in the pockets of his coat. Students are required to reach an agreement on their ideas regarding the person’s identity. They firstly write down their ideas in a chart in groups. The chart is used to record students’ initial hypotheses about the person’s identity under categories such as age, gender, occupation. It requires groups to register the degree of probability/possibility of each initial hypothesis. Then each group presents their ideas for their selection and justifies its reasons in an oral presentation which is finally presented in written form as a poster or report.
Samuda and Bygate (2008) explain that a task is holistic in the sense that “it requires learners to decide on potential relevant meanings, and use the phonology, grammar, vocabulary and discourse structures of the language to convey these in order to carry out the task” (p. 13). In this example, the holistic activity is the discussion among students in order to reach an agreement on the identity of the person. They use language in either oral or written form to come up with a description of the likely owner of the objects, which is the outcome of the activity. The outcome could also be a non-verbal representation such as a picture and ID forms. The overall aim is to promote language learning through the different phases of exchanging ideas, pooling of ideas and opinions, reorganisation and reworking of those ideas to present their ideas about the identity of the person.

The third framework is from Willis and Willis (2007), who provide six questions to help teachers to evaluate the extent to which an activity is ‘task-like’:

1. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?

2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?

3. Is there an outcome?

4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?

5. Is completion a priority?

6. Does the activity relate to real world activities? (p. 13)

Willis and Willis (2007) highlight that a task should relate to the real world, that is, be ‘authentic’. They suggest that authenticity can be viewed in terms of the following three levels. For the first level, learners “produce meanings which will be useful in the real world”; for the
second level, the activities “practise a kind of discourse which is very common in everyday life”; for the third level, the “activities could occur in the real world” (p. 15).

Willis and Willis (2007, pp. 13-15) present a series of activities which, they suggest, meet their six criteria. Firstly, the learners read some statements about the problem of addictive drugs and express the extent of their agreement or disagreement on a four-point scale. Learners mark the statements first as individuals and then decide a rating as a group. The teacher chairs a group discussion after the group ratings are presented to guide the outcome of the discussion. Finally, learners read the text with a purpose, which is to find out the text writer’s opinions and to compare the writer’s views with their own on the same issues. This activity is followed again by a teacher-facilitated discussion on the comparison of these views.

The activities are evaluated against the six questions as a whole by Willis and Willis (2007, pp. 14-15). Firstly, they suggest that the topic is intrinsically engaging for all learners; secondly, students focus on meaning via the exchange of opinions and supporting arguments; thirdly, the rating of each statement is the outcome; fourthly, the teacher values the students’ discussion because they are given an opportunity to express their opinions which strengthens the importance of the outcome, and the success is judged in terms of outcome; fifthly, students are given enough time to finish the task, thereby demonstrating the importance of achieving an outcome; and, finally, it is highly possible that students may be engaged in a discussion on the same topic in the real world.

Two overlapping features are observed across these three frameworks as outlined above. Firstly, in a task for the purposes of TBLT the primary focus is on meaning and, secondly, there is a clearly defined outcome. Even though Samuda and Bygate (2008) use the expression “engaging language use”, they argue that “language use implies both real world and primary focus on meaning” (p. 66). Since these two features (meaning and outcome) are common across
the three frameworks, these aspects may be considered as crucial for defining a task. The three frameworks differ from each other, however, in particular ways: Ellis (2009b) states that learners fill some communicative gaps by relying on their own resources; Willis and Willis (2007) emphasise the engaging nature of a task and its relation to the real world; Samuda and Bygate (2008) maintain that a task is a holistic activity aiming at promoting language learning through process, product or both. These three frameworks therefore not only share some common elements, they also complement each other in the approaches they take to evaluating tasks.

The above three frameworks have therefore been chosen as the means to evaluate and identify tasks in this study (refer to Section 4.3.4). In the next section, I describe different task phases.

### 2.4.2 Different Task Phases

Ellis (2003) says that “a key pedagogical issue is how a task can be fitted into a cycle of teaching” (p. 33). It is generally agreed there are three principal phases in task implementation: pre-task, during-task and post task (Ellis, 2003; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Skehan, 1998). Willis (1996b) labels the task stages as: pre-task, task-cycle and language focus. An essential characteristic of TBLT is the task, and therefore the requirement to have a clearly defined ‘task phase’ during task implementation in classrooms.

Carless (2015) describes the major roles of each phase: The pre-task phase introduces the topic that the task(s) will focus on and identifies language that may be required for task completion; the during-task or task phase involves students drawing on Phase I but also using their existing linguistic resources to transact the task(s); the language focus (which may include explicit language instruction) occurs in the post-task stage (p. 370).
Specifically, the pre-task stage is the preparation or motivational stage including the introduction of the topic and task, brainstorming and highlighting of new words, phrases and ideas, observing and performing similar tasks, and planning of the linguistic forms, meanings and strategies that may be drawn on to complete the task (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1996a; Willis, 1996). Skehan (2011; 2007) summarises two aims of the pre-task phase: the first is to introduce the new language or to promote language restructuring, that is, to enable learners to produce progressively more complex language; the second is to reduce the cognitive load so that students may give more attention to language in use during the task phase.

The second stage is the indispensable and fundamental during-task phase. As Ellis states, “only the ‘during-task’ phase is obligatory in task-based teaching” (2003, p. 243). Willis (1996b) suggests three basic steps in the during-task phase: task, planning and report. To illustrate, learners begin by carrying out a communicative task by using their previously learnt language resources. They then move to the planning step, which is to rehearse what they want to say or write for their final reports. Teachers can help students to polish and correct their language required to accomplish the report. While some students are giving the report, the others should purposefully listen. Skehan (2011; 2007) emphasises the importance of selecting a task of appropriate difficulty. A task cannot be too easy or too difficult or it will lose its value and will not achieve its goals. Skehan (2011) indicates that teachers can change the way tasks are implemented to reduce or increase the difficulty by manipulating the following five elements: the time pressure; modality (i.e. the four skills being used: listening, speaking, writing and reading); the scale (i.e. the number of participants and relationships involved); the stakes (i.e. how important the task is); and control (i.e. the extent of the influence the participants can exert on the task performance) (p. 72). Skehan (2011) maintains that a well-designed task can achieve an effective balance between fluency and accuracy while facilitating language
restructuring to encourage learners to produce more complex language. To sum up, this phase focuses on the task, which is pivotal in the three stages (Willis & Willis, 2007).

The third post-task stage involves procedures and activities after the task has been carried out. Willis (1996b) defines this stage as activities devoted to focusing on language forms (i.e., grammar). Similarly, Skehan (1996a) highlights the fact that the purpose of the post-task phase is to alter the attentional balance from fluency to accuracy for students to realize the importance of accuracy and restructuring. Both Willis (1996b) and Skehan (2011) agree that post-task activities offer opportunities for learners to direct their attention to form during the task (2011, p. 76). Skehan (2011) identifies three types of post-task activities: public performance, analysis and tests. Public performance involves the students in repeating the performance publicly in front of an audience. To ensure a focus on form, students’ performances should be recorded and analysed by themselves or others. Ellis (2003) also emphasises the important role of language focus in this post-task stage. Three major post-task activities suggested by Ellis are repeating the performance; reflecting on the performance, and shifting attention to language forms, especially those raised in the task performance. Willis’ task cycle (1996b), however, is different from those of Skehan (2011) and Ellis (2003) in that presentation is included in the second phase (during task) rather than in the post-task stage. In essence, the aim of this post-task stage “is to help students to explore language, to develop an awareness of aspects of syntax, collocation and lexis, to help them systematize what they have observed about certain features of language, to clarify concepts and to notice new things” (Willis, 1996a, p. 56). The post-task stage might also include grammar exercises and explicit teaching (East, 2012a).

East (2012a) points out the differences between the three task stages and the procedure of PPP in the following three aspects. Firstly, the pre-task phase is meaning-focused, “providing students with the language needed to complete the task at hand” rather than having “teacher-led and grammar-focused” instruction as in the first ‘P’ stage of weak CLT (p. 15). Secondly,
the task-phase has “more open-ended communicative tasks” and the outcomes of the tasks are not the use of targeted language or structures as in the final ‘P’ of PPP, that is, practice of the pre-determined language which has been learnt in the first ‘P’ in a communicative guise (e.g., structured role-play) (p. 15). Thirdly, the post-task phase focuses on grammar arising from students’ difficulties with communication in task performance, whereas practice of the targeted grammatical forms that have been presented is achieved in the middle ‘P’ of the PPP cycle. In the procedure of Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) of the weak version of CLT, the pre-selected language items are presented at the beginning of the PPP cycle, that is, during the first ‘P’ stage. It is then followed by the practice of the specific language items in the second ‘P’. After that, the language forms are produced in some communicative activities within the limitation decided by the first ‘P’. While in the task cycle, students pay attention to language forms in the post-task stage, after they have completed the task(s) through the previous two meaning-focused stages.

Faced with a wide choice of activities in the task cycle, teachers play a key role in deciding the exact activities. Ellis (2003) asserts that “teachers must make their own methodological decisions based on their understanding of what will work best with their own students” (p. 278). In fact, teachers play multifunctional roles in task-based classrooms where they act as course guide, monitor, linguistic advisor and chairperson. Teachers are responsible also for setting the goals of a class, scaffolding students during task performance, summing up the students’ achievements, focusing on required language forms and motivating their students. With such a wide range of responsibilities, it is quite possible that teachers implement the task cycle in various ways in classrooms in widely different contexts. Studies into teachers’ task implementation in diverse contexts are reported in Section 3.3.
2.4.3 Tasks Types

Just as there is diversity in implementing TBLT, TBLT also offers a wide diversity of task types which have been described in the literature. Nunan (2004) reports that “there are as many different task types as there are people who have written on task-based language teaching” (p. 56). Here I present a number of widely recognized task types as proposed by Ellis (2003), Prabhu (1987), Richards (2001), and Willis (1996).

Ellis (2003) distinguishes two types of tasks based on whether certain specific linguistic forms are targeted: unfocused tasks and focused tasks. Unfocused tasks are defined as tasks designed to “elicit general samples of learner language”; in contrast, focused tasks are those designed to “elicit use of specific linguistic features” where language forms are practised within the context of communication (p. 141). Moreover, Ellis (2003) notes that even though focused tasks are aimed at practising pre-selected specific linguistic forms, they differ from grammar exercises. That is, focused tasks attend to language forms incidentally because learners are not told about them before the task performance while, in a situational grammar exercise, the linguistic focus is made transparent to the learners before their practice. The attention to form in a focused task still happens in interaction where the primary focus is on meaning although there is a pre-planned linguistic feature.

Ellis (2003) also differentiates between input-based and output-based tasks. Input-based tasks usually take the form of listening or reading tasks that do not require learners to produce an outcome in speaking or writing. Ellis states that such tasks could be easily carried out in large classes where teachers lead whole class activities; moreover, they are suitable for learners who are used to a more traditional and structured approach. According to Ellis, input-based tasks are most suitable for beginners or those who are not accustomed to treating language as object. In contrast, output-based tasks ask learners to reach an outcome via spoken or written English and are aimed at developing higher levels of proficiency. Ellis (2017) points out that this
distinction can help to resolve one of the misunderstandings that TBLT only involves speaking tasks (an argument also taken up by East, 2017).


1. Information-gap task: Involves a transfer of given information from one person to another, or from one form to another, or from one place to another as they are holding different information.

2. Reasoning-gap task: Involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns.

3. Opinion-gap task: Involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. (pp. 46-47)


1. Jigsaw tasks: These tasks involve learners in combining different pieces of information to form a whole.

2. Information-gap tasks: These are tasks where one student or group of students has one set of information and another student or group has a complementary set of information.

3. Problem-solving tasks: Students must arrive at a solution to the given problem.

4. Decision-making tasks: Students are given a problem for which there are a number of possible outcomes and they must choose one through negotiation and discussion.

5. Opinion exchange tasks: Learners engage in discussion and exchange of ideas. (p. 162)
Willis (1996b) classifies the following six task types: listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks.

1. Listing: The outcome would be the completed list, or possibly a draft mind map.

2. Ordering and sorting: Tasks involving the four main processes: sequencing, ranking, categorising and classifying items in different ways.

3. Comparing: To identify common points or differences.

4. Problem-solving: Tasks that require intellectual activity as in puzzles, logic problems or real-world problems.

5. Sharing personal experiences: Tasks that encourage learners to talk freely about themselves and share experiences.

6. Creative tasks: Often called projects involving more than one stage and having a combination of task types above. (pp. 26-27)

I have listed above a wide range of task types. Ellis (2003) points out that this wide scope of task types indicates “the richness of the task construct” (p. 211). He further states the significance of various task types in that the syllabus designer, teachers and learners can benefit from it. The syllabus designer can integrate a wide range of tasks into courses, while teachers can choose from a great variety of tasks to see which tasks suit their students’ needs in their classrooms. Once again, teachers’ predominant role in task implementation is accentuated with the various task types to choose from. Meanwhile, it is quite possible that with such a wide range of choices about task criteria, task phases and task types, teachers may implement tasks in various ways in their classrooms. It is therefore useful to investigate teachers’ task implementation in diverse contexts.
2.5 Critiques of TBLT and Suggestions to Attend to Them

TBLT, as a development of CLT, has encountered similar problems to CLT in that it has been interpreted or misunderstood in different ways. Ellis (2017) points out that “misconceptions about TBLT abound”, with some objections to TBLT caused by these misunderstandings (p. 522). Furthermore, there are some issues arising from studies on a range of different aspects of TBLT around the world about whether TBLT is appropriate for contexts outside of BANA (Andon, 2018; Bruton, 2005; Butler, 2011; Deng & Carless, 2009; Klapper, 2003; Littlewood, 2004; Swan, 2005). To illustrate, TBLT may not be suited to a context where there is a highly competitive examinations system focusing on grammatical accuracy and knowledge rather than communicative competence; TBLT may be in conflict with the local educational norms and cultures in some Asian contexts; language learners’ same linguistic background may entail a risk of reinforcing each other’s errors; teachers may not have a high level of English language proficiency to use TBLT in their classrooms, etc. However, a growing number of studies have also reported successful implementation of TBLT around the world, for instance, the study by Van den Branden (2006) reporting a successful use of TBLT for teaching Dutch as a second language in state schools in Belgium, and the study by Shintani (2016) documenting successful use of TBLT for teaching of English as a foreign language to young children in the Japanese context, also the successful use of TBLT in foreign language teachers’ classrooms in New Zealand reported by East (2018) and Erlam (2016). A detailed account of all these issues related to TBLT implementation is presented in Section 3.3.

To address some of the concerns about TBLT, East (2012a) advocates for a balanced approach which connects focus on form and teacher-led grammar teaching with communicative experiences – a weak or task-supported approach. East argues that grammar and structures can be attended to at different stages of the task cycle (see Section 2.4.2) and in different ways. For instance, teacher-input can be included in a pre-task stage, and explicit teacher-led teaching
and grammar exercises can occur in the post-task stage to improve students’ explicit language knowledge. However, the major emphasis of the task must still be on meaningful communication. Ellis (2009b) also concedes that TBLT does not exclude planned approaches, and that TBLT can be used with more traditional, form-focused approaches as long as the “obligatory” main task phase is maintained (p. 224). In this balanced approach, there are adequate opportunities to attend to language forms in the different task stages. These can be pre-planned and allow teachers to operate in a structured framework. Tasks, therefore, are compatible with direct explicit instruction about grammar and structures as well as traditional grammatical exercises.

However, East (2012a) points out that “we are not yet in a position to assert irrefutably that TBLT should be embraced and applied worldwide” (p. 17). TBLT is still being debated because of teachers’ challenges in TBLT implementation which are still being widely reported around the world although Ellis (2015) argues that some reported constraints are not real problems. These challenges are reported in detail in the next chapter along with more implications and suggestions provided for successful TBLT implementation based on the research findings related to TBLT in various contexts.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced theoretical perspectives on TBLT, TBLT as a development to CLT, the strengths of TBLT, and the key terms related to tasks in TBLT, such as the task definitions and criteria, different task phases, and various task types. Some objections against TBLT and suggestions have also been mentioned. This has established the theoretical basis for the analysis of the participating teachers’ task implementations in their classrooms which I undertake later in this thesis. In the next chapter, I explore theoretical frameworks related to
language teacher beliefs, and present empirical studies about teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT.
Chapter 3 Literature Review 2: Language Teacher Beliefs and the Empirical Studies

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews theories and research regarding language teachers’ beliefs. It then provides an interface between TBLT and teacher beliefs by reviewing a range of empirical studies about teachers’ beliefs related to TBLT, and the implementation of TBLT in their classrooms or in TBLT teacher education programmes. The research summarised in this section was conducted not only in New Zealand and China, but also in other parts of the world. I finally introduce research on students’ attitudes towards CLT and TBLT, and sum up the implications of all the empirical studies related to teachers’ beliefs and practices, as well as students’ attitudes. I identify the gap that this thesis sets out to fill.

3.2 Language Teacher Beliefs

The second strand of the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis draws on research in the field of language teacher beliefs, a dimension which, according to a number of studies, has been found to influence teachers’ practices (Borg, 2003; 2015). East (2017), for example, argues that “[w]hen it comes to implementing any pedagogical approach, including TBLT, teachers inevitably bring their own beliefs and understandings about effective pedagogy with them into their own classrooms” (p. 414). Borg (2003) states that “teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” (p. 81). Investigating teachers’ beliefs can therefore help us to understand better teachers’ classroom practices. This chapter explores the factors influencing teachers’ beliefs, and examines the significance to pedagogical practice of teachers’ beliefs.
3.2.1 The Definition of Teacher Beliefs

During the 1970s, the focus of research into language teachers’ beliefs (or cognitions) changed as a consequence of the influence of cognitive psychology, moving theorists and researchers away from a process-product approach, that is, a study of the relationship between what happens in classrooms and learners’ achievement, to an examination of individual teachers’ thinking. Borg (2003) defines teacher cognition as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe and think” (p. 81). This ‘new’ research approach was concerned with how the thinking process of teachers: teacher planning, teacher judgement and teacher decision-making, determines teachers’ behaviours (Clark & Yinger, 1977). Various terms have been used to define teachers’ thinking. In the field of language teacher cognition, Borg (2015) claims that there are approximately 60 terms used to define teachers’ thinking, including, as arguably key terms, knowledge, beliefs, principles, maxims, personal theories and conceptions. The distinction between beliefs and knowledge, however, is challenging. Borg (2015) states that “aiming to separate knowledge, belief and related concepts is not particularly a fruitful exercise given that in the mind of the teachers these constructs are not held or perceived distinctively” (p. 38). Pajares (1992) explains that “beliefs are studied in diverse fields [which] have resulted in a variety of meanings”. He regards the two (that is, beliefs and knowledge) as inseparable although “belief is based on evaluation and judgement and knowledge is based on objective fact” (p. 313). Following Borg (2015), in the present study I define the term teacher beliefs as “what teachers know, believe, and think” (p. 81).

3.2.2 Factors Influencing Teacher Beliefs

Borg (2015) set up a model which presents several factors that may contribute to language teachers’ beliefs. These include prior language learning experiences, education programmes, contextual factors and classroom experience (p. 333). In this section, I focus on the influence
of the first two factors: prior language learning experiences and education programmes. The remaining two influencing factors are discussed in the next section.

Teachers’ beliefs have been reported in a number of studies to be shaped by their early learning experiences (Borg, 2003; 2015; Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, 2001; Golombek, 1998; Johnson, 1996; Numrich, 1996; Woods, 1996). Johnson (1996), for example, reported that a pre-service ESL teacher’s instructional decisions were based largely on her own prior language learning experiences in an American context. Similarly, Bree, Hird, Milton, Oliver, and Thwaite (2001) studied the teaching principles of 18 experienced ESL teachers to adults and children in an Australian context and found that their classroom practices were influenced by their earlier learning experiences. Likewise, Numrich (1996), in a study of 26 teachers in a master’s degree program in TESOL in the United States, found that teachers’ choices regarding specific instructional strategies are shaped by their experiences as learners, whether positively or negatively. Golombek (1998) and Woods (1996) noted similar findings in the United States. Golombek (1998) reported that a teacher was cautious about correcting her students based on her own negative experiences of being corrected as a second language learner. Woods (1996) similarly found that a teacher’s positive language learning experience, that of being accompanied by an L1 speaker, promoted his communicative ability and led him to believe in the superiority of communicative techniques over grammar-based techniques for language learning. Peacock’s (2001) study with 146 pre-service ESL teachers suggested that the teachers did not make any significant change in their beliefs during three years of teacher education in Hong Kong; this, he argued, was because the students’ beliefs arose from their earlier second language learning experiences. As Borg (2003) says, “teachers’ prior language learning experiences establish beliefs about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualizations of L2 teaching during teacher education, and which may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives” (p. 88).
Equivocal findings have been reported about the impact of language teacher education on teachers’ beliefs. Some studies (Borg, 2005; Peacock, 2001; Urmston, 2003) report stability in the pre-and post-course beliefs of teachers, while other studies (Borg, 2015; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Clarke, 2008; Liu & Fisher, 2006; MacDonald, Badger, & White, 2001; Mattheoudakis, 2007) found changes in individual teachers’ beliefs that occurred in the process of their language teacher education. For instance, Peacock’s (2001) study into changes in teachers’ beliefs concluded that these beliefs were not shaped by their pre-service methodology courses. In contrast to Peacock’s findings, Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000), using interviews to investigate the processes of belief development with 20 language students in a Postgraduate Certificate in Education programme, did identify changes in pre-service teachers’ beliefs. To sum up, prior studies have suggested that teacher education programmes can lead to new thinking and changes to practice although the outcomes differ with some individual teachers.

With regard to facilitating changes in teachers’ beliefs, East (2018) argues that “teacher education programmes that are built on a reflective practitioner model provide one means of challenging teachers’ existing beliefs and practices and mediating change” (p. 3). It is worth mentioning that his argument is situated within studies concerning TBLT. East cites Collin, Karsenti, and Komis, (2013) who noted that reflective practice is now “a key competency” in teacher education programmes (p. 104). East goes on to cite Schön’s influential work (1987; 1983) which identified reflection in and on action as two key components of reflection: ‘in action’ is the reflection that happens in a particular lesson and may bring about immediate changes in practice; ‘on action’ is the reflection taking place after the lesson which may lead to changes in subsequent practice. In addition to the reflection embedded within practice, East suggests ‘for action’ as future-focused reflection which enables teachers to distance themselves from the classroom and view their practices in light of theories. East argued that these three components of reflection work in a cyclical way.
There is evidence suggesting that reflection in teacher education programme can bring about changes to teachers’ existing beliefs (e.g. Borg, 2011; Farrell & Ives, 2015, Too, 2013). Borg’s (2011) study, for example, investigated the development of six English as second language teachers’ beliefs in a six-week in-service teacher education programme in the UK through six rounds of interviews and coursework that included reflective writing, essays, an experimental practice assignment along with the written feedback from the tutors. He found that the course impacted considerably, but differently, on the beliefs of the teachers. The findings showed that three teachers’ developed their beliefs to a stage that they could articulate the beliefs underlying their teaching practice. Although the other three teachers did not experience the same large shifts as the others, there was also evidence of some changes in their beliefs. His findings suggested that some teachers changed their previous beliefs while other teachers, who were aware, previously, of their beliefs, consolidated and extended them as a result of the course. Farrell and Ives (2015) explored and reflected on the relationship between the stated beliefs and observed classroom practices of one second language reading teacher through interviews, classroom observations and journal writings. Their findings showed that this teacher became more aware of the meaning and impact of these beliefs on his classroom practice by articulating and reflecting on his beliefs. Too (2013) examined 25 pre-service English language teachers’ reflection on literary texts through online forums and weblogs in two literary pedagogical courses in a public university where these teachers were majoring in teaching English as a second language. He found that, while all the participants achieved a good overall level of reflection by using these online applications, they did not engage extensively at the highest transformational level, that is, the aesthetic reading level, following their reflection.

Studies of reflective practices in language teacher education programmes related to TBLT have also reported positive outcomes (East, 2014a; East, 2014b). East (2014a) investigated the impact of critical reflection as part of a language teacher education programme on twenty
teachers’ beliefs, as demonstrated through a reading log assignment administered at the start and at the end of a year-long programme, and found that critical reflection can change pre-existing beliefs and promote new understandings regarding TBLT. In a parallel teacher education study, East (2014b) also found that reflective practice as enacted through a scaffolded reflective written assignment along with course input can help both pre-service and in-service teachers to develop their understandings and practices related to TBLT.

To conclude, it seems that an education programme based on reflective practices can influence teachers’ beliefs, leading them to adapt their practices. In the next section, I discuss the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices.

3.2.3 The Relationship between Teacher Beliefs and Practices

A substantial body of research has been carried out on teachers’ beliefs related to many aspects of language teaching practices, including teachers’ beliefs in teaching of grammar (Borg, 1998; 2015; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Jean & Simard, 2011; Watson, 2015), reading (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 1999), writing (Burns, 1992; Gilliland, 2015; Lee, 2008), listening and spoken language (Baker, 2014), as well as teachers’ beliefs about language teaching approaches such as CLT and TBLT (East, 2012b; 2014a; 2014b; 2018), learner autonomy (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), technology use (Mathews-Aydinli & Elaziz, 2010) and assessment (Xu & Liu, 2009). These studies have revealed the complex and interactive relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their practices, described by Foss and Kleinsasser (1996) as a “symbiotic relationship” (p. 441). Pajares (1992) also emphasises the powerful influence that teachers’ beliefs have on their practices. He states that “beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence, they play a critical role in defining behaviour and organizing knowledge and information” (p. 325). Borg (2003) argues that teachers’ practices
are greatly shaped by their beliefs; however, these practices do not always reflect teachers’ stated beliefs, personal theories and pedagogical principles. The consistency, and inconsistency, of these relationships identified in the literature on teacher beliefs and practices in relation to teaching and learning of language are discussed in the following section.

Some studies have shown a general alignment between beliefs and practices. For instance, Johnson (1992) studied the extent to which 30 ESL teachers’ theoretical beliefs on literacy instruction corresponded to their practices and found that these teachers taught in accordance with their theoretical beliefs. This study also revealed that less experienced teachers tended to take a function-based theoretical stance, emphasising use of authentic language within situational contexts; more experienced teachers, however, preferred a skill-based orientation with a focus on memorization and repetition of L1 language patterns. Farrell and Ives (2015) investigated and reflected on the relationship between the stated beliefs and observed classroom practices of one second language reading teacher; most of the teacher’s stated beliefs about teaching reading were evident in many of his classroom practices. For instance, the teacher said that he considered it important for students to be active language learners in the classroom; he consistently provided such an environment to allow for active learning. However, there was also divergence between his stated beliefs and teaching practice; for example, the teacher did not choose ‘interesting topics’ for their students, as he claimed; rather, he only used topics directly from the textbook.

A large number of studies have found inconsistency between teachers’ beliefs and their practices due to a wide range of reasons. Teachers’ practices have been shown, in a number of studies, to be shaped by contextual factors related to social, psychological and environmental realities of the school and classroom. These have included a prescribed curriculum, high-stakes examinations, time constraints, classroom and school layout, school policies, parents, colleagues, students and the availability of resources (Borg, 2003; Farrell & Bennis, 2013;
Farrell & Ives, 2015; Gilliland, 2015; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Ng & Farrell, 2003; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Richards & Pennington, 1998). Phipps and Borg (2009), for example, emphasise the importance of context, saying that “contextual factors mediate the extent to which teachers can act in accordance with their beliefs” (p. 381). Fang (1996) also argued that “contextual factors can have powerful influences on teachers’ beliefs and, in effect, affect their classroom practice” (Fang, p. 53).

For instance, Gilliland (2015) studied what two teachers understood about second language development and academic writing, and to what extent their perspectives were manifested in the teachers’ writing instruction. The findings suggest that teachers’ practices were not congruent with their beliefs because they were constrained by the high stakes writing assessment. Ng and Farrell (2003) investigated teachers’ beliefs and practices on grammar teaching and found that teachers directly corrected students’ errors, despite saying they believed elicitation was valuable, because error correction was not as time-consuming and was more practical in their context. Richards and Pennington (1998) investigated the extent to which five EFL teachers implemented the communicative principles they were exposed to in their university teacher education courses. They reported that, although teachers were prepared in communicative methods as a consequence of teacher education, few of their practices were consistent with their stated beliefs in communicative principles. Teachers gave their reasons for not using communicative approaches as large classes, unmotivated students, examination pressures, syllabus demands, students’ limited proficiency and students’ resistance to a new approach as well as heavy workloads. Junqueira and Payant (2015) also found a mismatch between the beliefs and decision-making processes of a novice second language teacher in regard to the teaching of writing. Although the novice teacher emphasised that giving feedback on organization and content should be the focus of teacher response, she was observed to provide more comments on grammar rather than on organization and content.
Other studies have suggested that students’ behaviours have influenced teachers’ practices. Bailey (1996), for example, found that teachers changed their teaching plan and did not follow their stated principles because of issues related to students, such as difficulty in engaging students’ interest or responding to an unexpected issue or question arising in a lesson. Farrell and Bennis (2013) found that there were instances when teachers’ practices were consistent with their beliefs, and other instances when their practices were inconsistent. In their study which included one teacher who was a novice and one who was experienced, the novice teacher made instructional decisions based on aiming to keep his students happy. The novice teacher appeared to care more about student behaviour, student reactions, student levels of engagement, and the relationship with the students when making decisions in the classes compared to the experienced teacher. Similar behaviours have been observed by Roothooft (2014) who noted that teachers’ practices are influenced by students’ feelings and responses.

Phipps and Borg (2009), in a study exploring tensions between teachers’ grammar teaching beliefs and their practices, identified what they noted as teachers’ core and peripheral beliefs. The core beliefs referred to a generic set of beliefs about learning which seemed to influence teachers’ beliefs more than the peripheral beliefs; peripheral beliefs observed could be in conflict with teachers’ practices. For instance, teachers said they believed that grammar should be presented in context (a peripheral belief), whereas they provided formal explanation for grammatical forms and functions in the classrooms because of students’ expectations. Phipps and Borg (2009) further point out the importance of exploring the underlying reasons behind the tensions between beliefs and practices. Inconsistency between beliefs and practices highlights the fact that teachers’ beliefs are mediated by various factors in their teaching practices, especially in different contexts, such as students’ expectations, examination pressure, and curriculum demands. The study of underlying reasons behind such tensions can enable
researchers and teacher educators to gain a better understanding of the process of teaching (Borg, 2015; Fang, 1996; Woods, 1996).

The studies reviewed in the above section have identified the influence of teachers’ beliefs on their practices. There is both convergence and divergence between teachers’ beliefs and practices. These appear to arise from contextual factors in teachers’ particular situations. In the following section, I focus on empirical studies into teachers’ beliefs and practices with specific relation to TBLT.

3.3 Empirical Studies into Teacher Beliefs and Practices Related to TBLT

A good deal of research has been carried out to investigate teachers’ understandings of TBLT and its implementation. This research has aimed to identify the ways in which TBLT has been adopted in different contexts, based on the argument that many scholars have pointed out that TBLT is a highly context-specific approach (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2007; Ellis, 2013; Littlewood, 2004). These scholars believe that the implementation of TBLT is predicated on a wide range of contextual factors, both inside and outside of classrooms.

Research findings into teachers’ beliefs have reported a diversity of concerns and adaptations of TBLT in different countries around the world at both school and tertiary levels, and different levels of teachers’ understandings of TBLT (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2007; Ellis, 2013; Littlewood, 2004). In the following section I summarise several empirical studies on teachers’ principles and practices related to TBLT both inside and outside of China.

3.3.1 Empirical Studies outside China

1) Empirical studies in the BANA (Britain, Australasia and North America) context: New Zealand and the UK
The empirical studies conducted in the UK and New Zealand are summarised in this section (Andon, 2009; East, 2012b, 2018; Erlam, 2016).

Andon (2009) investigated the influence of TBLT theory and research on teachers’ conceptions and practices with regard to task-based pedagogy. Two interconnected questions were addressed in his study: the first dealt with the correlation between TBLT theory and the extent of teachers’ uptake of this theory; the second was concerned with the adaption of TBLT in teachers’ classroom practices. Unlike previous research which has focused on compatibility between teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding TBLT, Andon’s research scrutinized the pedagogical principles and practices related to TBLT from the practitioners’ view. A case study approach was adopted. Four experienced teachers of English to adults, based in London, were recruited. Interviews and classroom observations were carried out and the data were subsequently analysed with reference to the essential principles of TBLT theory in order to establish teachers’ conceptions and practices pertinent to TBLT.

Andon (2009) first identified the tasks observed in the participant teachers’ classes, then he summarised four primary characteristics concerning teachers’ pedagogical principles and practices associated with TBLT: Firstly, the identified tasks were used as tools to promote communication among students. Secondly, by way of identified tasks, teachers endeavoured to link the classroom activities with real-world language use to achieve either situational authenticity (i.e., activities that aim to replicate day-to-day activities outside the classroom) or interactional authenticity (i.e., activities that are not necessarily related to real-world activities, but that replicate and elicit the kinds of language behaviours that may emerge from performing real-world tasks) (Ellis, 2003). Thirdly, the identified tasks were utilized as activities to achieve a goal or an outcome. Lastly, tasks were employed by three of the four case study teachers mainly to introduce or to practice form-focused activities. Based on the four principal characteristics identified above, Andon concluded that the four teachers had a good
understanding of TBLT theory and yet they did not mechanically replicate TBLT in their classrooms. On the contrary, they adapted it by flexibly integrating the theory into their classroom activities in line with their specific contexts, or combined TBLT with other teaching methods, shaped by their beliefs, professional training and experiences.

Andon (2009) states that “learning more about how teachers go about interpreting and practising TBLT has the potential to inform not only pedagogy and teacher development, but also future research and theory” (p. 210). He points out future research directions based on his study. Firstly, he calls for joint efforts between teachers and researchers. He says that “one way forward for TBLT is for researchers and teacher educators to do research with teachers” (p. 215). Secondly, he suggests that there should be more explicit discussion with teachers regarding their pedagogical choices and reasons for these. He also notes that teachers should be provided with specific information about TBLT and be offered help to design classroom research. Lastly, he acknowledges the privileged context in his study where the teacher participants were well-informed about TBLT and their environment was helpful to the implementation of TBLT, and suggests that future research might be conducted in different contexts. He says that “there is a need to conduct similar research, not necessarily into TBLT, but rather into the way teachers in other less privileged contexts draw on and combine ideas from the applied linguistics and teacher development literature” (p. 216).

In New Zealand, East (2012b) conducted a nationwide study exploring foreign language teachers’ uptake of TBLT as a result of a revised national curriculum for schools that has encouraged shifts in practice from teacher-fronted methods to a student-centered approach. This shift was encouraging foreign language teachers to move away from a weak CLT model and procedures such as Presentation, Practice, Production, and to move towards procedures more aligned with TBLT. Data were collected by interviewing nineteen foreign language teachers of one or more of the five most common foreign languages offered in New Zealand
schools (Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish), alongside eight school advisors who worked with teachers at secondary school level. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed to explore participants’ perspectives on the suitability of TBLT to fulfill the aims of the three strands of learning languages as expressed in the NZ curriculum document: communication, language knowledge and cultural knowledge (Ministry of Education, 2007c). Further, participants’ understandings of assessments related to TBLT were explored.

East (2012b) found that the school advisors showed a good understanding of TBLT principles, whereas teachers’ understandings of task principles differed, ranging from a high level to non-existent. East’s study appeared to suggest that teachers of European languages had a good understanding of TBLT principles. Fourteen of the nineteen teachers showed evidence of some knowledge about TBLT; the remaining five teachers appeared to have no knowledge of TBLT. Four of the five were teaching an Asian language: three were Chinese teachers and one was a Japanese teacher. East concluded that these Asian language teachers appeared to prefer traditional approaches which may have been influenced by their own and their Asian students’ backgrounds. However, it should be pointed out that there was one Chinese teacher and one Japanese teacher who were familiar with and enthusiastic about some of the TBLT principles.

East (2012b) identified three challenges in the New Zealand context which were: 1) teacher education which will address lack of knowledge and understanding of TBLT; 2) a supported approach to planning and implementation that will help to reduce teacher anxiety around TBLT; 3) assessment systems that support rather than undermine TBLT (p. 213). East made specific recommendations to address the three challenges.

For the first challenge, East (2012b) suggests that professional development should include both theories and experiential learning for teachers, based on a needs analysis of teachers’ knowledge and understanding related to TBLT. Teachers should not only explore the
theoretical rationale of TBLT. Meanwhile, teachers should be provided with classroom-based support in accordance with their own unique situations whenever they are in need of help. Furthermore, there should be collaborative action research between teachers and researchers, with dialogue between teachers and curriculum leaders to help them implement TBLT in their classrooms. Schools should also offer full support for teachers to take part in the programme such as giving them enough time to attend the programme and reducing their workload in their teaching. Even after finishing the education programme, there should be continuous support for task implementation. The successful implementation of TBLT requires joint efforts from all the different partners in the educational endeavour.

As for the second challenge aiming to reduce teachers’ anxiety towards TBLT, teachers should be helped to consider a feasible framework to incorporate frequently used language items, formulaic expressions, and topics into tasks. However, this framework should not be a replication of a sequential or hierarchical prescription of separate language items. Meanwhile, support resources such as textbooks should be offered. With regard to the third challenge, task-based language assessment could be introduced into school foreign language programmes. East (2012b) also suggests that observation-based research and post-observation reflection may promote practices that support task implementation.

Subsequent research conducted in New Zealand (Erlam, 2016) investigated how well teachers were able to design tasks that fulfilled the four criteria proposed by Ellis (2009b) by analyzing teachers’ descriptions of their tasks in a year-long professional development programme. (The four criteria proposed by Ellis (2009b) were introduced in Section 2.4.1.) This study found that over three quarters of teachers were able to design activities that were more like language tasks than like language exercises. Teachers have difficulty understanding and designing two aspects of task criteria, that is, to rely on their own resources and to close a communicative gap. The criterion that was easiest for teachers was the requirement that the task should have an outcome.
Erlam suggests that future research might investigate the correspondence between ‘task as work plan’ designed by teachers in advance and ‘task as process’ experienced by students in the classes, and also investigate teachers’ evaluations of their proposed tasks.

East (2014) carried out another study to explore the understandings, implementation and evaluation of tasks from the perspective of twenty pre-service secondary school teachers in an education programme for foreign languages other than English in New Zealand. This education programme consisted of sixteen weeks of theory-focused methodology and sixteen weeks of practical work in schools in their chosen language. Teachers in this study were given a reading log assignment focusing on theory and practice of TBLT in New Zealand context and a presentation assignment. They were required to design and implement a task in at least one class during their first six-week placement. When they returned to campus they presented the task and offered a reflection on its effectiveness to their colleagues in the course, based on three frameworks for evaluation of tasks (see Section 2.4.1). Finally, they handed in a written summary of their presentations.

East (2018) presented seven examples of tasks arising from the study presented in East (2014), which represented a range of different conceptualizations of tasks for different languages and teaching contexts. Drawing on an analysis of these task examples, he noted the positive role of the reflective process of evaluation of the tasks used in the teachers’ classes in this education programme. He found that teachers were provided with opportunities to challenge their existing beliefs and practices, leading to new thinking and changes in practice through these reflective processes. The findings suggest that teachers were able to evaluate tasks critically, starting from task-in-theory and moving to task-in-action by applying theories related to TBLT into their practices.
2) Empirical studies in non-BANA contexts

Empirical studies investigating teachers’ principles and practices related to TBLT have also taken place in Belgium, France, Thailand, Korea and Vietnam. Several studies are summarised below.

In Belgium, TBLT has been advocated to improve the teaching of Dutch as Second Language in Flanders since the early 1990s. TBLT has been included in teacher education programmes to coincide with the adoption of TBLT syllabi (Van den Branden, 2009). Van den Branden (2009) summarised four studies which explored teachers’ and students’ uses of tasks by recording classroom interactions and through interviews with teachers and students. He discussed teachers’ experiences when implementing two specific tasks and concluded that these tasks facilitated a high level of interaction among students and teachers even though students had low levels of language proficiency. He stated that these kinds of interactions appeared to promote language acquisition. Furthermore, the studies found that teachers adapted tasks to fit into their own specific contexts: their purposes, learning needs and interaction styles based on their beliefs about language teaching. The studies also suggested that teachers were encouraged by their students’ increased motivation as a consequence of engaging in tasks, and held positive attitudes towards the task-based syllabus. However, in practice teachers adapted the task-based syllabus and essentially enacted an eclectic pedagogical approach.

In France, McAllister, Narcy-Combes and Starkey-Perret (2012) investigated fourteen university teachers’ self-perceptions and attitudes towards learning and teaching while experiencing changes from a face-to-face teacher-centered approach to computer-mediated task-based teaching over two years. It was reported that most of the teachers embraced the new approach and adjusted to new roles of advisor, facilitator, guide and tutor in the computer-mediated and task-based teaching. Nonetheless, some conservative attitudes existed among
certain teachers as a result of an increased workload. The TBLT programme entailed teachers dealing with smaller groups of students in face-to-face tutorials, which was regarded as promoting language acquisition by teachers. However, interviews with thirteen teachers revealed that “the increased personal investment in the group work is problematic and some teachers may not remain committed to the programme because of this additional workload” (p. 339). The findings also suggest that increased workload and students’ autonomy were connected. Students in this French context assumed that teachers were responsible for all their studies, which required teachers to offer excessive support. The study recommends that future research should explore how teachers perform the new roles in the classrooms by analysing classroom interaction and the relationship between their perspectives and their practices in classrooms.

Mcdonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) collected teachers’ and learners’ impressions about task-based EFL courses over 12 months at a Thai university. Their findings suggest that both teachers and learners had positive responses to the task-based courses because they believed that tasks would assist students to become more independent in their learning and would help to meet their real world academic needs. Their attitudes towards the content also changed from negative to supportive by the end of the course.

Watson Todd (2006) explored English teachers’ task implementation after a task-based curriculum was carried out in a Thai university for four years. Data were collected from two sources: interviews with these English teachers and documentation about the language courses the teachers were teaching. Teachers were found to make changes to the task-based curriculum which were: reduction of tasks either by deletion of tasks or by combining two tasks into one; a greater emphasis on the explicit teaching of linguistic objectives; increase of the proportion of marks given to examination rather than continuous assessment on tasks (from 25% to 40% during the four years). The research found that teachers’ beliefs and students’ needs were the
dominant reasons for the changes. The decisions regarding changes first started from students’ feedback on courses. Teachers’ beliefs and preferences played a larger role in finally directing task-based curriculum revision. Other practical reasons, such as the increased workload on teachers and lack of reliability in marking the tasks, also led to the changes. The findings emphasised the need to consider context-specific issues in the implementation of TBLT, because “these changes were largely associated with practical constraints” (Watson Todd, 2006, p. 12).

In Korea, Jong (2006), and Jeon and Hahn (2006), explored Korean EFL teachers’ perceptions of TBLT through questionnaires in a Korean secondary school context. They identified a series of factors that hindered teachers’ use of TBLT, the foremost being that the majority of teachers admitted that they had little knowledge of TBLT and limited target language proficiency. Even so, the majority of teachers believed that TBLT would promote students’ communicative ability and enhance their intrinsic motivation in learning.

In Vietnam, Barnard and Nguyen (2010) conducted a case study by using narrative frames to elicit high school teachers’ beliefs about TBLT. Incompatibility was discovered between what the teachers claimed about CLT and their actual classroom practices. Teachers, on the one hand, admitted the importance of communicative activities and realized that these can promote students’ motivation; on the other hand, their reported stories revealed that they had a strong belief in the value of explicit grammar instruction. The findings indicated that teachers only paid “lip service” to TBLT in actual practice (p. 82).

The above reviewed studies suggest that, in a range of contexts, teachers can develop a good understanding of TBLT through teacher education programmes that would support the implementation of TBLT in classrooms. These studies reported that teachers adapted TBLT principles to match their own teaching styles and their specific contexts. Furthermore, in
Belgium (Van den Branden, 2009) and France (McAllister et al., 2012) it was found that teachers were encouraged by their students’ motivation and positive attitudes towards tasks. Meanwhile, some challenges regarding task implementation were raised in these studies, such as increased workload in France (McAllister et al., 2012), lack of task-based language assessment in New Zealand (2012b). Studies in Korea (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Jong, 2006) and Vietnam (Barnard & Nguyen, 2010) showed a different story. Teachers were found to have a limited understanding of TBLT and teachers in Vietnam were still playing the dominant role of giving explicit instructions in language teaching. In addition, there was a mismatch between teachers’ claim and their actual practices concerning CLT in the study conducted in Vietnam.

In the next section, I summarise the empirical studies related to TBLT in China.

3.3.2 Empirical Studies in China

Since TBLT (an essentially western notion) was imported into China, there has been a growing number of studies investigating the practicability of TBLT in Chinese classrooms at the school level (Carless, 2002; 2003; 2004; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; Deng & Carless, 2009; Hu, 2013; Luo & Xing, 2015; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007; Zheng, 2013). It seems that Hong Kong has played the vanguard role in the implementation of TBLT in the Chinese context as the notion was officially recommended in the Target-oriented Curriculum in the mid-1990s at school levels (Carless, 2003). However, considerable difficulties and concerns were uncovered in the studies that drew on interviews, classroom observations and questionnaires in authentic classrooms in Chinese schools. In a country as vast as China, the findings are diverse, although it was found that most teachers’ practices appeared to diverge from TBLT principles. Constraints are reported in the developed areas around China like Hong Kong, Beijing and Shenzhen because TBLT, as a new language teaching approach in China, was implemented
mainly in these developed areas. These constraints can be classified into the following three categories.

The first category is closely related to the Chinese educational system. Concern about the implementation of TBLT is expressed mostly in relation to examinations which target grammatical knowledge (Chen, 2008; Deng & Carless, 2009; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007; Zheng, 2013). As Deng and Carless (2009) explain, “in those contexts where examination-oriented education dominates, test formats are likely to have a greater influence on pedagogy than the latest government exhortations” (p. 286). The assessment system, which still utilises grammar-oriented examinations, has not been adjusted to developments in the Curriculum. In addition, teachers are confined to limited teaching resources such as textbooks, and are in great need of authentic materials related to students’ needs (Carless, 2003; Chen, 2008; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007). Furthermore, large class sizes and limited instructional time have been frequently observed as hindrances to TBLT in Chinese classroom by nearly all researchers (Carless, 2002, 2003, 2004; Chen, 2008; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007; Zheng, 2013). Maintaining discipline in big classes poses a significant challenge for teachers because such classes produce a lot of noise and lead to the overuse of Chinese as the L1. Carless (2004) points out that large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to involve students in interactive learning in pairs or groups and “noise and discipline inhibited task-based teaching” (p. 656). What is more, more time is required in the already tight instructional period when tasks are employed in large-sized classes (Zhang, 2007). For example, large class size may need more class time for students to complete tasks. Therefore, large class size may elicit discipline problems and prevent the use of interactive and communicative activities (Zhang, 2007).

The second challenge relates to students. According to research (Carless, 2002, 2003, 2004; Chen, 2008; Zheng, 2013; Luo & Xing, 2015), often students can only produce a low quality
of English language due to their variable language ability. Meanwhile, students are dependent on their first language in task performance. For instance, Carless (2002; 2004) observed students’ overuse of Cantonese as the most distinct barrier. Additionally, some students may not be accustomed to the new approach and have shown resistance to participation in tasks as a result of lack of competence or confidence (Luo & Xing, 2015; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011). It is difficult to get all the students involved in task performance (Carless, 2002; 2004). Lastly, students cannot apply their English into communicative practices outside of the classroom (Zhang, 2007).

The last category of constraints originates from teachers who play a dominant role in the implementation of TBLT. To begin with, their misconceptions about TBLT are deemed as the greatest barrier to the implementation of TBLT. According to the research, most teachers have a limited understanding of TBLT, and consequent observations reveal that their classroom activities are not aligned with TBLT, despite teachers’ claims to the contrary (Carless, 2003; Chen, 2008; Deng & Carless, 2009; 2010; Zhang, 2007; Zheng, 2013). Teachers’ beliefs are also greatly shaped by their own learning and teaching experiences (Chen, 2008). Similarly, teachers’ traditional views of teaching are in conflict with the core characteristics of TBLT. In Chinese culture, “teachers are expected to be omnipotent transmitters of knowledge and to take responsibility for students’ learning” (Peng, 2007). Teachers focus on the transmission of language knowledge, especially the formal aspects of language. Further, some teachers hold the misunderstanding that tasks only involve speaking in classrooms (Zheng, 2013). Another prominent obstacle lies in the fact that most teachers are not proficient language users; consequently, they do not have adequate confidence to conduct communicative activities or respond to unexpected situations in their classrooms (Luo & Xing, 2015; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007). Another recurrent concern is that teachers are not provided with enough professional development opportunities and lack sufficient assistance. As a result, teachers
cannot develop task materials and design task activities, or figure out a way to evaluate students’ task performance (Chen, 2008; Luo & Xing, 2015; Zhang, 2007).

Butler (2011) sums up the prominent issues of task implementation in the Asian-Pacific region as follows: how best to implement tasks in an examination-dominated culture; when and how best to include grammar instruction in TBLT; students’ use of first language in TBLT; and the difficulty of top-down policy implementation (p. 46). Littlewood (2007) also presents concerns with regard to the implementation of CLT and TBLT in Eastern Asian classrooms which include classroom management; avoidance of English and incompatibility with public assessment expectations (p. 244). Lai (2015) summarises the challenges to the implementation of TBLT in Asia as the students’ learning styles and preferences; teachers’ complaints about the impracticability of TBLT in their classrooms, and the mismatch between TBTL and educational ideology and values in Asia (p. 14).

Among all these constraints, teachers’ beliefs and examination pressure seem to be two major concerns (Deng & Carless, 2009). Carless (2004) points out that “teachers mold their innovations to their own abilities, beliefs, and experiences; the immediate school context; and the wider socio-cultural environment” (p. 659). Carless (2015) also states that “the general picture emerging [in Hong Kong] reaffirms the centrality of teacher agency in appropriating or side-stepping aspects of pedagogic reform” (p. 377). This is consistent with Chen’s (2008) opinion that “teachers and teachers’ beliefs are the most important factors influencing the implementation of task-based approach” (p. 110). Deng and Carless (2010) conducted research to investigate the impact of examinations on TBLT innovation and found that “it may be teachers’ beliefs rather than the role of examinations that are a more powerful barrier to pedagogic innovation” (p. 286).
Owing to the constraints mentioned above, many classroom activities in the Chinese context are still restricted to established traditional ways. Zhang’s (2007) study reported that “the implementation of TBLT became weaker when it was descended to different levels of disseminators, with only limited evidence of adoption of TBLT in the classrooms” (p. 83). Similarly, Deng and Carless’s (2009) study which investigated the extent of task-based activities in classrooms reported that widespread implementation of TBLT was rare and that classroom activities were form-focused instead of concentrating on meaning.

Despite the above constraints in practice, sporadic cases of successful implementation of TBLT have been discovered from the above-mentioned research, which indicates that a number of teachers in China have drawn on some principles of TBLT and are initiating the journey into this innovative area. For example, the cases of Helen (pseudonym) in Zhang’s (2007) study, Jane in Deng and Caress’s (2010) study, and Miss Wu in Zheng’s (2013) study, reveal that some teachers are holding positive attitudes towards TBLT and are beginning to integrate it into their classrooms, despite the various contextual constraints. Likewise, positive integration is supported by Hu’s (2013) study in Beijing, whose findings seem to suggest that it is plausible to implement TBLT in China. Hu (2013) argues:

_As a final point, scholars who believed the limited applicability of TBLT for foreign language classrooms at the most basic school levels and those who suggested that TBLT challenged the Confucian heritage school context, this paper provided empirical evidence to suggest the possibility of implementing TBLT in foreign language classrooms across different school levels in Beijing, China._ (p. 18)

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that considerable constraints do exist when TBLT is implemented in an EFL setting in China. On the other hand, the successful emergence of TBLT in classrooms in China should not be ignored.
In the following section, I sum up the implication of the empirical studies and also summarise the suggestions to facilitate the successful task implementation presented in these studies.

### 3.3.3 Implications of the Studies and Suggestions for Successful Task Implementation

The above findings support the claims by Ellis (2003), Littlewood (2007) and Butler (2011). They reiterate the complicated situations where TBLT is supposed to be implemented and the importance of having flexibility in adopting a specific teaching approach. Littlewood (2012) argues that “innovation and diversity reflect local conditions, as they result from the creative mixture of global elements with local meanings and cultural forms” (p. 359). Similarly, Butler (2011) states that “it is perhaps safe to say that effective practice, whatever that denotes conceptually, is grounded in context and has never been static” (p. 51). Zhang (2007) likewise claims that her study is in accordance with Adamson and Davison’s (2003) position that TBLT is a “context-bound process” and it is decided by complicated contextual factors (p. 85). As a result of the different contexts, various constraints have been identified in different countries. In summary, all the findings and suggestions have expressed the significance of contextual factors in different ways, which calls for flexibility or even adaptation of the implementation of TBLT to fit into specific contexts, such as China (Carless, 2015; East, 2012b; 2017; Ellis, 2015; 2017).

Different suggestions are put forward in order to solve some of the constraints in different contexts and to achieve the successful implementation of TBLT, with some researchers emphasizing the adaptation of TBLT (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2007; 2009; 2015; Littlewood, 2007), some accentuating the employment of TBLT with other approaches (Ellis, 2015; 2017), and others emphasizing flexibility in adopting TBLT (East, 2017).
Carless (2015) calls for “contextually grounded sources of good practice” or a “localized form of TBLT” (p. 378). Carless (2007) suggests three ways to adopt TBLT in Chinese schools: 1) Grammar instruction should be intensified; for example, more attention could be given to the post-task phase of the task cycle where various approaches to explicit grammar instruction could be used. 2) TBLT needs to be combined with the requirements of examinations. 3) The role of reading and writing tasks should be enhanced alongside oral tasks in classroom activities (p. 595). Meanwhile, Carless (2015) accentuates the important role of teachers in task implementation, saying that “the extent to which they will enact it productively, however, is likely to depend on three key issues: their understandings; values and beliefs; and the training and support provided” (p. 378).

Ellis (2015) notes that some reported constraints are not real problems. For instance, he says that input-based tasks can be used in large classrooms without causing discipline problems. He also asserts that TBLT is not in conflict with the learning culture in Asia and teachers’ lack of language proficiency is not the real problem. In order to solve some of the constraints arising from the studies, Ellis (2015) suggests that “teachers should adopt TBLT but use it alongside PPP in a kind of modular syllabus” (p. 383). Ellis further (2017) argues for “a hybrid syllabus consisting primarily of a task-based component but supported by a task-supported component to address recalcitrant linguistic problems when these become evident” (p. 522). However, Ellis (2015; 2017) points out that the real problem is to carry out a well-designed education programme to inform teachers of TBLT in a systemic way.

East (2017) proposes flexibility with regard to task implementation that allows “clearly planned and teacher-fronted components, including top-down grammar teaching, without compromising its essentially meaning-focused tenets” (p. 422). The suggestions seem mainly to focus on how to fit explicit instruction into TBLT classrooms.
Ellis (2017) calls for more research in this area and asserts that the successful implementation of TBLT “involves the development of task-based syllabuses, extensive teacher training, and ongoing research into the implementation of task-based programmes” (p. 522). A carefully designed task-based programme requires a clear understanding of teachers’ current perspectives and practices related to TBLT.

3.4 Empirical Studies into Students’ Attitudes towards CLT and TBLT

A growing number of studies have suggested that students in Asian countries are in favour of communicative activities and TBLT. What is more, there is discrepancy between the perspectives of teachers and students regarding specific tasks (Nguyen et al., 2015).

Considerable studies in recent years have reported that Asian students hold positive attitudes towards CLT in the classroom. In a study conducted by Savignon and Wang (2003) in Taiwan, a developed area of China, a mismatch was found between learner needs and preferences and their reported experiences of classroom instruction. The students preferred meaning-based classroom activities. Similarly, Chung and Huang (2009) note that, most high school students in Taiwan hold positive attitudes towards a more communicative-based form of language teaching. Such preferences for CLT are also reported in Japan and Vietnam (Gamble et al., 2013; Le Ha, 2004; Murphey, Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009).

Rao (2002), by contrast, reported that, in Jiangxi, the middle city of China, students favoured a variety of classroom activities, but they liked non-communicative activities more than communicative ones. Adams and Newton (2009) found that in Hong Kong students were suspicious about the effectiveness of TBLT, which may be a consequence of the prevailing conservative view of education. Some other researchers also indicate that Asian learners have low motivation for communicative language teaching (McDonough, 2004; Pham, 2007).
With regard to TBLT, Iwashita and Li (2012) conducted a study in a Chinese university in Beijing where students and teachers’ classroom interactions were observed and analysed. The research showed that EFL Chinese students embraced a task-based approach. In an EFL programme where CLT and TBLT were integrated into the teaching at a Cambodia language school (Takeda, 2015), fifty-five students’ reactions to an integrated CLT-TBLT programme were reported through questionnaires. An overwhelming majority of the students showed a preference for both CLT and TBLT and claimed that they have improved their four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) as well as their confidence in using English after the implementation of the programme. Similarly, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007), drawing on interviews, found that Thai University students held positive attitudes towards TBLT. Nguyen, Newton and Crabbe (2015) explored students’ perceptions of the pedagogical actions the teachers took during the pre-task phase via group interviews in Vietnam. They found that the majority of students explicitly voiced their preferences for fewer language-focused activities.

Notably, a discrepancy was also reported in the study by Nguyen, Newton, and Crabbe (2015) in that what was viewed as beneficial for students’ task performance by teachers was actually regarded as a hindrance by students when accomplishing tasks. Furthermore, students’ attitudes can also encourage teachers to use TBLT. Van den Branden (2009), focusing on teachers’ attitudes in the European context, found that teachers are encouraged in their use of TBLT syllabi by their students’ motivation to perform language use tasks.

It is valuable to investigate students’ perspectives on TBLT on the grounds that there is still a lack of studies on Chinese students’ attitudes towards TBLT at tertiary level. Luo and Xing (2015) suggest that “future research with learner’s perspectives via surveys and interviews would be valuable in presenting a more holistic understanding” after they investigated teachers’ perceived difficulty in implementing TBLT in China (p. 151).
3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature around teachers’ beliefs. It has also summarised several empirical studies regarding teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT, as well as empirical studies on students’ attitudes towards tasks. A research gap has been identified based on these studies, as follows.

It is evident that teachers hold a variety of understandings about TBLT and implemented tasks based on their specific situations around the world. Teachers in the UK, New Zealand, Belgium and France seemed to have more knowledge about TBLT compared to teachers in Asian countries such as China, Korea and Vietnam. There are various issues arising from task implementation in different contexts as TBLT is highly influenced by diverse contextual factors. Overall (with the exception of Thailand), studies in Asian countries such as Korea, Vietnam and, especially, China have reported more constraints related to task implementation compared to BANA countries and some European countries such as Belgium and France. In China, the prominent role of teachers has been accentuated in the successful implementation of TBLT along with the hindrance of the traditional testing system.

Even though we have witnessed a rapid growth of research at school levels in China, there have been few empirical studies on teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT at tertiary level in mainland China. Similarly, there is a shortage of studies on students’ attitudes towards tasks in China at the tertiary level. Ellis (2017) calls for more studies in this area. Further studies are needed to explore an appropriate way to implement TBLT in a context as vast and complicated as China.

The studies on a range of different aspects of TBLT in New Zealand (East, 2012b, 2018; Erlam, 2016) suggest that New Zealand teachers have favourable environments in which to use tasks. The school curriculum makes special reference to TBLT and TBLT is promoted widely in
educational programmes for language teachers (East, 2012b, 2017; Erlam, 2016). The findings also suggest that teachers at school level generally have developed a good understanding of TBLT through educational and professional development programmes to use tasks in their practices. Overall, teachers have become familiar with TBLT principles and are able to evaluate their implementation of tasks critically through educational programmes based on TBLT principles. In comparison with Chinese teachers, teachers in New Zealand appear to have a better understanding of TBLT and implementation of tasks although they still have challenges such as a lack of task-based assessments for TBLT. The research in this study is built, therefore, on the assumption that teachers in New Zealand are more likely to implement tasks in a favourable environment. Thus, this study compares the teachers’ beliefs and practices in both contexts, New Zealand and China, to gain insights that might help to promote successful TBLT implementation in China.

Additionally, a discrepancy can be found based on the above studies regarding students’ perspectives and teachers’ beliefs on TBLT and actual practices in classrooms: students are more favourably inclined towards communicative activities or tasks, while many Chinese teachers have misunderstandings about TBLT and are still stuck on practices that emphasise the transmission of language knowledge. Thus, it is also significant to explore students’ attitudes in order to identify how students’ needs might be better catered for, since teachers, as well as students, are the two major stakeholders in the task-based endeavour. My study aims to contribute to filling these gaps. The next chapter describes research method used in this study.
Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The major purpose of this thesis was to investigate teachers’ beliefs and practices, as well as the influence of contextual factors, on the implementation of TBLT in New Zealand and China. The study is based on the assumption that New Zealand teachers may be more advanced than their Chinese counterparts in using tasks and their task uses may provide insights for the development of the implementation of TBLT in China. Students’ responses to tasks were also examined as it is known that students’ perceptions can influence teachers’ teaching approach. This chapter describes the methodological approach that has been used to answer the questions that guided the research:

1. What do the six teachers know, understand and believe about using tasks in the two contexts: China and New Zealand?

2. In what ways do the six teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practices?

3. Which factors lead to observed differences between the teachers’ beliefs and practices in the two contexts?

4. What are Chinese students’ attitudes towards different tasks in both China and New Zealand?

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the research design and justification of the qualitative approach for this study, including a presentation of contexts and participants; the second section first focuses on the data collection methods and procedures; then it examines the decisions surrounding the data transcription and analysis; the last section presents the ethical considerations.
4.2 Research Design

Establishing a paradigm is crucial for any researcher because, as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, a paradigm is a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (p. 13). Empirical research has traditionally been carried out in accordance with three research paradigms: the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach and the mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2013). The third approach, mixed methods, combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Creswell (2013) defines qualitative and quantitative approaches respectively as follows:

Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. (p. 4)

Creswell (2013) also points out the methodological differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches. In quantitative methodology data gathered include numeric information using instruments which are analysed and interpreted statistically. In qualitative approaches, the researcher gathers data from interviews, observations, documents and recordings, and/or data consisting of texts or images, which are analysed through identifying and interpreting themes or patterns (Creswell, 2013).

This research is framed as a qualitative study. Two qualitative methods were used: class observation and semi-structured interviews. These approaches investigated teacher’s beliefs of, and practices related to, TBLT in different contexts; they also enabled an examination of students’ responses. A brief introduction to the research design and the justification for using qualitative research methodology for the current research are presented below.
4.2.1 A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach aims to “capture the meaning of real-world events from the perspective of a study’s participants” (Yin, 2015, p. 11). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” and “to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand” (pp. 3-4). Flick (2007) further points out that “the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study” is the interest of qualitative research (p. 3).

A qualitative approach is an interpretive, naturalistic, and constructionist/constructivist approach to the world (Bryman, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is interpretive because “the focus is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2016, p. 366). It is constructivist because its goal is to understand the meanings people hold about the world (Creswell, 2013).

The primary objective of qualitative approach is to build an understanding of persons and settings (Maxwell, 2012, p. 8). My research focuses on the beliefs and practices of teachers as well as students, and the contextual factors. Therefore, a qualitative approach was considered as the most suitable for my current research.

Many researchers have summarised the key features and characteristics of qualitative research. Creswell’s (2013) comprehensive summary of the characteristics overlaps with those of other researchers (Bryman, 2016, p. 366; Maxwell, 2012, p. 8; Yin, 2015, pp.7-8). Below I explain how my current research satisfies these features and characteristics. The seven characteristics of a qualitative approach, as described by Creswell, are: 1) natural setting; 2) researcher as key instrument collecting data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants; 3) multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations,
documents and audiovisual information; 4) inductive and deductive data analysis; 5) focus on meanings brought by the participants; 6) emergent design; 7) reflexivity; 8) holistic account of the participants’ perspectives, practices and contextual factors (p. 186).

My research satisfies the characteristics described above: 1) I observed students and teachers’ classrooms which is a natural setting; 2) I investigated contextual factors that influence the students’ and teachers’ classroom activities and perspectives; 3) I gathered data from several sources including interviews and observations; 4) I developed patterns of meaning from the data using inductive and deductive data analysis; 5) the research focused on meanings brought by the teachers and students through their teaching and learning; 6) questions used in interviews were flexible and based on teachers’ responses; 7) interpretation of participants’ meanings was shaped by my own values and personal experiences as a researcher; 8) I presented a holistic view of participants’ perspectives and practices, and the contextual factors.

Qualitative research may be operationalised in a number of ways such as action research, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, etc.; my qualitative study, however, does not fall within any particular approach – as Yin (2015) points out, “rather than single out one of the variations as the basis for a qualitative study, you can exercise a viable option by conducting qualitative research in a generalized form” (p. 17). The context and participants are introduced in the following section.

4.2.2 Contexts and Participants

4.2.2.1 The teachers

Six teacher participants were selected, three from one tertiary institution in New Zealand and three from two different universities in China (with two from one university and one from another university). The institution was selected because the English courses in it are similar
to the English courses in the two universities in China; and some of their Chinese students had completed high school in China.

The six teachers were identified because they were all experienced teachers with at least 15 years of teaching experience. An important consideration was that they claimed they were using TBLT in their classrooms. Experienced teachers were regarded as those with at least four to five years of teaching (Gatbonton, 2008; Tsui, 2005) and, as Tsui (2005) points out, experience generally leads to expertise. In this study, therefore, it was assumed that experienced teachers open to TBLT would have developed a level of expertise in using TBLT.

To recruit the six English teachers I first contacted the Deputy Heads of the Foreign Language Department in a New Zealand institution and a New Zealand university, and the Dean of the English Language Department in several universities in China by email for permission to access and undertake research with their teachers and students. They then distributed the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms to teacher participants. The Participant Information sheets explained clearly my research aims and the expectations of the participating teachers. Once teachers from some institutions had agreed to participate, they were contacted by email.

It was assumed that the teachers knew about TBLT because they would have received professional education programme in language teaching, such as CELTA and DELTA in New Zealand and an MA or a PhD in Linguistics in China, which would have provided them with language teaching theories, possibly including TBLT. Borg (1998) states that the certificate and diploma (CELTA and DELTA) are strongly practice based, focusing on classroom management skills and practical demonstrations of communicative techniques of language teaching. These qualifications may help teachers learn about contemporary views of good practice in language teacher education (Borg, 2011). These teachers may also have had
professional development opportunities to learn further about TBLT through conferences, workshops, in-service training and access to resources through their institutions. Furthermore, the two of the teachers in New Zealand are teacher educators familiar with a range of language teaching approaches, most likely including TBLT.

Background information on the six participants is provided in Table 4.1 below:

### Table 4.1 The Participating Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Tertiary institution</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>28 years’ English teaching experience in Japan, Berlin, London, Spain and NZ</td>
<td>CELTA, obtained postgraduate diploma in language teaching in a university in Auckland</td>
<td>An institution in Auckland</td>
<td>Lecturer and teacher trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>35 years’ English teaching experience in London and NZ</td>
<td>DELTA obtained in London</td>
<td>An institution in Auckland</td>
<td>Lecturer and teacher trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>30 years’ teaching experience both in a Chinese University and then in a NZ language school and an institute</td>
<td>MA in linguistics in a Chinese University and an NZ University, PhD in a NZ University</td>
<td>An institution in Auckland</td>
<td>Senior lecturer in NZ (Associate professor in China before moving to NZ in 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>21 years’ teaching experience in China</td>
<td>MA in Linguistics in a Chinese university, diploma in language teaching in a Singapore University for one year, currently doing a PhD in Linguistics in a Chinese University</td>
<td>A first-rate university in Wuhan, the middle of China</td>
<td>Associate professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>19 years’ teaching experience in China</td>
<td>MA in Linguistics in a Chinese university and six months experience as an exchange scholar in an American university, currently doing a PhD in linguistics in a Chinese university</td>
<td>A first-rate university in Wuhan, the central China</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>28 years’ teaching experience in China</td>
<td>MA in Linguistics in a Chinese University, once taught Chinese in another Asian country for one year</td>
<td>A university in Hainan, the south of China</td>
<td>Associate professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two of the three English teachers in New Zealand are L1 English speakers and one is an L2 English speaker, who speaks Chinese as L1. The three teachers in New Zealand are teaching English as a second language (ESL); the three teachers in China are teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The New Zealand context is regarded as part of the acquisition-rich and well-resourced BANA contexts (Andon, 2018).

4.2.2.2 The students

All the participating students are Chinese as L1 speaking students as the purpose of the study was to investigate L1 Chinese students’ attitudes towards the classroom activities, especially tasks, in their classrooms.

The requirements for the student participants in my study were: 1) they were Chinese; 2) they have completed high school in China; 3) they had learned English for at least six years in Chinese middle and high schools; 4) they spoke Mandarin as their L1. It was assumed therefore that the participating students shared a similar linguistic, cultural and educational background.

Once consents had been given by the institutions and teachers, I visited the classrooms, in New Zealand and in China. I explained my research purpose at the beginning of each observed class and invited all Chinese L1 speaking students in each class to participate. Fifty students volunteered to be interviewed, ten from the NZ institution, and forty from the two Chinese universities (eleven from a university in the south of China, twenty-nine from a university in the middle of China). Twenty students were selected who met all the criteria.

The characteristics of the classes including the number of participating students and classes are presented in Table 4.2
Table 4.2 The Composition of the Classes and the Participating Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Molly’s students (In NZ)</th>
<th>Mary’s students</th>
<th>Rachel’s students</th>
<th>Grace’s students (In China)</th>
<th>Gloria’s students</th>
<th>Susan’s students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participating students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class time of each week</td>
<td>Three-hour class for four days each week</td>
<td>Three-hour class for four days each week</td>
<td>Two-hour class for four days each week</td>
<td>Three-hour class each week</td>
<td>Three-hour class each week by Susan and extra 90 minute-class given by a L1 English speaker.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ courses and majors</td>
<td>English training courses</td>
<td>English training courses</td>
<td>English training courses</td>
<td>First year college students Philosophy, Materials science and engineering</td>
<td>First year college students Automatic engineering and medicine</td>
<td>First year college student Elite class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ English level</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>Intermediate (one level lower compared to the intermediate level )</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students selected to participate differed between the classes in China and those in New Zealand as shown above. The numbers varied because, of the twenty-four students in Rachel’s class, seven students were from China and the rest were from Japan, Africa and Middle Eastern countries. Similarly, in Molly’s class there were sixteen students, with fourteen from China, one from Spain and one from Korea. In Mary’s class, there were only three Chinese students. Some of the Chinese students in New Zealand teachers’ classes could not be included as they had not finished high school in China.
Both the English teachers in China (Grace and Gloria) had two separate classes, each with about thirty students. The same classroom activities occurred in the two separate classes, so I attended and recruited more students from these four classes.

The students in China were eager to participate in my research but only a small number of students in the classes in New Zealand were willing to participate. There were other differences between the students in China and those in New Zealand. The students in New Zealand took an English proficiency test to establish their competency level; Rachel taught the elementary level students while Molly and Mary taught the intermediate level students. In China, Susan’s class was an elite class. In this class, thirty students were selected from all the first-year students because of their high marks in a comprehensive exam which included Chinese, maths and English given by their university after they entered into it. There were no proficiency tests for students in the other two Chinese teachers’ classes.

The reason for learning English differed in the two contexts. The students in the three classes in New Zealand were learning English to support study in a New Zealand tertiary institution, while the students in China were completing compulsory English courses required by the Ministry of Education for all non-English majors in Chinese universities.

The length of courses in the two contexts differed as well. The students in Rachel’s class had two-hour classes each day for four days in a week, whereas the students in Molly’s and Mary’s class had three-hour classes each day for four days in a week. The students in China had three-hour English classes (four of forty-five minutes) each week. Susan’s students had an extra oral English lesson given by an L1 English speaker teacher except the same three-hour English classes as the other two Chinese teachers.

All the students in both contexts had two separate courses: one focusing on reading and writing, and the other on listening and speaking. Different textbooks were used in New Zealand
according to proficiency level. Students in Rachel’s class used the *Headway Academic Skills Reading, Writing and Study Skills book* (Soars, Philpot, & Curnick, 2011) and its companion books (Philpot, Curnick, Pathare, Pathare, & Harrison, 2011). Students in Molly and Mary’s class, however, used the *Oxford EAP B2* (De Chazal, McCarter, & Rogers, 2012) to develop students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and academic language. In China, all the three teachers used the same series of textbooks: *New Horizon College English Book 3 and 4: reading and writing* (Zhen, 2011b) and its companion book: *New Horizon College English Book 4: Listening and speaking* (Zhen, 2011a). Gloria and Grace also used another set of textbook: *New College Integrated Course, Book 4: Reading and Writing* (Li, 2011).

Even though there are some differences for the students in New Zealand and China, they had similar linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. The purpose of this study, moreover, is a comparative study of the teachers; data on the students’ attitudes to the teachers’ classroom activities is complementary to the main purpose.

### 4.3 Data Collection Methods, Procedures and Analysis

Observations, semi-structured interviews and individual interviews were used to investigate teachers’ principles and practices related to task uses in their classrooms. These methods were chosen to complement each other in that interviews capture teachers’ statements about their teaching principles and practices, whereas observations record teachers’ behaviours in actual classrooms; interviews can also uncover students’ reflections on their classroom activities. Interviews consist of “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge”, and observations are “detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviours, actions” (Patton, 1990, p. 10). Breen, et al. (2001) have argued that the combination of observation and interview can reveal and unravel teachers’ pedagogical principles and practices. Interviews and observations, the two “primary” sources of data in qualitative
research, were used in the current study for data collection (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). The use of interviews and observations, as applied in this study, is justified and described in the following sections. After that, the data procedures and data analysis are introduced.

4.3.1 Interviews

An interview is the principal way to explore another person’s perspectives and to collect qualitative data. Merriam (1998) maintains that “interviewing is the major source of the qualitative data needed for understanding the phenomenon under study” (p. 91). The objective of the interview is to “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” as we cannot “directly observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions” or the past events and thoughts of the participants (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Furthermore, an interview can provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences, or to organise and express their ideas and thoughts because, as Woods (1996) explains, “although they have had the experiences, they may not have categorized or labelled them” (pp. 27-28).

Scholars (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993) have identified several types of interview. Structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews are widely used. The semi-structured interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) was used in the current research because it enabled me to explore, thoroughly and flexibly, the participants’ ideas and thoughts. The strength of a semi-structured interview is that it includes specific questions in order, such that a large part of the interview “is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored,” but it is enacted in a flexible way without following a strict order (Merriam, 1998, p. 71). Denscombe (2010) defines a semi-structured interview as one in which the interviewees are encouraged to “speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher” and the emphasis is “on the interviewee elaborating points of interest” (p. 175). Patton (1990) claims a strength of
a semi-structured interview is that it allows the researcher to “establish in-depth communication with the interviewees” (p. 282).

Besides predetermined specific questions based on my research questions, questions arose from the immediate context. I developed an interview guide (refer to Appendix A) to “provide topics and subjects within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate the subject” (Patton, 1990, pp. 283-284). This interview guide was adapted from Andon’s interview questions (2009) since his research was similar to mine in that he investigated teachers’ perspectives and practices related to TBLT in the UK.

The key to an interview resides in asking good questions. Patton (1990) suggests “good questions should, at a minimum, be open-ended, neutral, singular, and clear” (p. 295). Merriam (1998) adds that multiple and leading questions, and questions with yes-and-no answers, should be avoided (pp. 76-79).

Probes, an essential part of a semi-structured interview, assisted me to pursue information in great depth. A probe is defined as “follow-up questions used to go deeper into the interviewee’s responses” (Patton, 1990, p. 324). Merriam (1998) also notes that “probe can be used when you sense that the respondent is on something significant or that there is more to be learned” (p. 80). A probe is not written into an interview, but is “a skill that comes from knowing what to look for in the interview, listening carefully to what is said and what is not said, and being sensitive to the feedback needs of the person being interviewed” (Patton, 1990, p. 327).

Interviews were audio recorded so as to “offer a permanent record and one that is fairly complete in terms of the speech that occurs” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 187). Merriam (1998) explained that an audio-recording “can ensure that everything said is preserved for analysis; secondly, the interviewer can also listen for ways to improve his or her questioning technique” (p. 88). I used a digital recorder to record the whole interviews with all the six teachers’ consent.
As well as semi-structured interviews with the teachers, follow-up face-to-face individual interviews with students were conducted immediately after class observations, because, as Gass and Mackey (2000) emphasise, “data should be collected as soon as possible after the event,” otherwise, “the event is less sharply focused on their memories” (p. 54). In this research, interviews supplemented the classroom observations, as observations cannot reveal students’ inner thoughts about the classroom activities. An introduction to the observations and audio-recordings is presented in the next section.

4.3.2 Observation and Audio-recording

Observation in the study complemented the information obtained from interviews. Patton (1990) claims that “the purpose of observational data is to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed” (p. 202). Merriam (1998) summarises the items that an observer should notice: the physical setting, the participant, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors and researcher’s own behaviour (p. 98). Observations offered me an opportunity to record directly teachers’ and students’ behaviours and activities in the natural setting of the classroom.

Observation was employed to produce “thick description” and provide “accurate explanation and interpretation of events rather than relying on the researcher’s own subjective inferences” (Cohen, et al. 2007, p. 405). Patton (1990) points out that observation is “an omnibus field strategy” where it links interviews of respondents and informants with direct participation and observation (p. 206). Data from observation can be triangulated with interviews.

In this study, each of the teachers was asked to nominate at least three hours of classes in which they thought a task or tasks were being used and in which typical events would occur. Observations focused on teachers’ classroom activities and behaviours, which included
teachers’ teaching styles and classroom activities, and students’ responses to the teachers. Only interactions between teachers and students, not all conversations among the students, were recorded, as my focus was on the teachers. Observations also include the teaching environment such as the classroom equipment, class size, seat arrangement and teaching materials. The observations were recorded through notes on the classroom activities; these were used to supplement audio recordings.

The audio recording can be a powerful device used in conjunction with observation (Erickson, 1986). He points out that “audio records of frequent and rare events in the setting and in its surrounding environments provide the researcher with the opportunity to revisit events vicariously through playback at later times” (p. 144). He argues, however, for the crucial role of observation and that the machine recording “does not substitute for first hand participant observation and recording via field notes”. Recordings can serve as “a valuable additional data source in fieldwork research” (p. 144). Lessons were therefore audio-recorded. The audio recording was also used to capture the students’ recall of classroom activities.

All the classes of each teacher were recorded with the consent of each of them. I put a digital recorder in front of the classrooms at the beginning of their classes so that it could clearly record the teachers’ words. I also asked teachers to invite all the students to sit in the front rows of their classrooms so that the digital recorder could also record students’ responses (except that some students’ voices were hardly audible). The New Zealand teachers did not need to wear a microphone because they were in relatively smaller classrooms compared to the teachers in China, who wore a microphone in their classrooms. To reduce the negative effects of observation, I followed Taylor and Bogdan’s (1998) suggestion that the researcher should explain the purpose of the observation to the participants and establish rapport with them.

In the following section, I continue to introduce the data collection procedures.
4.3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Four steps were designed to collect data in the present research. Firstly, a semi-structured interview was conducted to gather teacher participants’ background information, their general teaching methods, and their beliefs about and perspectives on TBLT. The semi-structured interview questions were adapted from Andon’s (2009) interview questions with his agreement; they were divided into four parts (see Appendix A). The first part focuses on the context and background of the participants, including the teacher’s qualifications, experiences and training; their students’ age and level, perceived student needs, and how they are assessed; and teachers’ use of time, teaching materials and teaching aids. The second part elicited a broad description of the participants’ teaching approaches. The third part investigated teachers’ perspectives and practices regarding TBLT, and the last part asked about the influence of teachers’ learning experiences and training on their perspectives and practices. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by me for later analysis.

Secondly, I observed at least three hours of each teacher’s classes and took notes in the classrooms. My focus was on the teachers’ instructions and actions and the classroom activities at different stages. Students’ responses to the classroom activities and the interactions between teachers and students were also observed. The teachers’ instructions and lectures were recorded by the digital recorder that was put in the front desk of the classrooms. I then transcribed all the recordings which included teachers’ instructions and lectures as well as the interactions between teachers and students. Meanwhile, I took notes on the major activities and also students’ reactions to teachers’ instructions. The field notes alongside the transcription of the teachers’ instructions and interactions between teachers and students provided complementary evidence as field notes only captured a partial and highly interpretive picture of the observed classes (Andon, 2009).
The third step was a stimulated recall interview with students after the observed lesson, to elicit their thoughts about, and their attitudes towards, classroom activities. Immediately after the observations, and prior to the student interviews, I reviewed my notes to identify the classroom activities related to tasks. I played relevant parts of the audio recording to remind them of the classroom activities and then asked them what they thought about these activities. The students’ interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by me.

### 4.3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data is challenging. As Yin (2003) says, it is a complex process of “making sense out of the data” which “involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 178).

Repetitive checks thus play a key role in the data analysis. A researcher should repeatedly inspect the episodes or passages of text, reflect, triangulate, and be sceptical about first impressions and simple meanings (Stake, 1995 p. 78). Stake further argues that researchers must review the different sets of data repeatedly; important meanings will emerge in information that reappears (p. 78). Merriam (1998) also suggests that researchers look carefully into the data for recurring information (p. 181).

With regard to the accuracy of transcripts, an English L1 speaker checked the accuracy of my transcriptions. I coded the transcripts of the teacher interviews with reference to TBLT theories and the three task criteria frameworks suggested by East (2012b) which have been reviewed in detail in the literature review section (refer to Section 2.4.1). I read the transcripts repeatedly and became very familiar with the data from the interviews, paying attention to the data that appeared relevant to the TBLT theories and task criteria, and I labelled them accordingly. Teachers’ general teaching methods and their principles related to task implementations from
the interviews were also identified based on the coding of the interview data. In order to identify their stated principles related to tasks, I referred to the three frameworks (Section 2.4.1), including four criteria of a task proposed by Ellis (2009b); the definition of a task put forward by Samuda and Bygate (2008); and the six questions to evaluate whether an activity is task-like offered by Willis and Willis (2007). I also referred to the other TBLT principles such as task types, which have all been introduced in the literature review section 2.4. An example of a coding of the interview is in Appendix I.

Observations of the teachers’ practices were analysed in the following way. To begin with, all the teachers’ recorded classroom activities were transcribed by me. Then I interpreted these classroom activities in detail and classified them into different instructional stages. Mary’s classes are used here to illustrate (refer to Appendix K). One of Mary’s classes started with an introduction and a review of in-text citation. Then Mary led a whole class group discussion to elicit words related to the lesson’s topic about differences and similarities between two countries, which is followed by listening activities based on several audio files. After that, there was explicit language focus instruction arising from the audio materials followed by students’ practice of a targeted language form. This section concluded with the display of products on the wall from students’ listening activities (that is, writing five sentences according to the listening material by using the language of comparison and contrast). The next instructional stage had a writing focus preceded by a brief review of the writing from previous classes. Mary explicitly introduced some sentence patterns that students would use in their compositions. Then students were asked to write an essay in small groups before they had a group discussion of the content of this essay: comparing students’ own home countries with New Zealand. I classified these classroom activities into five stages: the first two stages were class introduction and review, the third stage was the first round of presentation and practice of the targeted language through a series of speaking and listening activities, the fourth stage was the review,
and the last stage was another round of instruction on language forms and practice of these language forms through a series of speaking and writing activities. (All the teachers’ classroom activities have been classified into different instructional stages in this way.)

Then each stage was evaluated by referring to the three task criteria frameworks to identify the tasks or task-like activities (refer to Appendix L). After that, I selected the stage that seemed to contain more criteria listed under the three frameworks than other parts, that is, the stage that appeared to be the most task-like (refer to Table 5.2). This analysis was submitted to coder reliability until agreement was reached on the use of the frameworks. The second coder and I evaluated the activities from two teachers’ classes (Mary and Rachel) and we reached a high level of agreement (90 percent). As for the five stages in Mary’s classroom activities, both of us did not identify any real tasks. We did not reach an agreement on one of the criteria which is whether the primary focus of Stage Three is on meaning. In Rachel’s classes, there were seven stages altogether, both of us identified the same two tasks from the seven stages. However, we did not reach an agreement on one of the criteria of the task which is whether the stage can engage students’ interests. Finally, the stages that seemed to align most closely with the criteria based on our agreement were analysed. I then stated the reasons why these selected stages satisfied the most criteria of the three frameworks. In Mary’s class, the final stage has been selected for detailed analysis as this part of the lesson because it contained more task-like features than other observed parts.

Triangulation of data plays an important role in data analysis. In this study, the two sets of data, the semi-structured interview and observation, were compared. While reading and categorising the data from observations, I kept in mind all the data extracted from the interviews. The two sets of data were compared to examine if there was evidence of the teachers’ stated principles in their observed practices. The reasons behind any convergence and divergence of their tasks beliefs and practices were presented as well.
The data from each of the teachers in the study were then compared to examine similarities and differences in their beliefs and practices related to TBLT. The various factors influencing their task implementation were also identified. Merriam (1998) says that “there are two stages of analysis: the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis” (p. 194). In cross-case analysis the researcher explores “processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172). The factors leading to the differences between the two contexts were then identified and compared.

Finally, I examined the data from the interviews with the students to investigate their attitudes towards the classroom activities, and especially the instances of apparent task use. Four interview questions focused on: the students’ preferred activities; the reasons for their choices of the preferred activities; the problems they encountered in these activities; and, finally, their suggestions to solve these problems. I then coded the data by first classifying students’ opinions into categories and counting how many students expressed a similar idea, and then I ranked these ideas according to the number of students mentioning them (see an example of coding in Appendix J). For instance, reasons given by students for their preferred choices were classified into categories such as the effectiveness of the classroom activities, the engaging characteristics of the activities, positive or negative influence of the outside environment, the practical goal of the activities, other benefits of the activities. Students’ responses about the reasons for their preferred activities, the problems encountered in these activities and suggestions for solving these problems were classified into different categories and ranked according to the number of students making a particular comment. Then I explained the reasons for the classifications of the students’ responses. I also investigated if there was a mismatch between students’ expectations of the tasks and teachers’ perceptions of students’ expectations by comparing
students’ attitudes mainly arising from the interviews with teachers’ expressions on students’ needs.

4.3.5 Validity Issues of the Study

All research methods have strengths and limitations (Merriam, 1998). As described above, a qualitative approach enables a better understanding of the meanings and perspectives expressed by the participants, and can provide a rich and holistic account of phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yin, 2015).

Qualitative approaches also have criticisms (Merriam, 1998; Nisbet & Watt, 1984). It is claimed that a qualitative approach is too subjective, difficult to replicate, and may not offer generalizable results (Bryman, 2015).

Even though the qualitative approach has been criticized for its weaknesses (Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2015), Merriam (1998) argues that validity can be achieved “through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analysed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (pp. 199-200). Creswell (2013) says that qualitative validity can be achieved if the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures. Procedures proposed by Creswell to promote the validity of qualitative methods include: 1) triangulating data sources of information; 2) using member checking; 3) using a rich thick description to convey the findings; 4) clarifying the bias the researcher brings to the study; 5) presenting negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes; 6) spending prolonged time in the field; 7) using peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account; and 7) using an external auditor to review the entire project (Creswell, 2013, pp. 201-202).
Three of the strategies were employed to enhance the validity of the current study based on those proposed by Creswell. The three strategies used in my research were: triangulation, member checks, and the use of a second coder to check for consistency in the analysis of the data.

The first strategy, triangulation, is defined as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (Denzin, 1989, p. 291). Of the six types of triangulation identified by Denzin (1989), methodological triangulation was employed in the present research. According to Cohen et al. (2007), methodological triangulation is “the one used most frequently and the one that possibly has the most to offer” (p. 143). Denzin (1989) established two categories of methodological triangulation: within method triangulation and between method triangulation where the latter involves the “combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical units” (1989, p. 244).

Methodological triangulation in the current research includes comparison and contrast between the semi-structured interviews that recorded participants’ self-report of beliefs and practice, and observations of teachers’ classroom activities. Denzin (1989) emphasises that “the use of multiple methods is a plan of action that will raise sociologists above the personal biases that stem from single methodologies” and “it remains the soundest strategy of theory construction” (p. 236). Cohen, et al. (2007) also explain that multi-method approaches can prevent the researchers’ biased analysis and promote researchers’ confidence (p. 142).

The second strategy I used was member checks, which involves “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if the results are plausible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). For the current research, I wrote interpretations of the classroom observations and presented them to the teachers to confirm my understanding of their classroom practices. Member check is similar to investigator triangulation identified by
Denzin (1989) because both the observer’s and the participants’ opinions are “reflected in the resulting data”, and will “lead to more valid and reliable data” (cited in Cohen, et al., 2007, p. 143).

The third strategy is the use of another coder to check the reliability of interpretations. This process involved finding a researcher familiar with the research area to evaluate the classroom activities by referring to the same three task criteria I used in order to assess agreement between my interpretations and those of an independent coder. In order to identify whether the teachers were using tasks in their observed classes, I first classified their classroom activities into several stages based on the relationships between each class room activity. Usually, a series of closely related activities were classified together. I then evaluated each stage as to whether they contained tasks or task-like activities by referring to the three frameworks described by East (2012b) (see Section 2.4.1).

The independent coder, a PhD student doing research in the area of TBLT, had been trained by me to evaluate tasks according to the three frameworks by using, as examples, two tasks and two exercises from Ellis (2003, p. 11). Then we evaluated all the different stages from Rachel’s and Mary’s classes by referring to the three frameworks. After this process, I compared my data analysis with my coder’s analysis to establish the extent of agreement. Overall, we had a higher level of agreement except that we did not agree with each other on whether two activities (respectively from two teacher’s classes) satisfied one task criterion according to the three frameworks. Finally, the stages with the most amounts of criteria in the three frameworks were identified based on the agreement with my colleague.

Many researchers argue that particularity, rather than generalizability, is the characteristic of good qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998, Yin, 2015). Creswell argues that “the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in
context of a specific site” (Creswell, 2013, p. 204) Merriam (1998) agrees that “the general lies in the particular, that is, what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to similar situations subsequently encountered” (p. 210).

Merriam (1998) suggests three ways to improve generalizability: 1) To provide rich and thick description whereby readers can find similarities between the current study and their own situations and decide whether findings can be transferred to them. 2) To describe the typical characteristics of the programme, event and individuals so that readers can relate to their own situations. 3) The employment of several sites, cases and situations to create rich diversity (pp. 211-212).

In this research, I provide a detailed description about the participants’ educational backgrounds, experiences, thoughts, and classroom practices for readers to compare their own situations with the participants’ situations. The six participants in the present research were from two different contexts, New Zealand and China, and the three Chinese teachers were from two different universities. The diverse contextual factors of the participants were described and illustrated, thus enabling readers to consider the applicability of the findings for their contexts.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Consideration of ethical issues is critical in research, and has been discussed widely in the research literature (Flick, 2007). This research was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. In the current research, the following actions were taken to protect the participants’ privacy and confidentiality.

Participant Information Sheets (see Appendix C, D, E) and Consent Forms (see Appendix F, G, H) were distributed to the participants at the beginning of the research so that all the participants were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the research. I started the
interviews and observations only after I had obtained the consent forms from participants, indicating their voluntary consent. I was available to answer any questions on site, or subsequently by email. Participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any time and to change or withdraw information within an established timeframe. The teachers gave their assurance that the decision of any of the students to participate or not in the project would not affect their standing in the class. During the interviews and observations, the participants had the right to ask for the audio recording to be turned off at any time without giving a reason. The participants knew that they could choose not to answer any interview questions during the interview. However, this did not happen during my research. The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

Anonymity was guaranteed by using pseudonyms for the students, teachers and universities in the thesis, and any subsequent publications and presentations arising from the study. All forms of data could only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors and were stored in a secure place. The participants were assured that no judgement or evaluation of their statements and practices would be made in the thesis. Every effort has been made to ensure the findings are reported objectively and frankly. In the current research, all the above steps were strictly followed to respect the participants’ privacy and to respect their contributions.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research design for the present study, that is, a qualitative approach. Then the contexts and participants were presented. The chapter has also introduced the data collection methods, procedures, and approaches to data analysis. After that, pertinent validity issues of the study were discussed, followed by ethical considerations. The following two chapters present data pertaining to the teachers, with chapters devoted respectively to the three teachers in New Zealand and the three in China.
Chapter 5 Three Teachers in New Zealand

5.1 Introduction

This is the first of two chapters that report data from interviews and observations of the classes of the six teachers selected for this study. Each chapter has the same structure. First, background information on the teachers and their teaching experiences and approaches are described. Then, an outline of the observed class room activities is provided, and the tasks or task-like activities in the observed classes are identified according to the three frameworks for evaluating tasks described in Chapter 2 (Ellis, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007). Finally, an analysis of task implementation is presented. In this chapter data from the interviews with, and observations of, Mary, Molly and Rachel (pseudonyms), the three New Zealand teachers, are reported.

5.2 Mary

5.2.1 Background and Description of Teaching Approaches

Mary has been teaching English for 28 years. She is the only teacher among the six who has had teaching experience both in China and in New Zealand. She was born in China, is an L1 speaker of Chinese, and taught English as a foreign language in a Chinese university for 13 years after obtaining a masters’ degree in English Linguistics from a Chinese university. After moving to New Zealand, she completed another masters’ degree in Applied Linguistics from a New Zealand university and taught English as a second language in the same New Zealand tertiary institution as Rachel and Molly. She also obtained a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics in 2012.

Mary claimed that, after coming to New Zealand, she experienced a dramatic change in her teaching approaches, shifting from the grammar translation method as used in China to a more
communicative language teaching model. Subsequently, she claimed that she has begun to adopt a more task-based approach in New Zealand.

She attributed her change to the influence of different environments; the variety of ideas towards teaching in the two contexts; considerable training and professional development opportunities for teachers in New Zealand; her own learning experience of doing a masters’ and doctoral degree in New Zealand; and reflections on her teaching. She asserted that her own reflections influenced by her postgraduate study were the most significant reason leading to her change of teaching principles.

To illustrate, Mary explained that, in China, she was influenced by the “examination-driven context”, and that she was expected to be a “knowledge giver” and “authority.” This led her to focus predominantly on grammar in a teacher-dominated classroom. Mary emphasised the influence of context on her practice, saying: “So in that context [in China], my teaching was driven by the need of the society, by the stakeholders, [and] my teaching style was directed by that environment”. In New Zealand, she felt that the environment was not so examination and knowledge driven. She went on to explain, “Whereas in New Zealand, when I prepare my lesson, my main thought is about how I am going to present the content, what activities I could organize around this task”, adding that: “When I do my teaching, I usually think about what task would be better, other things I am thinking about is how I am going to progress those tasks”. Mary therefore chose to draw on labels such as ‘task’ to explain her current approach in New Zealand.

Mary described completing a masters’ degree in New Zealand as a turning point in her understanding, and a catalyst for shifting her long-established opinion that “language is a system” to an awareness that “language is used to communicate.” Her approach to language teaching was thus transformed from an examination-driven teaching focus on testing skills and
passing on knowledge to a communicative approach and, ultimately, a task-based approach, because of the change of her environment. She concluded that, “my change, most importantly, comes from my own reflection.”

5.2.2 Outline of the Observed Classes

During the period of this study, Mary was teaching English for academic purposes to intermediate level students. There were seven levels of English courses in her institute; Mary’s students were at level 4, with level 1 being the lowest level. She used the textbook *Oxford EAP B2, reading and writing* (De Chazal et al., 2012), pitched at B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference, and its companion book: *listening and speaking*. Mary had three-hour classes each day for four days a week. The aim of these classes was to enable students to become proficient in reading and writing academic English for their further study at tertiary level. There were 17 students in her class, with four from China and the others from Africa and Middle Eastern countries.

I visited Mary’s classes for one and a half hours twice, on two consecutive days in May 2016. The two observed classes, which focused on writing an essay, built on previous listening and speaking activities. Both classes were on the same topic, comparing any aspects of students’ own home countries with those in New Zealand. Mary also provided explicit instruction on words, phrases and sentences patterns of comparison and contrast, and opportunities to practise the targeted forms by writing sentences and the essay. A detailed description of the classroom activities is in Appendix K. In Table 5.1 I provide a brief outline of the classroom activity sequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type and time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers’ introduction to the classroom activities. (7’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Outline of Mary’s Observed Classes
2. Review: doing textbook exercises one and two. (41’)

3. Oral activity: teacher-fronted whole class description of pictures of London and New York and brainstorming the topic-related words and ideas. (10’)

4. Listening activity: listening to audio material concerning people talking about the two cities; then students took notes and filled in a table with key words about the two cities from five different aspects. (23’)

5. Language focus: Mary’s explicit instruction on words, phrases such as “similar to, as opposed to, in spite of” and sentence patterns used for comparison and contrast. (10’)

6. Language practice: writing five sentences according to the listening material by using the language of comparison and contrast; and then the teacher’s instant correction of these sentences. (17’)

7. Display of all the students’ sentences on the wall for the others to read. (10’)

8. Break time: offering feedback for some individual students’ writing from the previous class. (20’)

9. Language focus: teacher’s explicit instruction on more sentence patterns of comparison and contrast by using the words and phrases of comparison and contrast that she had covered in Activity 5. (21’)

10. Preparation for writing activity: group discussion of the content of the writing by comparing students’ own home countries with New Zealand, then students were assigned writing tasks in groups of four. One student was to be responsible for the instruction part, two students for the main part, and the final student wrote the conclusion. Then teacher-fronted discussion on how to structure the writing. (15’)

11. Group writing of the essay. (30’)

12. Display of students’ essays on the wall for other students to read. (10’)

Data gathered from Mary’s classes suggested that she was creating a context in which her students could practise the specific language item: language of comparison and contrast. Around 40 per cent of the whole class time was devoted to grammatical expressions before students summarised the listening materials and composed their final writings. Her classes demonstrated the Presentation and Practice characteristics of traditional communicative language teaching classes, drawing on the targeted language items (Ellis, 2003).
5.2.3 Evaluation of Activities with Reference to the Three frameworks

In this section I evaluate the activities reported above with reference to the three frameworks proposed by East (2012b) to evaluate tasks, that is, Ellis (2009b), Samuda and Bygate (2008), and Willis and Willis (2007).

The 12 different classroom activities observed in the two classes are classified first into five stages based on the connections between each activity: introduction (Activity 1); review (Activity 2); presentation of the targeted language (Activity 3-7); review (Activity 8); presentation and practice of the targeted language (Activity 9-12). I then evaluate each of the five stages according to the criteria listed under the three frameworks, and focus on those activities that seem to align most closely with the criteria. As illustrated in Table 5.2, the final stage (Activity 9-12) has been selected for detailed analysis as it was apparent that this part of the lesson contained more task-like features than other observed parts. A detailed description of the different stages is in Appendix K along with the observed tasks and task-like activities identified in this Appendix. The evaluation of all the stages against the criteria of the three frameworks are in appendix L.

Table 5.2 Evaluation of the Final Writing Activities (Activity 9-12) in Mary’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning ×</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning? ×</td>
<td>1. Does the activity involve language use? ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome ×</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome? 3. Is success judged in terms of outcome? ×</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome? ×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources ×</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest? ✓ (not sure)</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both? ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities? ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen from Table 5.2 that two common criteria across the three frameworks are whether there is a primary focus of meaning and whether there is a clearly defined outcome beyond the use of language. I focus first on an analysis of these two common criteria, and then describe whether it satisfied other criteria listed under each framework.

As identified in Table 5.2, this series of task-like activities does not have a primary focus on meaning. Before commencing the target activities, that is, the discussion and writing activities 10 and 11, students were given explicit instruction (Activity 9) on sentences of comparison such as, “Unlike London, everything in New York is taller; New Zealand is different from London in that everything is much taller.” Students were therefore more likely to pay attention to the language of comparison provided by Mary during the following group discussions rather than drawing on their own language resources, having been primed with these expressions. Such explicit introduction of the language forms prior to the discussion and writing may lead to a tendency to focus on form and pre-determined language rather than on meaning.

Even though this series of activities includes activities that appear to focus on meaning, students still used the practiced language form, in this case comparative structures. As Willis and Willis (2007) said, “the more we try to control the language that learners produce, the more learners are likely to be concerned with form rather than meaning, and the less task-like the activity becomes” (p. 14). In this series of activities, Mary maintained high control of the language by building up the activities little by little until she considered students were capable of producing correct forms for comparative sentences in their writing. Mary ensured that students were aware of the language required in advance of the targeted discussion.

With regard to a clearly defined outcome, this series of activities lacks a non-linguistic outcome. That is, the purpose of the students’ brief discussion on the differences between their own home countries and New Zealand was to write an essay co-operatively. Moreover, Mary
did not offer any feedback on the students’ discussion of differences between their home countries and New Zealand; instead, she explained how to structure the essay and students moved on rapidly to the writing. Hence, there was a lack of clear non-linguistic outcome and the success of the activity was not judged in terms of achieving an outcome.

Some other task-like criteria appear to have been satisfied, however. Only one of the criteria identified by Ellis (2009b) is met: the learners closed some gaps in the discussion because they exchanged their opinions on the differences between the two countries. However, learners did not rely on their own resources because of the preceding explicit instruction on the language of comparison.

This series of activities failed to satisfy one criterion specified by Willis and Willis (2007). The fourth question: “is completion a priority?” was not met because students were involved in a series of activities to compose a comparative essay, but this essay was still a display of language rather than a non-linguistic outcome. Thus, students did not arrive at a task outcome. The criterion, “Does the activity engage learners’ interest?” is difficult to answer from the classroom observation. In the discussion and writing activity, only one or two students wrote about the differences between the two countries in a group; less motivated students appeared to leave the discussion to the students who held responsibility for the assigned writing part. This suggests that the activity did not engage all the learners’ interests. The sixth criterion was met by the activities because it was related to the real world at the “level of meaning”, that is, students “produce meanings which will be useful in the real world” (Willis & Willis, 2007, p. 15). In this case, students were using language to compare their home countries with New Zealand, a topic of general interest in the real world. Moreover, it was also related to the real world at the “level of discourse” because the opinion-exchanging activity was similar to the kind of discourse common in the real world. Students expressed and exchanged their opinions with each other and discussed how to compose their essay.
This series of activities displayed three criteria of a task as identified in Samuda and Bygate’s (2008) framework. Firstly, this series of activities involved language use by comparing their own countries to New Zealand. Secondly, this series constituted a holistic activity because it “involves the learner’s knowledge of the different sub-areas of language—phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse to make meanings” (p. 7). Students were involved in discussing the differences between the two countries. Thirdly, these activities achieved the overall aim of promoting language learning via group discussions and writing activities.

While these activities demonstrated some task-like elements, as some criteria were met, they did not satisfy two essential criteria. The primary focus was not on meaning and there was a lack of non-linguistic outcome. It would therefore appear that there was no true ‘task’ in Mary’s classes because even the writing activities arising from all the classroom activities only met a few task criteria as presented in the three frameworks.

In the next section I look at Mary’s reported beliefs about TBLT as a means of comparing with her actual classroom practices.

5.2.4 Task Implementation

1) Mary’s beliefs about TBLT

Mary described her lesson as being designed around a task and appeared to have considerable knowledge about TBLT. She described some of the principles of TBLT such as the authentic, meaningful, engaging characteristics of tasks, the three-stages of a task-based lesson (the pre-task, task and the post-task); reliance on students’ own resources; catering to both meaning and language forms in task implementation; and the presentation of a product at the end of the task. She also stressed that the design of a task should meet her students’ needs and level.
Mary provided an example of a task she had used previously in which she assigned her students into four groups. Before the class the groups were required to watch four separate video clips which gave an introduction to, and discussion on, genetically modified food. She referred to this as the pre-task. When the students subsequently met in the language lab the four groups first discussed, within their group, what they had learnt from the video clips. They then watched the videos again and met with their group to decide, collaboratively, on the group’s presentation about the videos they had watched. Each group had to decide on the content and structure of the presentations: for instance, one group member gave an introduction of the content of the video, while the other two group members selected different perspectives from the video to present. Mary gave the students more readings related to the same topic, to read after class, for the students to produce a piece of writing using these resources. Mary claimed that both the presentations and the final essay were the outcomes of this task.

This example seems to include an information-gap task in that it “involves a transfer of given information from one person to another” and an activity “in which each member of the pair has a part of the total information and attempts to convey it verbally to others” (Nunan, 2004, p. 57). Students watched the different video clips and then transferred the information to other students via group presentations. When evaluated against the three frameworks for tasks suggested by East (East, 2012b), this activity appeared to meet several criteria for a task. Essay writing, however, is still a display of language itself and should arguably not be regarded as an outcome.

Mary stated that five factors influenced her use of tasks. These were the change of the context from China to New Zealand, her education in New Zealand, her own reading and research, her professional development, the e-learning environment where her students were provided with various online language learning resources to promote autonomous learning, and also her reflection on her practice. As noted above, she emphasised that, “my change [from the
traditional approach in China to task-based language teaching in New Zealand], most importantly, comes from my own reflection.” She also mentioned that the textbook was “useless” for task implementation because it did not offer any tasks, and so she designed tasks herself.

2) The relationship between her beliefs and her practices

Although Mary claimed that she “designed her classes around a task” and illustrated her task theories and gave an example in the interview, there was no real task observed in her classes. Mary’s classes resembled a traditional CLT class with the procedures of Presentation, Practice and Production rather than a task-based class, as she claimed. The identified task-like activities were at the end of the series of activities and were described by her as “free activities” based on a series of “controlled activities”. Mary’s practices diverged from her expressed beliefs in terms of two task criteria: she asserted that students used their own resources and that there was an end product or outcome for her task; neither of these was observed in her practice.

Mary claimed that her students used their own resources in the final discussion of differences between their own home countries and New Zealand. In her practice, however, she was observed to give explicit grammatical instructions on words, phrases and a comparative sentence pattern (such as ‘Unlike London, everything in New York is higher’ and ‘New York differs from London in the height of the place’) twice before the students’ discussions. Ellis (2013) argues that students should not be taught the language form before the task but should rely on their own resources. Mary’s explicit instruction of these sentence patterns made students aware of the language of comparison and contrast prior to their group discussions comparing the two countries. While comparing their home countries with New Zealand, they may therefore deliberately use the language provided by Mary, rather than completely relying on their own resources, in their discussion and writing.
Mary’s explanation for her explicit instruction on the language forms before the group discussion was as follows:

But this is the stage before the task, for me, for task is very important. I don’t want to do the task straight. I don’t feel comfortable because I just feel the learners are struggling. They are not confident, they may complete the task with your help, but in the end, they didn’t get it.

In addition, Mary said that she was confident about her explicit instruction of language forms before the tasks as her students had given her ‘positive feedback’ after she investigated their needs from both a teacher’s and a researcher’s perspective. As she said:

The feedback from students is always positive. So I think the positive feedback is because, again, I think I need to look at my learners, where they are from. Mostly they are from Asia, from Africa, from the Middle East. Normally, in their home country, they were taught with translation grammar approach, or the audio lingual approach. I think that if we try the other end, strong version of CLT... Normally, some of the teachers here; they don’t teach; they just go there; and students start doing activities, without any input [from the teachers]... I don’t feel comfortable; the reason is simply you need to look at the learners.

Mary’s description of her role also seemed to diverge from her use of explicit instruction on the language forms before the activities. She described her role as:

...a facilitator, a manager, an organiser. If they [the students] need help, I need to help them. So if they have questions, they can ask me. If they cannot decide who does what, I will be there to help them to solve the problems, but I leave it [the activities and discussions] to them.
Although her description of the role of a teacher was in line with the description of a teacher’s role in TBLT as articulated by Willis and Willis (2007), she was not observed to play this role. She not only dedicated time to explicit grammar work before students’ activities, but also approached her students and assisted them to perform these activities. She was observed to be a language instructor in terms of her explicit role in passing on grammar to her students.

Furthermore, although Mary claimed there was an outcome at the end of the observed task, the identified task-like activity from the observed classes lacked a real outcome. Outcome is the term used to describe the finished product of a task in TBLT. Samuda and Bygate (2008) described the outcome of a task as “an explicit non-linguistic outcome, that is, a language (and/or semiotically) mediated outcome that is not in itself a language focus” (p. 68). Ellis and Shintani (2013) further explained that “there is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language, that is, the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right” (p. 135). The only tangible end product of Mary’s task-like activities seemed to be an essay displayed on the wall. The essay was not the outcome of a task in that it was a means to practise the language focus, and so the language was the means as well as the end. Her classroom activities did not result in a clear non-linguistic outcome that was in line with the definitions of task in the literature (Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Samuda & Bygate, 2008).

The lack of outcome may be caused by her misunderstandings of this term. She seemed to equate the task with a project when she said, “all my lessons are around the projects, and tasks”. She further explained:

*The beauty of task-based teaching is that these are quite interrelated, and in the end, you have a product. It is project-based as well, so [it] depends on whether it is a large or small project in the end, and the students have the end product.*
Both TBLT and project-based approaches emphasise the final product. The feature of the end product in a project-based approach, however, is different from that of task-based language teaching. As Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006) state, “Students create a set of tangible products that address the driving question. These are shared artifacts, publicly accessible external representations of the class’s learning such as reports, games, Web sites and models” (p. 318). An essay put on the wall might be the product of a project-based learning but not an outcome corresponding to the definitions in the TBLT literature (Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Samuda & Bygate, 2008).

The mismatch between her claim of a task-based class and the classroom observations, which suggested a more traditional CLT class, may be attributed partially to her misunderstanding of the differences between CLT and TBLT. She explained that, for her, the major difference was that the pre-task, during-task and post-task stage activities in TBLT were more integrated.

But at the end of the day, I don’t think there are many differences between the two [CLT and TBLT], for me it is just that task-based language teaching is more surrounded by the task: before the task, during the task, after the task.

Furthermore, when asked to explain her general approach, Mary mentioned an “eclectic approach” although she claimed that she designed her classes around a task.

I don’t think currently in current language teaching: approaches to language teaching, you can summarise them in one way or another; I would say my approach is eclectic. But now if you say how you design your class, I will say I design my class around task.

To conclude, Mary’s classes resembled a CLT class rather than a class “designed on a task”. There was a divergence between her claimed task criteria and her observed practices. Students did not completely rely on their own resources and there was no evidence of an outcome. Her
commitment to explicit instruction for targeted language items before the tasks, misunderstandings about task outcomes, and her claimed equivalence of CLT with TBLT appeared to constrain her from using actual tasks in her classes. Her description of using an “eclectic approach” may also account for the mismatch between her stated beliefs and her practices in implementing tasks.

In the following section, I report on the analysis of data arising from the interview with Rachel and observations of her classroom practice. I follow the same structure as I did when I presented Mary’s story.

5.3 Rachel

5.3.1 Background and Description of English Teaching Approaches

Rachel is an L1 English speaker resident in New Zealand. She has taught English for about 30 years, thirteen of which was overseas including Japan, Germany, Britain and Spain. On her return to New Zealand in 1996 she became a teacher, and a teacher trainer, of English as a second language in the same institute in New Zealand as Mary and Molly. She secured her Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) in Barcelona and later completed a postgraduate diploma in language teaching when she returned to New Zealand.

The CELTA programme in Barcelona was a transitional period in Rachel’s teaching. She considered this training programme to have been an eye-opening experience and that the communicative methodology she was introduced to had exerted an influence on her teaching methods. She acknowledged that it was not until she took the CELTA course that she learned to teach language as communicative skills. From the CELTA programme she learned that the teacher’s key responsibility is to promote students’ communication, saying that “I guess this course initiated the sense that [the] teacher should facilitate students’ communication.”
Rachel further explained that her approach was to first evaluate her students’ language level, and then create a context in which to focus on the language so that it flowed naturally from the created situation. She said:

*My next major consideration or responsibility is to provide a context for the target language that students understand. My context, I mean, some natural way that the English, that I want to teach, be language or topic vocabulary, naturally occur.*

Rachel stated that she focused on teaching language with which the students were having difficulty. She said that her approach was to evaluate students’ language level first and then create a context in which to focus on the language identified. Language would then flow naturally from the created context enabling students to practise the specific items. She explained that, “That general line of context, language focus, practice is what I would call my base approach.”

In the following section I report on the classroom observations.

### 5.3.2 Outline of the Observed Classes

Rachel teaches English for academic purposes for elementary level learners (level three) in the institute. Her level three students use the *Headway Academic Reading and Writing book* (Soars et al., 2011), and its companion book: *listening and speaking*, designed to ensure students become proficient in academic English for further tertiary study.

I observed Rachel teaching two two-hour classes for the lower proficiency level students (that is level three students) in November 2015. These two classes nominated by Rachel for me to observe were of separate classes given to two groups of students and were not consecutive classes in a week. Rachel had two-hour classes each day, four days in the week with twenty students in the first class and twenty-four students in the second class. Most of the students...
were from China and Japan, and the rest from the countries in Middle East Asia and Africa. The students were in their twenties on average.

The topic of the first class was interacting in business settings around the world. The main purpose of this class was to provide opportunities for students to practise the first conditional and second conditional. In Table 5.3 I provide an outline of the first classroom activities. The detailed description of the classes is in Appendix M.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type and time</th>
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| 1. Warm up activity: students turned statements on a card into questions and then elicited answers from their classmates. For instance, one of the statements is to find someone who can read music. Another one is to find some students who had the same birthdays. Finally, they wrote down the students’ names on the cards. (10’)
| 2. Report of the answers in a teacher-fronted conversation. (10’)
| 3. Pair discussion of questions given by teacher (such as “what countries was your favorite one that you had visited?”) and then teacher-fronted whole class conversation: eliciting of the topic-related words and ideas on business meetings. (20’)
| 4. Pre-listening activities: cloze, true or false exercises and correction of statements that contained errors. (15’)
| 5. Listening activity and repeat of true or false exercises again. (15’)
| 6. Language focus: teachers’ explanation of two chosen sentences of the first and second conditional from listening material; highlighting all the sentences with first/second conditional from the transcripts of listening material. (20’)
| 7. Language practice: turning statements into first or second conditional sentences. (20’)
| 8. Playing a game by throwing the dice and answering questions by using the conditional. (10’)

In the first observed class, the target language forms (first conditional and second conditional) were efficiently integrated into the listening text and repeatedly practised in a variety of exercises. Rachel planned all the activities and was in control of what happened in the classrooms by managing the activities systematically. The class started with a group discussion about travelling and rules of business meetings abroad before a series of listening activities created a context to present and practice the targeted language. Rachel then gave explicit instructions on the use of first and second conditionals by analysing the two sentences from the listening materials. Students practised the targeted language forms in the exercises which
followed by turning statements into conditional sentences. This class thus demonstrated a traditional communicative process of Presentation, Practice and Production through practising of the particular language form, that is, the first conditional and second conditional (Ellis, 2003).

Class Two was different from Class One, which involved students mainly in communicative activities rather than practising target language. In the second class, the students focused on discussing the factors people consider if they plan to live abroad. Students were involved in continuous pair discussions and listening activities. The outline of the second observed classroom activities is provided in Table 5.4. The detailed description of this class is in Appendix L.

Table 5.4 Outline of Rachel’s Second Observed Class

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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Warm-up activity: group discussion of experiences on the previous day, then teacher-fronted conversation of the same topic. (10’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teacher-fronted picture description in the whole class: the picture is the city Zurich in Switzerland. (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pair discussions and teacher-fronted whole-class conversation related to the topic: what are the factors people consider before they move to live abroad? (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pair discussions: ranking of the six factors that people would consider when choosing which city to live in. (7’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Writing down the reasons for their first choice and then pair discussions of the reasons. (15’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Pair work and discussions of the reasons for the first three choices. (7’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Listening comprehension: listening to an audio text with a similar topic and discussing the questions given by the teacher, first in groups then in the teacher-fronted whole class discussions. (7’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Language focus: identifying and emphasis of the expressions for giving opinions from the listening transcript. (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Group work: to reach an agreement on the three top factors for moving to a new city. (17’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Students’ presentation of the three factors and reasons from each group. (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Listening to another audio text with a very similar topic and then answering questions raised by the teacher. (10’)</td>
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</table>

To summarise, the two observed classes differed in that the first observed lesson consisted of highly controlled activities in which students were required to practice the target language, the first and second conditional, based on a series of listening and speaking activities. In the second
lesson students communicated their personal opinions during several rounds of pair and group discussions, and listening activities. Nearly all the activities were communicative and meaningful rather than being used to practice targeted language form as in Class One.

5.3.3 Evaluation of Activities with Reference to the Three Frameworks

In this section, I evaluate Rachel’s classroom activities against the three frameworks and focus on the activities that appear to meet more criteria of a task (Ellis, 2009b; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007).

There were a total of 19 different activities in the two observed classes (two hours for each class). I classify all the classroom activities into five stages based on the characteristics and connections between each activity: the warm-up activities (Activity 1-2) and a series of listening and speaking activities aiming at practicing the targeted language (Activity 3-8) in the first class; the warm-up activities (Activity 9), a series of speaking activities and speaking activities (10-18) and listening activity (Activity 19) in the second class.

I then evaluate each of the five stages according to the criteria listed under the three frameworks. Two parts of the observed activities have been selected from all the activities for detailed analysis as more of criteria are observed. The first one, the warm-up activities (Activity 1-2) from first class, met all the criteria of a task. The second was the speaking activity (17-18) at the end of a series of closely related listening and speaking activities (Activity 10-18) from the second class. This series of activities met most of the criteria of a task with exception of one criterion as indicated in Table 5.5. The evaluation of all the other stages against the three task criteria frameworks are in Appendix N.
It can be seen from Table 5.5 that Activity A satisfies all the criteria and the Activity B fails to satisfy one criterion. In the following section, I analyse the two activities respectively with regard to how they meet the criteria of a task across the three frameworks. I start from the two criteria that are non-negotiable to the three frameworks (i.e. a primary focus on meaning and a clearly defined outcome beyond the use of language).

1) Analysis of the first warm-up activities (Activity A: Activity 1-2) in the first class

The primary focus of the first warm-up activity (Activity1-2 or Activity A) in class one was on meaning; that is, students communicated with each other by asking their classmates about personal information, such as birthday, interests, hobbies, jobs and studies. For instance, one of the statements was finding someone who had more than three different jobs. Students first changed the statements into questions and then interviewed their classmates until they found an answer.

The clearly defined outcome was the information students collected from their classmates, that is, their classmates’ names on their information cards. All the students were encouraged to

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1. Does it involve language use?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>3. Is success judged in terms of outcome?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td>✓</td>
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(continued)
walk around the classroom to gather information for each statement from their classmates. This was followed by a whole-class discussion after which teachers asked students to present their interesting findings. Success of the activity was judged in terms of an outcome because, as Willis and Willis (2007) pointed out, if teachers encourage the groups to get on with their discussions, facilitate their discussions and provide a follow-up activity which values the student discussion, it will emphasise the importance of an outcome (p. 15). Willis and Willis (2007) also explained that in order to satisfy this criterion, completion is a priority, and “students should be given reasonable time to complete the activity and should be encouraged to do so” (p. 16). The most important thing of this warm-up activity is for students to collect personal information from each other in order to achieve the outcome of the task, that is, using English to gather and record information for each statement. Thus, completion is a priority.

In addition to satisfying the two criteria common to the three frameworks, the warm-up activity met all the criteria in the three frameworks. There were gaps that students closed via communication because they asked for and exchanged different information from each other, and learners relied on their own resources as there was no preceding language teaching activities. Hence, the criteria specified by Ellis (2009b) were met. All the criteria of a task as identified by Willis and Willis (2007) were also met: the activity appeared to be engaging as all the students were actively involved moving around the classrooms eliciting answers for each statement. The activity related to the real world in that students communicated with each other in an authentic way. Similarly, the activity met all the criteria specified by Samuda and Bygate (2008): it was a holistic activity aimed at promoting language learning via gathering and sharing information in English and recording their findings on their cards.

2) **Analysis of the speaking activities (Activities B: Activity 17-18) in the second class**
The primary focus of the speaking activities in the second observed class was on meaning as the task required the students to engage in discussions of factors when choosing which city to live in. They had to communicate to reach an agreement on the top three factors in the task. Rachel planned the task based on previous discussions and listening activities on a similar topic. The students’ focus, therefore, was on meaning.

A clearly defined outcome was evident in that each group reached an agreement on the top three factors, which was then presented to the class. There was also evidence of a clear evaluation of the outcome in this task. Rachel commented on the students’ use of their own language resources rather than using the words and phrases provided in the listening text such as, “as I see it”, “personally”, “I heard because…”. As Willis and Willis (2007) put it: “The more a teacher values students’ opinions and encourages them to express their opinions, the more task-like the activity becomes” (p. 15). There was evidence, therefore, that success was judged in terms of an outcome. Completion was also a priority because students were encouraged to arrive at a task outcome, which was the group decision of the top three factors when choosing which city to live in. This appeared to be the objective of these series of communicative activities.

As for the other criteria, there was evidence that students closed the gaps because they held different opinions on the top three factors people considered when they planned to live abroad. They then had to exchange, and debate, their opinions to agree on the top three factors. They were not provided with the language they needed to use before their discussion, and so were called on to rely on their own resources. Therefore, the criteria specified by Ellis (2009b) were met.

This activity, however, did not seem to satisfy one of the criteria proposed by Willis and Willis (2007): it did not seem to engage all the learners’ interest. Some students did not participate in
the discussion to reach an agreement in Activity 17. Students’ engagement may have been
constrained for a number of reasons, such as limited language proficiency and loss of interest
because of repeated discussions on the same topic which meant they felt unable to contribute
further to the group discussion. A further constraint may have been the size of the class with
the groups of 12 too large for an effective discussion.

The activities satisfied the other criteria identified by Willis and Willis (2007), for example,
the activities were related to the real world in terms of both the meaning they produced and the
kind of discourse they fostered. The topics on travelling and living abroad engaged students in
authentic communication processes, such as asking for and giving information, comparing
information, or even arguing with each other and finally reaching an agreement. The task also
satisfied the task features put forward by Samuda and Bygate (2007) in that it was a holistic
activity. It promoted language learning as students were involved in real-life discussions in
order to reach an agreement about the top three factors.

In the next section Rachel’s expressed beliefs on language teaching and tasks are compared
with her classroom practices of tasks.

5.3.4 Task Implementation

1) Rachel’s beliefs about TBLT

Rachel claimed that she used task-based language teaching in her classes even though she was
not quite sure of the definition of a task. She mentioned “focus on form” frequently when asked
about using tasks. Rachel stated that she got to know TBLT from a seminar, and contended that
she had already used this approach which she referred to as “focus on form.” She explained
“focus on form” in terms of a theory of noticing. As Rachel said,
“I definitely use focus on form. I think it is the way of talking about the same thing. To tell you about the truth, what Ellis talked about noticing, so I definitely use that, but I don’t think it is so new. I mean you draw the students’ attention to something and ask them to make some deduction about the language. You ask them to engage themselves to some degree either orally or written so once they are invested in it, then we can teach them something else about it”.

Rachel appeared to equate focus on form with TBLT. She offered an example that she had once applied in her class to illustrate her understanding of TBLT. In this example, Rachel focused on auxiliary verbs through a communicative activity. Students were required to work in groups, with each member describing a particular place for the rest of the group had to guess. Students had to use the modal auxiliary to convey their meanings accurately. Rachel monitored her students’ performance by writing incorrect sentences on the whiteboard, which she subsequently analysed and discussed with her students. Rachel explained how, in this example, she employed focus on form as well as tasks in her classes with a focus mainly on meaning. After her description of the example, she said:

As I listen to them I take notes and I write down all the examples I heard. At the end of the task I stop and I put up an example of their own language, and from that point, I analyse with them what they already know and I try to input. It is the focus on form. ...Then I will ask them to do another task or even the same task again, and I will try to notice if they have picked up anything or learned anything else, so that is an example of methodology I would consider my idea of task-based.

Rachel’s understanding of focus on form seemed to correspond to Long’s (2000) description which states that the focus on form “involves briefly drawing students’ attention to linguistic elements (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patters, etc.) in context, as
they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, on communication” (p. 185). Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2002) also explain that focus on form is “a particular type of form-focused instruction---the treatment of linguistic form in the context of performing a communicative task” (p. 419). Focus on form is the approach which can be used to attend to language forms in tasks.

Rachel’s example also appears to be consistent with the three frameworks for tasks advocated in the literature (Ellis et al., 2002; Long, 2000; Samuda, 2001). In this example, she was observed to use the task to focus on form with students’ primary focus on meaning, as she had previously claimed she did. When students were communicating with each other, Rachel recorded any of their sentences which had errors in using auxiliary verbs. These were then analysed after students finished their descriptions and had guessed the place. Students’ attention, therefore, was drawn to the use of auxiliary arising from their communication.

Rachel regarded the textbook as a constraint to implementing tasks in that it only offered topics, reading passages and exercises. Furthermore, the topics and materials did not engage the students’ interests and were above her students’ current level of language achievement. She said that, therefore, she had to design communicative tasks herself.

A self-reported example, however, is insufficient to draw a conclusion about her task implementation. In the following section, her use of tasks and the relationship between her reported beliefs and her practices in relation to TBLT is discussed.

2) The relationship between Rachel’ beliefs and classroom practices

There seemed to be both convergence and divergence between Rachel’s beliefs and classroom practices related to TBLT. There were tasks observed in Rachel’s classes as she claimed. But Rachel was not observed to use tasks to focus on form even though Rachel described tasks as
related to focus on form and said that she used focus on form in a task. She appeared to favour pre-planned language forms with tasks integrated into her communicative language teaching classes. Prior to the students’ task, which was reaching an agreement about their discussion; she highlighted expressions used for giving opinions in the listening materials they had been using. The expressions were drawn again to students’ attention after they had presented their outcome. From the observations, it appeared she pre-planned vocabularies and phrases to present to the students before their task performance rather than attending to language forms arising from the task performance. These data show an inconsistency between her claim to focus on form in a task, with a focus on language usually coming after the tasks, and her observed task performance claimed that. She said:

*I definitely would not teach the language that I want them to use before I would listen to them. I would ask them to do the task with no indication of what language to use. Because I would want to listen to see what language they have got in this area. Yes, so that I know how to teach.*

Rachel gave reasons for her pre-planned language forms before the tasks. She explained that she saw the classroom learning as the starting point for real communication, saying that, “I guess the classroom is a stepping stone to communication in the outside world”. She said she believed she should draw students’ attention to the language forms at the appropriate time, providing opportunities to practise the target language so they could use the language to communicate in the world outside the classroom.

In her observed classes, tasks appeared as a part of her communicative teaching approaches. In the Rachel’s first observed class, for example, the first twenty-minute task (Activity 1-2) acted as a warm-up to the two-hour class, which included a series of activities with Presentation, Practice and Production. The majority of the activities in this first class involved presenting
and practicing grammar, in this instance, the first conditional and second conditional. The second task (Activity 17-18) only appeared at the end of a series of communicative activities and occupied only a relatively small amount of time. This series of activities included repeated discussions, listening to the audio with the same topic and explicit explanation of the new phrases and occupied most of the class time. This is inconsistent with Willis and Willis (2007) argument that tasks should be indispensable major activities. Her class seemed to be more Presentation, Practice and Production focused because of repeated practice of the pre-taught language and the use of task at the last stage of production.

Rachel’s task implementation may be influenced by her belief in a communicative approach as she aimed to create a context in which her students can focus on the language saying, “that general line of context, language focus, and practice is what I would call my base approach”. She also illustrated this approach with an example of how students learned to introduce and greet each other in her classes. Firstly, she showed her students a video of conversation on greetings and self-introduction; she then asked students questions about the video before watching the video again to notice how people greeted each other. She described how she would draw students’ attention to the phrase in the target language, which is “hello, how are you, my name is…”. Students were then given opportunities to use the target language in what she called “a controlled practice”. Following this she would move to “some kind of free-spoken practice or maybe written practice”. She claimed that “the idea is for students to be able to notice, understand and practice using the target language”. Thus Rachel integrates tasks with her communicative approach with the first task serving as a warm-up activity and the second task at the end of a series of activities following the procedure of Present, Practice and Production.

To conclude, although Rachel’s description of her task example was in line with task criteria, she appeared to have some misunderstandings of tasks for she equated focus on form with
tasks. Furthermore, she was not observed to focus on form in her task, as proposed in the literature (Ellis, et al. 2002). Her task implementation appeared to be greatly influenced by her belief in a communicative approach because the two tasks in the observed classes were fitted into her communicative language teaching class consisting of a procedure of Presentation, Practice and Production. These two tasks occurred only at the beginning of the class as a warm-up or at the last stage of practice of pre-planned language forms and occupied only a small amount of the two observed classes.

In the next section I look at Molly’s reported beliefs about TBLT with her actual classroom practices.

5.4 Molly

5.4.1 Background and Descriptions of English Teaching Approaches
Molly is a native English speaker, resident in New Zealand. She has a Diploma in English language teaching to adults (DELTA) and has taught English as a second language for about 30 years, sixteen of which were in London. During the time of this study, she was a teacher, and teacher trainer, of English as a second language in the same institute as Mary and Rachel.

Molly identified her approach to language teaching as a communicative approach. She said she believed that language can only be learned by using language, and should be taught in a context that is meaningful to students, rather than being told directly by their teachers. “Using language” was a recurring theme during her interview. As Molly explained, “You have got to use the language. So my approach, I guess, is always to try to find a way to encourage students to use the language to communicate”. Language, she claimed, is a tool rather than as a subject to learn. Her fundamental understanding of language teaching seemed to be in line with one of the essential features of TBLT which is to learn language through using it (Willis & Willis, 2007).
Molly said she believed that language forms should be taught in the context of language use, constantly reminding her students’ that language is for communicative purposes. She repeatedly stated that she believed that students could not acquire language taught directly by their teachers, saying that: “So telling is nearly not working…It comes from constantly using the language”, adding that, “I tend not to give grammar lessons. So what I think what we need to do is to constantly remind students”. She emphasised the importance of providing a context for language teaching saying: “the other thing that is very important is teaching language in the context, in situation which we use it”. She seemed to reject the explicit instruction of language forms because she believed that her students would not benefit from it. She further explained, “I don’t want to talk to them about grammar because I knew they wouldn’t understand. They would switch off. I knew it would be a waste of time”.

Molly emphasised that students determined her teaching approach and exerted the greatest influence on her teaching method. If her students did not respond when she was trying an approach, she altered it; as she stated that, “I think probably the biggest factor on me is my students. That is what changes my teaching.” She also stressed that the role of the teacher and the student was more important than the approach, saying, “It is not necessarily what you do or the approach but the teacher the student and the people.”

### 5.4.2 Outline of the Observed Classes

There were sixteen students in Molly’s class, fourteen were Chinese, one was Korean and one was Spanish. Most of the students were around twenty years old. The students had two courses for English, one listening and speaking, and the other reading and writing, with three-hour classes, four days a week. She taught English for academic purposes for intermediate level students using the same textbooks as Mary, *Oxford EAP B2* (De Chazal et al., 2012) and its companion book, to prepare them for the further study at tertiary level.
I observed Molly teaching three ninety-minute lessons in October, 2015 on three consecutive days. During the first observation, the focus was the differences and similarities in eating habits between today and fifty years ago. The class mainly involved questions and discussion on the topic. The major activity of this class was group discussion of the questions on the topic of eating habits, either dictated by Molly or transcribed from the phonetic symbols in the handouts. Molly devoted the rest of the time to words arising from the questions and discussions. Details of classroom activities are in Appendix O, with an outline of classroom activities in Tables 5.6.

**Table 5.6 Outline of Molly’s First Observed Classes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type and time (90’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dictation of twelve questions concerning the different eating habits between the current generation and their grandparents 50 years ago. (20’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher-centered explanation of new vocabulary arising from the questions. Also, she emphasised the pronunciation of the new words and got students to read after her. (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Group discussion of the questions followed by teacher-led discussion of the questions with the whole class. (13’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students’ transcriptions of further questions related to the same topic in the form of phonetic symbols in groups, with each group holding 6 questions different from the other groups. (8’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teachers’ introduction of the new words from the questions. (5’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Students’ peer monitoring of the transcripts of the questions and discussing the questions in groups. (12’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Regrouping the students to have further group discussion about the questions since each group had been given different questions. All the four students in the new group were holding different questions after regrouping. (8’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Monitoring of vocabulary arising from group discussions. (4’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Identification of general ideas from all the questions by students summarised to elicit the topic words: “eating habits”. (10’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in the above table, the majority of the first observed class time, 63 minutes of the 90 minutes, was spent on listening and speaking activities including dictation, discussions and summary of the questions on eating habits. A relatively small amount of time was devoted to explicit instruction of vocabulary arising out of questions and students’ discussions. The goal
of this first class was for the students to become familiar with the topic-related words and concepts.

The second observed class was built on the first class in which students were given two reading materials on eating habits currently and fifty years ago. Students were required to sum up the general ideas of each part of the first reading passage to their group members as each group was provided with different parts of the whole reading passage. Molly dictated the second passage to her students and explained the words to her students. Students appeared interested in reading the two additional texts, as they had exhausted the topic through discussions from Activity 3 to 9 in Class One.

The third class was developed from the first two classes where students were required to write on the main differences of eating habits between today and fifty years ago by referring to the two reading passages. In Table 5.7 I provide an outline of the second and third classroom activities. The detailed description of the classes is in Appendix M.

Table 5.7 Outline of Molly’s Second and Third Observed Classes

| 10. A reading passage, *Did your grandparents have better eating habits than you do now?* was divided into five parts given to different group to read and summarise. (15’) |
| 11. Group discussion of the summary of each part of the reading. (10’) |
| 12. Regrouping the students to have further discussions, then each student writing down the general ideas of the whole reading passages after listening to the other four member’s summary. (28’) |
| 13. Dictation of another short passage. (15’) |
| 14. Teacher’s explanation of passage through graphs and explaining of the new words. The title of the short passage is: *What the world eats: daily diet.* (20’) |
| 15. Teachers showed students’ the webpage of the two passages and asked students to read them carefully after class and prepare for writing an essay. (5’) |
| 16. Teacher’s presentation on structure for a comparing and contrasting essay of eating habits between today and fifty years ago. (15’) |
| 17. Students discussion of the structure and content of the essay in pairs, followed by recording the structure of the essay. (10’) |
| 18. Teacher monitoring of, and feedback to, each group on the structure. (10’) |
| 19. Pair writing of the essay in the lab. (55’) |
The three classes were closely related to each other as they were on a similar topic: the first elicited students’ ideas on this topic; the second provided reading materials on the topic, and the third required students to write an essay on the topic by referring to what they read and communicated. Overall students were mainly involved in a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities throughout the three observed classes, while teacher-fronted instructions took up a small amount of the entire class time comparing to these activities.

5.4.3 Evaluation of Activities with Reference to the Three Frameworks

In this section, I evaluate a total of 19 different activities in the three classes observed (ninety minutes for each class) with reference to the three frameworks (Ellis, 2009b; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007). I first classify the classroom activities into four parts based on the characteristics and relationships between each activity: the listening activities (Activity 1-9), the reading activities one (Activity 10-12); the reading activities two (Activity 13-15) and the writing activities (Activity 16-19). Secondly, I evaluate each of the four parts and lifted the reading activities for detailed analysis on the basis that it appeared to have more criteria of a task against the three frameworks than the other parts (refer to Appendix P). The evaluation of the lifted reading activities is illustrated in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8 Evaluation of the Reading Activities (Activities 10-12) in Molly’s Class with Reference to the Three frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome? 3. Is success judged in terms of outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Some kind of gap</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4. Is completion a priority?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Does it involve language use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Is it a holistic activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 5.8, it can be noted that this series of reading activities satisfy all the task criteria except one related to outcome. First, I analyse the activities in relation to the two features (whether there is a primary focus on form and a clearly defined outcome) common across the three frameworks.

This series of activities satisfy the first criterion across all the three frameworks. There is a primary focus on meaning, and there appears to be an information-gap task in that the activity “involves a transfer of given information from one person to another” (Nunan, 2004, p. 57). In these activities (Activities 10-12), groups were given different information in a reading passage on diet habits of today and fifty years ago, to encourage meaningful communication between students. As they talked with each other, they exchanged information to develop an idea of the whole reading. During this process, students were closing the gap as they conveyed different information to each other.

Furthermore, Molly did not provide students with any language forms before, or during, the reading activities, and students relied on their own resources to summarise and convey the general idea of the reading passages to their group members. Molly emphasised students’ independence in that she left the groups to get on with their discussion of the reading passages. She ensured students were clear about her instruction on the activities; she seldom interrupted her students when they were involved in discussion groups unless they approached her with questions. She was observed to communicate with her students only twice during the group discussions: the first time to ask one of her students to stop speaking Chinese, and the second to explain the objective of the activity from one group to another. She played the role of a facilitator as required in a task-based approach (Willis & Willis, 2007).

This series of activities failed to achieve a clearly defined outcome, the second common criterion of a task across the three frameworks. Students conveyed information (that is, the
summary of different reading passages they had read) to their group members but did not reach any definite outcome other than using the language. They were asked to write down a summary of the information in the whole reading passage, but there was no evaluation either of the students’ discussion or the summary. Molly did not provide any follow-up activity based on the students’ discussion but moved them on to another reading passage quickly. The success of the activity, therefore, does not appear to have been judged in terms of an outcome. According to Willis and Willis (2007), if “the teacher gives little value to the conclusions that students have reached and moves on rapidly to another activity, this will detract from the importance of outcome” (p. 15).

I now analyse the other criteria of tasks listed under each framework. This series of activities meet one of the criteria of a task identified by Willis and Willis (2007) which is whether the activity can engage students’ interest. As most of the students were observed to listen to each other carefully, frequently asking the speaker to clarify ideas during group discussion, this series of activities appears to have engaged students in the activity. Another task feature identified by Willis and Willis (2007), priority of task completion, appears to have been met as students were given enough time to be engaged in the activities. This activity also appeared to be related to the real world, another task feature identified in this framework. Discussion of the topic of world eating habits was an authentic activity corresponding to an event in the real world.

The framework of Samuda and Bygate (2008) identifies being a holistic activity and promoting language learning as the features of a task. Reading and exchanging information among different group members could be considered as a holistic activity which can promote language learning. It thus satisfies these requirements.
Based on the above analysis, it can be argued that this series of activities has the criteria of a task except that it lacks a clearly defined outcome. In the final section Molly’s task implementation is examined by comparing her expressed beliefs with her observed practices.

5.4.4 Task Implementation

1) Molly’s beliefs about TBLT

Molly claimed that she applied many tasks in her classes, although, she conceded that she was uncertain of what defined a task because “different people are holding different opinions about it”. Molly said that she learnt about TBLT when completing her diploma. She emphasised that she learned to use TBLT, however, through her practice and her students’ responses, as she explained, “We are introduced to it through course book we use... Instead of starting from theory to practice, we are going from practice to theory. We are going from the opposite direction”.

She gave an example of a task implemented in her class, which she referred to as “an information-gap task”, noting that, “I use that task a lot in my teaching, so I call it information-gap task”. The example she described required students to be in two groups to view different videos. Each group summed up what they watched, regrouped for a second discussion and finally combined information in a timeline. This example appears to meet the definition of an information-gap task in that they transferred and combined the different information. It also seems to display all the criteria of tasks according to the three frameworks in section 2.4.1 (East, 2012b).

Molly also described the factors in her context which negatively influenced her employment of tasks. Firstly, the pressure to spend time on assessment for students to be prepared for academic reading and writing exam was a barrier for her to use tasks. Secondly, the course
book, *Oxford EAP B2* (De Chazal et al., 2012) did not support her in the way she wanted to teach, so that she had to design communicative activities on the basis of the course book. She therefore designed classroom activities that satisfied the teaching objectives, while catering to students’ language standards as well as arousing their interests. Thirdly, Molly said that trying to convince her students to use language to communicate was difficult. She thought Chinese students were reluctant to use language for communicative purposes because they were used to their Chinese teachers’ ways of teaching; she therefore had to persuade them of the significance of using English to communicate. Despite these negative influences in her context, she commented on positive role of technology in promoting task implementation in her classes, noting that she used an information-gap task with the help of technology.

2) **Analysis of the relationship between her beliefs and her classroom activities**

Although Molly claimed that she frequently used information-tasks in her teaching, only a main part of the observed class (activity 10-12) is similar to an information-gap task. The activities failed to satisfy a key criterion of a task according to the three frameworks, that is, having a clearly defined outcome. Molly’s explanation for a lack of an evaluation of students’ discussions was that there would be a follow-up essay. It appears she regarded essay writing as the outcome of the task because of course demands for academic reading and writing.

Apart from Molly’s misunderstandings of what constituted an outcome, her professed teaching beliefs about tasks were consistent with her classroom practices. Her professed beliefs, which include facilitating students to use language, encouraging students to communicate by relying on their own resources and choosing materials or topics relevant to engage them in using the language are consistent with the TBLT principles cited in literature (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007).
In her interview, Molly stated that her teaching approach was to promote communication among her students. She explained the aim of the tasks that she designed was to get her students to produce language, saying, “I think I use TB [task-based] materials and communicative activities to encourage students to produce language. I don’t care what they produce as long as they are producing and communicating.” In her practice, the majority of the classroom activities were observed to be communicative. This principle was also evident in the task-like activity in which students had to read, summarise and convey the general ideas of a passage to their group members. Reading different passages meant that students had to communicate with each other to get all the information in the reading passage.

Moreover, Molly was aware that students needed to use their own language resources for communication. She explained, “I don’t tell them what the language is. I think it is important that they use whatever they can”. During the class observation students appeared to use their own resources to communicate information to the other group members in the selected activities rather than any language forms which had been taught prior to group discussions.

Molly also stressed that the activities and topics should be related to students’ lives in order to engage them, saying that: “I find something that they are interested in and use that”. In the observed classes, she chose the reading materials from the Internet rather than using the reading passages from the textbooks. She was able to use the textbooks to suit her teaching approach, saying, “It is up to me to use the course book in a communicative way”. During the observed classes she accessed an article on a webpage as the basis for discussion. She then introduced the reading passages to students after they had discussed the topic with each other. Thus students were motivated to read the passage because they had discussed this topic. Furthermore, the topic on food seemed to be more relevant to students’ lives compared to the passages in the textbook.
Lastly, Molly stated that she stopped using tasks focusing on specific language items because students did not use the targeted language forms, as she explained, “I think one of the biggest problems, one thing that is quite common is that students will complete the task without necessarily using the language”. Ellis (2003) has also observed that students may circumvent the use of targeted language in the focused tasks. Observations of her practice did not record any specific language items. She said that: “it is important to help them to monitor what comes out of their mouth”. She was observed to focus on the specific words only when she noticed that most of her students confused the words for meat with the animals’ names. As for the other times, she left her students to continue with their own discussions unless her students approached her with questions. Molly said she preferred to encourage students to explore language use; she saw her role as a facilitator and observer, rather than an instructor of form-focused activities. Molly’s approach was consistent with Nunan’s (1989) argument that the three key roles for a teacher in a communicative classroom as facilitator of the communicative process are as participant, observer and learner (p. 87).

To conclude, in Molly’s classes there was one task-like activity observed. This activity occurred in conjunction with other listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Her professed beliefs were mostly consistent with those noted in the TBLT literature, and with her observed practices. Her practices, however, may have been influenced by her communicative language teaching approaches; TBLT is regarded as a development of CLT, with some features common to the two approaches. Furthermore, her misunderstanding of one of the task criterion, that is, to have an outcome beyond the language use, may prevent her from using true tasks in her classrooms.
5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described three New Zealand teachers’ teaching experiences, their background, their general approach and their classroom observations. I then evaluated their classroom activities in relation to the three frameworks for task-likeness described by East (2012b) and analysed the relationship between teachers’ beliefs about task implementation and their practices as observed in their classroom activities. Also, I introduced how the tasks or task-like activities fitted into their observed classes.

All the three teachers claimed that they employed TBLT in their classrooms, with Mary specifically emphasizing that her class programme was designed around tasks. In the interview, all three appeared to have some knowledge of TBLT. Their presentation of examples of tasks also suggested that they have certain knowledge of TBLT because their activities appeared to align with the criteria of a task according to the three frameworks.

The three teachers, however, were observed to differ in their implementation of tasks in their classrooms. In Mary and Molly’s classes, after reference to the three frameworks, no tasks were observed. Mary and Molly similarly failed to satisfy one criteria for a task of having a clearly defined outcome. This may have been due to misunderstandings about what constituted a task outcome. In contrast, two tasks that met the criteria of the three frameworks were observed in Rachel’s classes.

Meanwhile, divergence between teachers’ perspectives and practices were observed after comparing data from the interviews and the classroom observations. Mary’s practices suggest that she misunderstood concepts such as task outcome and input before the tasks. Molly claimed that she used many information-gap tasks, however, only one information-gap task like activity was found in her classes. Both Rachel’s claimed focus on form and Mary’s claimed
task-based classes were not observed in their classes. The limited classroom observations may account for a lack of evidence of consistency between teachers’ beliefs and their practices.

All three teachers similarly used tasks, or task-like activities, in their communicative language teaching classrooms. Both Mary and Rachel were observed to follow the procedure of Presentation, Practice and Production. Although Molly did not follow this pattern, communicative activities still occupied the majority of the class time.

Unlike the language teaching practices in the classrooms of Mary and Rachel, there was no targeted language teaching in the task-like activities of Molly’s classes. Mary and Rachel tended to teach pre-planned language forms in the communicative context. Mary, especially, devoted more time to the explicit instruction of language forms prior to task-like activities than the other two teachers, influenced possibly by her teaching experience in China.

The findings appear to concur with Andon and Eckerth’s (2009) conclusion that teachers “experiment with different elements of TBLT, reject some of them, embrace others, and combine all of them with other pedagogical elements” (p. 305). These three teachers adapted and integrated tasks into their communicative language teaching classrooms based on their own course demands and understandings of TBLT. Only Rachel’s classes were observed to have two tasks, although she appeared not to make conscious decisions related to tasks. While she said that her task implementation was to focus on form, this was not evident in the tasks observed in her classes. For all three teachers, their approach to language teaching, that of promoting communication for their students, seemed to influence their task implementation. Such similarities are likely due to their common teaching experiences and professional training as well as their employment in the same institute. Furthermore, TBLT is widely regarded as a development of communicative language teaching with many common features with CLT.
identified in the practice of all three teachers (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2012; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006).

In the next chapter, I analyse the three teachers’ beliefs and practices in China related to TBLT by following the same structure.
Chapter 6 Three Teachers in China

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports data arising from interviews with the three teachers in China: Gloria, Susan and Grace (pseudonyms), and observations of their classes. The data are analysed and reported following the same structure as in the previous chapter.

6.2 Grace

6.2.1 Background and Description of English Teaching Approaches

Grace has been teaching English for 19 years. At the time of this research, she was a senior lecturer, completing a PhD in Linguistics part-time in a highly rated university in China. She had been an exchange scholar in an American university for six months.

Grace stated that she believed language was to be used for communication, a word that occurred frequently during her interview. For instance, she said that: “Language should be employed to achieve the goal of communication in a class; otherwise, it is not a successful lesson”, and “I think we should center on communication to cultivate students’ ability to use language.”

Grace said she employed an eclectic approach in classroom activities, focusing on language forms, mainly new vocabulary, phrases and difficult sentences in the reading passages of the textbook, as well as getting her students to engage in conversation. In China, a typical English class is based on a reading passage, with teachers focusing on explanation and translation of each sentence (Hu, 2002a). She asserted that she integrated communication and interaction with language focused activities arising from the textbook.

Grace stated that while she tried to find engaging and communicative ways to attend to the language forms required by the textbooks, it was difficult to design communicative activities or tasks owing to constraints imposed by the themes and styles of texts from the textbooks. She
gave an example to illustrate this point. She also regarded this example as a task. When they were studying the reading passage *the last leaf* by O. Henry, she devised an activity for students to work in groups in which each group had to raise questions from the text for the other group. Points were awarded for correct answers. A group could score 10 points for each question answered correctly. The group with the highest points won the game. The selected text was an appealing narrative which interested the students. In this activity, students focused on attending to language forms such as new words and difficult sentences. This game, she said, was only suited to simple and interesting narrative articles and not difficult expository or argumentative writing, which was the predominant form of articles in the textbook. Thus, Grace argued that it was hard for her to create communicative activities and tasks to engage her students based on the textbook.

To sum up, Grace asserted that although her main aim was to assist students in using language to communicate, she had to employ an eclectic approach to meet her students’ needs and therefore spent considerable time on the language forms as required by the textbook. Her teaching approach seemed to be influenced by the textbook and exploring communicative ways to attend to the language forms contained in the articles of the textbooks. (Grace’s thinking with regard to TBLT is presented later below.)

In the next section I describe Grace’s classroom activities based on two observations.

### 6.2.2 Outline of the Observed Classes

I observed Grace teaching two different classes, each ninety minutes long, in March, 2016. The classes occurred on different days. There were thirty-two students in the first listening and speaking class and twenty-three in the second reading and writing class. She had four English classes each week with first-year students who had different majors. The web-based text books used were *New Horizon College English, reading and writing, Book 4* (Zhen, 2011b); its
companion book: *listening and speaking* (Zhen, 2011a), and the *College English Integrated Course, Book 4* (Li, 2011). All these textbooks consisted of printed textbooks, CDs and related websites (refer to Section 8.4).

The first observed class was an introduction to English learning experience presented by previous students, which, according to Grace, was a routine activity for all her classes at the beginning of each year. Each of the four sophomores gave a presentation about their English learning experience, and about what helped them obtain higher marks in their college English band-four test. This activity took half of the class time. The second activity was listening to different audio recordings to complete a table and respond to multiple-choice questions. The topic of this series of listening activities was fame. All the listening activities were from the textbook, except a guessing game designed by Grace as a warm-up activity to the lesson.

Even though this class was a listening and speaking class, very little speaking was observed except during the guessing game. Grace pointed out that there was usually a topic-related group discussion in the listening and speaking classes, however, she omitted the activity in the observed class because of the student presentations on learning experiences. A detailed description of the classroom activities is in Appendix Q. In Table 6.1 I provide an outline of the first observed classroom activities.

**Table 6.1 Outline of Grace’s First Observed Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity and activity time</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Presentation of English learning experiences by four second year students.</td>
<td>(48’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher-led presentation: definition of fame and related vocabulary.</td>
<td>(7’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Whole class guessing game: three students took turns to describe five celebrities to get the rest of the students to guess their names.</td>
<td>(10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Listening activity 1: listening to passage on idea of fame and advantages of being famous; completion of summary table followed by a summary on a PPT by teacher.</td>
<td>(7’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Listening activity 2: listening to a passage and completion of multiple-choice questions about influences of fame on Wilde. Teacher explanation of new vocabulary.</td>
<td>(9’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 6. Listening activity 3: listening to a passage on disadvantages of being famous; completion of multiple-choice questions; teacher explanation of new vocabulary. The teacher finished the lesson by summarising the disadvantages in a PPT. | (15’)}
The second reading and writing class focused on reading of the passage from Unit 1, Text A: *Icy defender*, about the invasion of Russia by Hitler’s army in 1941. Two activities were observed in this class, as described in Table 6.2. The first was a pre-reading activity in which each student contributed one sentence to a whole-class discussion on the differences and similarities between Hitler and Napoleon and their experiences in the same battlefield. Grace responded to each student by repeating or rephrasing his or her sentences. The second activity was to learn the new words and phrases from the reading passage; this activity occupied two-thirds of the class time. The teacher got students to read through each paragraph, and then she picked out words and phrases from some paragraphs to explain. She explained the different meanings of the words and made sentences with these words. After that, she got students to translate the sentences and introduced more words related to these selected words and phrases. She also started conversations with her students based on certain new words. For instance, she picked the phrase “press on with our work” from the textbook, and asked students to translate the following sentence from English to Chinese: “our new president pressed on with the educational reform”. Then she continued to ask her students the following question: “Have you ever felt the educational reform in our university?” and her students started sharing their ideas with each other on this topic. While there were interactions between Grace and her students over new words, the purpose of the lesson was to learn the language points from the textbook.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.2 Outline of Grace’s Second Observed Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Pre-reading activity: Each student gave one sentence about the differences or similarities between Hitler and Napoleon. The teacher repeated the sentences or rephrased part or whole of the students’ sentences. (30’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Reading activity: focus on language points from the text. Students read each paragraph; teacher identified and explained new words and phrases; students then translated sentences with new words from Chinese to English; teacher initiated a topic based on some new words. (55’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grace’s reading and writing class was mostly teacher-fronted learning of the new words and phrases of the reading passage from the textbook. Grace was highly in control of all the classroom activities. The aim of the classes was to practise the language forms from the textbook rather than focusing on meanings although there were some interactions related to the new words.

6.2.3 Evaluation of Activities with Reference to the Three Task Frameworks

In this section, I report on the evaluation of the activities described above with reference to the three selected TBLT frameworks (Ellis, 2009b; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007).

The nine classroom activities observed in the two classes (90 minutes for each class) are classified into six parts: presentation (Activity 1); the introduction of topic related words (Activity 2); game of guessing the name of the celebrity (Activity 3); listening activities (Activity 4-6); review (Activity 7); reading activities (Activity 8-9). I evaluate each of the six parts according to the criteria listed under the three frameworks, and identify the part that satisfies the most criteria. As illustrated in Table 6.3, the third part (Activity 3) has been selected for detailed analysis as more task-related criteria were observed in Activity 3 than in the other parts. The evaluation of all the other stages against the three frameworks are in Appendix R.
Table 6.3 Evaluation of the Guessing Game (Activity 3) in Grace’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>1. Does it involve language use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome?</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>3. Is success judged in terms of outcome?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest? (not sure)</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the previous chapter, I first report on an analysis of the activity in relation to the two criteria common to all three frameworks (whether there is a primary focus of meaning and whether there is a clearly defined outcome beyond the use of language), and then analyse the activity in relation to each criterion specific to each of the frameworks.

As identified in Table 6.3, Activity 3 arguably has a primary focus on meaning. Students were engaged in describing the celebrities for the other students to guess, without any preceding language study. The activity was complete when the other students guessed the name of the celebrity. The activity thus met two criteria of having a clearly defined outcome and that success was judged in terms of outcome.

The other two criteria specified by Ellis (2009b) were met: that is, students closed gaps during the conveying of information among them, and students relied on their own resources to describe the celebrities without being expected to use any pre-determined language.
Another two criteria of a task as identified by Willis and Willis (2007) were met: completion appeared to be a priority in that the primary goal of this activity was to guess the name of the celebrity. Students describing the celebrities can go back to their seat only after the other students succeeded in guessing the celebrities’ names. This activity satisfied the criterion of relating to the real world because the interactions in the activity were similar to those in the real world. However, the activity did not appear to engage all students’ interests since this activity mainly required one student to describe the celebrity until another student in the class guessed the name.

This activity met one of the criteria specified by Samuda and Bygate (2008): it was a holistic activity because students use English to convey their meanings in this game. However, it failed to satisfy the last criterion suggested by Samuda and Bygate (2008): it did not seem to achieve the overall goal of promoting language learning since this activity can be achieved by using minimum English, and also only a proportion of students was involved in this game of listening to several English words or short sentences and then speaking out the Chinese names of the celebrities. It served more as a warm-up game rather than an activity aiming at promoting language learning owing to the limited activity time and English it produced. (Activity 3 was only a small section of the whole class).

In the next section I analyse Grace’s implementation of the tasks in practice and examine her beliefs in relation to her TBLT based practices.

6.2.4 Task Implementation

1) Grace’s beliefs about TBLT

When asked about TBLT, Grace believed that “tasks should play the leading role in my approach where language used for communicative purpose was the emphasis”. She noted that,
in her understanding, the core principle of TBLT was to use language for communication. This was in line with her general principle for language teaching; as she said: “Overall, language is used for communication, a class is doomed to be a failure without communication.” Meanwhile, she accentuated that she used an “eclectic approach” in her classes because she had to cater to her students’ needs.

Grace mentioned that she had learned about TBLT during her master’s degree. Grace said she considered herself to be “an open-minded and creative person, always willing to try a new approach including TBLT.” However, she maintained that it was the teacher’s own personality and character that exerted the most influence on teaching and students’ learning by saying, “What you are and what you believe will be reflected in your class.” She further argued that “if a teachers’ personality is conservative, it would be very hard for him/her to change from his/her well-established approach to any other new approaches because of his personality.” It seems that Grace attributed her enthusiasm for tasks to her own personality more than any other factors.

She described four examples of tasks that she had used in her classes (including the first one described in Section 6.2.1). However, these tasks were only described by her in the interview, without being observed in her classes. It is therefore difficult to evaluate against the criteria of the three frameworks without supporting evidence from the observed classes.

After reading a passage on the ‘Five Famous Symbols of America’, the second task she described required students to use English to interview students from other countries on their campus about their countries’ symbols, and meanwhile record a video of this interview. The third task that she mentioned was a performance, such as a drama chosen by students, prepared, rehearsed and presented in English by groups of students once a week. These two self-claimed tasks appeared to be task-like activities according to her descriptions.
The forth self-reported example was a routine speaking activity in her listening and speaking class every week. Students exchanged opinions in groups on hot issues related to the textbook topic. They recorded and transcribed their discussions before submitting them to Grace. She provided feedback on the overall ideas and how they were expressed. This appeared to be only a general discussion which did not have a clearly defined outcome.

Grace also mentioned that she tried to figure out ways to raise students’ awareness about the importance of carrying out tasks or communicative activities because Chinese students are used to the traditional approach of learning language forms from their teachers and textbooks. She pointed out that she persuaded her students about the effectiveness of engaging in discussion by asking them to keep all the transcripts of the recordings, and to self-evaluate their own progress from the transcripts at the end of the term. Ninety percent of her students reported that they made progress in their spoken English after comparing all the transcripts throughout the whole term, according to Grace.

However, Grace categorized some communicative activities as task examples because her understanding of ‘tasks’ was that they were mainly activities to promote communication. In addition to the examples of tasks she gave, she explained what she saw as the disadvantages and advantages in using these activities.

She noted disadvantages in that introverted students or weak students were reluctant to participate in the activities. However, she said that “I feel that I can change the introvert students’ attitudes by always encouraging them and helping them to build their confidence in speaking English boldly in these communicative activities and I believe that [the] environment can change people.” Further, she pointed out that some students complained that they could not benefit because their group members’ oral English during task implementation was limited.
Although Grace had encountered these problems in the implementation of tasks, she appeared to be positive about TBLT overall.

She claimed that the advantages of using these tasks were that students were actively involved in the tasks, and teacher and students enjoyed the communicative language learning process. She said:

*The advantages of using these activities is that I turn the dumb English into English that can be spoken out by my students. Students now understand that they can learn English in a communicative way, which is completely different from their approach in their high school. Many students did not know that they can learn English in this way. However, they were introduced to this new approach by me and they enjoyed this new approach. Meanwhile, I myself also enjoy this learning process because of the interesting atmosphere created by these activities. All of us enjoy learning English in a relaxed environment.*

Grace held positive attitudes towards tasks which is reflected in her statements in relation to some of the constraints reported in the literature (Carless, 2007; 2008; 2009; Deng & Carless, 2009). For example, she said she did not agree with the view that TBLT conflicted with the role of the college English test (Deng & Carless, 2009), or that some teachers in China were not proficient enough in English to implement TBLT in their classrooms. She claimed that teachers and students had access to up-to-date listening and reading materials from English-speaking countries, which, along with technology use, can assist non-native English teachers in task implementation and also English learning overall. She said,

*Some people said that non-native English teachers cannot provide feedback efficiently as the native speakers in the task implementation. I admit that this is one of the shortcomings, but it is not big enough to influence the task implementation. Students are taught by me to explore knowledge by themselves rather than receiving knowledge from me. Furthermore, I*
downloaded the original listening and reading materials from the Internet and students can also explore all these materials by themselves. Students can not truly learn the language in the short classes, whereas they learned the approach and they were motivated to learn by themselves after classes.

Grace also pointed out that teachers in China have increasing autonomy over the classroom activities and the content of the final examination, which, in her view, means they can also implement tasks. She said she was not required to follow the textbooks completely in class which gave her freedom in designing communicative activities and tasks for her classes. Furthermore, universities provided her with opportunities to attend various seminars focusing on language teaching theories including TBLT and how to include tasks.

Based on her explanation of the key principles of TBLT, the examples she gave of tasks and task-like activities, her rejection of the constraints mentioned in the literature as well as her affirmation of the engaging role of tasks for her students, it can be concluded that, at least as far as the evidence in her self-report, tasks had become a part of Grace’s teaching. However, owing to her apparently incomplete understanding of what constituted a task, that is, a task is just a focus on communication, some of the tasks she described seemed to be task-like activities rather than tasks.

2) The relationship between her beliefs and task practices

Observation of Grace’s classroom provided evidence of what she had described in the interview as an “eclectic approach”. Only a very small proportion of class time in the observed lessons was devoted to task-like activity in the listening and speaking classes where most of the class focused on the textbook language points. Indeed, task-like activity occupied only ten minutes of the whole ninety-minute class, indicating that (at least as far as this snapshot was concerned) she hardly used tasks in her classes based on this time allocation. She justified using an eclectic
approach to meet her students’ need because she believed the teacher was the authority, as “students may not know the important language points in the reading passage,” and students had a better understanding of vocabulary after she had explained it. She believed that some group members cannot benefit from communicating with each other because of their weak English. This might also have been one of the reasons why she devoted more time to teacher-controlled activities. Grace also pointed out that students had a long-established habit of learning language forms from their teachers. She said:

*I also focus on language forms because I want to cater to my students’ need. The students have developed an opinion since they were in the high school, that is, they might feel that they do not learn anything substantial in the class if I do not express any words and phrases. They really care how many words they have learned in my class. When I am expressing words and grammar, they would take notes fiercely; otherwise, they do not seem to care about it. Therefore, I had to take their need into consideration.*

In summary, Grace appeared, in the interview, to have some understanding of TBLT as she not only acknowledged that the core principle of TBLT is to use language for communicative purposes, but also reported using two activities, which appeared to satisfy the task criteria under the three frameworks. Another communicative activity she described also seemed to be a highly task-like activity. That few tasks were noted may be also due to the limited time for classroom observations. There is some self-report evidence, therefore, that Grace was incorporating tasks in her practice, although tasks were not observed to be implemented consistently in her actual practice.

In the following section, I report on the analysis of data arising from the interview with Gloria and observations of her classroom practice by following the same structure as for the previous participants.
6.3 Gloria

6.3.1 Background and Descriptions of English Teaching Approaches

Gloria had been teaching English as a foreign language for about 20 years after completing a master’s degree in linguistics. She had obtained a diploma in language teaching in Singapore. At the time of this study, she was an associate professor at the same highly rated university in China as Grace. Gloria was teaching English to first year students majoring in a range of fields while studying for a PhD in linguistics in another Chinese university part-time.

Gloria was aware of the principles underlying her teaching which, she stated, was to “engage” students in learning. She endeavoured to create an environment in which students would not only learn how to study but would maintain a strong desire to learn independently in the future. As she stated:

*My idea is to engage my students in the learning, no matter which methods are involved, either be it traditional or communicative or TBLT. Different approaches can be used in the different stages in classrooms as long as it can actively involve students in the learning.*

Gloria claimed that she did not attend to language forms before discussing the content of the text with her students. She gave an example of how she worked with a reading passage in her classes since the typical English class in China is centred on a reading passage. Gloria explained how she deviated from the traditional way of teaching by focusing on language forms in a reading passage only when her students failed to understand a particular language form or raised questions.

Similar to Grace, Gloria did not acknowledge any specific language teaching approach as her major approach in her classes. She asserted that she learned about theories through her own study, which she then applied in her practice. She continually modified her teaching
approaches, changing and refining them until she felt she could use them satisfactorily in her practice. She stressed that the most significant influence on her teaching principles and approaches was her pursuit of perfection, and that “The reason why I use the current principle is because I am a dreamer, a pursuer. I wish that I can reach [a] perfect state in my teaching”.

In the next section, I describe and analyse her classroom activities.

### 6.3.2 Outline of the Observed Classes

During the time of my study, Gloria was teaching English to first year students majoring in Philosophy, Materials Science and Engineering. All had finished high school study in China and their age ranged from 18-23. Four English classes (45 minutes per class) were held each week, two of reading and writing, and two of listening and speaking. Text books used were *New Horizon College English, reading and writing, book 4* (Zhen, 2011b); its companion book: *listening and speaking* (Zhen, 2011a); and the *College English Integrated Course, book 4* (Li, 2011). All these textbooks consisted of paper textbooks, CDs and its related websites (refer to section 8.4). There were 24 students in the first observed classes, 28 in the second observed class.

The first class observed was designed to be a reading and writing class, although in practice more listening and speaking activities were observed than reading and writing. The topic of the lesson was cars, with the majority of the discussion time allocated to debating whether or not students should drive cars in China, with students required to give their opinions. Details of classroom activities are in Appendix S, with an outline of classroom activities in Tables 6.4 and 6.5.
Table 6.4 Outline of Gloria’s First Observed Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type and activity time (90’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher’s introduction of the whole class. (3’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Review: teachers dictated the words and phrases from listening materials about Chinese spring festivals learned in the previous class such as “lunar calendar, Chinese zodiac, and couplets”. (7’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Writing activity: students wrote a passage by using all the dictated words and phrases. (5’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The teacher-led whole class brainstorm on the words and phrases related to cars: teacher elicited words and phrases related to cars from students by raising questions or giving meanings and recorded on the blackboard such as “automobile, engine and steering wheel”. (20’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Free writing: the teacher divided students into two groups recording opposing views on driving cars in China. Group A students were given the beginning sentence: if I could drive a car, I will buy and drive one without hesitation. Group B students were given the beginning sentence: Even if I could afford a car, I may not actually want to drive one. (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Debate in pairs: two students from two groups, Group A and Group B, stood face to face with each other in two lines, formed a pair and debated on whether they should buy and drive a car. (12’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teacher-led whole class debate: individual students from Group A presented their opinions; Group B challenged Group A; teacher recorded students’ main ideas, and also she communicated with the presenters. (22’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Break time: watching video clip dubbed by students, which is the homework. (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Reading: skimming unit 2 Smart cars in the textbook for key features of smart cars. (6’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Teacher-led whole class conversation: the key features of a smart car. (5’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second observation was a class which was part of the listening and speaking course with a topic centred on originality. The focus of this class was a range of listening and speaking activities based on video or audio files.

Table 6.5 Outline of Gloria’s Second Observed Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type and activity time (90’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Introduction of the class. (2’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Review: teacher dictated words and phrases about fame learned in the previous class. (5’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Writing activity: students writing of a passage about fame by using the dictated words and phrases. (5’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Checking homework: teacher explanation of the new words and phrases after reading each sentence from transcription of a video about a Chinese spring festival. (18’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Teacher-led discussion: teacher elicited thematic-related words about originality from students through descriptions of five pictures. For instance, one of the pictures is a digital knife with multiple functions. (10’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Listening activity: students watched a video, Thinking Differently by Steve Jobs, and then they filled missing words on the hand-outs according to the video. After that, teacher explained the new words after getting students to watch the video again. (8’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. Listening activity: students listened to the passage from the textbook, writing key words on advantages and disadvantages of originality, then teacher reviewed the answers with whole class. (5’)

18. Whole class activity: students volunteered to record their opposing ideas on the blackboard on originality under two columns followed by teachers’ summary of students’ responses. (12’)

19. Writing activity: teachers’ modelling of written argument for originality, then students wrote a persuasive article to support or oppose originality. (5’)

20. Presentation of the articles: three students’ presentations of writing on originality to class with teacher feedback on the general idea of their presentations. (12’)

21. Listening activity: students listened to another passage on Charlie Chaplin and took notes in order to retell the passage in a group. (7’)

22. Teacher-led activity: whole classroom discussion on this listening material by answering teachers’ questions. (5’)

Observation of the two classes indicated the following similarities:

Firstly, in both classes the teacher was in control of all the activities which were undertaken at a fast pace. Secondly, the teacher routinely reviewed words and phrases from previous classes and subsequently required students to write these words and phrases into a short passage. Thirdly, her focus was on learning and expanding use of the words rather than teaching pre-planned grammar items. Fourthly, the main goal appeared to be meaningful communication with her students; in neither class was she observed to point out, directly, a student’s errors or inappropriate expressions, but rephrased or repeated his or her utterance. Furthermore, she used the textbook flexibly and selectively to design activities according to the theme and topics of the lesson. Lastly, in both classes she appeared to have a preference for whole-class discussions with students recording their opinions prior to discussions or presentation.

The observation of her classes suggested that they differed from those described by Hu (2002a) in which the teacher mainly focused on presenting language points from the textbooks.
6.3.3 Evaluation of Activities with Reference to the Three Frameworks

In this section, I report on the evaluation of the classroom activities described above by referring to the three frameworks and selected the activities which appear to have the more of the criteria of a task (Ellis, 2009b; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007).

The 21 different activities in the two observed classes, one a reading and writing class and the other a listening and speaking class, were first classified into parts based on the characteristics and correlations between activities. The first class observed, reading and speaking, was divided into three parts: introduction and review (Activity 1-3), debating activities (Activity 4-8), and a reading activity (Activity 9-10). The second, a listening and speaking class, was divided into three parts: introduction and review (Activity 11-14), listening, speaking and writing activities (Activity 15-20), and listening and retelling activities (Activity 21-22). Each of the seven parts was then evaluated according to the criteria for a task listed under the three frameworks. As illustrated in Table 6.6, the debating activity (Activity 4-8) was selected for detailed analysis for more of the criteria were met compared to the other classroom activities. The evaluation of all the other stages against the three frameworks are in Appendix T.

Table 6.6 Evaluation of the Debating Activities (Activity 4-8) in Gloria’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>1. Does it involve language use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome?</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage leaners’ interest?</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As before, I first analysed the activities in reference to the two features common to the three frameworks (i.e. whether there is a primary focus of meaning and whether there is a clearly defined outcome beyond the use of language); I then analysed criteria specific to each framework.

As is shown in Table 6.6, the debating activities appeared to satisfy all criteria of a task; they have a primary focus on meaning because students were engaged in persuading each other with their opinions. Students first composed their ideas in writing, then discussed their ideas in pairs, and, finally, in a whole class activity, debated whether they should, or should not, drive a car in China. It was apparent that students’ major focus was on meaning and that all students were actively involved in contributing to the debate in order to defend their opinions.

Gloria did not pre-teach or correct her students on any specific linguistic forms but rephrased or paraphrased students’ utterances to extend their vocabulary or model correct language use in the task. For example, when a student said, “driving a car is a modern ability”, she restated the sentence correctly adding, “Yes, it is a kind of skill, like swimming skills”. In another example a student said, “I will spend money to maintain the car”; in her response she modelled a noun form by saying: “to spend money on car maintenance”. The third example was a student who said, “It will cause greenhouse effect”, to which Gloria added, “The exhaust / or the emissions may cause greenhouse effect”. When a student said, “In China, traffic is so terrible”, Gloria paraphrased it as: “The traffic conditions in China are not so good; many times you may be stuck in the traffic jams.” During the whole class debating activity, she was not observed to give explicit instruction on language forms; she focused instead on expanding students’ vocabularies within the communication process. Gloria, through encouraging her students to communicate their ideas in the whole class debate, thus, was ensuring that students focused on the meaning rather than form. This is consistent with Long’s (2000) proposal that the language forms should be attended to during the communication process.
This series of activities also met the criteria of having an outcome on which success was judged. Gloria also provided a follow-up activity in which she asked her students the following questions: “How many of you have convinced your partner not to buy a car even if you can afford a car?” After Group B presented their ideas in the whole class debate, she asked, “Now Group A students, are you convinced with all these reasons? Do you have any ideas to argue with us? Can you find ways to solve these problems?” While students presented their opinions, Gloria recorded a summary of their ideas on the blackboard. Gloria’s questions and feedback hence ensured that there was an outcome.

This series of debate activities also met the other criteria of a task described in the three frameworks. For example, students closed the gap by persuading their partners in the debate, and they relied on their own language resources rather than being provided with targeted language, a criterion identified by Ellis (2009b). The activity met criteria identified by Willis and Willis (2007): the debate appeared to engage all the students’ interest; completion was a priority as students were given sufficient time to complete the debate, and the debate resembled the communication process in the real world. Finally, it also satisfied the criteria identified by Samuda and Bygate (2008) in that the debate on whether they should drive a car in China was a holistic activity designed to promote language learning.

In the next section, I analyse Gloria’s implementation of tasks as observed in her classroom practice and examine her beliefs in relation to her TBLT based practices.

6.3.4 Task Implementation

1) Gloria’s beliefs about TBLT

Gloria claimed she used TBLT in her classes, but said she also included other approaches as she believed TBLT does not cater to all the needs in the classrooms. She pointed out that she
had been interested in TBLT for some time, and that she “keeps on exploring TBLT for all these years”. When asked about the definition of tasks, she described them only briefly saying, “Students were given a task to perform and they were required to present the outcome at the end of tasks, such as a presentation”. She gave a debate as an example.

Gloria mentioned several major factors which influenced her implementation of tasks. She stated that she first gained knowledge of TBLT when doing her diploma in Singapore; subsequently she developed her understanding further through reading journal articles, her study during completion of a PhD degree and the professional development opportunities offered by her university, such as a seminar given by Ellis. She argued, however, that the examples provided by Ellis were not appropriate for her students but were more suitable for the elementary students. She complained about the lack of resources, for instance, examples of tasks to use in her teaching, and that she had to design tasks by herself based on the topics of her textbooks.

As well as these factors that influenced her own task implementation, she emphasised that her current teaching approach, including the use of tasks in her classes, was mainly determined by her own characteristic which was “the relentless pursuit of perfection”. She said:

*It is myself that play the most radical role in my teaching approach. I am a dreamer and a pursuer, aiming to achieve perfect in my teaching. I am an especially self-motivated person. I never stop the process of improving my own approach through my own reading and my continuous study, and then making constant changes according to the problems arising from the applications of the theories in my practices until I reach the “perfect approach” that come naturally to me.*

Gloria claimed that her students also played an important role in her decisions about the implementation of tasks saying, ‘I modify or change my practices on the basis of students’
reactions. If my students are highly involved in the activity and take in more from my class, I will continue to use it and refine it”. This statement seems to reflect her general approach to teaching language which is to engage her students. She further justified her different approach from the traditional one saying,

_Students had to learn grammar in the very traditional teacher-dominated classes in order to meet the need of higher entrance examination in their high schools. These resulted in their habit of acquiring knowledge from their teachers. They had experienced this kind of learning approach for many years and these led them to have a new desire and expectation for their college life. They wanted their college life to be different. Additionally, I was once in a seminar with students’ representatives and they actually had these different expectations._

Gloria’s perception of students’ expectations of their college life led her to use tasks in her classes. Rather than continuing to cater to their long-established learning habits, she viewed students’ needs from a different perspective compared to the other two teachers in China.

Gloria’s attitudes towards TBLT were positive; she said that some negative reports of TBLT in the literature were not necessarily barriers to implementation (Luo & Xing, 2015; Xionyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007). The argument that non-native language speakers cannot apply TBLT is unjustified if teachers prepare their classes thoroughly and have a deep understanding of the topic from the text. Nonetheless, she admitted that giving feedback to the students was challenging for teachers especially when questions arose spontaneously during communication. She also disagreed with claims that exams hindered task implementation. She said their universities recruited excellent students who did not have difficulty in passing the College English Examinations. In addition, she did not agree that Asian students are passive learners, saying.
Even the introvert students who seem to be passive in the classes are longing to be involved in using language to communicate in my classes. This needs time, and they need teachers to guide them to start their exploration of learning language through using them to communicate.

Lastly, she mentioned that the use of textbooks also supports her to use tasks and that she extended the topics, which were based on the textbooks. She did not restrict herself to the use of textbooks but used a large amount of authentic materials from other resources as supplementary materials.

2) The relationship between her beliefs and task practices

Gloria’s beliefs about language teaching and tasks appeared to be consistent with her observed practices. Gloria was observed to use tasks in her reading and writing classes. She included one task with other approaches, which is a topic-based debating task, a major classroom activity, occurred before a skim reading of the text and after a group discussion and a writing activity. She did not devote her class time to explicit expression of language forms from the textbook, but was observed to extend students’ vocabularies by building on their utterances. A series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities were observed in both of her classes: the reading and writing class, and the listening and speaking class. Her two classes appeared to be highly communicative.

She said she included tasks into her classroom programmes because of her principle of engaging students in language learning, which is in accordance with a task criterion in the framework advocated by Willis and Willis (2007). This was apparent during the debating activity as students actively negotiated meanings. In addition, Gloria explained that “I used this approach because of my definition of classrooms”. Gloria’s claim that “a classroom is a community where every student is the participant and community member, and they
communicate with each other and learn from each other rather than being as a platform for a teacher to pass on knowledge”, was evident as students communicated their differing viewpoints. She further explained that “I want my students to communicate with each other to acquire some new ideas or even inspirations for their lives. I don’t want them to sit here and listen to me”.

In summary, my study found that Gloria’s task implementation appeared to concur with her beliefs. The key principle guiding Gloria’s language teaching was to ensure that students are actively engaged in language learning, which is consistent with one of the task criteria. This may account for the convergence of her beliefs and task practices in her classes. Her own definition of classrooms also helped to promote the use of tasks in her classrooms. Gloria said she included TBLT in her reading and writing classes with other listening, speaking, reading and writing activities, because she said task was not the only approach she used as it cannot cater to all the needs in the classroom. She asserted that her pursuit of perfection and her students’ needs are the major factors influencing her task implementation. She was positive about TBLT and advocated the use of TBLT despite the arguments in the literature that non-native speakers of the target language cannot use it effectively, the role of examinations hindered implementation, and that passive Asian students do not like to participate in tasks.

In the following section, I report on the analysis of data arising from the interview with Susan and observations of her classroom by following the same structure as for Gloria and Grace.

6.4 Susan

6.4.1 Background and Description of English Teaching Approaches

Susan has been teaching English for about 28 years and has a master’s degree in linguistics from a Chinese university. At the time of this study she was teaching English as a foreign
language in a Chinese university in the southern China; previously she taught Chinese in Malaysia for one and half years as an associate professor.

Susan claimed she used teaching approaches based on her students’ language level and needs, and that her current teaching approach was task-based and student-centred. When teaching classes with lower level English learners she used traditional approaches. As she said:

*If the students are advanced language learners, I will design some active activities to engage them in it, otherwise, I would use the traditional approach, focusing on the explaining of the language forms. I adjust my teaching approach based on different classes and their language level.*

She explained that she used textbooks most of the time, focusing on the language points in the texts, to cater to students’ needs and to meet the requirements of the band-four college English test and the final examination.

### 6.4.2 Outline of the Observed Classes

During the time of my study, Susan was teaching English to an elite class of first-year students majoring in arts in the university. The 30 students, aged 18-23, were chosen as elite students according to their marks in an exam given by their university when they entered into it. They had six English classes (45 minutes per class) a week whereas other first years, as in the English classes of Gloria and Grace, had four. These were reading and writing, listening and speaking and an oral English class given by a first language English teacher. The texts used were *New Horizon College English, reading and writing, book 3* (Zhen, 2011b) and its companion book, *listening and speaking* (Zhen, 2011a), the same series of books as used by Gloria and Grace.

I observed Susan for 90 minutes in the listening and speaking classes, and 180 minutes in the reading and writing classes in December 2015 in a week. In the next section, Susan’s practice
in the observed classes is summarised in Table 6.7 and Table 6.8. (A detailed description of the classes is in Appendix U).

1) Susan’s first observed class

The first class I observed was a listening and speaking class, the topic of which was business negotiation and ideas on where and how to start a business. The activities in this class included three listening activities: watching and listening to a video and completing a table based on the video, and two listening passages with multiple-choice questions to complete. There were two speaking activities: one in which students created and presented a business talk and a game in which they matched two different items and discussed reasons for their choices with their partners.

Table 6.7 Outline of Susan’s First Observed Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type and time</th>
<th>Time (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher’s introduction of the class.</td>
<td>2’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Listening activity: the students watched the video about a business negotiation and completed a table based on the video.</td>
<td>7’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teacher instruction on the strategies used in a business negotiation based on the video.</td>
<td>4’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students responses: preparation and presentation of a business talk in pairs by referring to a group of seventeen given words and phrases.</td>
<td>16’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teacher-led activity: presenting a sample of business talk with focus on the words and phrases used in the business talk. Review of video with teacher focusing again on business negotiation vocabulary from the video. Teacher summary of business talk strategies.</td>
<td>11’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Listening activity: listening to a passage about where to start a business with multiple choice questions.</td>
<td>5’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teacher-led activity: review of students’ responses with a focus on the words and phrases from the listening passage.</td>
<td>10’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Matching game and pair discussion: students matched columns and explained reasons of their choices in pairs.</td>
<td>8’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Presentation of the matching game: pairs of students presented their answers in the form of a dialogue.</td>
<td>9’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Listening activity: another passage on how to start a business, completion of multiple-choice questions. Teacher reviewed answers and focused on words and phrases from the listening materials.</td>
<td>10’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the classroom activities were from the textbook, including the reference book and the listening and speaking course-materials. Most of the class time was devoted to the listening
and speaking activities, with Susan occasionally explaining selected words and phrases from
the listening materials.

2) Susan’s second and third observed class

I observed four reading and writing classes (180 minutes in total), nominated by Susan over a
period of two weeks.

Three major activities were observed in the class: two movie clips and epitaphs of four famous
people to elicit the ideas related to the theme; a focus on the new words and phrases from the
reading passage; an analysis of the writing style and the students’ completion of a piece of
writing. Following these activities, Susan listened to two students’ writing and read her own
sample of writing. All these activities were based on the reading passage in the textbook.

Table 6.8 Outline of Susan’s Second and Third Observed Classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type and time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Teacher’s introduction of the theme of this class which was concerned with topic on death: students watched a clip of a movie Forest Gump, a dialogue between Forest and his dying mother; teacher’s reflection on the movie. (6’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Teacher’s presentation and explanation: epitaphs of four famous persons on the screen, such as the epitaph by Benjamin Franklin. (25’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Movie watching: watching another movie clip from Titanic, and it is the dialogue between Jack and Rose when they were in the sea, and then teachers’ reflection on it. (8’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Group discussion: teacher introduction of the topic of Unit 5 titled graceful hands which is the description of a dying lady from the perspective of a doctor. Then group discussion of the question raised by the teacher: what does a dying person need the most? After that, some students presented their opinions. (5’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Teacher-led discussion: students read text silently, instructed to think about structure and general idea of the passage; and then whole class discussion. (16’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Language focus: teacher’s explicit explanation of new words and phrases from each paragraph; student making sentences with the new words; teacher’s retelling of the plot and summary of each part of the text. (90’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Mini-writing activity: teacher’s introduction of writing style of the reading passage; students’ writing of a 120-word composition using the same style with the title of cowboy is the hero. (17’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Writing presentation: presentation of the writing by three students; teacher’s display of the sample. (5’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Review: students’ translation of new words and phrases learned from the reading passages from Chinese into English. (2’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These reading and writing classes were teacher-dominated learning of the new words and phrases of the reading passage. Teacher input, which took most of the class time, included comments on the movie clips and epitaphs; language points from the reading passage to focus on; explanation of meanings of the new words and phrases; and instructions to students for translation of the sentences into English. Students listened to her while taking notes most of the time. Only a few students volunteered their ideas despite teacher encouragement.

6.4.3 Evaluation of Activities with Reference to the Three Frameworks

In this section, I report on the evaluation of the activities described above with reference to the three frameworks (Ellis, 2009b; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007) by East (2012b).

In the two classes there were 19 different activities observed. The first listening and reading class was divided into four parts: introduction; watching video and acting it out (Activity 1-5); listening exercise one (Activity 6-7); matching game (Activity 8-9); listening exercise two (Activity 10). The second observed reading and writing class was divided into four parts: the lead-in part for reading activities (Activity 11-14); reading activities (Activity 15-16); writing activity (Activity 17-18); and review (Activity 19). I then evaluate each of the eight parts according to the criteria listed under the three frameworks, and choose the part that satisfies the most amounts of criteria. As illustrated in the following table, the matching game (Activity 8-9) met more criteria compared to the other parts. The evaluation of all the stages against the three frameworks are in Appendix V.
Table 6.9 Evaluation of Matching Game (Activity 8-9) in Susan’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>1. Does it involve language use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome? 3. Is success judged in terms of outcome?</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the previous teachers, the analysis of the activities starts from the two common features across the three frameworks: whether there is a primary focus on meaning and whether there is a clearly defined outcome.

The matching game (Activity 8-9) had a primary focus on meaning because students were required to match the qualities and skills with different job titles, and to justify their choices to their partners. Communication was encouraged as the activity generated discussion between the pairs while preparing their decisions for presentation to the class. I argue, therefore, that this activity had a major focus on meaning.

There was no clearly defined outcome as Susan asked students to talk about and justify their decisions but did not instruct them to reach agreement on at least one choice. Inclusion of such a component would have indicated a clearly defined outcome.

The activity met other criteria proposed by Ellis (2009b): students closed gaps as they expressed their opinions to other students, and were not pre-taught language forms but relied on their own language resources to exchange their opinions on their choices. The activity also met criteria identified by Willis and Willis (2007): the activity was apparently engaging as students were actively involved in exchanging justifications for their decisions; it was related.
to interactions and communicative processes in the real world; and completion was a priority as students were given sufficient time to finish their discussions. Finally, as a holistic activity promoting language learning through students having to justify their choices to each other, it met the criteria identified by Samuda and Bygate (2009).

In the next section I analyse Susan’s implementation of the tasks in her practice and examine her beliefs in relation to her TBLT based practices.

6.4.4 Task Implementation

1) Susan’s beliefs about tasks

Susan said that she learnt about tasks and TBLT at a course provided by the Foreign Language Press. She said,

_I didn’t really know TBLT until I joined the training courses on how to use the textbook and observed how they carry out the activities in the class. I observed the teacher using the tasks in the practice and it was engaging and interesting, as a result, I want to apply them into my class as well._

Susan claimed she benefited from the textbooks and that they had led her to employ tasks. She said: “I tended to use tasks with advanced English learners, such as the elite class, but to use traditional teaching approaches with low proficiency students because tasks were not appropriate for lower level students”. This statement, however, appeared to be based on her misunderstandings about tasks. She equated tasks with the common activities in the classes saying, “All the listening activities, spoken activities, along with the summary of a reading passage and the writing of a composition from the textbooks and its courseware are tasks as well.” When implementing what she claimed were tasks she excluded explicit explanations of language forms stating that, “I used the traditional approach to explain the language forms from
the reading passages of the textbook so that students can learn new words, phrases and sentence patterns”. She stated that the explicit explanation of language forms was at the “while reading stage”, emphasising that, in this stage, she did not use tasks.

Although she had misunderstandings about tasks, she said that tasks motivated her students to participate in the classes. She pointed out that the use of technology and web-based textbooks, as well as the full support of their university, also encouraged her to use tasks.

2) The relationship between Susan’s beliefs and her classroom practices

Observation of Susan’s classroom activities indicated that they did not correspond to her claims that her current classes were task-based, possibly as a result of her misunderstandings about tasks. Her listening and speaking classes consisted of listening exercises from the textbook. The only task-like activity was a time to practice oral English, which occupied seventeen minutes of the ninety minutes class. The reading and writing class was teacher-dominated with the majority of the class time devoted to explicit presentation of the language points from the textbook. Susan’s reading and writing class was what Hu (2002a) described as a traditional teacher-dominated class in which teachers analyse texts from the textbook sentence by sentence, explaining and exemplifying language points in detail, paraphrasing sentences, making sentences with new words and so on.

As stated in her interview, Susan appeared to depend heavily on the textbook. All the activities, including the observed task-like activity, were selected from the textbook and its attached courseware. The teachers’ reference book and its accompanying course materials were used as her teaching guide.

Her misunderstandings about tasks appeared to lead her to choose communicative activities from the courseware attached with the reference book, rather than real tasks, for her observed
listening and speaking class. This courseware consists of a power point document about classroom procedures, based on the textbook, which seems to include three highly task-like activities along with a variety of activities in it. One of the tasks was getting students to work in groups of four to rank 10 jobs (such as farmer, CEO and teacher) from the most to the least stressful and giving reasons for their group choices. Another task in the courseware required the students to try to sell something to their partner by using negotiation strategies and to report their results to the whole class. The third task was a group discussion, about job application skills, to design a handbook for new college graduates. In the power point document, however, these activities are not called “tasks” on the power point document.

In Susan’s observed listening and speaking classes she chose the two spoken activities from the courseware rather than the three highly task-like activities: making a business dialogue with the given words and phrases (Activity 4-5); a matching game (Activity 8-9, refer to table 6.7) and a discussion with their peers about their choices. Both of the communicative activities she selected were not true tasks. Susan’s reason for not choosing the three task-like activities may be because of the limited class time, which she had emphasised was a barrier to the implementation of tasks. Also, her preference of focusing on language forms enabled her to choose activities which demanded less time and to include more targeted language forms. For instance, she chose the activity of role playing where students were required to sell things to each other, using given phrases, in a business dialogue, but then omitted the following task-like activities which required students to create a business dialogue, without being given phrases.

Susan also may have been constrained by other factors she believed to hinder the implementation of tasks, such as the negative influence of students on their partners in the activities, the big classes and the pressure from the demands of band-six and band-four college English text and final examinations. These possible constraints on task implementation in
China have been identified previously in the literature (Littlewood, 2007; Butler, 2011). Susan explained that she devoted time to the explicit teaching of language forms owing to her students’ needs to pass the examination and to improve their writing.

To sum up, Susan’s claim that she taught task-based classes was not confirmed by observations of her practice. The discrepancy is mostly likely the result of her misunderstandings of tasks, as she regarded general activities as tasks. She had learned about tasks from the textbook related trainings, which she claimed to have the greatest influence on her. She was observed also to depend on the textbooks, and claimed that tasks could motivate her students’ in their language learning. The barriers to task implementation that she identified were consistent with some of the constraints reported from the literature (Littlewood, 2007; Butler, 2011).

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the three Chinese teachers’ teaching experience, backgrounds, general approach, beliefs about TBLT and the observations of their classroom practice. I then evaluated their classroom activities according to the three frameworks (East, 2012b) and analysed the relationship between their beliefs and task implementations.

All the three teachers appeared to be positive about TBLT and considered that they used tasks in their classrooms. They all acknowledged that tasks can arouse students’ interest and engage them in language learning.

A range of understandings of TBLT and its role in language learning was apparent amongst the three teachers. Whereas Gloria embraced TBLT, as it was in line with her teaching principles, she acknowledged it was not her only teaching approach. Similarly, Grace said she felt positive about TBLT, claiming that tasks should play a leading role in the class. She believed the core principle of TBLT was to use language for communication. Grace’s examples
of tasks appeared to be in line with the criteria of tasks according to the three frameworks (East, 2012b). She also acknowledged, however, using an eclectic approach in her classes because she had to focus on learning of language points from the textbooks. Both Gloria and Grace supported the use of TBLT and did not agree with arguments that TBLT was not appropriate in Asian classrooms, or that is inconsistent with college English tests or that non-native teachers’ were incapable of implementing tasks (Deng & Carless, 2009; Luo & Xing, 2015; Zhang, 2007).

Susan, unlike Gloria and Grace, claimed the textbook assisted her in using tasks and that she followed the instructions of the textbooks to apply tasks into her classroom. She appeared to misunderstand TBLT because she equated tasks to some general activities and believed tasks only suited advanced learners; she was the only teacher to identify factors that prevented her from adopting it in her classes.

The three teachers differed in their implementation of tasks in their classrooms. Only Gloria was observed to employ a task in her classrooms, with a task cycle as one of the major classroom activities in her reading and writing classes. A task-like activity was observed in Grace’s listening and speaking class and it only occupied a small proportion of the whole class time. Susan’s practice was not consistent with her claim of teaching a task-based class and a task-like activity was observed in her listening and speaking class.

Grace applied task-like activity in her listening and speaking classes, and taught language points from the textbook in the reading and writing classes, believing she was catering to the students’ needs and learning habits. Similar findings that Chinese teachers tend to focus on transmission of knowledge of the textbooks have been reported in the literature (Hu, 2002a).

Gloria, however, applied a task cycle in her reading and writing classes as a major classroom activity instead of conducting similar language-focused activities as Susan and Grace.
Textbooks appeared to play a role in the three teachers’ task implementation. Gloria, unlike Susan and Grace, did not appear to have “a close adherence” to the textbook (Hu, 2013, p. 297), but flexibly chose content from the textbooks. Grace appeared to be constrained by the textbooks noting it was difficult for her to design tasks based on some of the topics of texts. All the three teachers identified the supportive role of their university in their task implementation, such as their increasing autonomy over classroom activities and the final examinations, as well as the use of technology and more opportunities to learn about TBLT via seminars or conferences or further studies.

Even though Grace included only a mini task-like activity in her classes, her self-reported task principles and task examples suggest that she had some understanding of TBLT and its underlying theory. Similarly, Gloria appeared to have a good understanding of TBLT for she was observed to use tasks deliberately as the major activity into her classes. To summarise, the findings from Gloria and Grace seem to indicate that the TBLT are a part of their practices.

In the next chapter, I present findings about students’ attitudes towards tasks in all the six teachers’ classes.
Chapter 7 Students’ Attitudes to Teachers’ Classroom Tasks

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have focused on the teachers in the two contexts. In this chapter, I turn to the students. I start with the introduction of the participating students. I move on to present and analyse the findings from the data generated from the four interview questions that investigated students’ attitudes towards tasks and the underlying reasons for these. They are respectively: (1) the students’ favourite activities; (2) the reasons for their choices of the favourite activities; (3) the problems they encountered in these activities; and finally (4) their suggestions to solve these problems. After that I discuss the findings.

Students’ attitudes to classroom tasks were investigated for the following reasons. Firstly, as I identified in Chapter 4, there are few studies on students’ attitudes towards the use of tasks in China at the tertiary level. Secondly, there has been controversy in the literature over students’ attitudes towards tasks. Some studies have suggested that Asian students are passive language learners, and so a weak version of TBLT is more appropriate for them (Adams & Newton, 2009; Littlewood, 2007). Others argue that Asian students are ready to embrace TBLT (Takeda, 2015; Nguyen, Newton & Crabbe, 2015; Iwashita and Li, 2012). Thirdly, there has been some inconsistency between teachers’ perspectives on TBLT and students’ expectations of task implementation reported in the literature (Nguyen et al., 2015). Van den Branden (2006) has suggested that students’ attitudes towards tasks may encourage teachers to use TBLT.

7.2 Introduction of the Participating Students

As described in Chapter 3, all the participating students (n = 20) are Chinese as L1 students from the six teachers’ classrooms. The criteria and process for participant selection are described in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.2.2), and the student interview process is also described in that chapter (see 4.2.2). I chose two students respectively from Mary’s class and Rachel’s
class, and four students from Molly’s class in a New Zealand institute. The remaining twelve students are from the two Chinese universities, with four students from each of the teachers’ classes.

### 7.3 Students’ Preferred Activities

It was found from the interview data that the students identified 14 preferred activities. I rank these activities according to the students’ choices from each class in the following tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ preferred activities</th>
<th>Number of students and class teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A debate task</td>
<td>4 (Gloria-China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>4 (Grace-China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading activity: group reading of different parts and compilation of information via discussions</td>
<td>4 (Molly-New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing activity in limited time frame</td>
<td>3 (Susan-China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and discussion of general idea with form-focused activities included</td>
<td>2 (Mary-New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative writing in groups</td>
<td>1 (Mary-New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form-focused activities arising from communication and writing</td>
<td>1 (Molly-New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion–exchange activities</td>
<td>1 (Grace-China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing of celebrities’ names from other students’ description</td>
<td>1 (Grace-China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubbing a film via a phone app</td>
<td>1 (Grace-China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictation of words; writing using the dictated words</td>
<td>1 (Gloria-China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahoot game</td>
<td>1 (Rachel-New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All four students in Gloria’s class identified ‘a debate task’ as their preferred task (see Section 6.3.3), while the four students in Grace’s class selected ‘performance’ as their preferred task; for the four students in Molly’s class ‘reading and compilation of information’ was the preferred task (see Section 5.4.3). This chosen activity from Molly’s class is similar to an information gap task (also see Section 5.4.3). All the students chose their preferred activities from a menu of what had been done in their own classes. Hence, it appeared that the top three activities chosen by all the twelve students from the three different classes could be described
as two tasks and an activity that is very similar to an information-gap task when considered against theoretical definitions of task. For the other activities, there was less consensus in students’ preferences, except that three students preferred the writing activity in limited time from Susan’s class, and three students from Molly’s classes selected the group discussion about the dictated questions and cooperative writing based on group discussion. These activities were not judged to be tasks or task-like activities. The other activities include three different communicative activities selected by three students from different classes and two form-focused activities arising from communication by two students from two different classes. It seems that students’ preferences first went to tasks and task-like activities, then writing activities, after that, listening and group discussion activities (noted by fewer students), and finally the other activities such as form-focused activities arising from communication (noted by the least students).

The first task mentioned by four students from Gloria’s class as their preferred activity was a debate task (Activity 4-9 described in Section 6.3.3). This series of closely related activities was selected by me from all the classroom activities as these activities satisfied the highest amount of task criteria after being evaluated against the three frameworks. During this task, students were divided into two groups, each group writing down opposite views on what they felt about driving a car in China. They then worked in pairs to debate their opinions. Finally, Gloria led a whole class debate, with students from each group presenting their opinions. At the same time, Gloria recorded key words uttered by students in the debate on the blackboard.

Four students from Grace’s class selected the second task, the performance. Even though only a ten-minute brief task-like activity, the celebrity game as a class ‘warm-up’, was observed in Grace’s classes, both Grace and her students described other tasks in their interviews. Performance, a regular activity in their classroom every week, was not included in the observed class because of a presentation given by the sophomores on their successful English learning
experiences. As described by the students, for a performance, several groups were established, with each group free to choose any topic to perform in English, such as a performance of a section of a movie at the beginning of the listening and speaking class every week. Only one group gave a performance each week; other groups took turns to present their programme in the following weeks.

The third activity chosen by students from Molly’s class was very similar to an information-gap task; students were given different parts of a text to read. They were to discuss these, and then compile them into a summary of the passage, which was then discussed in groups. Molly, however, did not give any feedback on the students’ summary of the reading passage so that there was no clearly defined outcome. These series of activities were also selected by me as the highly task-like activities from all Molly’s observed classroom activities because they satisfied the most criteria after evaluating against the three frameworks (Activity 10-12 described in Section 5.4.3). Molly’s class appeared to be positive towards her classroom activities, as all the activities were identified as their preferred activity by at least one student.

Two other activities, nominated by three students as their preferred activities, were observed in Molly’s classes. These were pair discussion of dictated questions and group discussion and cooperative writing in pairs.

The other activities selected by students can be classified into the following categories: the first type is spoken activities: a group discussion of some dictated questions from Molly’s class; discussion of general ideas from a listening text from Mary’s classes; and an opinion-exchange activity from Grace’s class. The second type is writing activities: the writing in limited time from Susan’s class, and group discussion and cooperative writing from Molly and Mary’s classes; and also writing an article based on dictated words in Gloria’s classes; the third type is task-like activities: guessing the name of celebrities and dubbing a film via a phone app from Grace’s classes. The last type is a form-focused activity arising either from communication or
writing in Molly’s classes, or form-focused activity followed by the listening activity from Mary’s classes. It seems that communicative activities, and writing activities along with the form-focused activities based on these activities, were the main activities selected by all the students as their preferred ones except the tasks and task-like activities.

Students, it can be concluded, seemed to show preferences towards the tasks or task-like activities, communicative activities and also writing activities according to their chosen preferred activities. In the next section, I discuss reasons for the students’ choices.

7.4 Reasons for Students’ Choice

The second interview question asked about reasons for students’ choices of their preferred activities. Students offered a variety of reasons for their choices. I coded the data by first classifying students’ opinions into categories based on the interviews, and then I ranked these opinions according to the number of students expressing that view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for students’ preferred activities</th>
<th>Number of students and class teachers (N = 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. They can grasp English words and phrases/or learn English through using them in communication.</td>
<td>15 (students from both contexts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. They enjoy real communication with the teacher and their classmates.</td>
<td>8 (all the students are from Molly’s class in NZ and Gloria’s class in China.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. They are aware of environmental pressures for communication.</td>
<td>4 (Molly’s students in NZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. They are aware of the importance of communication.</td>
<td>2 (Susan’s students in China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The topics are interesting and related to their lives.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 (Grace’s students in China)+4(Molly’s students in NZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They want to learn English to use in real life.</td>
<td>3 (Grace’s students in China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. They want to study English for practical reasons, such as for studying abroad/talking to foreigners.</td>
<td>2 (Susan’s students in China)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. They believe their university English class should be different from high school English classes.

9. These activities inspire creativity, learning critical thinking, broadening their minds.

10. Team spirit is encouraged in the activities.

11. Communication with their teacher can provide guidance for their lives as well as improve their English.

12. They are active learners and prefer to explore knowledge independently.

13. It is not easy to find many classmates to practise oral English together.

14. The tasks are helpful in passing oral English test.

The primary reason for their preferred activities, as indicated in Table 7.2, is that students believe that these activities can promote language learning and acquisition. As one student put it, “I learned the words and phrases after using them in discussion or communication.” Fifteen students out of the total number of eighteen gave similar explanations when asked about reasons for their preferences.

One student from Gloria’s class expressed why she preferred the debate tasks in her classes:

I received knowledge passively in high school, but I am feeling much better nowadays. I feel that a lot of knowledge has been passed on to me by teachers at high school; however, I cannot apply the language I learned in high school into practice. But nowadays, I know how to use the words in real life by using them in the discussion in classes.

As she indicates above, her favourite activities can facilitate her communicative ability because she learned how to apply these words into real life scenarios while the knowledge directly passed on to her by the teachers in high school does not help her to achieve this practical goal.

Similarly, one of Susan’s students said, “Sometimes even I spend a lot of time memorizing a word, I still forget it; however, if I can use this word to communicate with teachers, I can easily
memorize it. I want teachers to give me more practice like this.” Likewise, another of Susan’s students said, “The teacher may pass on considerable knowledge to you; however, it may not arouse your interests, and you are just passively taking notes. Even if you get a high mark, but you don’t use it in practice and you still don’t get it.” One of Molly’s students said, “I like this kind of practical approach because it is only when you put language into practice, you will notice the different tense should be used in which kind of situations. If you don’t use it, you will never really grasp it.” Thus, the majority of the students from both contexts expressed the view that by engaging in activities involving using language, they can acquire communicative ability. It seems that these students realise the effectiveness of tasks or communicative activities in promoting their communicative ability. This contrasts with the conclusions of some previous studies which argue that students prefer traditional ways of passively receiving knowledge from their teachers. (Adamson & Davison, 2003; Lee, 2008; Zhang, 2007).

The second most frequently expressed reason (by all students in Molly’s and Gloria’s classes) was that they enjoy the communication with their classmates and their teachers. Both Gloria and Molly’s classes were observed to have tasks and task-like activities. A debate task was observed as one of the major activities in Gloria’s reading and writing classes, and Molly’s classroom activities can be classified into three major stages, and all these stages bear many features of a task when evaluated against the three frameworks.

One of Gloria’s students commented on how she made them aware of the benefits of practising oral English through tasks like the debate in the observed classes, but in a somewhat scaffolded way. She said,

_I feel that a good teacher should let her students to feel the happiness of communication first, because we are from the traditional classes and not all the students are ready and willing to open their mouth. We are like people who have stayed in darkness for a long time._
and we should be offered first a little bit of light rather than being put in the strong light suddenly. Otherwise, we may choose to go back to stay in the darkness again. Gloria, however, she never forces us, rather, she guides us to have pleasing and equal conversation with her. Furthermore, she can receive our opinions. I do enjoy communicating with her.

The third and fourth reason given by the students identified the importance of communication. Two students from Susan’s class in China said, “Communication is of the primary importance,” whereas the four students from Molly’s class in New Zealand commented that awareness of the importance of communication outside the classroom motivated them to use English to communicate in Molly’s classes.

One of Molly’s students said he changed his target from using correct English to communicating his ideas, when in an English-speaking environment. As he explained:

   I was once in a homestay family, and I used to ask my landlord if I made any mistakes when I was communicating with him; later on, I never asked him such kind of questions. Because I finally realised that the key was whether I conveyed my ideas appropriately. I would attend to my grammar only in certain occasions such as making a presentation in classes.

He continued:

   Environment is very important. When I worked as a receptionist in a hotel, I realised that even though I made a lot of mistakes, the foreigners can understand me. Also in this process, I realised that I need to convey my ideas to the others rather than focusing on if I am using the correct English.

Another of Molly’s students expressed a similar idea: “Environment is very important. If everyone around you is speaking English, you will be influenced by them and started to speak English too.” Likewise, a third student said, “I speak English with my landlord every day and
I can improve my oral English. The environment really matters”. Similarly, the fourth student said,

*The environment influenced me and I had a chance to practise my English. I have my mobile phone at all times and check it whenever I need to find the word I cannot speak. As time goes on, I become fluent in English.*

It can thus be concluded that the crucial role of the English-speaking environment on all the four students in New Zealand greatly challenged and altered their opinions concerning English learning. They realised that language was an important tool for communication owing to the outside environment rather than grammatical rules learned in classroom.

With regard to the fifth reason, six students explained that they preferred topics and activities that are interesting and engaging. Four students from Molly’s classes commented on the role of discussion in engaging students, while two students from Grace’s class said that performance can arouse students’ interest.

The sixth and seventh reasons are concerned with the learning objectives. Five of the students in China said that the ultimate goal of learning English was to apply it to real life. Two of them specifically stated that they wanted to become fluent in English in order to communicate with foreigners or to study abroad. As one of Grace’s students said,

*I like the performance because English is a language originating from life and it should go back into real life again rather than merely for exams. Even though you know the meaning of the words, you can understand the articles, you can translate the sentences; however, when you are expected to communicate, you are at a loss, and you cannot find the right words to express yourself; you only ended up in using broken English.*
Similarly, Grace’s other student expressed his desire to learn English in order to communicate in authentic settings, saying:

*I want to integrate English into our daily lives. Sometimes I want to express myself in English; however I cannot find the right words even though I can write. I want to turn language into something alive, to be a part of me and to use it appropriately in the right situation when necessary.*

It appears from the above comments that students’ eagerness to improve their communicative ability rather than learning passive knowledge for an examination motivates them.

As for the next reason, four students from China pointed out that they had different expectations for their university courses from what they had experienced at high school. They expected to have an opportunity to learn more than just knowledge about language.

Seven students from both contexts identified other benefits more than language learning such as developing their creative and critical thinking, learning team spirit (co-operation with others), and obtaining guidance concerning their lives from communicating with teachers. Furthermore, students asserted that their selected activities fit their characters or their learning style. Two students said their preferred activity matched their learning style as active learners, and communicative activities provided them with opportunities to explore language by themselves rather than listening to teachers. Also, two students said that they could not find opportunities apart from classes for them to practise oral English, and finally, one student mentioned that the activity helped her with the oral examination.

The top five reasons for their preferences were consistent with the task features identified in the frameworks as seen in Table 7.3.
Table 7.3 Students’ Reasons for Task Preference Related to Task Features from the Three Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ reasons for preferred activities</th>
<th>Task features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning English through communication.</td>
<td>Promoting language acquisition (Ellis, 2009; Willis &amp; Willis, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Enjoying communication with students and teachers.</td>
<td>Engaging activities (Willis &amp; Willis, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interesting topics and activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communication is of the utmost importance.</td>
<td>Primary focus on meaning (the essential feature of the three frameworks, see Section 2.4.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Applying English to the real world.</td>
<td>Related to the real world (Ellis, 2003; Willis and Willis, 2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top five reasons given by students match well with the task features as illustrated in Table 7.3. For example, the main reason given by students for favouring communicative tasks is that they believe the activities help them with their learning of English. Tasks are believed to be effective ways to learn English because they engage learners in real language use in the classroom (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). The second and fourth reasons, enjoyment of communication with classmates / teachers and interesting topics, are consistent with one of the features identified by Willis and Willis (2007), that of engagement of learners. The third reason, their belief in the importance of communication for language learning, is consistent with the most essential feature of a task, a primary focus on meaning. The fifth reason the students emphasised was application of English to the real world, which is also identified as a task feature (Ellis, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007). This consistency of preference aligned with task features suggests that the use of tasks by the teachers is appropriate for the students’ language learning.

In the following section, I discuss some of the challenges students noted that they experienced with the tasks and preferred activities.
7.5 Problems and Solutions Raised by Students

Students pointed out the problems that they encountered in their chosen activities. As previously, I rank these problems according to the number of students making a particular comment in Table 7.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems listed in their preferred tasks or activities</th>
<th>Number of students and class teacher (N = 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack of English speaking environment after class for students to practice oral English.</td>
<td>4 (Grace, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Some of the activities are time-consuming.</td>
<td>3 (2-Molly, NZ; 1-Grace, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lack of time because of demands of study for their majors; insufficient English classes.</td>
<td>3 (2-Grace; 1-Susan, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chinese students developed the habit of keeping silent in the classroom.</td>
<td>2 (1-Molly, NZ; 1-Susan, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Students are used to be taught grammar by their teachers in high school.</td>
<td>2 (Grace, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Students are afraid of ‘losing face’ and experience peer pressure.</td>
<td>2 (Grace, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teachers find it hard to release control in the classroom.</td>
<td>1 (Susan, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Chinese students are used to a focus on correct grammar rather than communication.</td>
<td>1 (Molly, NZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Chinese students are used to studying for grammar-focused exams.</td>
<td>1 (Susan, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Students have to learn grammar after class by themselves in order to get a good grade in the exam.</td>
<td>1 (Gloria, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Chinese students prefer to use their mother tongue in group discussion.</td>
<td>1 (Molly, NZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Passing on knowledge and studying for exams is still the focus of the class.</td>
<td>1 (Mary, NZ)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are twelve problems experienced by the students identified in Table 7.4, which could be combined into six major challenges. The first problem is the lack of an English-speaking context outside the classroom by students in China, meaning that there are few opportunities to practise oral English after class; the second problem is that the tasks, such as opinion-exchange activities and performance, are time-consuming. The third one lies in the limited
English classes and insufficient time with English learning because of the demands of courses for their major subjects.

One of Gloria’s students said, “It is not easy to gather such a big group at the same time and do oral practice together. It is the precious opportunity for all the students to practise oral English because we seldom have any chances to practise oral English after class.”

A fourth issue is concerned with traditional habits of teaching and learning (problem 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8). Students are accustomed to be ‘spoon-fed’ by their teachers, and the focus is on learning correct grammar rather than communication in a teacher-fronted class. Students are also afraid of expressing their opinions in public because of peer pressure. As one of Susan’s students put it,

*Education is a continuous process, if there is something wrong with one of the links, it will have an influence on the following study. Chinese students have got used to the passive learning of receiving knowledge from their teachers. They have been studying for exam, and as a result, students find it difficult to adapt themselves to the new situations when change comes in the university.*

The influence of examinations (problem 9, 10 &12) is also strong with students expecting to study for these; the final examination, however, is not related to the communicative activities in their current classrooms. Finally, Chinese students tend to use their L1 for group discussions even when the expectation is to use English in the task activities.

For the students in this study, the major challenges associated with using tasks appear to be the shortage of an English-speaking environment to practise English, time-consuming activities, limited English classes, and the traditional ways of teaching and learning in China.
When asked if they could offer any solutions for the problems, students put forward a range of suggestions. In Table 7.5, I group similar ideas together and then rank these suggestions according to the number of students who agreed with the suggestion, and the class in which they were based.

Table 7.5 Students’ Suggested Approaches to Increase Communicative Approaches for Teaching and Learning English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ suggested approaches</th>
<th>Number of students and class teacher (N= 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. More opportunities for and encouragement of, students to use English for communicative purposes.</td>
<td>9 (2-Gloria; 4-Susan; 3-Grace, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Class activities should include both form-focused activities and opportunities to use language.</td>
<td>7 (2-Grace’s students; 1-Susan; 1-Gloria, China; 2-of Molly; 1-Mary’s students New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The teacher should provide more scaffolding in the discussions (e.g. topic-related words and sentences) for successful communication and language extension.</td>
<td>3 (1-Susan; 1-Grace;1-Gloria, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students should learn language forms after class independently, not through lecture on language points from the textbook.</td>
<td>3 (all teachers, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. More test-oriented instructions from teacher.</td>
<td>3 (2-Gloria, China; 1-Molly, New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Compulsory homework and greater monitoring of what students have learned.</td>
<td>3 (2-students, Gloria, Susan’s class, China; 1-Molly, New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. More tests of oral English in all the English tests.</td>
<td>1 (Grace, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. More English classes.</td>
<td>1 (Susan, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Less form-focused activities in the classes (e.g. translation).</td>
<td>1 (Susan, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Encourage Chinese students to mix with students from other countries to avoid relying on speaking Chinese.</td>
<td>1 (Molly, New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The teacher should provide differentiated tasks for high-level and low-level students rather than giving them the same task.</td>
<td>1 (Molly, New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The teacher should make the purpose of studying English clear at the beginning of each class.</td>
<td>1 (Molly, New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The English teacher should learn Chinese from the students as well.</td>
<td>1 (Molly, New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A range of views was expressed by the students. The suggestions calling for teachers to provide more opportunities for students to use English for communicative purposes rank first in Table 7.5. Nine students in China, out of the total of twenty students, put forward this suggestion.
Students repeatedly called for an environment in which they could use English to communicate with each other. For instance, one of Grace’s students said:

*The objective factor is that we don’t have this English-speaking environment. It is difficult to create an environment by ourselves to practice English. I expect that my teacher can arrange more activities for us to use English in real communication. If teacher spend too much time on language points in the class, it will be boring and it will kill my interests.*

Similarly, the other student in Grace’s class explicitly stated that he expected his teacher to organize activities for them to communicate in English; not only in class but also after class. He said:

*I imagine that everybody dares to open their mouth to speak English and no one would laugh at you in this atmosphere. It is a matter of atmosphere. If anyone can create this kind of atmosphere, I believe that every student in the class will struggle to get the chance to speak English and no one wants to be left behind. I therefore hope that my teacher can help us to create this kind of environment.*

The second most highly rated suggestion, noted by seven students, was to attend to language forms along with the communicative activities. Four of these students were in the two Chinese universities and the other three were from the New Zealand institute. One of Susan’s students said, “I think communication is the most important thing, but grammar is also important, and I want to learn both of them in the class”. Three students in New Zealand (two students from Molly’s class and one student from Mary’s class) similarly said: “It is better to combine the eastern way and western way of teaching together. And the eastern way of teaching is the explicit instruction on grammar, while western way of teaching is the communicative activities.” Two of the students from Mary’s class praised her for giving explicit instruction on language forms; Mary has had teaching experience in both China and New Zealand. One of the
students said, “the native teachers are not as professional at passing on knowledge as Mary”;
while the other student said, “Mary is really good at passing on English knowledge, and this is
her advantage compared to the native teachers.” She continued by saying that Mary should
offer more opportunities to guide them to explore language knowledge by themselves.

The students in my study appeared to expect teachers to design activities to promote fluency
and accuracy to improve their communicative ability, as well as their knowledge of language
forms.

Contrary views were also expressed by three students in China who opposed teachers giving
lectures on language forms. They stated that it was unnecessary to explain the language points
of the reading passage in class, because they could learn these independently after class so that
more communicative activities could be included in the limited English classes.

A third suggestion from three students was for teachers to offer more help when students were
involved in the performance of the activities. For instance, teachers could provide accurate
topic-related words and phrases to assist them with their task performance, and extend their
language knowledge through using language in the activities. One of Susan’s students gave an
example; he described an activity in which they had role-played a United Nations Conference,
with students representing different countries and required to negotiate important issues. He
recalled that one of the representatives kept on saying: “I will fight against this country.” He
commented about this:

*If we don’t have the related words and grammar, I don’t know how to express ourselves.
That is why I said Susan should help us extend our words and grammar before or after the
practice so that we can convey our meanings clearly and appropriately. It is not still at my
own level after the discussion; it is not just limited to the words that I have already known.*
Another interesting suggestion from three students in Gloria and Molly’s classes, whose classroom activities were observed to have more tasks and task-like activities, was that they expected more test-oriented instructions from their teachers.

The students in this study appeared to expect their teachers to take on multifunctional roles: organiser of activities, facilitator, instructor, language advisor and monitor, as well as having a strict supervisory role. Three students stated that they still expected their teachers to give them homework and regularly check their assignments because they lacked self-discipline; one of these students was from the New Zealand institute and the other two were from the Chinese universities.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented students’ thinking about and attitudes towards tasks in the six teachers’ classes as expressed by them in post-lesson interviews. To sum up, students identified some tasks or task-like activities as their preferred classroom activities. The data suggest that their choice may be because of the following: they can learn English better through using English in these activities; they enjoy the communication with their classmates and teachers, and it provides them with opportunities to apply English in authentic contexts. Furthermore, they appear to realize that communication is of primary importance for language learning. The reasons they give are consistent with several task features noted in the three frameworks: tasks can promote language acquisition; tasks are engaging; tasks relate to the real world, and the primary focus of a task is on the meaning (Ellis, 2009; Willis and Willis, 2007). It appears, therefore, that students who had experienced some exposure to communicative tasks and activities have positive attitudes towards tasks; and that some task features are consistent with students’ thinking about learning and perceived needs.
Students also identified challenges in their classes with tasks or task-like activities. These include insufficient opportunities to practise English as a foreign language in a Chinese-speaking environment, the time-consuming nature of tasks and task-like activities, and the limited number of English classes, thereby limiting communicative opportunities. Furthermore, students’ long-established learning habits, that is, listening to their teachers’ explicit instruction regarding language forms, are also perceived as an obstacle to effective implementation of task-based activities.

Students proposed how these challenges could be surmounted. The most consistent solution, it is suggested, is to have more opportunities to use language to communicate in an encouraging and authentic environment created by their teachers, thereby supporting an argument for greater inclusion of tasks. Students in both China and New Zealand identified the environment as an influence on their language learning. In the New Zealand context, students confirmed the role of the environment in facilitating language learning; whereas students in China complained about the lack of an English-speaking environment. In this context, tasks might go some way towards providing opportunities to use the target language for communicative purposes.

The second suggestion is concerned with the relationship between tasks and the form-focused activities. Students in both contexts prefer a combination of both tasks and form-focused activities in their classrooms. This suggests that a task-supported environment might be optimum for these students. Additionally, students identified the need for teachers to have diverse roles such as being an activity organiser, a facilitator, an instructor, a monitor and a language advisor. This suggests that these students perceive their teacher as both a facilitator (of tasks) and a teacher (of grammar).

In the next chapter, I discuss the findings that have been presented in this and the previous two chapters.
Chapter 8 Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has investigated six teachers’ beliefs and practices related to tasks in New Zealand and China, and twenty Chinese as L1 students’ attitudes towards tasks in these two contexts. This chapter discusses the findings of the study, reported in Chapters 5 to 7, in relation to previous pertinent literature and the four questions that guided the study:

1. What do the six teachers know, understand and believe about using tasks in the two contexts: China and New Zealand?

2. In what ways do the six teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practices?

3. Which factors lead to observed differences between the teachers’ beliefs and practices in the two contexts?

4. What are Chinese students’ attitudes towards different tasks in both China and New Zealand?

Firstly, I summarise the similarities and differences between the six teachers’ beliefs and practices related to tasks in the two contexts, and then I discuss the factors influencing these teachers’ beliefs and practices in the two contexts. Finally, I discuss the students’ self-reported attitudes towards different tasks in the two contexts.

8.2 The Six Teachers’ Beliefs Related to Tasks

This section focuses on the first research question: What do the six teachers know, understand and believe about using tasks in the two contexts, China and New Zealand? The discussion of teachers’ beliefs related to tasks is based on the interview data that collected teachers’ views about task definitions, the task criteria and theories of TBLT, and the examples given by them.
in the interviews of tasks they have used. I compare the similarities and differences concerning teachers’ beliefs and reported practices in the two contexts.

It was apparent that the six teachers had different levels of knowledge about how to define a task as understood within TBLT and the criteria that may distinguish a task from a communicative activity; these levels of knowledge ranged from well-developed to minimal. Overall, the teachers in New Zealand appeared to have more knowledge about tasks, in theory and practice, compared with the teachers in China. There were, however, levels of certainty about task definitions and criteria among all the teachers in my study.

Mary, a teacher in the New Zealand context, clearly articulated knowledge of several task criteria which were consistent with those proposed by Ellis (2009b) and Willis and Willis (2007), such as having a primary focus on meaning, a clearly defined outcome, tasks as motivating and engaging, and students depending on their own resources when completing the tasks. She appeared to be more aware of TBLT theories than the other teachers. However, even though the other two teachers in New Zealand admitted that they were not sure about the definition of a task, they were able to express some understandings about, and preferences for, using tasks. Molly spoke about information-gap tasks. Rachel did not mention any criteria related to tasks, but she mentioned that she used tasks to focus on form, which means that she was aware of the way used to deal with language forms in TBLT. Although her reported example of focus on form was in line with the definition in the literature (e.g., Long, 2001), her observed class did not follow this principle. Rather, she attended to pre-planned language forms before task performance. For these New Zealand teachers, TBLT appeared to be more like an umbrella term which includes a package of ideas and techniques from which they might draw. This is similar to what was observed by Andon (2009) who found that “teachers treat it as a collection of principle and techniques that can be drawn on flexibly” (p. 204). Unlike the teachers in New Zealand, who discussed their preferences about, or related to, tasks using terms
such as information-gap and focus on form as well as arguing that they drew on some of the
task criteria, the teachers in China only gave general descriptions of what they understood to
be tasks instead of relating to specific criteria. Nevertheless, Grace said that tasks should play
a key role in the classroom to promote communication. Gloria reported that, when her students
were given a task to perform, after that they had to present the result (outcome) of the task,
such as presenting their discussion conclusions at the end of the task in a presentation. She
generally emphasised that there must be an outcome without articulating this as a criterion.

The teachers in the Chinese context reported positive attitudes towards concepts congruent with
TBLT even though they seemed to have limited knowledge about TBLT compared to the
teachers in New Zealand. Grace claimed that tasks should play a leading role in language
classrooms, and Gloria emphasised that she had been exploring tasks for many years.
Moreover, neither of them agreed with some of the factors preventing the implementation of
TBLT in Asian countries, articulated in the literature, such as pressure from exams and lack of
ability of non-native teachers to implement tasks (Butler, 2011; Lai, 2015; Deng & Carless,
2009; Littlewood, 2007). They claimed that they have excellent students who were capable of
passing the College English Examinations. Grace pointed out that the updated online materials
from the L1 speakers, along with the use of technology, can assist non-L1 English teachers in
task implementation. Gloria said that a thorough preparation of the topics by non-L1 English
teachers would be conducive to task implementation although she admitted that it was a
challenge to give feedback especially for the questions arising spontaneously from the
communication. Susan also fully supported TBLT, claiming she used TBLT in her classes, and
that the textbooks provided her with plenty of ‘tasks’. However, these ‘tasks’ claimed by Susan
were not real tasks because she had misunderstandings about them. She equated the general
activities suggested in the books with tasks. In the New Zealand context, Mary seemed to be
more enthusiastic about TBLT compared to the other two New Zealand teachers and claimed that she designed her classroom activities around tasks.

Five of the interviewed teachers provided examples of classroom activities which seemed to correspond to task criteria as articulated in the three frameworks (Ellis, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis 2007). The three New Zealand teachers offered examples of tasks based on their descriptions of task in theory: Molly and Mary described information-gap tasks they had used in their classes and Rachel explained that she used tasks to focus on form, and their examples appeared to meet task criteria (refer to Sections 5.2.4; 5.3.4; 5.4.4). In the Chinese context, Grace provided examples to illustrate her theoretical understanding of task by describing three activities that seemed to correspond to the task criteria (refer to Section 6.2.4). Gloria argued that the examples offered by Ellis in a lecture given at her university were not suitable for her college students; the examples seemed to be more appropriate for beginners or for students in primary and secondary schools. Gloria noted that she designed tasks, such as a debate for her college students, who are advanced language learners.

Susan, in China, explained that all the examples she used in classroom were from the textbooks and its courseware (mainly PowerPoint documents) downloaded from the textbook-based website. She did, however, appear to have some misunderstandings about tasks as, while reporting that she used ‘tasks’ from her textbooks and its accompanying courseware, she chose only activities rather than real tasks (refer to Section 6.4.2). The courseware she displayed in classes included various activities on PowerPoint such as a role-play, matching games, and pair discussions which were not labelled as” ‘tasks’. However, when I read the whole PowerPoint she gave to me, I noticed that she did not choose three of the activities in this Power Point which appeared to be consistent with the task criteria. These three activities were: 1) to rank a list of jobs and put them in order from the most stressful to the least and discuss the reasons in groups, an activity named as Group Work on PowerPoint; 2) to sell something to their partners
and report the outcome; this one is given the name of Acting it Out on PowerPoint; 3) to design a handbook in groups about job application skills for freshmen; this activity was called Oral Assignment on PowerPoint. These three activities were also on Susan’s PowerPoint but were not selected by her to be used in her classes. The reasons that she did not choose these highly task-like activities may be because of Susan’s misunderstandings about tasks. She equated general activities such as listening exercises, spoken activities, summary of each paragraph of a text, and writing activities in classes with ‘tasks’. She assumed that all these general activities, that is, ‘tasks’, in her opinion, were only suitable for advanced language learners. She would only focus on expressing language points from the textbook for the lower level students rather than giving so-called tasks to her students.

Susan’s reason for not choosing to implement these three task-like activities may also be because of the limited class time that she emphasised as a barrier to task implementation. In addition, her emphasis on language forms led her to choose activities which demanded less time and incorporated more targeted language forms. For instance, she chose the activity of role playing on PowerPoint where students are required to sell things to each other using the given phrases, but then omitted the task-like activity that required students to create a dialogue that could be used to sell anything to their partners without given phrases.

The findings presented above are congruent with findings by East (2015) who, referring to recent studies on teachers’ perspectives by Andon and Eckerth (2009), Carless (2007, 2009), East (2012b), Van den Branden (2006, 2009); and Van den Branden, Van Gorp and Verhelst (2009), concluded that teachers “hold a range of interpretations and understandings of TBLT”, which range from relatively comprehensive descriptions of TBLT theories to limited explanations (p. 415). My findings also suggest that, although the Chinese teachers appeared to have positive attitudes towards tasks, they seemed to be uncertain about the definition of tasks and task criteria. Five teachers (apart from Susan) could describe examples that appeared
to be consistent with the task criteria (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). In the following section, the six teachers’ practices related to task use are discussed.

8.3 The Six Teachers’ Practices Related to Tasks in the Two Contexts

This section addresses the second research question: In what ways do the six teachers integrate the core characteristics of tasks into their practices? In this section I discuss the similarities and differences apparent in the six teachers’ implementation of tasks, based on observation data.

My findings show that there was divergence between teachers’ beliefs about tasks and their practices. Also, there were differences between the two contexts (New Zealand and China) in the approaches of integrating tasks into their classes. However, the six teachers were similar in the following aspects: it seemed that tasks were used with other approaches and activities; tasks or task-like activities, when used, were mostly spoken activities employed to promote fluency and communicative proficiency, tasks were adapted to fit into teachers’ own approaches. These aspects are described below.

1) Divergence between teachers’ beliefs and practices

A comparison of data from the interviews and the classroom observations made it evident that there was divergence between teachers’ expressed understandings and their practices. Despite the fact that some understanding of tasks and task criteria were evident in the teachers’ discourse and their apparently positive views on using tasks, a small number of activities were observed in three teachers’ classes in the two contexts which, according to the key criteria, could be judged as tasks.

Divergence was evident in the three teachers’ classes in New Zealand: what they claimed they did regarding task use was not apparent in the observed lessons, and their practices were more consistent with a traditional CLT/PPP approach. For instance, Mary’s description of ‘input’
and ‘outcome’ was similar to ‘presentation’ and ‘production’ in the communicative approach (refer to Section 5.2.4). Rachel had asserted in her interview that she definitely used tasks as a means of focusing on form, but this was not observed in her practice. Her ‘tasks’ instead appeared to be at the final stage of a series of communicative activities, but they were intended to practise the pre-planned language forms owing to her misunderstandings about tasks. Molly claimed that she used a lot of information-gap tasks. However, only one information-gap task-like activity was observed in her classes alongside other communicative activities.

Although the teachers’ descriptions of task examples seemed to demonstrate an apparent enthusiasm for using tasks, in practice (at least in the lessons observed for this study) they were less enthusiastic about using tasks. Three reasons may account for this mismatch. Firstly, all the three teachers had been trained to use CLT rather than TBLT in their education programmes. For example, both Mary and Rachel mentioned that CLT had had a great influence on them - Mary, when she was doing her master’s degree, and Rachel, while she was completing her CELTA course. There is a substantial body of research that suggests that teachers’ education can exert an influence on teachers’ cognitions (e.g., Borg, 2011; 2015; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; East 2014a; 2014b; Farrell& Ives, 2015). These three teachers claimed that their general approach was to promote communication among students; Mary also claimed that she used a task-based approach in her classes in addition to this general approach, although her observed classes appeared to follow a CLT model. Teachers, it appeared, had not learned about TBLT during their teacher education; they reported that they learned about TBLT through using textbooks (Molly), attending conferences and reading recently published articles (Rachel and Mary); and also through her own reflections on these (Mary).

Secondly, the mismatch was possibly because of similarities between the CLT model that they had been exposed to during their teacher education and TBLT. TBLT is noted as a development of CLT (Butler, 2011; East, 2015; Littlewood, 2012; Nunan, 2004). Borg (2011) argues that
teachers are more likely to incorporate new approaches with old ones, especially if there are similarities between their initial teacher education approaches and the new approaches. Mary, in New Zealand, claimed that she did not see many differences between CLT and TBLT. The observed mismatch between their reported use of tasks and their practices may also be because the classroom observations were limited and Molly and Rachel may have used tasks in other classes that were not observed.

For the three teachers in China, there were both divergence and convergence between the tasks they claimed they used and their observed classroom practices. Susan had demonstrated misunderstanding about tasks, and Grace and Gloria claimed to use tasks alongside other approaches. For Susan there was an apparent divergence between what she claimed as task-based classes and an absence of tasks in her practices. She did not choose any tasks from the textbooks and courseware, despite stating that she picked tasks from the courseware, owing to her misunderstandings about the nature of tasks. Grace’s and Gloria’s observed classroom practices appeared to be consistent with their claims. Grace claimed she used an eclectic approach in her classrooms while admitting that tasks should play a crucial role in her classes. Gloria said that she did not use any specific approach exclusively as long as the approach she was using engaged her students. Their classes were observed to have the use of tasks or task-like activities along with other approaches. These two teachers’ flexibility in language approaches may have been influenced by the traditional Chinese culture in education which emphasises the employment of various approaches based on different students’ needs.

My findings about the inconsistency between teachers’ beliefs and practices related to tasks in both contexts are similar to those reported by Carless (2009), Deng and Carless (2009), Iwashita & Li, (2012), Zhang (2007), Zhang & Hu (2010) and Zheng & Borg (2014). In these studies, although the participating teachers’ claimed that they used tasks, the classroom activities observed did not demonstrate features of what are considered to be tasks. East (2018)
similarly reports differences between task-in-theory and task-in-action for six pre-service teachers’ self-reported tasks in New Zealand. Phipps and Borg (2007) note that teachers are under the influence of a mixture of beliefs once they face the day-to-day realities of actual classrooms and they make decisions according to practical and contextual realities. These factors are discussed in detail in Section 8.4.

2) Integrating tasks or task-like activities into other approaches

Previous researchers have argued that tasks in TBLT serve not only as major components but also as important units around which a course may be organized (e.g., Ellis, 2003; Littlewood, 2007). For the six teachers in my study, tasks or task-like activities were only one part of a combination of activities included in their classroom practices. Andon (2009) also found that no teacher participants adopted TBLT alone in their classrooms. Instead, they used tasks alongside other techniques and activities.

Major differences were observed in how teachers in the two contexts integrated tasks with other approaches. In China, two teachers (Susan and Grace) were observed to integrate mini spoken task-like activities into a series of listening activities, but only in their listening and speaking classes. Their reading and writing classes were still teacher-dominated classes with the focus on language forms from the textbooks. This finding is in line with the study by Peng (2018) who investigated eight teachers’ cognitions and practices related to TBLT at tertiary level in China (these were teachers of Chinese as a second language). Peng found that eight teachers use “a combination of the traditional approach and TBLT, with the traditional approach predominating” (p. 197). However, the three teachers in New Zealand were observed to use tasks or task-like activities in their CLT oriented classrooms in their reading and writing classes as well as in their listening and speaking classes.
To be specific, in two of the Chinese teachers’ classes (Grace and Susan), one task-like activity was a warm-up activity, while the other task-like activity was selected from the courseware of a web-based textbook, which is supplied to listening and speaking classes to practise oral English as a part of main classroom activities. Furthermore, the reading and writing classes of these two teachers appeared to be teacher-dominated, focusing on language points from the reading passages in the textbook and its courseware. Susan’s reading and writing class was, as Hu (2002a) described, a traditional teacher-dominated class in which teachers mainly analysed texts sentence by sentence, explaining and exemplifying language points, paraphrasing sentences, making sentences with new words and so on by displaying the courseware downloaded from its web-based textbooks in the classes. Likewise, Grace’s reading and writing classes were teacher-dominated, working through language points from the text, even though teacher-student interactions occurred. The main focus of the two teachers’ classes was clearly not on meaning.

One teacher (Gloria) in China, however, was observed to implement a task deliberately into her reading and writing class with a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities similar to teachers in New Zealand. The task was a debate on whether students should drive, or not drive, a car in China. The debate related to the topic of the reading passage (*smart cars*) in the textbook and occurred as a major activity in her reading and writing class. This task was preceded by a whole-class discussion of the vocabulary related to the topic, and free writing on this topic; the task was then followed by a speed reading activity.

Different from the teachers in China, all three teachers in New Zealand used tasks or task-like activities within their CLT oriented classrooms. Both Mary and Rachel were observed to follow the procedures of PPP with tasks, or task-like activities, observed in this process. Furthermore, the tasks or task-like activities were a part of a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing
activities even though they classified their classes into listening and speaking, and reading and writing.

It is evident from the observations that teachers in both contexts modified tasks to “make them fit more comfortably with their own preferred teaching styles” (East, 2015, p. 10). The New Zealand teachers appeared to implement tasks and task-like activities into their CLT classrooms, whereas tasks or task-like activities were embedded in two of the Chinese teachers’ listening and speaking classes as an opportunity to practise spoken English alongside the teacher-fronted traditional reading and writing classes. Zheng and Adamson (2003) also observed that teachers tend to expand their repertoire of language teaching approaches rather than rejecting previous approaches (p. 335).

3) Usage of speaking tasks or task-like activities in both contexts

When all the six teachers seemed to use tasks or task-like activities, these were essentially speaking tasks or task-like activities used to promote students communicative proficiency. Also, two teachers in New Zealand designed speaking tasks or task-like activities for students to practise pre-determined language as well. Mary designed spoken task-like activities to target specific language points which had previously been presented by her. Rachel presented pre-planned new words or phrases before and after one of the spoken task or task-like activities, to deliberately pre-teach language forms.

Two teachers in China appeared to use task-like activities to only practise oral English in the listening and speaking classes independently, and these classes were not related to the teacher-dominated reading and writing classes which were devoted to form-focused activities. Ho (2004) similarly found that, when investigating the implementation of CLT in East Asia, communicative activities were provided as additional elements to give learners opportunities
to practise spoken English. Only one teacher (Gloria) in China used a debate task in her reading and writing class which was different from the other two teachers.

The six teachers preferred to use tasks or task-like activities in which students were involved in meaningful interactive activities. East (2017) similarly observed that teachers embraced TBLT ideas and concepts, “in particular around more meaning-and fluency-focused work and promoting spoken communicative proficiency” (p. 421). This finding also echoes the findings by Wang (2009) who investigated the process of tertiary English language teaching and learning experienced by EFL and ESL teachers as well as their students in the same two contexts and concluded that teaching methodology in the Chinese context is teacher-centred and textbook-oriented, but with some tasks focusing on communication.

Six teachers’ practices of using speaking tasks or task-like activities to promote communication in both contexts seem to be related broadly to CLT and to the prominence of communicative ideas rather than being informed by TBLT theory (Littlewood, 2013). Especially, all three of the New Zealand teachers emphasised that their general approach was to promote communication among their students, which they had learned from their pre-service education programme focusing on CLT.

4) Adaptation of tasks

Another similarity was that all the teachers in the New Zealand context made adaptations to their task-like activities or task practices. For instance, the task-like activities in two New Zealand teachers’ classes (Molly and Mary) did not have a non-linguistic outcome because they both asked students to compose an essay on the topics they had discussed. The lack of a defined non-linguistic outcome may be due to either course demands or misunderstanding of what constitutes an outcome. Molly, for example, when asked why there was no outcome during the class break, stated that the students would write about their discussions for the next
lesson, as one of the objectives of the course was to write a composition on comparison and contrast. Similarly, Mary asked her students to write an essay based on their group discussion. One of the teachers in China, Susan, was also observed to adapt tasks. Susan’s task-like activity, as with Molly and Mary, was not observed to have an outcome. It appeared that teachers in my study did not put much emphasis on an outcome as understood within the theory of TBLT or even had misunderstanding about what an outcome was. They assumed that the outcome can be linguistic in that they regarded ‘outcomes’ as an essay or a summary of the reading passage based on the needs of their academic course. Teachers may find it difficult to understand how a non-linguistic outcome fits into a language teaching classroom. Having a non-linguistic outcome is one of the key criteria that distinguish TBLT from the traditional approaches which has a major focus on teaching language forms. Long (2015) also pointed out that TBLT is so fundamentally different from a traditional approach, therefore, to understand this non-linguistic outcome is to challenge teachers’ deep-rooted traditional ideas of teaching language in their classrooms. In addition, there appeared to be a tension between this task criterion and the demands of their reading and writing courses which expected students to produce an essay as the last stage. As a result, it seemed that teachers assumed that the essay was the task outcome, which, however, is not the sort of outcome anticipated in task criteria (Ellis, 2009b).

In terms of the absence of non-linguistic outcome at the end of tasks, my finding is consistent with the study by Zheng and Borg (2014). They found that tasks with non-linguistic outcomes were not evident when teachers of English in the three Chinese secondary schools implemented tasks. Their findings suggested that tasks are seen as a synonym for communicative activities because of teachers’ narrow understandings of what constitutes tasks. They pointed out that teachers’ beliefs about grammar and its place in teaching sequences were a challenge to task implementation. It is also similar to Peng’s (2018) finding in the sense that a clearly defined
outcome was not mentioned in any of the teachers’ interviews when asked about their beliefs regarding task criteria. However, my finding regarding outcomes is different to Erlam (2016). Erlam looked at a group of primary and secondary school languages teachers’ understanding of a task during a year-long professional learning and development programme in New Zealand in which teachers had been introduced to TBLT in a second language acquisition pedagogy course. Erlam found that teachers believed that the most obvious feature of a language task was that a task had an outcome, goal or objective. She concluded that this was because teachers needed to engage their students by setting a goal for the tasks, and that the enjoyable learning process encouraged their students to continue their study of the foreign language. Furthermore, teachers’ clearer understanding of outcomes may also be attributed to the Professional Learning and Development programme in New Zealand which had a dedicated focus on task use (East, 2012b).

To conclude, in my study a mismatch was found between teachers’ beliefs and practices. In both contexts (China and New Zealand), tasks were integrated into other approaches and techniques and were implemented together with ideas and activities from a number of approaches instead of adopting TBLT as a complete approach. Two of the teachers (except Gloria) in China employed task-like activities to practise oral English in the listening and speaking classes alongside the teacher-fronted traditional reading and writing classes, whereas the New Zealand teachers integrated tasks or task-like activities into their CLT oriented classes via a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Borg (2015) argues that “mismatches between teachers’ beliefs and practices should not be a focus of criticism; rather, they present exciting opportunities for deeper explorations of teachers, their cognitions, their teaching, and the contexts they work in” (p. 167). The use of tasks within the teachers’ own preferred approach and their adaptations are consistent with East’s (2015) observation that “teachers made context-specific adaptations to tasks to align them more closely to their own
beliefs about, and understandings of, effective pedagogy” (p. 10). Similarly, Carless (2004) points out that “teachers mould innovations to their own abilities, beliefs and experiences; the immediate school context; and the wider sociocultural environment” (p. 659). Also, Willis and Willis (2007) suggest that “teachers who begin with the notion that tasks should be central to teaching then go on to refine an approach which fits their own classrooms and their own situations” (p. 1). Therefore, it is valuable to explore the reasons for divergence such as those caused by school context, social environment and teachers’ own situations to enhance our understanding of teachers’ cognitions and practices. The factors that influence teachers’ perspectives and practices are discussed in the following section.

8.4 The Factors that Influence Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices

As described above, there are both similarities and differences between teachers’ task implementation in the two contexts; however, teachers in the same contexts shared similarities in their task implementation: that is, the three teachers in New Zealand used tasks or task-like activities within an overarching CLT approach, while two teachers in China applied task-like activities in their listening and speaking classes but maintained teacher-fronted approaches for reading and writing classes. Context, therefore, seems to play an important role in task implementation. This is consistent with the literature that suggests that TBLT has been regarded as a highly context bound approach (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2009; East, 2012b; Littlewood, 2007), with a number of contextual factors identified in different countries, as summarised in the review of the literature, Section 3.3. My study has identified several similar issues to those reported in the literature; these include the use of textbooks, students’ established learning habits, influence of examinations, and traditional education norms (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2004; Deng & Carless, 2010; Ellis, 2015; Littlewood, 2007; Van Den Branden, 2006). However, it should be acknowledged that it is difficult to uncover factors that influence teachers’ beliefs and practices as this is largely tacit knowledge.
1) Influence of textbooks

The first factor claimed by the three Chinese teachers to influence task implementation is the use of textbooks. Researchers have found that teachers in China rely on textbooks. This constrains them in using tasks (Carless, 2003; Chen, 2008; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007). The three Chinese teachers in this study, however, claimed that textbooks, and their associated multimedia and web-based resources, were supportive for them when it came to using tasks. Only one teacher (Grace) pointed out that the reading and writing textbooks constrained her in task implementation. In contrast, the three teachers in New Zealand claimed that their current textbooks are “a hindrance” or “useless materials” for their implementation of tasks.

It seems that, when they did try to use tasks, the three New Zealand teachers designed tasks or task-like activities themselves rather than relying on the textbooks. Unlike the teachers in China, the teachers in New Zealand appeared to refer only to the teaching objectives of each unit of the textbooks rather than closely following the content of the textbooks. Two teachers (Mary and Molly), teaching the same level of students, chose different reading and listening materials from Internet resources and designed task-like activities with these materials rather than directly using the passages from their textbooks. However, these objectives of each unit seemed to prevent them from using real tasks. During the classes that were observed, the two teachers focused on achieving the final goal of writing comparison and contrast essays, which was the objective of one unit of their textbooks. Their task-like activities failed to satisfy one of the task criteria, that is, to have an outcome. The two teachers asked their students to write an essay at the end of the activity and regarded this essay as the outcome of the task. There appeared to be a tension between the task criteria of having a non-linguistic outcome and objective of their reading and writing courses which expected students to produce an essay. Another teacher, Rachel, who was not observed to use textbooks and designed a series of
activities to target a specific language form based on students’ problems, was found to integrate tasks into her CLT classes. Based on this finding, the textbooks seemed to prevent two teachers from using tasks in their classrooms.

Mary, who was once an English teacher in China, commented that textbooks became “useless” when she moved to New Zealand because they did not support her in the way that she wanted to teach, that is, using tasks in her classes. Furthermore, the reading and listening materials did not arouse students’ interests, while the resources in the textbooks seemed to be difficult for them. She said that she used to be “textbook-driven” in language teaching in China owing to the examinations based on the textbook, but that the change of context, that is, moving from China to New Zealand, had changed her attitude towards textbooks. It would appear, therefore, that textbooks are a contextual factor which influence teachers’ task implementation in China, but not so much in New Zealand according to Mary’s statement.

Unlike the New Zealand teachers, the teachers in China relied on textbooks to a greater extent. For Susan, the textbook was the authority; similarly for Gloria and Grace, the textbook seemed to be the foundation stone on which they designed their tasks. Gloria used all these resources creatively and selectively, while Grace referred to the topics in some units from the textbooks. Nonetheless, the reading and writing textbooks did appear to prevent Grace’s task implementation because, as she commented, “it was difficult to design tasks based on certain topics [of the reading passages] from [the reading and writing] textbooks.”

Susan regarded the textbooks and attendant courseware as the authority, claiming that she selected ‘tasks’ directly from the textbook’s courseware. The courseware includes PowerPoint documents of the classroom activities for both listening and speaking classes and reading and writing classes. Courseware activities are listening exercises (listening to do multiple choice or filling in the blanks, etc.); spoken activities (pair discussion, group discussion and role plays,
etc.) for the listening and speaking classes; and pre-reading activities (watching movie clips and discussion of topic-related questions, etc.); structure analysis; language forms; and summary of the reading passages and writing activities for the reading and writing classes. Among all these activities, three activities were found to be in line with the three task frameworks (East, 2012b), but the activities were given titles without using the word “task” on the PowerPoint. Susan did not choose these three task-like activities, which were ranking lists of jobs and reaching an agreement on the choices in groups; making a dialogue and trying to sell something to their partners, and designing a handbook about job application skills for the freshmen in groups. Susan was observed to select other listening, speaking, reading and writing activities for her classes, and it seemed that she equated all these activities with tasks. Susan’s reason for not choosing these three task-like activities may be because of the limited class time that she emphasised as a barrier to task implementation. Also, her emphasis on language forms led her to choose activities which demanded less time and incorporated more targeted language forms. East (2012a) also found that in some cases task was interpreted as simply a synonym for “activity”.

Grace designed task-like activity using the topic of the first unit of the textbook which was about fame and celebrities. She designed a celebrity game which served as a warm-up activity for the later listening and speaking activities in her listening and speaking classes (refer to Section 6.2.3). Another task Grace described was based on another topic from a unit of the textbook about the five symbols of America which are the Statue of Liberty, Baby Dolls, American Gothic, Buffalo Nickel and Uncle Sam. Building on the unit, her students were asked to interview foreign students on the campus and to make a video about the symbols of their own countries.

Gloria’s approach to using textbooks, however, differed greatly from the traditional attitudes towards textbooks as reported in the literature (Hu, 2005a; Wang, 2009). She designed tasks
herself, building on the theme of the reading passages from the textbook in the reading and writing class. During this class, I also observed her making use of the courseware attached to the textbook downloaded from its supporting multimedia system. She referred to only one of the warm-up questions on one PowerPoint slide, which she turned into a debate (refer to Section 6.3.3). The title of the unit was Smart Cars, and one of the warm-up questions was “If you could afford a car, would you buy one?” She changed it into a debate rather than merely getting students to answer this question. She did not spend much class time on the expression of the new words and phrases, as Susan and Grace had done, but devoted most of the time to this debate task.

From the observed classes it could be seen that textbooks exerted influence on the three Chinese teachers’ task implementation to different extents: Grace designed task-like activities based on the topics of the passages from the texts while Gloria referred to the textbooks and courseware to design real tasks. Susan failed to choose tasks from the textbooks even though she claimed that she did do this. The following factors may account for the influence of textbooks on the three teachers in China.

Firstly, language study in Chinese colleges has been, for a long time, guided by the centralized curriculum, and the textbooks used by teachers. The teachers in this study reported they used *New Horizon English* (Zheng, 2008) and *College English Integrated Course* (Li, 2011), which embodies the curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education. Secondly, textbooks are widely used in all subjects from primary school in the Chinese education system. Students study these textbooks before and after class because they are the basis of their examinations (Hu, 2003). Moreover, books are considered by people in China as the carrier of knowledge (Hu, 2003; Li, 2002), and, in the words of Li (2002), “knowledge is believed to reside in the teacher-expert and authority-textbook: teachers use textbooks as a source to prepare lessons, organize classroom activities, systematically transmit the knowledge, and assess students’ learning
outcomes” (p. 11). The traditional guiding role of the textbooks in the Chinese educational system may explain why Susan still adhered to the use of textbooks and its courseware, and why she selected what she called “tasks” from the textbooks. Susan also pointed out that she needed to explain the language points from the textbooks to cater to her students’ needs to pass the final examinations.

Gloria’s and Grace’s implementation of tasks and task-like activities differed from Susan’s, which may be attributed to the use of the new form of textbooks compiled on the basis of the new college English curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2017). The new curriculum has called for a dramatic shift of language teaching philosophy, from a teacher-dominated practice to a student-centred approach, by taking advantage of network technology to cultivate students’ ability to use language, to improve their autonomous learning and to cater to individualized teaching. The new college English curriculum has also suggested that teachers use approaches based on tasks, cooperation, projects and exploration, etc., and also to adopt the newest teaching approaches in their practice to achieve the shift from teacher-dominated to student-centred. The textbooks did not claim, however, that they are task-based; they claimed to be compiled on the basis of the curriculum, and to help the teachers to realize the change from a teacher-dominated approach to a student-centred approach.

The current textbooks used by the three teachers in China are therefore dramatically different from the traditional textbooks. Both of the two sets of textbooks they used consisted of paper textbooks, CDs and related websites. The website is based on the topic of each unit of the textbooks and other language learning resources. Students can also download apps of the textbooks, which include all the language points with passages, and audio files, from the textbooks, from the Internet onto their mobile phone. Students’ learning situations, assignments and achievements can be recorded automatically on the website so that teachers can supervise and offer immediate feedback, or upload more exercises and quizzes for their students. It is a
highly interactive website providing a platform on which students can communicate with their classmates and teachers.

Furthermore, all the textbooks and websites have been updated since their first editions, although the courseware used by Susan in the observed classes was still from the first edition. These textbooks have been updated to third editions, which enable teachers to upload courseware of their own design to the textbook related website, and to share their courseware with other teachers.

These various language carriers such as websites, CDs and Apps have extended the original paper textbooks to provide both students and teachers with more resources compared to the one paper textbook previously available. Teachers now have increased autonomy over the use of the variety of resources provided by the web and multimedia-based textbooks. All three teachers were observed to make decisions as to what should be incorporated into their classroom activities, based on these various resources, because it would be impossible to include all in their limited class time. Furthermore, both Gloria and Grace pointed out that students could access the language points easily through the websites and apps, and so there was no need to focus excessively on this aspect during class. As a result, teachers could devote more time to communicative activities and tasks. Gloria and Grace, unlike Susan, appeared to take advantage of the freedom and inspiration provided by the supporting role of the technology and the varied and plentiful teaching resources to design tasks and integrate them into their own classes.

Therefore, even though there is still a culture and tradition of reliance on textbooks for the Chinese teachers, they now are given a considerable number of resources to choose from the web-based textbooks, providing greater freedom in the selection of their classroom activities, which includes tasks. The web-based textbooks also allow students to learn language forms
online through the adoption of digital equipment. The use of web-based textbooks can hence play a facilitating role in task implementation for the Chinese teachers, whereas the textbooks also constrained the teachers to use tasks for they had to design tasks according to the topic of each unit in the textbooks. As for the New Zealand teachers, my findings seem to suggest that textbooks are a barrier for their task implementation (but that the New Zealand teachers are not as bound by textbook use as those in China).

2) Students learning habits and needs

The second influencing factor from my study appears to be related to learning cultures and Chinese students’ learning habits. Firstly, two teachers (Susan and Grace) in China pointed out that they explained language points from the textbooks to cater to perceived students’ needs and habits for learning language forms as presented in the textbook. Grace stated that her students believed that the language points were items of knowledge they could take home with them. However, unlike Grace and Susan, Gloria viewed students’ habits and needs from a different perspective. She said that students had different expectations for their college study from their teacher-dominated and examination-oriented learning in high school. Therefore, rather than catering to students’ long-established habits of receiving knowledge from teachers, Gloria pointed out that she preferred a different approach by engaging her students in using language to communicate. Secondly, two teachers, Grace in China and Molly in New Zealand, felt that teachers need to persuade students to change long-established learning habits because they have become used to a teacher-dominated approach. Earlier studies (Adams & Newton, 2009; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; McDonough, 2004; Pham, 2007) have similarly suggested that students may not be comfortable with TBLT, seen as a new approach, because in many Asian countries they are used to being given information by their teachers in a traditional teacher-dominated class.
Students in my study appeared to both negatively and positively influence teachers’ implementation of tasks. Both teachers and students mentioned that students negatively impacted teachers’ practices in implementing tasks because of their learning habits. Students, however, can also encourage teachers to use tasks inside their classrooms. Molly, in New Zealand, and Susan, in China, emphasised that their students’ responses played a key role in shaping their current language teaching approach. All the teachers in my study agreed that tasks can motivate and engage students in language learning, as reported also in earlier literature (Van den Branden, 2009). In the words of East (2017), “teachers drawing on TBLT ideas report increased confidence, enjoyment and motivation among learners” (p. 421). Ellis (2015) also points out that “the so-called passive nature of Asian students is not a reason for rejecting TBLT.” TBLT can be applied to “re-socialize the Asian students” because “Asian students are not inherently passive but may only appear to be so because they have been socialized into passivity in the classroom” (p. 384).

3) Influence of examinations

The third factor is the influence of examinations. Previous studies have argued that the examination system in China is incompatible with task implementation and that the examination system is the major obstacle in task implementation in schools (Butler, 2011; Deng & Carless, 2009; Littlewood, 2007). My study nonetheless suggests that it is not an important factor in task implementation since only one teacher (Susan) in China mentioned that examinations had a negative influence on her task implementation; the other two Chinese teachers rejected the argument.

Gloria and Grace did not regard examinations as a hindrance because their students were sufficiently proficient to pass the band-four and band-six college English examinations. Both Gloria and Grace in China stated that the objective of English teaching and learning was to
promote students’ ability to use language and that their students were capable enough to pass the college English examination. They supported their argument by saying that their universities were privileged to be able to recruit excellent students. Susan differed, however. She seemed to adhere to the traditional opinion that her students’ needed to learn the language forms from the textbook to get prepared for the final examination even though her students were capable of passing the College English Examination as elite students in the so-called ‘experiment’ class (this was a class that was different from the other ordinary classes as the students were selected based on their high marks from an examination organized by their university). Susan’s beliefs seemed to echo the findings by Zheng and Borg (2014) that Chinese teachers’ deep-rooted beliefs about grammar teaching would act as a challenge to the implementation of tasks. However, this was not observed in the other two teachers.

4) The influence of teachers’ reflections, their personalities and education on using tasks in their practice.

The Chinese teachers’ reflective practices and personalities seemed to play a role in whether, and how, they used tasks. Gloria emphasised that it was the continuous reflection on her own efforts that led her to explore TBLT in practice. Similarly, Grace argued that it was her own personality which played a decisive role in the task implementation. Mary in New Zealand also said she felt her reflection on her practices exerted the greatest influence on what she did in class, although she said she thought pre-service education programmes seemed to influence her task implementation. The other two teachers’ practices related to tasks reflected the fact that pre-service education exerted greater influence on them compared to the other influences. This is in line with arguments in the literature (Borg; 2011; Caboroglu & Roberts, 2000; East, 2014a; 2014b; Farrell & Ives, 2015) that reflective practices can lead to changes in teachers’ beliefs.
Gloria was observed to use tasks in her classes. Although she asserted that she did not use one specific approach in her classes, but rather chose any approaches that engaged her students, she pointed out that she had been interested in TBLT previously and had been exploring the approach for a number of years. She emphasised that her current teaching approach, including the use of tasks in her classes, was determined mainly by a personally driven goal, which was, in her words, “the relentless pursuit of perfection.” She said that she was a highly self-motivated person. She called herself “a dreamer and a pursuer” because she never stopped the process of aiming to improve her own teaching approaches. She did this through her own reading and ongoing study for degrees, and then making changes according to the issues raised from her readings, and from her students’ challenges and responses, striving to reach a “perfect approach” that came naturally to her. Her attitude seemed to echo the argument in the literature that teachers’ analytical thinking about their past and current teaching beliefs, experience, and practice can bring about change to their beliefs and practices (Borg; 2011; Bullock & Muschamp, 2004; East, 2014a; 2014b; Farrell & Ives, 2015).

Grace, in China, stated that her personality influenced her acceptance and implementation of tasks; she said she was an open-minded person who was willing to accept new approaches and to try different activities in her classes, including TBLT. Her view seems to echo with the statement by Pachler, Barnes, and Field (2009) that teachers should “keep up with new developments in the field” and have the “willingness to engage in continuing professional development and to challenge sometimes deeply held personal views on what constitutes effective MFL [Modern Foreign Language] teaching” (p. 2). Although Grace was not observed to use tasks in her observed classes, the task examples she described appeared to be in line with the three frameworks proposed by East (2012b).

Mary in New Zealand stated that five factors influenced her use of tasks. These were: the context; her education in New Zealand; her own reading and research; her professional
development; and her reflection on her practice. She claimed, however, that reflection was the most important factor in shaping her current approach. As an example she described a critical moment that changed her teaching philosophy. This was when Mary was doing her master’s degree in New Zealand and programme participants were asked by their teachers what a language is. She said that one of her classmates’ answers was that “language is for communication”, whereas prior to that she had embraced the idea that language is a set of systems. It appeared that the communicative approach and understandings about that which she learned from her teacher education programme in New Zealand, together with her own reflections, had an impact on her. As a consequence, Mary’s classes resembled a CLT classroom, suggesting that her teacher education programme, and her own reflections, had a strong impact on her when learning of the new approach. However, Mary’s adherence about the role of teachers’ explicit instructions for targeted language items before the tasks, misunderstandings about task outcomes, and her stated equivalence of CLT with TBLT seemed to be preventing her from using actual tasks in her classes. Also, her stated “eclectic approach” may account for the mismatch between her stated beliefs and her practices regarding task implementations.

Rachel emphasised the decisive influence of her teacher education programme in her teaching. The three New Zealand teachers agreed that they learned CLT from their pre-service education and that they learned about TBLT ideas through their textbooks, their own reading, doing research, attending conferences and their own reflections. Their observed classes appeared to be more like a CLT classroom than a TBLT classroom; only few tasks or task-like activities were evident in their classrooms. This suggests that their pre-service education exerted a greater influence on them than the other influences that have been identified. This finding is consistent with studies that argue that teacher education has a great impact on teachers’ beliefs and practices (e.g., Borg, 2015).
To sum up, the study presented here found that New Zealand teachers’ education programmes exerted a great influence on their teaching approaches, and Chinese teachers’ reflective practices seemed to play an important role in task implementation. It echoes the findings in the literature that education programmes grounded in reflective practice which embody “an understanding that facilitating critical thinking about past and present beliefs alongside actual experiences in the classroom will enhance the likelihood of changes both to beliefs and to future practice” (East, 2017, p. 414).

5) Other influences at tertiary level

Gloria and Grace described factors in their university in China which may also account for implementation of task-like activities or tasks being observed in their classes and reported in their statements. They include: teachers’ increasing autonomy over the content of the final examination; professional development opportunities such as access to conferences and seminars on the latest language learning and teaching theories; the role of new technologies, and strong levels of support from their university in implementing tasks. The three New Zealand teachers reported similar factors in their contexts. Molly and Mary commented on the role of technology in helping them with their communicative activities and tasks in their classrooms; Mary and Rachel reported that they had opportunities to hear about the latest language teaching theories through conferences and professional development, and that they also had full support from their institution. Susan also identified the conditions mentioned above, such as the facilitative role of technology and growing autonomy in decisions about the teaching content that may have enabled her to use tasks; her misunderstandings of the nature of tasks may have constrained her from their more effective use in her classes.

To conclude, the use of textbooks, student factors, examinations, teachers’ reflections and personalities, education programmes, as well as a number of other favorable conditions at
tertiary level, are found to have an influence on teachers’ implementation of tasks in both contexts. Although there are likely to be other factors influencing their implementation, these were the factors observed in teachers’ classes and elicited from the interviews.

8.5 The Students’ Attitudes towards Tasks

The following section addresses the fourth research question: What are Chinese students’ attitudes towards different tasks in both China and New Zealand? Students’ attitudes towards tasks were explored through face-to-face interviews. Twenty students were selected to be interviewed from the six participant teachers’ classes in both contexts, with twelve students from China and eight students from New Zealand. Some studies have argued that Asian students prefer non-communicative activities while others report that Asian students are ready to accept a new approach such as TBLT and express positive attitudes towards it (e.g., Adams & Newton, 2009; Chung & Huang, 2009; Gamble et al., 2013; McDonough, 2004; Pham, 2007; Rao, 2002; Savignon & Wang, 2003). Van den Branden (2009) also found that teachers are encouraged in their use of TBLT by their students’ apparent motivation to perform tasks. Nonetheless, a discrepancy between the perspectives of teachers and students regarding specific tasks has been reported (Nguyen, et al., 2015). It is relevant in this study, therefore, to establish students’ attitudes towards tasks in the six teachers’ classes.

The interview questions investigated students’ preferred activities, the reasons for their choices, their perceived problems in task implementation, and finally their suggestions to solve these problems. I first ranked the identified fourteen preferred activities according to the students’ choices from each class. Then reasons given by students for their preferred choices were classified into the following categories: the effectiveness of learning activities; the engaging characteristics of activities; positive or negative role of environment outside of classrooms; practical goal of activities; and other benefits of the learning activities. Students’ responses to
questions regarding each of the four categories were ranked according to the number of students expressing that view. Similarly, I ranked the perceived problems and suggestions according to the number of students making a particular comment and analysed the responses thematically.

Data from the interviews suggest that the students had positive attitudes towards tasks. The top three activities chosen by twelve students from three of the classes were two tasks and an activity similar to an information-gap task. For the other activities, there was less consensus in students’ preferences, except that three students preferred the writing activity in limited time from Susan’s class, and three students from Molly’s classes selected the group discussion about the dictated questions and cooperative writing based on group discussion. The other activities included three different communicative activities selected by three students from different classes and two form-focused activities arising from communication by two students from two different classes. It seems that students’ preferences first went to tasks and task-like activities, then communicative activities, and then writing activities, and finally the form-focused activities arising from communication.

The top five reasons for the preferred activities mentioned by students match well with approaches that align with a task-based approach. The first major reason given by fifteen of the students is that they believe the preferred tasks or task-like activities help them with their learning of English. Using tasks is believed to be an effective way to learn English because they engage learners to use language in the classroom (Ellis, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007). The second and fourth reasons, enjoyment of communication with classmates and teachers and interesting topics given by fourteen students, are consistent with one of the features identified by Willis and Willis (2007), that of engagement of learners. The third reason, their belief in the importance of communication for language learning, reported by six students, is consistent with an essential feature of a task - a primary focus on meaning.
(Ellis, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 2007). The fifth reason (noted by five students) was application of English to the real world, which is also identified as a task feature involving real-world language use (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). Tasks, therefore, might arguably be suitable alternatives for teachers to apply in their language classrooms as they can cater to the students’ needs as exemplified in this study.

The problems identified by students in these preferred activities were similar to some constraints reported in the literature in Section 3.3.2, such as the lack of English speaking environment, limited time for English classes, and the long established habit of receiving knowledge from the teacher (Carless, 2002; 2004; 2009; Luo & Xing, 2015; Xionyong & Samuel, 2011; Zhang, 2007). The participants interviewed in these prior studies, however, were teachers rather than students. That is, these studies investigated the practicability of TBLT in authentic Chinese classrooms through interviews with teachers, classroom observations, questionnaires, or accounts of teacher education programmes and did not include students’ views. In these studies, the major issue appeared to be attitudes towards, and the pressure of, examinations. In the present study, which has collected student data, the students did not identify examinations as a dominant problem in their classes, with only one student mentioning that it might be a problem because a communicative classroom approach did not mirror the assessments in the final examination. Students in my research identified the lack of English speaking environment and learning time, as well as traditional learning habits, as the major constraints for them to engage in communicative activities or tasks.

The students in this study made suggestions for improvements to practice such as asking teachers to create a more inviting environment to practise English and to focus on both communicative activities and language forms. They also said that they expected their teachers to play a number of roles in their learning, such as activity facilitators, language instructors and supervisors.
To illustrate, the findings of my study suggest that there is a demand for teachers to create a context or an environment for students to use English for communicative purposes; this was the top suggestion given by nine of the twenty students. It suggests that these students believe that tasks (or at least communicative activities) can create an environment for them to practise English, and they are ready to embark on tasks, as suggested in the literature (Nguyen, Newton & Crabbe, 2015). Students had different views on the inclusion of language forms in their classes. While seven students wanted teachers to create opportunities to use English to communicate, they also wanted teachers to attend to language forms either through direct teaching or in the process of task performance. Three students said they expected teachers to integrate language forms into language lessons, before or after the use of tasks, to extend their language, whereas three other students argued that classroom activities should consist entirely of communicative activities or tasks. My findings suggest that students had a variety of perceived needs, with a majority of students emphasising that there should be a balanced focus on both fluency and accuracy.

Furthermore, the influence of the environment was evident in that students in China complained about the lack of an English environment to practise English, which seemed to be a barrier to the use of tasks or communicative activities inside the classrooms because there are few opportunities to practise oral English after class. In contrast, the four students in Molly’s class, in New Zealand, said they appreciated being in an English-speaking environment outside the classroom because they saw this as a means to improve their communicative awareness and abilities using English, so that they could become actively involved in tasks and communicative activities in their classes. Zhang (2007) also reported that students in China complained of insufficient opportunities to use English for communicative practice outside of classrooms. Similarly, Butler (2011) points out that there is a need to create communities of learning outside of classrooms since, in such acquisition-poor environments, “learners see limited opportunities
to use the target language in their real-life situations” (p. 50). Accordingly, it may be argued that the employment of tasks in language classrooms can respond positively to the students’ requests by creating ‘authentic’ environments in which students can use English. Ellis (2003) likewise says that tasks can “function as a useful device for planning a communicative curriculum, particularly in contexts where there are few opportunities for more authentic communicative experiences, for example, many FL situations” (p. 30).

Finally, the findings indicate that students in both contexts expected teachers to play a range of roles in the implementation of tasks. Teachers, it seems, needed to create opportunities for students to use English, to be facilitators to engage them in tasks or communicative activities, to be language instructors, advisors and supervisors to pass on language knowledge to students. The students’ positive attitudes towards communicative activities and tasks in this study are consistent with reports from recent studies in Asian countries (Chung & Huang, 2009; Iwashita & Li, 2012; McDonough, 2007; Nguyen et al., 2015; Takeda, 2015). These studies suggest that Asian students are ready to embrace approaches such as CLT and TBLT. My findings do not seem to echo the findings that Asian students are passive receivers of knowledge with low motivation for communicative language teaching approaches (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Pham, 2007; Rao, 2002). As Butler (2011) has said, “it is thus potentially misleading to over emphasise the role of traditional cultural values (such as Confucian values) in shaping Asian classroom practices at all grade levels across Asia” (p. 40). Ellis (2015) also points out that current studies in Asian contexts “provide evidence that TBLT is implementable in these contexts and with this kind of learner and also that it is capable of providing learners with substantial new knowledge” (p. 381). Teachers should therefore be encouraged to include tasks in their classes, as exemplified in students’ attitudes and needs as found in the current study.
8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings about teachers’ beliefs and practices related to tasks, as well as students’ attitudes towards tasks, based on data collected from interviews and observations.

The six participant teachers appeared to have a wide range of knowledge related to TBLT: from relatively substantial knowledge to very little. Some teachers in both contexts appeared to have inadequate knowledge and even misunderstandings about TBLT. There was a lack of certainty about the definitions of task among the teachers. Despite expressing different attitudes to TBLT, and providing general, and variable, descriptions of task criteria or principles, five of the teachers argued that they used tasks to promote communication.

There was some divergence between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. None of the six teachers’ classes was observed to be fully task-based, and tasks were found in evidence in only two teachers’ classes, with these occurring alongside more traditional teaching principles and approaches. My findings are consistent with previous literature which has reported that teachers adapted tasks and used them with other approaches on the basis of their own beliefs and contexts (Andon, 2009; Carless, 2009; East, 2015, 2017; Littlewood, 2007). The major differences between teachers in the two contexts lie in their way of using tasks with other approaches. New Zealand teachers appeared to apply tasks and task-like activities in CLT-oriented classrooms more readily than their Chinese counterparts, whereas it appeared that only brief task-like activities were embedded into two Chinese teachers’ listening and speaking classes to provide opportunities to practise spoken English alongside teacher-fronted traditional reading and writing classes. One teacher in China, Gloria, appeared to use tasks into her reading and writing classes, like the New Zealand teachers, alongside other listening and speaking activities.
All the six teachers employed oral tasks or task-like activities to focus on meaning and language fluency. Similarly, Zheng and Borg (2014) found that English teachers in a Chinese secondary school defined TBLT in a narrow manner and associated tasks strongly with communicative activities, especially in relation to oral activities with students working in pair or groups. Such practices are likely to be influenced by New Zealand teachers’ general approach to language teaching learned mainly from their teacher education programmes, which focus on promoting students’ oral communication. Teachers in China seemed to be influenced by their own reflective practices due, possibly, to the limitations of conducting large-scale teacher education programmes in a country as vast as China (Carless, 2012).

Students in both contexts reported positive attitudes towards tasks. Tasks seemed to satisfy their perceived language learning needs. Students in China complained of insufficient opportunities for English communication, and tasks offered them opportunities to practise oral English and improve their communicative ability. Students in New Zealand, on the contrary, confirmed the facilitative role of environment in promoting their awareness to use language during task implementation. Furthermore, students in both contexts preferred tasks and communicative activities to be combined with form-focused activities. They expected their teachers to create contexts where both communicative proficiency and language accuracy could be developed. Students in both contexts expected their teachers to be not only instructors but also facilitators. Most of the students in my study expressed similar preferences for TBLT as students reported in previous research (Takeda, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2015; McDonough, 2007). To sum up, it seemed that both teachers and students in my study held positive attitudes towards the integration and use of tasks in their classrooms. However, there is a gap between students’ positive attitudes towards tasks and a lack of tasks in their classrooms. In addition, my findings show that the New Zealand teachers appear to be further along the road towards task integration in their lessons than the teachers in China, even though, in both contexts, understandings about
tasks and TBLT are still emerging. However, the China-based teachers demonstrate some signs of openness to tasks. The Chinese teachers’ practices related to tasks may be attributed to the increasingly favourable conditions for the implementation of tasks in China, such as web-based textbooks based on the new college curriculum (2007, 2017), which emphasise student-centred learning approaches in contrast to more traditional teacher-fronted language teaching.

My study suggests that it would be feasible to include more tasks in the web-based textbooks and to provide TBLT focused professional learning and development opportunities, perhaps through textbooks for the teachers because textbooks are still relied on in China. The findings of my study suggest, however, that TBLT teacher education related to textbooks should be grounded in reflective practices. My study also suggests that teacher education programmes are an effective way for New Zealand teachers to be helped to implement tasks successfully. Finally, my findings do not correspond to the findings by Wang (2009) that both EFL teachers in China and ESL teachers in New Zealand are in the process of transition and moving towards the implementation of TBLT. My study seems to reflect the reality that tasks, when they are used (which was reasonably minimally, at least in the observed lessons), are still embedded within other traditional approaches such as PPP, and that the divergence between teachers’ claimed use of tasks and the lack of tasks in their practices in my study is a common occurrence.

These findings could provide evidence to understand TBLT in light of sociocultural perspectives. The investigation of TBLT within sociocultural perspective suggests that all participants involved in tasks co-construct activities together through interaction, scaffolding and cooperation with each other in their social context (Ellis, 2000, 2003). The great influence of social context on teachers’ task implementation was accentuated in my studies in that teachers in the same context appeared to share more resemblances in their task implementation. As summarized above, New Zealand teachers employed tasks or task-like activities into CLT-oriented classrooms, while two teachers in China integrated these into their listening and
speaking classes alongside their traditional teacher-fronted reading and writing classes. My study found that, teachers, as important participants of tasks, adapted tasks or task-like activities and fitted them into their preferred approaches and activities to align with their own beliefs and specific contexts. My study echoes the findings from Donato’s study (2000). Donato analysed commentaries from a group of doctoral students involved in the application of social cultural theory to examine the dynamics of classroom foreign language instruction and learning. He concluded that “one important lesson of sociocultural theory that we learned is that learning and development, including foreign and second languages is situated. Situatedness means that learning unfolds in different ways under different circumstances” (2000, p. 47).

Similarly, the influence of context was also evident in terms of students’ attitudes towards task uses in their classrooms. Students in China saw the acquisition-poor EFL context as a barrier to their task implementation in the classrooms, by contrast, students in New Zealand appreciated the favourable ESL context in promoting their task uses. Furthermore, teachers’ scaffolding role in task performance was also emphasised by students in my study. Students made suggestions for teachers to offer more help when they were engaged in the task performance such as providing accurate topic-related words and phrases to assist them with their task performance. Additionally, spoken tasks were widely used in the teachers’ classrooms to achieve interaction among students instead of aiming at any specific language forms. Various contextual factors (refer to Section 8.4) contributed to the different task implementations in the two contexts. My findings correspond to those in the literature that TBLT is highly situated in the specific social cultural context (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2009; East, 2012b; Littlewood, 2007).

In the next chapter, conclusions, implications and limitations of the study will be stated and avenues for further research will be suggested.
Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a summary of the findings and discussion, which is followed by the implications derived from the research findings. It then points out the limitations of the current study and makes recommendations for further research in relation to tasks and TBLT.

9.2 Summary of Major Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate six tertiary English teachers’ beliefs of, and practices related to, using tasks in language classes in New Zealand and China. It also investigated factors that appeared to influence their beliefs and practices. The ultimate goal of the study was to gain insights which may assist in implementing TBLT in the Chinese context as recommended in China’s revised Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2017). Students’ attitudes towards tasks in these teachers’ classes were also explored to obtain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of tasks in practice.

In summary, it was found that the teachers held a range of knowledge in relation to TBLT. Despite displaying positive attitudes towards using tasks, there were levels of clarity about task definitions and criteria among these teachers and only some activities observed in two teachers’ classes could be judged as tasks. Teachers in the two contexts shared some similarities in their beliefs and practices related to tasks. It seems that these teachers adapted tasks or task-like activities and integrated them into other more established approaches and activities to align with their own beliefs, teaching styles and contexts. The idea of using tasks to promote communication seemed to be well-established among the teachers, and, when used in some way, tasks or task-like activities were observed to achieve the goal of communication at times.

In addition, it was common that teachers in both contexts did not prioritize a particular task feature, which was to have a non-linguistic outcome at the end of the task. This absence may
be due to teachers’ misunderstanding about tasks and a tension between this task criterion and the demands of their reading and writing courses which, in the observed lessons, expected students to produce an essay in the last stage of an activity (viewed as the outcome).

It is important to note major differences between teachers in the two contexts. The first difference, uncovered in the interviews, is that the New Zealand teachers seemed to have more knowledge about tasks than the Chinese teachers as demonstrated by the New Zealand teachers’ relatively more clearly illustrated understanding of theories regarding task criteria and TBLT principles. By contrast, Chinese teachers’ knowledge regarding these appeared to be rather limited.

The second difference lies in their way of using tasks with other approaches. New Zealand teachers appeared to employ tasks and task-like activities within otherwise more established CLT-oriented classrooms, whereas two Chinese teachers integrated them into their listening and speaking classes to practise spoken English, alongside teacher-fronted traditional reading and writing classes, with emphasis on the explicit instruction of language forms. That is, the New Zealand teachers were observed to follow the procedures of PPP in their classes, with tasks or task-like activities integrated into these procedures. These tasks and task-like activities were a section of a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities although their classes were classified into listening and speaking, and reading and writing. In two Chinese teachers’ listening and speaking classes, tasks and task-like activities merely appeared as a very small proportion of the whole class room activities to practise oral English or to serve as a warm-up activity. One Chinese teacher was an exception in that she devoted more of her class time to an apparent task cycle in a reading and writing class consisting of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities (as the New Zealand teachers had done). Although the New Zealand teachers seemed to have more knowledge related to TBLT than the teachers in China, the teachers in New Zealand appeared to implement CLT (but not tasks). However, this small
integration of tasks into CLT procedures appeared to be done more effectively by them than by the teachers in China. Overall, the New Zealand teachers’ classes appeared to be more communicative compared to the Chinese teachers classes.

Different factors appeared to influence teachers’ task implementation in the two contexts. Amongst all the identified factors, education programmes emphasising CLT appeared to have had more impact on New Zealand teachers’ practices than other factors. The findings clearly show that the CLT learned from their education programme had the most significant influence on New Zealand teachers in this study, leading to tasks or task-like activities as part of PPP procedures. Furthermore, the three teachers made it clear that CLT had a greater influence on their general teaching approach than other influences. They reported that they learnt about TBLT through their own reading, professional development and some textbooks instead of education programme (that is, the exploration of TBLT appeared to be lacking from their teacher education). For the Chinese teachers, web-based textbooks, and Chinese teachers’ own reflective practices and personalities (rather than education programmes) appeared to have the greatest influence on their use of tasks. This may have been due to the limitation of conducting large-scale education programmes in a country as vast as China. This study echoes with some findings in the literature that teacher education programmes, especially those based on teachers’ reflections, can bring about changes to teachers’ existing beliefs and practices (Borg, 2011; Collin, Karsenti, & Komis, 2013; East, 2014a; 2014b; Farrell & Ives, 2015; Too, 2013).

Finally, students in both contexts held positive attitudes towards tasks or task-like activities, asserting that tasks can satisfy their learning needs. Students preferred the combination of tasks with language focused activities, and they expected their teachers to be both language instructors and task facilitators. The major difference in the two contexts was found in students’ different attitudes towards the environment outside of their classes. In the New Zealand context, students confirmed the role of the environment in facilitating language learning;
whereas students in China complained about the lack of an English-speaking environment. Furthermore, students in China pointed out another challenge with task implementation, which is the limited number of English classes each week in addition to insufficient opportunities to practise in a Chinese-speaking environment.

9.3 Implications of Findings
A number of implications for research and practice may be drawn from the study. These are discussed in the following section.

9.3.1 Implications for Research
This study contributes to our understanding of teachers’ beliefs and practices with regard to TBLT in two arguably contrasting contexts. Although the New Zealand teachers appeared to have more knowledge related to TBLT than the Chinese teachers (which is perhaps to be anticipated), the New Zealand teachers’ classes appeared to be more traditionally ‘communicative’ rather than more task-based. Few tasks were found in teachers’ classes in both contexts. This finding challenges the assumption that TBLT may be more advanced in some western countries because of the more privileged BANA (Britain, Australasia and North America) context, such as the well-resourced context and good opportunities to acquire professional knowledge (Andon, 2009). Teachers in New Zealand did, to some extent, implement tasks or task-like activities, but, as said, this was as a part of their CLT classrooms. This appeared to be as a consequence of the greater influence of their educational teacher preparation programmes which were CLT-oriented. The data also suggest that tasks have entered into Chinese teachers’ classes. Task examples were presented in the Chinese teachers’ interviews although few tasks or task-like activities were found in their classes and these activities only occupied a small proportion of the whole classroom activities in two Chinese teachers’ classes (except Gloria who used tasks into a series of listening, speaking, reading and
writing activities just like the New Zealand teachers). This supports the findings in the literature that there are some examples of successful task implementation in some Asian contexts (McDonough, 2004; X. Wang, 2009; Zhang, 2007; Zheng & Borg, 2014).

Secondly, the study identifies the most common features of tasks used by these teachers, as well as task features that appear to be absent in teachers’ practices. The findings of this study show that teachers did not prioritize certain aspects of tasks, such as task outcome. However, they all accepted that tasks are used to promote communication. An implication of this finding is that researchers and TBLT advocates need to be more explicit with teachers about what ‘outcome’ means as a task criterion.

Thirdly, the research identified factors which appeared to influence teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT in the two contexts. There were differences between the two contexts, some of which are consistent with the literature, whereas others are not. For instance, teachers in China claimed that their own reflections and personalities played a positive role in encouraging them to use tasks in their classes. Furthermore, they were observed to rely on web-based textbooks for task ideas. These factors arising from my study diverge from some of the research findings in the literature related to China, which suggest that teachers’ beliefs and examination pressures are major factors influencing their task implementation (Deng & Carless, 2009). In contrast, New Zealand teachers’ task implementation was found to be influenced mainly by the teacher education focusing on CLT as the tasks or task-like activities were a part of their CLT classrooms. Lastly, the study provides some evidence of students’ attitudes towards tasks and is consistent with the findings in the literature that Asian students are ready for TBLT (Takeda, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2015; McDonough, 2007). The study also provides specific suggestions from students for their teachers’ role in task implementation and the place of form-focused activity in task performance, which has been rarely reported in previous literature.
9.3.2 Implications for Practice

The first practical implication is that more tasks should be integrated into the textbooks in both contexts. For the New Zealand teachers, it seemed that the textbooks did not support them in their task use, and textbook use was not a significant component of teachers’ planning. They also clearly pointed out that they had to design tasks themselves because of lack of resources. Erlam (2016) reported that there was a lack of resources to support the implementation of TBLT in New Zealand. It would be useful if more resources about tasks were to be incorporated into textbooks, serving to introduce tasks to some teachers in a more feasible and explicit way. This would at least give New Zealand based teachers some examples that might trigger greater task use.

The issue of tasks in textbooks is particularly relevant to the China context. Although teachers in China relied on the textbooks for task design ideas, the textbooks and accompanying courseware were not found to provide teachers with enough tasks. For instance, Susan in China claimed that she chose tasks from the textbooks, but it turned out that these were general activities that could not be defined as tasks. Only three activities in the courseware used by Susan in her listening and speaking classes were found to be in line with task criteria after evaluation of the activities against the three frameworks. Furthermore, both Gloria and Grace, in China, mentioned that there was a lack of resources to support them to use tasks. Grace said that it was difficult to design tasks by themselves based on the theme and topic of the textbooks and Gloria referred to the courseware of the textbook to design the major tasks by herself in her classes. In the observed classes, Gloria seemed to get inspiration from one of the questions in the courseware and turned this into a debating task.

The second implication is related to education programmes for TBLT. My study suggests that it would be appropriate for TBLT professional learning opportunities, arguably related to textbook use, to be offered in China to promote the successful use of tasks. All three of the
participant teachers in China explained that they had been given opportunities for teacher education input related to textbooks, and Susan claimed that she learned about TBLT through a training programme based on textbooks. Carless (2012) argued that it is difficult to provide in-depth teacher education in a country as vast as China, and later asserted that “if teachers are to implement an innovation such as TBLT successfully, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of its principles and practice” (Carless, 2015, p. 368). One of the Chinese teachers attributed her successful use of tasks to her reflective practices. An increasing number of studies in the literature (Bullock & Muschamp, 2004; Borg, 2011; East, 2014a; 2014b; Farrell & Ives, 2015) suggest that reflective practices in education programmes can result in changes to teachers’ beliefs and practices. Thus, reflective practices in collaboration with teacher education programmes appear to be an appropriate way to progress the implementation of TBLT ideas. This is just as much the case in New Zealand as in China. Without “carefully designed initial and in-service teacher-training/education programs that take account of the characteristics of successful innovations”, it would appear to be impossible for teachers to implement tasks successfully in their classes (Ellis, 2017, p. 521). East (2018) also argues that “teacher education programmes that are built on a reflective practitioner model provide one means of challenging teachers’ existing beliefs and practices and mediating change” (p. 3). His argument arises from the New Zealand context, but is equally applicable in a range of contexts, including China.

As said, it would also be appropriate to include a greater or more explicit focus on TBLT in New Zealand teachers’ education programmes for them to develop a more solid understanding about TBLT ideas, and to implement tasks more successfully into their classes. The findings suggest that teachers learned CLT rather than TBLT from their education programmes such as CELTA and DELTA, both of which had had great influence on the teachers. Observations indicated that, when task-like activities were used, they were integrated into the PPP
procedures. Furthermore, the three teachers claimed that CLT had a greater influence on their general teaching approach than other models. This finding is consistent with studies which also argue that teacher education has a great impact on teachers’ beliefs and practices (Borg, 2015; East, 2014a; 2014b). Incorporating TBLT into teacher education programmes would be an effective way to ensure tasks are employed more successfully than at present.

In addition to education programmes, teachers should be provided with opportunities to collaborate with teacher educators to provide clear and user-friendly guidelines, and see models of TBLT applied in their own practice. Teachers also need to understand task criteria and to have opportunities to design and implement tasks based on the theories. Most importantly, they need time to reflect on the use of tasks with teacher educators. Two New Zealand teachers mentioned that they got to know CLT in their education programme in a very practical way. In turn, this was found to be the dominant approach in their observed classes. East (2014a) suggests that “teachers should be introduced to the innovation, both in theory and in practice, in ways that enable practitioners to evaluate its claims for themselves” (p. 263). Likewise, Van den Branden (2006) says that teacher education focused on TBLT should itself be experiential and task-based. Furthermore, teachers need opportunities to discuss problems that arise during their implementation of TBLT with teacher educators, who should provide feedback on their application of TBLT theories in their classrooms. Educators should assist teachers in taking into account the aspects of task criteria that seemed to be problematic, such as misunderstanding around outcome, as noted in this study. Hence, it is necessary for educators not only to introduce the theory, but also to help teachers to design tasks. Teachers also need to reflect on their use of tasks, and to be given opportunities to discuss the issues arising in their practices.

A further implication of this study’s findings is that teachers should provide opportunities for their students to become familiar with the principles and advantages of TBLT. Some students
in this study explained that long-established learning habits constrain them from embracing more communicative work in their classes. Erlam (2016) also suggests that teachers should be encouraged to consider how they can help students adjust to and prepare for a new teaching approach when they are accustomed to using a traditional approach.

The last implication of the study is that there should be a balance between meaning-based and form-focused activities, as advocated by a number of authors (East, 2015; Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Swan, 2005). Students in my study were emphatic that they needed both tasks and explicit attention to language forms to enhance, respectively, their communicative ability and language accuracy. Such a balance could combine TBLT with explicit instruction to address specific linguistic problems. The principle of focusing on form could be ensured through teacher-input at the pre-task stage or explicit teaching and practice of grammar in the post-task stage. Ellis (2017), for example, suggests a “hybrid syllabus” consisting of TBLT and explicit instruction on language forms (p. 522). Based on the findings of my study, this might be an appropriate way forward for teachers in both contexts.

9.4 Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study has provided detailed description and analysis of how teachers interpret and practise TBLT at tertiary levels in two different contexts, New Zealand and China, as well as the attitudes of Chinese as L1 students towards tasks. There are some limitations that need to be taken into account.

One limitation of this study is that the data are from teachers’ and students’ perspective alongside classroom observations, without investigating the effectiveness of the tasks and activities the students engaged in more objectively (i.e., to establish language learning gains). However, the study provides insights from which to develop a teacher education programme for TBLT in China. As Andon (2009) says, understanding how teachers interpret and practise
TBLT has the potential to inform future teacher education programmes. East (2012b) likewise states that investigating teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT can ultimately challenge theoretical perspectives and promote teachers’ practices in this area. For instance, my study found that teachers preferred to use tasks with other approaches. My study has also identified aspects of TBLT already being implemented in teachers’ practices, and aspects that at present appear to be neglected. Furthermore, my study identified a number of factors which appear to influence teachers’ implementation of tasks. It suggests that it is quite feasible that tasks can be compiled into the textbooks and to offer TBLT professional learning opportunities related to textbooks. Such information can contribute to a well-designed and directed education programme for teachers in China. Hence, even though this study has not evaluated the effectiveness of the tasks these teachers claimed to use or did use, it does provide information about teachers’ understandings and practices related to TBLT that may inform education programmes.

Another limitation is that this was a small scale study focused on six teachers in three tertiary institutions in two contrasting contexts as well as twenty Chinese as L1 students. The generalizability of the findings is therefore limited. It should be recognized also that more classroom observations would have provided a stronger basis for claims about the teachers’ work. Unlike the Chinese teachers, the New Zealand teachers had at least three hours of English classes for four days in a week and they gave me more opportunities to observe their classes. These observations provided me with abundant data for further analysis of their task implementation in their classrooms. Furthermore, there was not a balance of students between China and New Zealand as there were only a small number of Chinese students in the New Zealand teachers’ classes. The current study, however, aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of teachers’ perspectives of and practices with TBLT in the two contexts, as well as Chinese as L1 students’ attitudes towards tasks. Although the participants were not
necessarily representative of all teachers and students in the two contexts, they provide the views of a sample, and readers may identify similarities that relate to their own situations.

A further limitation was that some participants were not interviewed to clarify their ideas and reflections on their classroom activities immediately after the classroom activities. This may have affected the data analysis. Interviews were not conducted directly after the class observations because I sent teachers the description and interpretation of the classroom activities with the identified tasks or task-like activities observed in their classes for them to confirm. When later analyzing the data, I noted a mismatch between teachers expressed beliefs and practices. Had I interviewed them following the classes I may have obtained more detailed explanations of the data recorded.

Some recommendations for further research are presented in the following section.

9.5 Recommendation for Further Research

The first recommendation for further research that arises from this study is for more research on educational programmes to improve teachers’ understanding of TBLT. One example is Erlam’s (2016) study investigating teachers’ designing of tasks that fulfilled the four criteria of Ellis (2009b). Another instance is reported by East (2016), who investigated teachers’ thinking and reported practices with regard to task-based language teaching three years after initial teacher education. Researchers could investigate why teachers make particular choices about tasks while rejecting others, and also how teachers develop their ideas and approaches related to TBLT during this process.

Future research into TBLT could also involve teachers as participants actively evaluating the practical application of tasks in their own classrooms. Since TBLT is a context-bound approach, teachers in a range of contexts could gather data to assess the use of TBLT in their
specific contexts. It is also important to undertake collaborative research in which teachers and researchers work together to identify issues, and address problems arising from task implementation in natural contexts. Littlewood (2013) says that “every teacher is the best expert in his or her own situation but can draw insights from other people (theorists as well as teachers) and test them in this situation” (p. 15). Teachers play a vital role in helping to resolve problems specific to their own contexts. My study suggests that, as Chinese teachers are now provided with more favourable conditions, and have strong encouragement from their universities with regard to task implementation, it would be feasible to carry out research on task implementation.

Research with teachers could also investigate why teachers accept some aspects of TBLT while resisting others. In my study, for example, teachers were not observed to include a clear outcome for their tasks because they did not fully understand what this meant. Additionally, the reading and writing courses in both China and New Zealand require students to produce an essay, which was referred to by them as an ‘outcome’. Hence researchers should assist teachers to design tasks with task outcomes and to encourage teachers to reflect on how this concept should be interpreted and enacted. Furthermore, teacher educators should carry out follow-up studies to examine teachers’ use of tasks in their natural contexts, such as East’s (2016) investigation of teachers’ use of tasks three years after initial teacher education.

Further research might also investigate how TBLT can not only promote communicative ability but can also enhance linguistic accuracy. In my study, for instance, some teachers were not convinced that tasks can promote language accuracy. Therefore, more research is needed into the effectiveness of TBLT with regard to the development of grammatical accuracy, so that teachers can evaluate the use of tasks in their classrooms. An example of such a study is Shintani (2016) who produced evidence that TBLT can be more effective for grammar acquisition than traditional structural teaching as in a PPP model. Ellis (2017) argues that
“doubts will also continue to exist until it can be shown that TBLT is effective – not just in developing communicative ability but also in achieving linguistic accuracy” (p. 522). In the words of Andon (2009), “the second language acquisition research on task-based teaching has not so far been sufficient to convince them (teachers) to do more [TBLT]” (p. 211). More research is therefore needed to investigate the effectiveness and value of TBLT, particularly with regard to developing grammatical competence. More comparative across-context studies are also needed to investigate teachers’ beliefs and practices related to TBLT education programmes in a range of contexts to find context-relevant effective ways to promote use of tasks.

9.6 Final Remarks

This study investigated teachers’ beliefs and practices related to task use, and the factors that appeared to influence them in two contexts, China and New Zealand. To conclude, none of the teachers really employed TBLT although most of them self-claimed that they used tasks in their classrooms. All the teachers in both contexts incorporated few tasks or task-like activities, and when this was done these were integrated into more traditional frameworks. New Zealand teachers embedded task-like activities or tasks into their CLT classrooms while Chinese teachers integrated these into their skilled-based classes such as listening and speaking classes, or reading and writing classes. In addition, the tasks or task-like activities only occupied a very limited time in two Chinese teachers’ classes whereas these activities took up more time in New Zealand teachers’ classes and one Chinese teachers’ class. This study also investigated L1 Chinese students’ attitudes towards tasks or task-like activities. It seemed that students in my study held positive attitudes towards the integration and use of tasks in their classrooms. However, there is a mismatch between students’ positive attitudes towards tasks and a lack of tasks in their classrooms.
I chose the comparative context on the hypothesis that New Zealand teachers are further advanced in their understanding and interpretation of TBLT than teachers in China. In fact, the data seem to show that New Zealand teachers did appear to have a better understanding about TBLT theories compared to the teachers in China because they clearly illustrated more TBLT theories in the interviews. However, in practice, New Zealand teachers were stuck in a CLT model rather than what they claimed to be TBLT. Two of the New Zealand teachers’ classes clearly followed the procedure of PPP, with few tasks or task-like activities integrated into these CLT classrooms. The data seem also to suggest that New Zealand teachers appeared to use a communicative approach more effectively than teachers in China based on the classroom observations where New Zealand teachers’ classes were made up of a well-structured PPP model, and many communicative activities compared to Chinese teachers’ classes.

A key recommendation of the study, which reiterates what others have called for, is a greater emphasis on appropriate teacher education initiatives. My study suggests that TBLT-focused teacher education, perhaps related to web-based textbooks and grounded in reflective practice, would be an effective way to promote implementation of tasks by Chinese teachers. As for the New Zealand teachers, it is suggested that TBLT ideas could be integrated into education programmes such as CELTA and DELTA courses since these education programmes were found to have substantial impact on teachers. It is effective and feasible for tasks to be integrated into textbooks for teachers in both contexts. This would help to overcome the lack of task resources reported in both contexts and the influence of textbooks on task use in China.
Appendices

Appendix A Initial Interview Schedule for Teachers

1. Context and background questions
Teacher's qualifications, experience, training and teacher development undertaken.
Language taught, age & level of students, student's needs (individual, class, institutional & wider settings, exams)
Resources-time, materials, aids used (with a particular class?)
Focus mainly on current experience, but also note different contexts for later questions.

2. Broad description of the teacher's own approach

Main question:
How would you describe your approach to teaching?

Subsidiary questions:
Find out about the teacher's own language learning experience and ask them to compare this with the way they teach.
What foreign languages do you know? (In the case of NNS teachers focus on English)
When/how did you learn them?
How do you keep up your foreign language(s)?
How would you compare your experience of learning foreign languages with the way you yourself teach?
How would you describe your approach to teaching?
Do you find that you need to use very different approaches with different classes?
How do you think your students would describe your approach?
Has your approach to teaching changed greatly as you have become more experienced?
What kinds of materials do you find most effective? Do the materials you use support you in the way you want to teach?
How do the particular circumstances in your teaching context affect your teaching approach and the kinds of activities you can use?
3. Teacher's attitudes to tasks and TBL.

I'm interested in communicative activities and tasks that teachers use in their classes. What kinds of communicative activities do you find useful with this class?

What do you see as the purposes of using communicative tasks?

Do you think it is important that a communication activity always has a clear language focus?

Do you ever discuss with students the reasons for doing language learning tasks?

What do you see as the advantages of using tasks in class?

What do you see as the disadvantages of using tasks in class?

Some people see tasks as having a central role in the teaching process and others see them as having more of a supporting role, to consolidate, to do extra practise, to motivate students, as light relief or a change of pace and focus.

How do you feel about this?

What is the role that tasks play in the teaching materials you use? How do you feel about the role given to communicative tasks in the materials you are using?

Are there particular points or stages in a lesson or in a series of lessons where you feel it is most appropriate to use communicative tasks?

How do your students feel about doing tasks?

4. Teacher development and teacher knowledge about task-based learning.

How has your teaching developed over your career? In what ways do you teach differently now compared to a couple of years ago? 5 years ago?

Have any books on methodology or theory of language, learning and/or teaching, or any particular experts in our field, been a particular influence on your approach?

How has INSET helped you to develop the approaches and techniques you use in your teaching? In what ways have the courses you have taken helped you to change the way you teach?

What (if anything) have you learned about TBLT or communicative tasks from professional learning and development, and/or from books you have read, books you use etc. Do you feel that you need to know more about TBL or CLT?
Appendix B Initial Letter to Deans

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Auckland 1023, New Zealand  
education@auckland.ac.nz  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899

Facsimile 64 9 623 8898

Dear Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages,

I am currently enrolled in a PhD in education at the University of Auckland. The purpose of this letter is to seek your permission to invite two teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) from your faculty to participate in my research project.

The aim of the project is to investigate EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices related to Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), and their Chinese students’ attitudes towards TBLT. At the end of the research, both the teachers and students may gain new understandings of Task-based Language Teaching and improve promote their practices in this area.

Two teacher interviews and three class observations are involved in the project. In the initial semi-structured interview, I will gather information about the teachers’ learning, teaching and training experiences and their teaching approaches. I will then observe teachers’ classroom practices and both the teachers’ interactions with the students and their students’ responses in the class. After the observation, another interview will be conducted to elicit teachers’ thoughts on their classroom practices. Interviews with the Chinese students will be conducted after the class observation.

The enclosed Participant Information Sheet details the aims and procedures of the entire project. I would be grateful if you would arrange for the advertisement to be distributed to the teachers you would recommend who may be practicing TBLT (or using tasks) or if you would give me the contact details of the teachers.

If you have any questions or queries about my study, please do not hesitate to contact me or either of my supervisors by phone or e-mail. Thank you for considering this request.

Best regards,

Lingling Guan  
Doctoral Candidate
School of Curriculum and Pedagogy

Faculty of Education

The University of Auckland

Lingling.Guan@auckland.ac.nz

+0220785830+64 9 623 8899 ext. 84194

If you have any concerns of ethical nature you can contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 373-7599 ext. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 20, July, 2015 for (3) years, Reference Number 014660
Appendix C Participant Information Sheet (Deans)

School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
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Auckland 1023, New Zealand  
education@auckland.ac.nz  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
Facsimile 64 9 623 8898

**Project title:** A study of the use of tasks in tertiary English as an additional language programme in New Zealand and China: Teachers’ beliefs and practices and students’ attitudes

My name is Lingling Guan, a Chinese PhD candidate in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education and Social Work, the University of Auckland. I am conducting this research project for my doctoral thesis.

The objective of the project is to gather information about tertiary English teachers’ comparative pedagogical principles and practices related to TBLT in China and New Zealand. The challenges for teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in New Zealand and English as a foreign language (EFL) in China arising from the implementation of TBLT in their classrooms will also be explored and compared. Also, Chinese students’ attitudes to the classroom activities and the interactions in the class will be investigated.

This research follows a qualitative case study approach. Four methods are employed in my project: initial semi-structured interview, observation, stimulated recall interview and internet interview. I would like to invite two ESL teachers to participate in the interviews and observation. The semi-structured interview will be used to gather teachers’ teaching and learning experiences, training, their students’ age, levels and needs, and their teaching approaches. The interview will be conducted at a time and place chosen by the teachers and will last for about 40 minutes. The teacher will then be asked to nominate three full lessons that I might observe. The lessons I would like to observe will be part of the normal classroom programme and hence the observations should not involve any additional effort on teachers’ part. The main focus of the observations is to record teachers’ actual classroom practices; meanwhile students’ responses to the classroom activities and the interactions between teachers and students will also be observed. Before the observation, I will explain the research aims to students and hand out Participant Information Sheet and Consent Forms to obtain the students’ consents to be observed and to be interviewed. A thirty minutes stimulated recall interview with the teacher will occur after the observation, which is to elicit the participants’ inner thought processes so as to understand why they conduct certain classroom activities. Interviews with the Chinese students will be conducted after the class observation.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be declined without giving a reason. The participants can decline to answer interview questions, stop the interview at any time, or choose to withdraw from the project. Both the interviews and observations will be audio recorded with
the participants’ permission. However, participants can choose to have the audio recorder turned off at any time. The recorded interviews and observations will be transcribed by the researcher. The participants will receive the electronic copies of their interview transcripts via email, cloud-delivery or face-to-face delivery. They can change, delete and add further information on drafts of the transcripts. The participants can also withdraw information they have provided at any time up to May 1, 2016 when analysis of the information will begin.

Data collected from this study will be used for academic and educational purposes, such as the researcher’s PhD thesis at the University of Auckland, academic publications and conference presentations. The research findings, which will inform the thesis, will be locked in the University of Auckland library. If the information the teacher provides is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify them as a source. Anonymity is therefore assured. The hard copy of data (interview and classroom observation notes, interview and observation transcripts) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors. The soft copy of data (interview and classroom observation audio recordings) will be stored in researcher’s computer safely with password protection. The data will be destroyed after six years of its collection following the university’s established procedures.

I also seek your assurance that the decision of any of the teachers to participate or not in the project will not affect their standing in the faculty in any way.

I appreciate your possible cooperation with my study, and I look forward to your response. Please don’t hesitate to contact me or either of my two supervisors if you have any questions or concerns.

Lingling Guan
E-mail: Lingling.Guan@auckland.ac.nz

Contact details
All researchers are at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland, 74 Epsom Ave, Epsom, Auckland 1023, New Zealand. You may also contact the Head of the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy Associate Professor Helen Hedges: h.hedges@auckland.ac.nz or 64096238899 ext. 88998

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<td>Lingling Guan</td>
<td>Prof. Martin East</td>
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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 093737599ext.83711; email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.
Appendix D Participant Information Sheet (Teachers)

School of Curriculum and Pedagogy
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Telephone 64 9 623 8899
Facsimile 64 9 623 8898

Project title: A study of the use of tasks in tertiary English as an additional language programme in New Zealand and China: Teachers’ beliefs and practices and students’ attitudes

My name is Lingling Guan, a Chinese PhD candidate in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland. I am conducting this research project for my doctoral thesis.

The objective of the project is to gather information about tertiary English teachers’ comparative pedagogical principles and practices related to TBLT in China and New Zealand. The challenges for teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in New Zealand and English as a foreign language (EFL) in China arising from the implementation of TBLT in their classrooms will also be explored and compared. Also, students’ attitudes to the classroom activities will be investigated.

This research follows a qualitative case study approach. Four methods are employed in my project: initial semi-structured interview, observation, stimulated recall interview and internet interview. I would like to invite you to participate in the interviews and observation. The semi-structured interview will be used to gather background information such as your qualifications, teaching and learning experiences, training, your students’ age, levels and needs, and your teaching approaches. The interview will be conducted at a time and place chosen by you for about 40 minutes. As I explain in more detail below, the interview will be digitally recorded and later transcribed. You will be invited to review and (if you wish) edit the transcript. You will then be asked to nominate three full lessons that I might observe. The lessons I would like to observe will be part of the normal classroom programme and hence the observations should not involve any additional effort on your part. The main focus of the observations is to record your actual classroom practices; meanwhile your students’ responses to the classroom activities and the interactions between you and your students will also be observed. Before the observation, I will explain the research aims to your students and hand out Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms to them to ask for their consent to be observed and to be interviewed.
A thirty minutes’ stimulated recall interview with you will occur after the observation, which is to elicit your thought on classroom activities. You can decide a time and place. Some of your Chinese students will also be interviewed through internet which is to gather Chinese students’ attitudes towards classroom activities. The internet interview will be conducted by using a popular Chinese chat tool (WeChat) which allows the researcher to talk with the students on a one-to-one basis where others will not get the messages. The identity of participants will be confidential to the researcher and her supervisors. If you agree to participate in the interview, I will ask you to sign that section of the Consent Form and return it to me.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be declined without giving a reason. You can decline to answer interview questions, stop the interview at any time, or choose to withdraw from the project. Both the interviews and observations will be audio recorded with your permission. However, you can choose to have the audio recorder turned off at any time. The recorded interview and observation will be transcribed by the researcher. You will receive the electronic copies of your interview transcript via email, cloud-delivery or face-to-face delivery. You can change, delete and add further information on drafts of the transcripts. You can also withdraw information you have provided at any time up to May 1, 2016 when analysis of the information will begin.

Data collected from this study will be used for academic and educational purposes, such as the researcher’s PhD thesis at the University of Auckland, academic publications and conference presentations. The research findings, which will inform the thesis, will be lodged in the University of Auckland library. If the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as a source. Anonymity is therefore assured. The hard copy of data (interview and classroom observation notes, interview and observation transcripts) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors. The soft copy of data (interview and classroom observation audio recordings) will be stored in researcher’s computer safely with password protection. All the data will be destroyed after six years of its collection following the university’s established procedures.

I appreciate your possible cooperation with my study, and I look forward to your response. Please don’t hesitate to contact me or either of my two supervisors if you have any questions or concerns.

Lingling Guan  
E-mail: Lingling.Guan@auckland.ac.nz

Contact details  
All researchers are at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland, 74 Epsom Ave, Epsom, Auckland 1023, New Zealand. You may also contact the Head of the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Associate Professor Helen Hedges: h.hedges@auckland.ac.nz or 64096238899 ext. 88998

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APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON
20-Jul-2015 for (3) years, Reference Number 014660
Appendix E Participant Information Sheet (Students)

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Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
Facsimile 64 9 623 8898

Project title: A study of the use of tasks in tertiary English as an additional language programme in New Zealand and China: Teachers’ beliefs and practices and students’ attitudes

My name is Lingling Guan, a Chinese PhD candidate in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education and Social Work, the University of Auckland. I am conducting this research project for my doctoral thesis.

The objective of my study is to investigate how English is taught in your class. Your teacher has agreed to participate in this research project and your school has granted permission for me to observe three of your English classes and to interview some students.

I would like to observe and audio record three of your English classes. The focus of the recordings is your teachers’ practices and your responses to teaching activities. I will take notes in the back of your classroom and try not to interrupt your work. If you agree to participate in the observation, I will ask you to sign a Consent Form and return it to me.

After observation of your class, I would like to invite you to have an interview with me, which is to gather your attitudes towards teaching activities. The identity of participants will be confidential to the researcher and her supervisors. Our interview will be audio-recorded. You can decide when you would like to have an interview. If you agree to participate in the interview, I will ask you to sign that section of the Consent Form and return it to me.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be declined without giving any reason. If you do not wish to take part in the observation/recording I will make arrangements with your teacher so that you can sit in a place in the classroom that will not be recorded. I will not observe you and include you in my research project. I have also sought the assurance from your teacher that your decision to participate or not will not affect your standing in the class in any way. The recorded observation will be transcribed by the researcher. The recording and transcript of class observation can only be accessed by the teacher and researcher.

If you consent to be interviewed, you can choose not to answer any interview questions you do not wish to answer, or stop the interview at any time. The interview will be audio recorded.
with your permission and the interview recordings will be transcribed by the researcher. You will receive your transcripts via email, cloud-delivery or face-to-face delivery. You can change, delete and add further information on drafts of the transcripts if you wish. You can also withdraw information you have provided at any time up to May 1, 2016, when analysis of the information will begin.

Data collected from this study will be used for academic and educational purposes, such as the researcher’s PhD thesis at the University of Auckland, academic publications and conference presentations. If the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as a source. Anonymity is therefore assured. The hard copy of data (interview and classroom observation notes, interview and observation transcripts) will be stored in a secure locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors. The soft copy of data (interview and classroom observation audio recordings) will be stored in the researcher’s computer safely with password protection. The data will be destroyed after six years of its collection.

I appreciate your cooperation with my study, and I look forward to your response. Please don’t hesitate to contact me or either of my two supervisors if you have any questions or concerns.

Lingling Guan
E-mail: Lingling.Guan@auckland.ac.nz

Contact details
All researchers are at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland, 74 Epsom Ave, Epsom, Auckland 1023, New Zealand. You may also contact the Head of the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Associate Professor Helen Hedges: h.hedges@auckland.ac.nz or 64096238899 ext. 88998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Main supervisor</th>
<th>Co-supervisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lingling Guan</td>
<td>Prof. Martin East</td>
<td>Dr Constanza Tolosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6496238899ext.84194</td>
<td>+64 93737599 ext.48345</td>
<td>+64 9 3737599 ext. 48692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:Lingling.guan@auckland.ac.nz">Lingling.guan@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:m.east@auckland.ac.nz">m.east@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz">c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
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</table>

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 093737599ext.83711; email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON
20-Jul-2015........ for (3) years, Reference Number 014660
Appendix F Consent Form (Deans)

Project title: A study of the use of tasks in tertiary English as an additional language programme in New Zealand and China: Teachers’ beliefs and practices and students’ attitudes

Researcher: Lingling Guan

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understood that the participation is voluntary. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- I agree to allow the researcher to undertake interviews with the teachers and students.
- I agree to allow the researcher to conduct observation in the classroom.
- I understand that the research will include audio recording of teachers’ and students’ interviews and observations.
- I understand that data will be stored securely for a period of six years and then destroyed.
- I understand that the data will be used for the researcher’s PhD thesis and may be used for academic publications, conference presentations and teaching.
- I understand that any form of data can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors.
- I understand that no identifiable information on the teachers and students will be disclosed to a third party or the public, and that all findings will be presented in an anonymised fashion.
- I give my assurance that the decision of the teachers to participate or not in this research project will not affect teachers’ or students’ standing in the faculty.

Signature:                                             Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON
20-Jul-2015……….. for (3) years, Reference Number 014660
Appendix G Consent Form (Teachers)

School of Curriculum and Pedagogy
Faculty of Education
The University of Auckland
A Block, Gate 3
74 Epsom Avenue, Epsom
Auckland 1023, New Zealand
education@auckland.ac.nz
Telephone 64 9 623 8899
Facsimile 64 9 623 8898

Project title: A study of the use of tasks in tertiary English as an additional language programme in New Zealand and China: Teachers’ beliefs and practices and students’ attitudes

Researcher: Lingling Guan

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understood that my participation is voluntary.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- I agree to have interviews with the researcher.
- I agree to allow the researcher to conduct observation in my normal classroom.
- I agree that the interviews and observations will be audio recorded.
- I understand that I may ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that I may withdraw any information traceable to me at any time before May 1, 2016, without giving a reason.
- I understand that I have the opportunity to read the transcripts of the interviews and class observations and may edit the transcripts.
- I understand that the researcher will use pseudonyms for all data, the thesis and future publications and presentations of this research. My anonymity is assured.
- I understand that data will be stored securely for a period of six years and then destroyed.
- I understand that data will be used for the researcher’s PhD thesis and may be used for academic publications, conference presentations.
- I understand that data can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors.
I understand that no identifiable information about me will be disclosed to a third party or the public.

I understand that assurance has been given that my decision to participate or not participate in this project will not affect my standing in the school/faculty in any way.

I understand that my participation in the project will be confidential to the researcher.

If you would like to receive a copy of research findings, please indicate one of the following choices:

I wish / do not to receive the final copy of research findings by email or other forms.

Signature: __________________________           Date:  __________________________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON

20-Jul-2015………. for (3) years, Reference Number 014660
Appendix H Consent Form (Students)

School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
A Block, Gate 3  
74 Epsom Avenue, Epsom  
Auckland 1023, New Zealand  
education@auckland.ac.nz  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
Facsimile 64 9 623 8898

**Project title:** A study of the use of tasks in tertiary English as an additional language programme in New Zealand and China: Teachers’ beliefs and practices and students’ attitudes

**Researcher:** Lingling Guan

- I have been given and understood an explanation of this research project and understood that my participation is voluntary.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- I agree that I will be interviewed about my learning in class and that I will be observed in class.
- I agree that the interviews and observations will be audio recorded.
- I understand that only my teacher and the researcher will listen to the recordings of interviews/observation, and the recordings will be stored securely.
- I understand that, during the observation and interview, I may ask for the recording device to be turned off at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that I will have the opportunity to read the interview transcripts, and that I may edit drafts of the transcripts.
- I understand that I may withdraw any information traceable to me at any time up to May 1, 2016, without giving a reason.
- I understand that the researcher will use pseudonyms for my data, the thesis and future publications and presentations of this research. My anonymity is assured.
- I understand that all the data will be stored securely for a period of six years and then destroyed.
• I understand that the data will be used for the researcher’s PhD thesis and may be used for academic publications, conference presentations.

• I understand that assurance has been given that my decision to participate or not in this project will not affect their standing in the class.

• I understand that my participation in the project will be confidential to the researcher.

• I am willing to participate in this research.

Signature: __________________________           Date:  __________________________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON

20-Jul-2015 for (3) years, Reference Number 014660
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer (Hereafter I): Which approach do you think has particular influence on you?</th>
<th>Exploring Molly’s teaching approach</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (hereafter Molly): I think probably, what is having the biggest factor on me is my students. That is what changes my teaching. I might think, ok, this is a good idea. I might think, ok, I might try this idea, this approach. But if my students don’t respond, then I need to rethink. Maybe it is me. Maybe it is the approach. I’ve got to try to find out.</td>
<td>The factor that influenced her the most: her student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly: I mean, I have been trained in the communicative approach. You can tell people the information about a language. You can tell people the rules. And you can tell people how a language works. But if they don’t use it, just telling them isn’t enough. You know, like the Chinese approach, giving information, that is not enough to learn a language. You’ve got to use the language. So my approach, I guess, is to always try to find a way to encourage students to use the language to communicate.</td>
<td>Her language teaching principle: using language to communicate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly: But you are dealing with people, and I mean, at the moment, I have got a class of basically 14 Chinese, and 2 people who are not Chinese. So I have a real problem. The biggest problem, I think, with the way we try to teach with the Chinese learners is that what I think, is that, maybe until you go and live in another country with a foreign language and until you experience trying to use the language, you don’t really understand what a language is. Any language. So I think that a lot of, not just Chinese, but young people, if they have never experienced living in another environment where they’ve got to use a different language, then they don’t know what a language is for. I think this is what I think at the moment.</td>
<td>Her teaching principle: to use language in the real context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly: So I have got two groups of Chinese students. I’ve got the international students and the migrants, the people who came here to live. And invariably, the migrants are adults</td>
<td>Giving an example to justify her language teaching principle: language is a tool used to communicate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and they have got children or they have been working and they know that they need to do the language: to buy something, or to do something or to get something; and they know they need to practice using it. But the young people stay with a home stay family. They don’t have to buy food; they don’t have to do their washing; you know. So they find it hard to understand that language is a tool. But after six months or after a year here, they began to realize that they need to use the language to communicate.

I: Would you please give me an example of a task you used in your classroom? What is your definition of task?

Molly: Ok, let me think about something I did last week. Ok, I will give you an example. Last week, they had to do a listening task. And it was their first listening to a lecture. And it was about legal systems, really a difficult subject because it is so different. You know the legal systems, in China and West, and especially English speaking countries. And the lecture was talking about over a thousand years ago in the U.K. It was talking about Anglo-Saxons, Vikings. Students, maybe, some of them know in Chinese, but they don’t know the English words. They know what we are talking about but they just don’t know English words. I think they are familiar with these ideas because it is the history.

Ok, so anyway, I put them into two groups, and I give one group a video to watch about the Anglo-Saxons, and I give the other group the video to watch about the Vikings. And the video is one-minute long. It is very fast, and it is an animated video. Somebody is talking while they are drawing pictures showing what happens. I can share the links with you if you’d like to have a look at the video. And they have to watch this for homework. One group watched this one. One group watched this one before the class. And then when they came next day, the next stage of this is all the people sit together and tell each other what

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to explore Molly’s understanding of tasks.</th>
<th>An example of task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ik: Would you please give me an example of a task you used in your classroom? What is your definition of task?</td>
<td>Molly: Ok, let me think about something I did last week. Ok, I will give you an example. Last week, they had to do a listening task. And it was their first listening to a lecture. And it was about legal systems, really a difficult subject because it is so different. You know the legal systems, in China and West, and especially English speaking countries. And the lecture was talking about over a thousand years ago in the U.K. It was talking about Anglo-Saxons, Vikings. Students, maybe, some of them know in Chinese, but they don’t know the English words. They know what we are talking about but they just don’t know English words. I think they are familiar with these ideas because it is the history. Ok, so anyway, I put them into two groups, and I give one group a video to watch about the Anglo-Saxons, and I give the other group the video to watch about the Vikings. And the video is one-minute long. It is very fast, and it is an animated video. Somebody is talking while they are drawing pictures showing what happens. I can share the links with you if you’d like to have a look at the video. And they have to watch this for homework. One group watched this one. One group watched this one before the class. And then when they came next day, the next stage of this is all the people sit together and tell each other what</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
they found out. And all the B people, the people who watched the other video, sit together and tell each other what they have found out. And then they sit together. One A one B person sit together. And they tell each other what they have found out and I asked them to draw a timeline to show who arrived first and who arrived second in England, and that seems to go ok.

They knew who I was talking about. They understood about the impact, the influence from the language. They were very interested about understanding the Norman, the words from French, which we now using in written language, the words from the Anglo-Saxons, the German words, which we used in speaking every day. So that helps them to understand a little about spoken and written language. But they found the listening a little bit easier.

Molly: So that activity involves giving one group one piece of information, another group different information, and then checking together with other people about more of their understanding. The thinking is one person will understand this bit and another person will understand that bit. As they put their ideas together; they get a better understanding. And I use that task a lot in my teaching. So I think we call it an information-gap. That kind of task/activity I try to use.

Her principle and preference of using tasks: information-gap task
### Appendix J Examples of Coding an Interview (an Excerpt from an Interview with One of the Students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcriptions</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer (Hereafter I): Which activities do you like the most? Why do you like it?</strong></td>
<td>Questions to explore students’ attitudes towards tasks and the reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student (Hereafter S): Performance certainly is my favorite.</strong></td>
<td>A student’s favorite activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: It can arouse my interests to study English.</td>
<td>The first reason for his preference: arousing his interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: English is a language originating from life and it should go back into real life again rather than merely for exams.</td>
<td>The second reason: practical function of English in real life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Even though you know the meaning of the words, you can understand the articles, and you can translate the sentences; when you are expected to communicate, you are at a loss, and you cannot find the right words to express yourself. You only end up in using broken English.</td>
<td>The third reason: English is used to communicate; obtaining language knowledge is not equal to communicative competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: We studied English for entrance examination when we were in the high school. However, the aim of English study has changed in college. If you want to study abroad one day, for instance, English should be used into the real life.</td>
<td>The forth reason: different aims of English learning from those in high school, and an example to justify his opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the performance because we create different contexts to practice real English in these performances. For instance, I played the role of an interviewee and I learnt a lot of English used in job application. And also, I learnt the western culture.</td>
<td>The fifth reason: to create a context to practice English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer (Hereafter I): Would you please tell me the activities that you don’t like? And why?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: I don’t like teacher’s explicit instruction on the language forms because it is boring. If the teacher focused on expressing new words all the time, it would kill my interests. It gives me the feeling that I must recite all these words.</td>
<td>The activity he doesn’t like and the reasons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
S: I will give you an example. The reason for the popular use of an Internet hot word is because everyone is using it. At the very beginning, I don’t know the meaning of the characters: Diaosi (that is, a loser); however, if any person around me is using it, I would have interests to get to know these characters. I can memorize the new characters effortlessly, and I will definitely learn this word and use it in my life.

An example to show the best way to learn English for him: to use language in real life.
### Appendix K Mary’s Classroom Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Activity Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: activity 1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers’ introduction of the classroom activities. (7 minutes)</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Activity 2</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher and students focused on the first exercise from the textbook. In the exercise, there are six extracts which contain an in-text citation with one or more mistakes. Students were required to correct the mistakes according to the APA style. Students first discussed answers with each other, then the teacher checked answers with the whole class. During the process, if there were any different opinions, the teacher would get the students to write their answers on the blackboard and finally she came up with her answers. (31 minutes)</td>
<td>Review: Doing textbook exercise one and two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher and students focused on the second exercise from the textbook. Students were asked to complete a table with the given reporting verbs according to similarity of meaning. For example, the words “point out” and “state” are put under the column of “say”. The teacher elicited all the answers from students. (10 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Activity 3-7</td>
<td>Presentation and practice of the target language: comparison and contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The teacher presented two pictures of the London Eye and the Liberty of Statue. She asked students the question “what are the differences between the two cities?” Students provided various answers. The teacher guided students to give opposite words such as “free and conventional, modern and traditional, busy and slow”. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Speaking activity: comparing the two pictures and brainstorming the topic-related words and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students listened to a passage which was about the difference between New York and London. They were required to fill in a table by writing down the bullet points on the</td>
<td>Listening activity</td>
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</table>
similarities and differences of the two cities from the following five aspects: people, shops, their attitudes towards work and holidays, transport and general opinions on the two cities. They listened to it twice. After the first time, the students compared their answers with their partners. (23 minutes)

5. The teacher asked students to refer to their notes and write five sentences by summing up the similarities and differences of the two cities. Before this activity, the teacher summed up the words, phrases, sentence patterns about comparison and contrast with her students, such as: “similar to, likewise, similarly, as opposed to, have in… common, in spite of’ etc. She first tried to elicit more words from her students, then she wrote them on the blackboard. Finally she classified all the words into different word classes and presented them in a power point. She also gave a sentence pattern for students to imitate which is: “Like/ unlike London, New York is…”. After her speech on the words and sentence patterns, students were asked to write down five sentences by using these words and sentence patterns. (10 minutes)

6. Students started their writing of the five sentences. During this process, the teacher walked around the classroom, monitoring them closely and pointing out their grammatical mistakes in their sentences. Then the students corrected the errors under the teacher’s guidance. (17 minutes)

7. The teacher got all the students to put their sentences on the wall of the classroom for other students to read and correct. Some of the students continued to do this during the following break. (10 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 4: Activity 8</th>
<th>Review</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. The teacher talked to three students during the break about their writings from the previous class. The focus was mainly on the overall structure. (20 minutes break)</td>
<td>Break time activity: offering feedback for students’ writing from the previous class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5 : Activity 9-12 ( highly task-like stage)</td>
<td>Presentation and Practice of the target language based on a series of speaking and writing activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. The teacher gave several sentences on comparison and contrast as models before getting her students to have group writings on comparing their own home country with New Zealand. She explained each sentence by using the words and phrases she had presented in Activity 5, her first explicit instruction on language forms. For instance, three of the sentences are: “New Zealand is different from London in that everything is much higher; Unlike London, everything in New York is higher; New York differs from London in the height of the place”. She emphasised how to use a paraphrase as well through these examples. Finally, she asked her students to paraphrase their language resources. (21 minutes)</td>
<td>Language focus: teacher’s explicit instruction on more sentence patterns of comparison and contrast by using the words and phrases of comparison and contrast that she had covered in Activity 5.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The following activities were in the lab. The teacher divided students into four writing groups: two African groups, one Middle East group and one Asian group. The aim of the essay was to compare the students’ home countries with New Zealand. The four students in each group were assigned different writing, with one student writing an introduction, the second and the third student writing two perspectives, and the forth one writing the conclusion. Then the teacher also discussed the framework of a composition with the whole class, and she put the outline on the blackboard. For instance, the thesis statement is included in the introduction, and topic sentences in the body part, and summary in the conclusion part. (15 minutes)</td>
<td>Preparation of group writing: discussion of the outline and content of the writing. Then teacher-fronted discussion on how to structure the writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Students started writing in groups. (30 minutes)</td>
<td>Writing activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The teacher put all their writings on the wall for the whole class to read and correct. Then she collected all the writings and told her</td>
<td>Display of their writings on the wall for other students to read and correct.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
students that she would offer her feedback when they met next time. (10 minutes)
### Appendix L Evaluation of the Five Stages in Mary’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

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Note: s1=stage 1; s2= stage 2; s3=stage 3; s4=stage 4; s5= stage 5
## Appendix M Rachel’s Classroom Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity (Rachel’s first observed class)</th>
<th>Activity type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Activity 1-2</td>
<td>Warm-up activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(information-exchange task)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The students were given one card with five statements on it. The statements are as follows: find someone who can read music; find someone who has had more than three different jobs; and find some students who have the same birthday. Students were then asked to turn them into questions such as “Can you read music?” or Have you got any jobs?” They moved around the classrooms to look for answers for these questions. After that, students compared the answers they had collected and wrote down the names of their classmates on the cards. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Warm-up activity: information-exchange task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students exchanged information and compared information, then wrote down the findings on cards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher got some students to report the interesting things they have found out. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Report of the findings. Teacher-fronted conversation with the whole class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Activity 3-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The teacher got students to have a pair discussion regarding travelling, business trips, and rules of meetings. Rachel first asked the questions as: “tell your partner what countries you have visited, and then your favourite one? Which country would you like to visit in the future? And why.” Rachel first gave her answers. Students then discussed for a short time with their partners. Then Rachel had a whole class conversation with her students about the aim of travelling. After eliciting some answers from students, she said that people travel for business. Then she asked students to discuss the following questions: “what do you like or dislike about meetings?”</td>
<td>Presentation, practice and production of the target language: first and second conditional based on a series of listening and speaking activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pair discussion and teacher-fronted whole class conversation. Eliciting of the topic-related words and ideas on business meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After students discussed it for one minute, Rachel listened to her students’ ideas and had a free conversation with the whole class again. She continued to ask questions: “what are some rules you should follow in a meeting?” and then she listened to students’ ideas and wrote all the rules of business meetings on the blackboard such as “don’t leave, don’t sleep, Listen, on time, and respect cultural habits” etc. (20 minutes)

4. The teacher distributed handouts to students and got them to prepare for the listening task by filling the blanks of a paragraph which was about having business meeting overseas. The words missed in the paragraph are part of the phrases as “(make) a deal” “(do) business”, and “(make) an appointment”. Rachel read each sentence and students gave her the missing words.

The teacher got students to do another listening exercise to decide if the statement is true or false according to their own experiences. For example: Business lunches in the U.S go on for a long time. Is it true or false? (15 minutes)

5. Then students listened to the passage which is about rules of doing business in different countries around the world. Then Rachel and students did the same exercise to indicate true or false. The teacher checked answers with all the students by getting them to tell her if it is true or false and to fix the false statements. (15 minutes)

6. The teacher picked two sentences from the listening materials and got her students to notice and generalize the differences between first conditional and second conditional pattern. The two sentences are: If you have a business lunch, it will probably last for an hour; if you gave them a present, they would probably think it was a bribe. The teacher asked questions like: “Is it likely or unlikely to happen? Is it present or past tense?” Then teacher clarified the differences. (10 minutes)

The teacher got students to find all the first conditional and second conditional structures from the listening transcript. Then the students were asked to read these sentences aloud.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. The teacher distributed handouts to students and got them to prepare for the listening task by filling the blanks of a paragraph which was about having business meeting overseas. The words missed in the paragraph are part of the phrases as “(make) a deal” “(do) business”, and “(make) an appointment”. Rachel read each sentence and students gave her the missing words. The teacher got students to do another listening exercise to decide if the statement is true or false according to their own experiences. For example: Business lunches in the U.S go on for a long time. Is it true or false? (15 minutes)</th>
<th>Pre-listening exercises: cloze, true or false exercises and correction of statements that contained errors.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Then students listened to the passage which is about rules of doing business in different countries around the world. Then Rachel and students did the same exercise to indicate true or false. The teacher checked answers with all the students by getting them to tell her if it is true or false and to fix the false statements. (15 minutes)</td>
<td>Listening activity and doing the same listening exercise: indicating true or false and correcting the statements. Teacher checked answers with the whole class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The teacher picked two sentences from the listening materials and got her students to notice and generalize the differences between first conditional and second conditional pattern. The two sentences are: If you have a business lunch, it will probably last for an hour; if you gave them a present, they would probably think it was a bribe. The teacher asked questions like: “Is it likely or unlikely to happen? Is it present or past tense?” Then teacher clarified the differences. (10 minutes) The teacher got students to find all the first conditional and second conditional structures from the listening transcript. Then the students were asked to read these sentences aloud.</td>
<td>Language focus: teacher first induced rules of the first and second conditional from students. Then teacher’ explanation of the differences between the first and second conditional. Highlighting all the sentences with first/second conditional from the transcripts of listening material.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
together. After that, the teacher read the first part of the if-clause, and then she asked the individual students to take turns to finish the second half of the sentence without looking at the book.

For example, the teacher said: “if someone invites you to a pub”; one of the students said: “they will expect you to buy a drink”. (10 minutes)

6. The students did exercises: turning the statements into first conditional or second conditional by deciding how likely each situation is. For example, one of the statements is: it is sunny tomorrow. The teacher first gave the model: “If it is sunny tomorrow, I will be happy”. Then the teacher checked answers with them. After that all the students wrote down at least one sentence and took turns to read it out again. (20 minutes)

Language practice: turning statements into first or second conditional sentences.

7. Students were divided into several groups to play a game where they threw the dice and answered the questions on the handouts which had the same number as the dice. For example, if one student threw six, the student was supposed to answer the question six on the handout: Under what kind of circumstance, would you go to work in another country? Students should use the first and second conditional when they were answering the questions. After that, teacher checked answers with all the students by getting one student from each group to pick one question and answer it. (10 minutes)

Playing a game: throwing a dice and answering questions by using first and second conditional.

Then teacher listened to some students’ sentences.

Activity (Rachel’s second observed class) Activity Type

Stage 3: Activity 9 Warm-up activity

9. The students were asked to talk about interesting things they did the day before the classes and also they were asked to find out who had done any study. Then the teacher listened to students reporting their answers from each group (mostly volunteers). The teacher asked questions like: “Did anyone do any study? Have you done anything interesting?” (10 minutes)

Warm-up activity: information-exchange task and then reporting of their findings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 4: Activity 10-18</th>
<th>A series of listening and speaking activities to practice the expressions for giving opinions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Task appeared at the end of these series of activities: Activity 17-18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The teacher showed a picture to students and got them to describe it. The picture is from the textbook which is the city Zurich in Switzerland with a lot of old buildings beside a river and boats on the river. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Whole-class free conversation: teacher-fronted picture description.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The teacher got students to discuss the factors they would need to take into account if they wanted to move to a new city. Teacher tried to elicit words and ideas related to the topic by keeping on asking them questions, such as: “what kind of things do we need to know before we kind of think we want to go there?” Then she discussed these questions with her students and wrote down the new words on the blackboard such as “accommodation, employment, and safety” rather than the words: “job, house” offered by students. The teacher also tried to extend students’ words in this process. For instance, when students mentioned politics, she asked: “when we talk about politics, we have conservative. How do we describe politics? If politics is very conservative, what do we say? Left or right?” (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Pair discussion and teacher-fronted whole-class conversation. Focusing on eliciting and extending words and ideas related to the topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The teacher presented six factors and asked students to rank them in order of importance. Then the students compared their answers and discussed the reasons for their ranking with their partners. ( 7 minutes)</td>
<td>Pair work and discussion: ranking of the six factors. No presentation of the ranking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The teacher gave reasons for her first choice. Then she asked students to write down the reasons beside their first choice and discuss with partner again. (15 minutes)</td>
<td>Writing down the reasons for their first choice and pair discussion. No reporting of the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The teacher gave her reasons for the first three choices and got students to discuss the reasons in pairs again. ( 7 minutes)</td>
<td>Pair work and discussion : reasons for the first three choices No reporting of the discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15. The teacher gave questions before students listening to an audio file about the factors people were considering when they wanted to live in a new city, such as: “Which one wants climate to be at the top? Which speaker is more worried about personal safety? What does Peter want at the top? Which speaker explains his views most reasonably?”

Then the students listened to the passage and discussed the questions in pairs. After that, the teacher played the audio again. Then teacher checked the answers with all the students. (7 minutes)

16. The teacher got students to read the listening transcript from the textbook and asked them to underline the expressions for giving opinions such as: “I really believe, I firmly believe, I am convinced, as I see it here etc.”. Then the teacher checked the answer with all the students by listening to them to read these expressions. Meanwhile, she explained the expressions by asking students if these expressions are strong, normal or cautious expressions. (10 minutes)

17. Students worked in two large groups to reach an agreement about the top three factors for moving to a new city. Meanwhile, students were asked to use the expressions for giving opinions in their discussion. (17 minutes)

18. Each group was asked to send a representative to present their final decision about the three factors in front of the class and the teacher responded to students’ content mainly by focusing on meaning. (10 minutes)

Stage 5: Activity 19

19. Students listened to another passage concerning an introduction to Dubai. Students were asked to consider the questions about the general ideas and details given by the teacher before the listening such as “What is the name of the city? Which factors are discussed? Which three months are the hottest?” After listening to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening comprehension: listening and answering the questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair discussion and teacher-led whole class check.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language focus and teacher’s brief explanation: identifying and emphasis of the expressions for giving opinions from the listening transcript.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group work: reach an agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A decision-making task with a clear outcome (an agreement on the three top factors).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ presentation of the three factors in front of the class.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening comprehension: listening and answering questions and then whole-class check of the questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the passage, Rachel checked answers with all the students. (10 minutes)
## Appendix N Evaluation of the Five Stages in Rachel’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>1. Does the activity involve language use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome? 3. Is success judged in terms of outcome?</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓/✓/✓/✓/✓</td>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
<td>✓/✓/✓/✓/✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
<td>✓/✓/✓/✓/✓</td>
<td>✓/✗/✓/✓/✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓/✓/✓/✓/✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: s1=stage 1; s2= stage 2; s3=stage 3; s4=stage 4; s5= stage 5
## Appendix O Molly’s Classroom Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activity-type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Activity 1-9</td>
<td>A series of listening and speaking activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> The teacher gave dictation of 12 questions comparing the different eating habits between the current generation and their grandparents 50 years ago. For example: “How many meals do a typical person in your country eat a day? How many meals did your grandparents eat each day?” After each sentence, she asked her students to compare their written sentences. (20 minutes)</td>
<td>Listening activity: dictation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> The teacher gave expression and expansion of the new words from the 12 questions (such as typical, typically; leftover; Sunday roast). Also, the teacher emphasised the pronunciation of the new words and got students to read the new words after her. Meanwhile, she reminded her students some grammar such as present “do” and past tense “did”. For example, she asked students the following question: “Which one is about now the present?” She also explained the different food cultures in UK and NZ based on the new words such as Sunday roast. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Language focus on new vocabulary. Teacher-centered explanation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Teacher got students to discuss the 12 questions. Meanwhile, teacher walked around the classroom and listened to students. She did not voluntarily talk to her students unless she was asked by their students. Then teacher gathered answers from the whole class about these questions. Teacher asked questions and then some volunteers answered the questions. (13 minutes)</td>
<td>Group discussion: exchange opinions. Teacher-centered whole class activity. Teacher discussed the questions with the whole class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Teachers gave students more questions related to the same topic in the form of phonetic symbols on the handouts and got them to transcribe the questions. Students were divided into four groups, with each group holding 6 questions on the handouts different from the other groups. (8 minutes)</td>
<td>Students’ transcription of further questions related to the same topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Teacher expressed the new words rising from the questions, such as “convenience and ready-made”. (5 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language focus: teacher-centered activity. Introduction of the new words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Students checked with each other the transcripts of the questions and started discussing the answers with each other in their groups. (12 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group discussion of the transcribed questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. Regrouped the students and got the students to discuss the questions again. All the four students in the new group were holding different questions. (8 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regrouping students and discussion: exchange opinions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. Then teacher attended to some problems arising from students’ discussion, for instance, she noticed that students were confused with the name of meat in the discussion. As a result, she raised the questions at the end of discussion: “What do we call the food the meat?” And then she discussed the name: beef, lamb, pork with her students. Teachers then got students to guess the thematic words by asking questions (such as “what are we comparing and contrasting?”) and giving some letters to elicit the topic of the class: “eating habits” from students. (4 minutes)

| Attending to the language problems arising from discussion. 
| Guessing the words of the theme of the class. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-fronted activity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. Teacher got students to summarize all the answers to the questions and discuss in pairs: what are the main differences and similarities of eating habits between current times and fifty years ago. (10 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair discussion: summary of the general idea based on the discussed questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Stage 2: Activity 10-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reading activity one</th>
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</thead>
</table>

10. Students read the passage with the title: Did your grandparents have better eating habits than you do now? Teacher split the reading passage into five parts and gave the different parts to five different groups (group A read the first part, Group B read the second part, etc.). Then the students were asked to read the passage and summarize the main idea. (15 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading practice: summing up the general idea.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Activity 13-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Activity 16-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
structure) and then she asked her students to write a framework with their pairs first. (15 minutes)

17. All the pair groups then decided the items and their perspectives and then wrote down the framework. (10 minutes)

18. Teacher then checked all the groups’ framework and made sure that they had correct structure so that they can start writing. (10 minutes)

19. Students started writing with their partners. Each pair of students started writing their own part and then they combined the two parts together to form a complete writing. After that, they submitted their writing to the teacher. The teacher read their writing and offered feedback to her students with regard to all the aspects of language forms such as spelling, grammar and connotation. (55 minutes)

| Discussion and writing practice in pairs: students wrote the structure of the writing in pairs. | Teacher’s feedback on the structure. |
| Writing practice in pairs and teacher’s offering of the feedback |
## Appendix P Evaluation of the Four Stages in Molly’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>✓/✓/✗/✗</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>✓/✓/✗/✗</td>
<td>1. Does the activity involve language use?</td>
<td>✓/✓/✗/✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>✗/✗/✗/✗</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome?</td>
<td>✗/✗/✗/✗</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?</td>
<td>✗/✗/✗/✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Is success judged in terms of outcome?</td>
<td>✗/✗/✗/✗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>✗/✓/✗/✗</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
<td>✓/✓/✓/✓</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
<td>✓/✓/✗/✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td>✓/✓/✗/✗</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓/✓/✗/✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: s1=stage 1; s2= stage 2; s3=stage 3; s4=stage 4
### Appendix Q Grace’s Classroom Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activity type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Activity 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The teacher invited four second year students to give presentations on how they studied English and got high marks in the college English band-four test. All of the four students were Grace’s former students. (48 minutes)</td>
<td>Presentation of English learning experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Activity 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher introduced the topic by asking the following questions: “people die in pursuit of wealth, birds die in pursuit of food; What else do people seek?” Then she started Unit 1: <em>The Fame Game</em>. After that, she got students to think about the definition of fame, and then she listened to two students’ opinions on the definitions. Finally she presented her PPT with the definitions of fame on it and got students to read out these definitions. She also presented some phrases related to fame such as “fame and fortune, and rise to fame”. (7 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher-led presentation: definition of fame and related vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Activity 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A highly task-like activity)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The teacher got students to write five celebrities’ names on cards. Then some students came to the front and described the five celebrities for the rest of the students to guess the names. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Playing a game: guessing the names of celebrities Pre-listening activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Activity 4-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students listened to the first audio passage from the textbook and completed the summary table about the reasons why being famous is good. Then the teacher checked the answers with the whole class. After that, she summarized the advantages of being famous in her own words in a PPT after listening to this audio for the second time. (7 minutes)</td>
<td>Listening activity 1: listening to summarize the general idea and fill in the table followed by a summary on a PPT by teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Students listened to the second audio passage about the influences of fame on Oscar Wilde from the textbook and then did the multiple choices. The questions covered general as well as detailed ideas. For example, the first question was: What are these speakers talking about? After the first listening exercise, the teacher asked questions about the passage, and then they checked the answers with the whole class. After the second time, the teacher explained two phrases “run-through” and “single out” in English. (9 minutes)

| Listening activity 2: multiple choices from a listening exercise and teachers’ expression of new words. |

6. The teacher got students to listen to the third audio passage from the textbook which focused on the disadvantages of being famous using the example of Marilyn Monroe. The questions required students to summarize the ideas and also to remember several details. For example, the first question was: what is the main idea? The teacher and students checked the answers together after listening to the audio for the first time. Then the teacher explained some new words after the second time of listening, such as “innocence, respectable and respectful”. Finally, the teacher summarized the disadvantages in a PPT. (15 minutes)

| Listening activity 3: listening to do the multiple choices followed by teachers’ expression of new words |

Stage 5: Activity 7

7. The teacher reviewed all the new words and phrases learned in this class by getting students to translate the Chinese phrases into English. (2 minutes)

| Review |

| Review of all the words and phrases learned in this class |

Stage 6: Activity 8-9

8. The teacher got students to speak aloud one sentence that either compared or contrasted Hitler and Napoleon. This was the assignment from the previous lesson and it was the background information for the reading passage, Unit 1: Icy Defender, which is about the invasion of Russia by Hitler. The teacher repeated the sentences or rephrased part or whole of the students’ utterances after the students spoke their sentences. (30 minutes)

| Reading activities |

| Pre-reading activity: comparing and contrasting the two persons: Hitler and Napoleon |
| 9. The teacher and students began to focus on the reading passage. The teacher got students to read through each paragraph, and then she picked out words and phrases from some paragraphs. She explained the meanings of the words and made sentences with the different meanings. She got students to translate the sentences and also introduced more words related to the selected words and phrases. She also started discussions with her students based on some new words. (55 minutes) | Reading activity: focusing on language points from the text. |
Appendix R Evaluation of the Six Stages in Grace’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>x/ x/ √/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>x/ x/ √/ √/ x/ x</td>
<td>1. Does the activity involve language use?</td>
<td>x/ x/ √/ x/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Some kind of gap</td>
<td>x/ √/ √/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>4. Is completion a priority?</td>
<td>√/ √/ √/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>3. Is it a holistic activity?</td>
<td>x/ √/ √/ √/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>x/ √/ √/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
<td>√/ √/ √/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
<td>x/ √/ √/ x/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td>√/ √/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: s1=stage 1; s2= stage 2; s3=stage 3; s4=stage 4; s5= stage 5; s6=stage 6
## Appendix S Gloria’s Classroom Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity (90 minutes)</th>
<th>Activity type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 1: Activity 1-3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher’s introduction of the overall lesson plan. (3 minutes)</td>
<td>Introduction from teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. The teacher dictated the words and phrases from the listening materials the students learnt in the previous class, which was about the Chinese spring festival, such as “lunar calendar, Chinese zodiac, and couplets”. The teacher sometimes read a whole sentence with the new words and expressions to get students to understand the meaning of the words and phrases. (7 minutes) | Dictation  
Review of content from previous classes. |
| 3. Students wrote a passage about the spring festival by using all the dictated words and phrases. (5 minutes) | Writing  
Review |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Stage 2: Activity 4-8</strong> (A debating task)</th>
<th>Debating activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. The teacher explained and expanded upon new words and phrases on the topic of <em>Smart cars</em>. While asking the students questions and explaining meanings, she drew out particular words and phrases. She then recorded these on the blackboard. The words and phrases include: “automobile, licence plate, bumper, engine and steering wheel”. (20 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher-led whole class discussion to elicit topic related words and phrases</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The teacher divided students into A and B groups and got students to continue writing by giving them the different sentence starters. The sentence starter for group A was: If I could afford a car, I will buy and drive one without hesitation. The sentence starter for group B was: Even if I could afford a car, I may not actually want to drive one. The teacher also provided structure model for students to fill in their opinions. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Writing down the ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Two students formed a group (one student is from group A, the other from B). Students were required to stand in two lines and talk to each other in pairs. They were asked to persuade each other by explaining on their opinions on whether they should or should not drive cars in China. (12 minutes)</td>
<td>Debate in pairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Activity 9-10</td>
<td>Reading activities</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7.</strong> The teacher first got individual students from group A to present their opinions; then group B challenged Group A. Meanwhile, the teacher wrote the general ideas on the blackboard and summed up each student’s opinions. (22 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher-led whole class debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.</strong> Break time: students watched video clips dubbed by some volunteer students, which was made through an app downloaded from the Internet. Dubbing a movie clip is the homework for each week. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Break time activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9.</strong> Students read through the passage in Unit 2: <em>Smart cars</em>, with the following question in their mind: what are the features of a smart car? Students were also required to underline the key sentences of each paragraph. (6 minutes)</td>
<td>Reading: Skimming for main ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10.</strong> The teacher asked students to tell her the key features of a smart car. (5 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher-led conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 4: Activity 11-14</strong></td>
<td>Introduction and review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11.</strong> The teacher introduced the overall lesson plan. (2 minutes)</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.</strong> The teacher dictated words and phrases about fame from the previous class such as “famous, infamous, fame and fortune, celebrity; everyone has his fifteen minutes of fame”. (5 minutes)</td>
<td>Review: Dictation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13.</strong> Students wrote a passage using these dictated words and phrases. (5 minutes)</td>
<td>Writing task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.</strong> The teacher explained the new words from a listening material, which was a video about the Chinese spring festival. Students were asked to listen to it and transcribe it after class. (18 minutes)</td>
<td>Language focus: The teacher’s explanation of the new words and phrases after reading each sentence from a transcription of a video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 5: Activity 15-20</strong></td>
<td>A series of closely related listening, speaking and writing activities on the same topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15.</strong> The teacher showed five pictures to students and got students to describe them. Then she introduced the theme: originality. For instance, one of the pictures is a digital knife with multiple functions. (10 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher-led discussion of five pictures to elicit topic-related words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Students watched a video with the title: Thinking different. The teacher played it twice and got students to complete hand-outs with missing words. After the second time, she also stopped the video after each sentence and explained the new words. She asked the question: “what are the attitudes towards originality?” (8 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Students listened to the second audio passage from the textbook which is about the advantages and disadvantages of originality and wrote down the key sentences of the advantages and disadvantages of originality. After that, teacher checked answers with all the students. (5 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Students wrote their own ideas on the blackboard about being original. They were asked to write under two columns, one in support of originality; the other in opposition of it. Then the teacher summarized the students’ opinions. (12 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>The teacher read a writing sample on originality and got students to write their own by following this sample. (5 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Students presented their opinions on originality in front of the classroom and the teacher gave her feedback. (10 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Students were asked to take notes and write down as much information as possible while they were listening to another audio passage from the textbook about Chaplin’s life and his originality. The passage was replayed three times. Students were also told to retell this audio passage. (7 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>The teacher checked students’ listening by asking them questions about Chapline’s life, such as: “What did he do in different years?” The teacher got students to listen to the audio passage again after class and asked them to retell the story next time. (5 minutes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listening activity: listening to fill in the blanks followed by teachers’ formal explanation of the new words.

Listening activity: Listening to the passage and writing down the general ideas.

Whole class activity: students volunteered to record their opposing ideas on the blackboard on originality under two columns followed by the teacher’s summary of students’ responses.

Writing activity

Students’ presentation and teachers’ feedback.

Listening activity: listening and taking notes to retell the passage.

Teacher-led whole classroom discussion based on the listening.
## Appendix T Evaluation of the Six Stages in Gloria’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>x/✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>x/✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓</td>
<td>1. Does the activity involve language use?</td>
<td>x/✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>x/✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
<td>✓/✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
<td>✓/✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td>x/✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓/ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: s1=stage 1; s2= stage 2; s3=stage 3; s4=stage 4; s5= stage 5; s6=stage 6
## Appendix U Susan’s Classroom Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activity type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Activity 1-5</td>
<td>Introduction, watching video and acting it out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The teacher introduces the overall lesson plan. (2 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher’s introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The students watched a video about a business negotiation for three times. During this process, they were required to fill in the missing information on a table, which focused on the numbers of the goods, the prices and the discount rate. Then the teacher checked the answers with all the students. (7 minutes)</td>
<td>Listening activity: the students watched a video about a business negotiation and completed a table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The teacher explained the strategies used in a business negotiation based on information from the video. For instance, a seller needs to be persistent, and a buyer sometimes needs more time to negotiate with the seller before he is offered a good price for the commodities he wants to purchase. (4 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher instruction on the strategies used in a business negotiation based on the video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The students were required to create a business negotiation in pairs by referring to a group of given words and phrases. One student played the role of the buyer, and the other one was the seller. The words and phrases are: interested in, 25-inch color TV sets, 5% higher than that of the same product, etc. Then the teacher got several pairs of students to act it out. (16 minutes)</td>
<td>Students’ presentation of a business negotiation in pairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The teacher showed students an example of the business negotiation that students had acted out. She first got students to read it and then she emphasised the words and phrases that were widely used in the business negotiation such as: “have a good reputation, give me an indicator of price, and meet each other halfway”, etc. Then they listened to the first video again and she repeated the words about business negotiations from the video such as “have a larger discount, with a guarantee, delivering” etc. Then she summed up the strategies of business negotiations again. (11 minutes)</td>
<td>Teacher-led activity: presenting an example of a business exchange with focus on the words and phrases used in the business negotiations. Teacher’s summary of business negotiation strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Activity 6-7</td>
<td>Listening exercise one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The students listened to another passage and completed five multiple choice exercises. The listening passage is about where to start a</td>
<td>Listening task: aural multiple choice exercises.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
business. Before the listening task, the teacher explained two new words to students. (5 minutes)

7. After listening to it, the teacher checked the answers with all the students. During this process, she played the part again if her students were unclear about the answer. Meanwhile, she translated some English words into Chinese such as: “build up, a business at a distance from home and economically inactive place”, etc. (10 minutes)

Stage 3: Activity 8-9
(Highly task-like activity)

8. The students were required to do a matching game from the textbook. There is a list of skills and qualities under column A, and a list of job titles under column B. Students were required to match A to B and explain the reasons for their choices in pairs. (5 minutes)

9. The teacher got several pairs of students to present their answers in the form of a dialogue. She gave praises to their students’ presentation. Sometimes she reiterated the students’ ideas. (12 minutes)

Stage 4: activity 10

10. The students listened to another audio passage twice and did a multiple choice exercise. This listening passage was about how to start a business. Then the teacher checked the answers with the students. In this process, the teacher explained the new words before checking the listening exercise, and the teacher played the audio again if students were not clear about the answer. (10 minutes)

Stage 5: Activity 11-14

11. The teacher first introduced to the class the theme of death and discussed her feelings about this theme. She then got students to watch a video and explained her feelings about the video. It is a clip from the movie Forest Gump and it is the dialogue between Forest and his dying mother. (6 minutes)

12. She drew out the word “epitaph” from this movie clip and presented the epitaphs of four
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 6: Activity 15-16</th>
<th>Reading activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. The teacher got students to watch another movie clip which is from the movie Titanic, and it is the dialogue between the hero Jack and heroine Rose when they were in the sea. Then the teacher explained her reflection on it. (8 minutes)</td>
<td>Watching another movie clip and teachers’ explanation of her reflections on it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The teacher introduced the topic of Unit 5 titled <em>graceful hands</em> which is the description of a dying lady from the perspective of a doctor. Then she asked students the question: “What does a dying person need the most?” The students first had a group discussion on this question and then the teacher got one student to stand up and share her opinions. (5 minutes)</td>
<td>Group discussion: discussion of a question related to the reading text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 7: Activity 17-18</td>
<td>Writing activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The teacher got students to read the new words in this unit together. Then she asked students to read the text from unit 5 and to think about the structure by dividing this passage into several parts. Also she got students to sum up the general ideas of each part and to think about the writing styles of this passage. (16 minutes)</td>
<td>Reading silently: Students read the passage silently and thought about the questions given by the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The teacher read this text together with students. She divided this passage into several parts and explained the general ideas of each part, and then she picked the new words and phrases to explain. After each explanation, she gave a Chinese sentence for her students to translate into English using the newly-learned words and phrases. Meanwhile, she provided more words and phrases to help her students translate the Chinese into English. During this process, she discussed the development of the plot in English. (90 minutes)</td>
<td>Language focus: the teacher’s explicit explanation of new words and phrases from each paragraph; student making sentences with the new words; the teacher’s retelling of the plot and summary of each part of the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. The teacher briefly introduced the writing style of this reading passage. It was about the vivid and detailed description of a person. Then she gave students 10 minutes to write a 120-word composition, titled *The cowboy is the hero*, by using detailed description. (17 minutes)

| Writing activity |

18. She got two students to read their compositions and then she read her own sample. Meanwhile, she emphasised some words and phrases in the sample and explained them in Chinese. (5 minutes)

| Presentation of students’ compositions and presentation of a sample from the teacher. |

Stage 8: Activity 19

19. The teacher reviewed all the new words and phrases from the reading passages. She dictated these phrases in Chinese and got students to translate them into English. (2 minutes)

| Language focus |

| Review of all the new words and phrases learned in this class. |
Appendix V  Evaluation of the Eight Stages in Susan’s Class with Reference to the Three Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary focus on meaning</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>1. Is there a primary focus on meaning?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>1. Does the activity involve language use?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly defined outcome</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>2. Is there an outcome? 3. Is success judged in terms of outcome?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>2. Is there a non-linguistic outcome?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Some kind of gap</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>4. Is completion a priority?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>3. Is it a holistic activity?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learners relying on own resources</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>5. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>4. Is it aimed at promoting language learning through process or product or both?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td>6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?</td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x/ x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: s1=stage 1; s2= stage 2; s3=stage 3; s4=stage 4; s5= stage 5; s6=stage 6; s7=stage 7; s8=stage 8
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