

Task-based adapted for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities

The development of cognition and language are closely intertwined; therefore, students with intellectual disabilities also deserve high-quality language instruction and meaningful learning opportunities. Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge to provide this.

For teacher educators, equipping teacher trainees with the methods and skills to teach foreign languages is their main responsibility. Many teacher trainees are not prepared to work in special schools; however, each year, graduates from various university programmes may look for teaching positions in special schools. In Hong Kong alone, there were 43 special schools attended by students with intellectual disabilities in the Year 2023-2024. In special schools, the notion of subject teachers being subject trained is uncommon. These teachers lacked strong subject knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, little pedagogical experience implementing TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching). The goal of this study is to contribute to teacher education and to the personal development of teachers.

Praxis-oriented approach to narrow the difference

In the report, one criticism was that the current climate of TBLT focuses on outcome and measurement. While the discussion of TBLT adoption and granularity in mainstream classrooms is valid, the majority of TBLT research does not discuss incorporating value learning, community adjustment, concept development, dialogic mediation of skills, and sense-making into task designs. In brief, TBLT's minor findings, such as planning time, accuracy, complexity, and negotiation of meaning, do not easily combine into (a) a comprehensive picture of how tasks should be designed and (b) how English teachers in special schools can find these fragments useful. As a result, the study design adopted a praxis-oriented approach to the integration of TBLT. This means that any theoretical frameworks must be based on contextual understanding, observation, and practice; any well-understood consensus from mainstream TBLT cannot be directly transferred into these schools.

The research method

The current study adopts an observational approach to verifying TBLT. By employing a team of experienced teacher educators and principals, the study design enables assessment of the extent to which the intended objective of TBLT was achieved. Altogether, we observed 91 lessons with a majority of the lessons observed three times. The study's assessment scheme focused on five aspects: **Context, task input, task output, dialogic mediation, and assistive techniques**. The distillation of these **five dimensions** results from the study PI's theoretical papers (Chan, 2022, 2023), the information-processing nature from input to output, and the importance of dialogical mediation (Johnson, Verity, & Childs, 2023; Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). In order to address the question of 'How should teachers design effective tasks for special

classrooms', this research started from observation of teachers' teaching and students' learning. This method enables us to calculate internal consistency, assess reliability, and predict whether TBLTs will be successful (or not). In short, these analyses allow us to validate and refine our perspective on the five aspects.

What has been revealed?

Deep Dive Context

In order to teach students with SEN (intellectual disabilities in this study), a deep dive into a context (Dimension/Principle 1) is the most important. The context is not merely meaningful like second-generation tasks (jigsaw reading, information gaps, problem-solving actions), rather a prolonged context that provides teachers with sufficient mediational spaces as well as opportunities for concept development. Moreover, it must be based on real-life scenarios. Special schools have intrinsically long unit lengths than mainstream schools, which means they need to plan long-term and must develop this skill. Some teachers face a problem when it comes to long-term planning. Overall, the observations and close support with teachers suggest special schools need to focus on third-generation tasks - tasks that facilitate collaborative thinking, such as project work, game plans, and adventures.

Task Input

Task input (Dimension/Principle 2) is also predictive of effective TBLT implementation. This dimension requires teachers to plan in detail what they teach students: Are their multi-skills being trained? Are there different activities? Is the game plan progressing logically? Does it involve experiential learning and affective connections? If teachers are too textbook-oriented, focus on one skill such as vocabulary repetition, they cannot score well, or if the lesson content does not touch upon concept development, they cannot score well. If teachers' input is not logical, it will muddle the input given to learners. Despite their weak cognitive abilities, learners can still make sense of good material and feel excited when a teacher's input is logical, game-like, and involves them in an adventure.

Dialogical mediation

Dialogical mediation (Dimension/Principle 4) is also predictive of effective TBLT implementation. This is not emphasized in mainstream TBLT research, but many educators have long emphasized it. Some teachers are always textbook-oriented and unable to lead students into a '**fantastic world of activities, concepts, and people**'. Speaking skills and collaborative thinking are part of this dimension. The teacher cannot score well if he/she lacks responsive mediation skills and is not detail-oriented. Overall, the model explains 43.5 variance (43.5% of what teachers do or not can be explained by the 5-dimensional model).

Interestingly, if we ask lesson raters only to observe the lesson's effectiveness (e.g., individualised instruction, class discipline, and achieving lesson goals), we notice a difference: all teachers score higher and are quite effective. **Thus, teacher education must focus on and train teachers in the use of tasks.** Effective use of tasks is not equivalent to effective teaching.

While mainstream TBLT research emphasises students' **negotiation of language points**, it is hard to observe instances of negotiation of language points in SEN lessons. However, students may negotiate concepts (Who is this person? Why is he there? How do noodles taste after adding lemon juice?) with their teachers, but not with each other. This part of TBLT must be modified when it is implemented in special schools.

References:

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