

# EFL Teachers' Perception and Practice of Task-based Language Teaching Using Family and Friends Textbook Series

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## Abstract

Despite the growing emphasis on communicative approaches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), limited research has explored the extent to which teachers implement Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in contexts such as Iran. This study addresses this gap by investigating EFL teachers' perceptions and classroom practices of TBLT while using the young-adult textbook series *Family and Friends*. Given the complex, context-dependent, and often implicit nature of teachers' beliefs and their strong influence on instructional decisions, this study adopted a qualitative methodology to gain in-depth insights into teachers' perspectives and practices. Data were collected through systematic classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with ten EFL teachers, allowing for an in-depth exploration of both observed teaching practices and teachers' self-reported experiences. The findings revealed that although teachers generally held positive perceptions of TBLT, their conceptual understanding was limited. Some teachers unconsciously implemented TBLT principles, while others encountered barriers such as time constraints, institutional pressures, and textbook-task misalignment. The study highlights the need for targeted professional development and provides insights for researchers, teacher trainers, and educational institutions aiming to support effective TBLT implementation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emerged from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a response to the need for authentic language use in classrooms (Richards & Rodgers, 2002), has become a central focus of current Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research (Ahmadian, 2016). Recent systematic reviews and empirical studies continue to highlight TBLT's significance in promoting meaningful language use and learner engagement across diverse contexts. For example, a recent meta-analysis reports that TBLT enhances learner engagement and language proficiency by providing contextually relevant communicative tasks that foster active learning (Ramesh et al., 2024). Similarly, blended TBLT approaches show promise for improving speaking, writing, and vocabulary outcomes while fostering learner autonomy (Gong & Said,

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2025). In EFL contexts such as Iran, where students have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, TBLT's emphasis on meaning-focused, real-world tasks is considered particularly relevant (Jeon, 2005; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Empirical evidence also supports TBLT's effectiveness in enhancing communicative competence and task-related engagement, suggesting its adaptability and impact in various instructional settings. As a pedagogical approach, TBLT provides a means to promote learners' active use of the target language and develop communicative competence within classroom settings (Hadi, 2013). Given that teachers are the primary agents of pedagogical implementation, their beliefs and perceptions are widely recognized as critical to the adoption and sustainability of teaching methods such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Aliasin, 2019). A substantial body of research has indeed established that teachers' attitudes can either facilitate or hinder the classroom realization of TBLT, as their perceptions directly influence instructional decisions and task design (e.g., Acala, 2023; Zheng & Borg, 2013). Teachers' beliefs about language learning, the role of tasks, and the efficacy of communicative methods strongly shape how they approach task-based activities, and often determine the degree to which TBLT is fully implemented or modified in practice. For instance, teachers who hold positive beliefs about learner-centered approaches may be more inclined to adopt TBLT with high fidelity, while those who view traditional teaching methods as more reliable may modify or even reject task-based activities in favor of more structured exercises. Moreover, teacher beliefs can interact with contextual factors such as institutional pressures, curriculum requirements, and student needs, further complicating the implementation of TBLT. Understanding the dynamic relationship between teachers' perceptions and their classroom practices is therefore essential for addressing barriers to effective TBLT implementation and ensuring its long-term sustainability in diverse educational settings. As such, exploring these beliefs provides valuable insights into not only the immediate success of TBLT, but also its scalability and adaptability across various teaching contexts.

However, while the general terrain of teacher perceptions on TBLT has been explored, a significant gap remains in understanding its implementation within the specific, practical constraints of textbook-driven curricula. In many EFL contexts, teachers rely heavily on prescribed commercial materials and coursebooks as the core of classroom instruction (e.g., Alhamami & Ahmad, 2018; Korkmazgil, 2023). This pattern is also evident in Iran, where private language institutes commonly adopt internationally published commercial textbooks. This creates a critical interface between pedagogical theory and material application that is not yet fully understood. Although this series incorporates communicative elements, its prescribed structure may not fully align with task-based principles, potentially creating a disconnect that influences how teachers interpret and apply TBLT in daily practice. Previous research suggests that reliance on prescribed commercial textbooks can constrain teachers' ability to implement innovative pedagogies such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), particularly in contexts where materials are rigid and exam-oriented (Lu, 2023). This issue has also been noted in Iran, where the widespread use of standardized coursebooks may not always align with the flexible, learner-centered principles of TBLT (Mahdavi-rad, 2017; Seyyedi et al., 2023). These tensions highlight the need to explore how teachers negotiate their understanding of TBLT within the practical limitations imposed by commercially produced instructional materials.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of TBLT explicitly within the framework of the *Family and Friends* textbook series. By focusing on the intersection of teacher beliefs, task-based pedagogy, and a dominant commercial textbook, this research seeks to contribute a nuanced understanding of the

contextual realities of TBLT in Iran, ultimately helping to bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and the material conditions of classroom practice.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): Theory and Practice

The field of second language acquisition has undergone a profound transformation, moving from rigid, form-focused methods like the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) toward more communicative, meaning-oriented approaches. While these earlier methods provided declarative knowledge, they often failed to equip learners for spontaneous, real-world communication (Willis & Willis, 1996). The subsequent Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model, which attempted to bridge form and communication, similarly lacks robust empirical support and can result in learners who struggle to integrate target structures into their spontaneous communicative repertoire (Willis & Willis, 1996). It has also been challenged for its tendency to result in inert knowledge that does not transfer effectively to real-world communication (Ellis, 2021; Skehan, 1998).

In response to these limitations, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerged as a pedagogical approach grounded in the principle that language is best acquired through purposeful use rather than through isolated practice of linguistic forms. TBLT emphasizes learners' engagement in meaning-focused tasks designed to achieve a non-linguistic outcome, thereby reflecting more naturalistic processes of language acquisition (Nunan, 2004; Van den Branden, 2016). This shift from "learning about language" to "learning through language use" constitutes the philosophical core of TBLT and aligns closely with contemporary usage-based and interactionist views of SLA.

The theoretical foundations of TBLT are strongly anchored in SLA research. Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis underscores the importance of "pushed output," arguing that learners must be compelled to articulate meaning in order to notice gaps in their linguistic competence and move from semantic to syntactic processing. More recent work has refined this view by highlighting the role of output in promoting metalinguistic reflection and self-regulation during task performance (Ellis, 2021). Complementing this perspective, Long's (2014) Interaction Hypothesis posits that the negotiation of meaning—through clarification requests, confirmation checks, and recasts—facilitates acquisition by making input comprehensible and providing timely feedback. Empirical classroom-based studies continue to confirm that such interactional processes are central to language development in task-based settings (Seedhouse, 2004).

Within this framework, a clear conceptualization of what constitutes a "task" is essential. Scholars such as Skehan (1998) and Ellis (2021) propose defining criteria that distinguish tasks from traditional exercises, including a primary focus on meaning, learner engagement in real-world language processes, cognitive challenge, and the presence of a clearly defined non-linguistic outcome. Pedagogically, TBLT is commonly operationalized through a cyclical lesson structure comprising a pre-task phase, a task cycle (task performance, planning, and report), and a post-task or language focus phase. Recent studies emphasize that the language focus stage plays a critical role in consolidating learning by drawing attention to form without undermining communicative intent (Ahmadian, 2016; Hardacre & Güvendir, 2020). Empirical research has associated this framework with increased learner motivation, greater willingness to take risks, improved fluency, and more sustained engagement with language use (Ahmadian, 2016; Leaver & Kaplan, 2004).

Despite its strong theoretical grounding and documented benefits, TBLT remains challenging to implement consistently in real classrooms, particularly in contexts where institutional and material constraints shape pedagogical choices.

### Teachers' Perceptions, Practices, and the Role of Textbooks

Although TBLT has become a dominant paradigm in SLA research and language pedagogy (Ellis, 2021; Van den Branden, 2016), its classroom realization is heavily mediated by teachers' beliefs and the instructional materials they are required to use. A robust body of research on teacher cognition has established that teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and prior experiences play a decisive role in shaping instructional decision-making and pedagogical enactment (Acala, 2023; Borg, 2006). Consequently, positive attitudes toward TBLT do not automatically translate into faithful implementation.

Across diverse educational contexts, studies consistently report a perception–practice divide: teachers express favorable views of TBLT's communicative value yet struggle to implement it in practice (Harris, 2016; Liu & Ren, 2024; Pohan et al., 2016). Commonly cited barriers include exam-oriented educational systems, time constraints, large class sizes, perceived low learner proficiency, and insufficient professional training (Akmal & Angga, 2020; Carless, 2009; Zheng & Borg, 2014). More recent empirical work further suggests that teachers often reinterpret tasks in ways that align with their existing pedagogical beliefs, transforming them into form-focused drills or loosely structured speaking activities that depart from core TBLT principles (Acala, 2023; Yuan & Ellis, 2003).

This global pattern is clearly reflected in the Iranian EFL context. Studies indicate that Iranian teachers generally acknowledge the pedagogical value of communicative and task-based approaches (Hadi, 2013; Mahdavi, 2017). However, systemic constraints—such as rigid syllabi, high-stakes examinations, institutional expectations, and parental pressure for traditional instruction—significantly limit opportunities for genuine task-based implementation (Najjari & Sadeghi, 2014; Rahimi & Rezaee, 2020). These contextual pressures often compel teachers to prioritize coverage and accuracy over interaction and meaning-making, even when they are theoretically supportive of TBLT.

A particularly underexplored yet critical factor in this process is the role of textbooks. Textbooks remain central to ELT practice worldwide, especially in contexts where curricula are standardized and teachers have limited autonomy (McGrath, 2013). However, commercial textbooks are frequently driven by market demands rather than pedagogical coherence, and many continue to follow structural or PPP-based syllabi despite the lack of strong empirical support (Tomlinson, 2010). Research has increasingly called attention to the misalignment between textbook design and task-based pedagogy, noting that communicative labels often mask fundamentally form-focused activities (Alemi & Hesami, 2014; Pirzad et al., 2021).

In Iran, textbook-driven instruction is particularly dominant, and even teachers who are trained in communicative approaches report difficulty reconciling TBLT principles with the constraints imposed by prescribed materials (Amini et al., 2019). Evaluative studies of Iranian EFL textbooks reveal a prevalence of exercises over genuine tasks and limited opportunities for outcome-oriented, meaning-focused interaction (Alemi & Hesami, 2014). Yet, much of this research has focused on locally produced textbooks, leaving widely used international series underexamined.

The *Family and Friends* series is extensively used in Iranian private language institutes, particularly at the primary and lower-intermediate levels. Existing studies on this series have largely relied on general evaluation checklists (Sahragard & Rahimi, 2018) or addressed peripheral

issues such as gender representation (Esmaeili & Arabmofrad, 2015). Notably absent from the literature is a systematic investigation of how *Family and Friends* textbooks align with TBLT principles and how teachers perceive and implement task-based pedagogy when working within its prescribed structure. Therefore, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent are the task-based activities in the Family and Friends textbooks implemented by teachers in classroom practice?
2. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of the implementation of TBLT in their classrooms when using the "Family and Friends" series?

By answering these questions, this study aims to provide valuable insights for textbook designers, teacher trainers, and curriculum developers in Iran and similar contexts, helping to bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom practice.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a two-phase qualitative design. First, a series of classroom observations was conducted. Data were analyzed through transcriptions, reviewing, content analysis, categorization, and extracting themes. Second, interviews with teachers were conducted and recorded. The recordings were transcribed, reviewed, analyzed in content, categorized, and the themes was extracted. Triangulation of data also validated the data.

#### Participants

Ten Iranian EFL teachers were purposively sampled from language institutes offering the Family and Friends series across Mazandaran province, Iran. To recruit participants, an invitation to participate was disseminated through professional teacher networks, including institute administrators, regional teacher coordinators, and national EFL teacher online communities (e.g., Telegram and WhatsApp groups) who were known to be teaching or to have experience teaching Family and Friends.

Of these teachers, 13 expressed voluntary interest in participating in the study. The relatively small number of volunteers can be attributed to time constraints, workload pressures, and the longitudinal and interview-based nature of the study, which required sustained commitment. Following initial consent, three teachers withdrew due to scheduling conflicts, resulting in a final sample of 10 participants.

The final participants were selected through convenient sampling based on clear inclusion criteria: (a) current or recent experience teaching Family and Friends, (b) willingness to participate in interviews and classroom observations, and (c) availability across the data collection period. The researcher had no supervisory or evaluative relationship with the participants; contact was established solely for research purposes following their voluntary response to the recruitment invitation. The final sample included teachers conducting face-to-face and online classes, as well as private and group instruction, ensuring variation in teaching contexts.

Although detailed information about participants' instructional and institutional contexts (e.g., online vs. face-to-face instruction, private vs. group classes, and institutional setting) was collected to ensure contextual transparency, these variables were not treated as primary analytic categories in the data analysis. The primary aim of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions of TBLT and its implementation within a textbook-driven curriculum, rather than to compare perceptions across different institutional or instructional contexts.

Given the small sample size and the qualitative, exploratory nature of the study, incorporating contextual variables as analytic dimensions would have risked over-interpretation and unsupported comparisons. Instead, contextual information was used to situate participants'

accounts and to ensure that interpretations were grounded in the realities of the Iranian EFL context, particularly within private language institutes where the Family and Friends series is commonly used.

This approach aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritize depth of insight over categorical comparison, allowing the study to maintain analytic coherence while still providing sufficient contextual detail for readers to evaluate the transferability of the findings.

The following table illustrates the demographic information of the participants:

**Table 1: Teachers' Demographic Information**

Participant	Degree and field	Class type	Location
1	MA, TEFL	In-person, group	Babolsar
2	MA, TEFL	In-person, group	Babol
3	MA, TEFL	Online, group	Sari
4	MA, TEFL	Online, private	Sari
5	BA, TEFL	Online, group	Kelardasht
6	BA, TEFL	Online, group	Sari
7	BA, TEFL	In-person, private	Babol
8	BA, English literature	In-person, private	Babol
9	BA, English literature	Online, private	Qaemshahr
10	Non-English major	In-person, group	Sari

## Instruments

### *Checklist for Tasks Implementation Analysis*

To address Research Question 1, a checklist was developed to examine the extent to which the tasks in the Family and Friends textbook series align with core principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). For the purposes of this study, a task was operationally defined as a classroom activity that (a) primarily focuses on meaning, (b) requires learners to use the target language to achieve a non-linguistic outcome, and (c) follows a task-based pedagogical sequence, rather than isolated practice of linguistic forms (Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Willis & Willis, 1996).

Task implementation was operationally defined as the presence of the essential phases of a task-based lesson as realized in textbook activities, including the pre-task, task cycle (task, planning, and report), and language focus stages. An activity was considered task-based only if it demonstrated these phases in a way consistent with established TBLT frameworks.

The checklist consisted of five main items, each corresponding to a key stage of a task-based lesson as outlined by Willis & Willis (2019) and Samuda and Bygate (2008):

Pre-task phase, in which the teacher introduces the topic and task, activates background knowledge, highlights useful vocabulary or expressions, and ensures learners understand task instructions.

Task stage, where learners carry out the task in pairs or groups, using the target language to achieve the intended outcome, with the teacher acting primarily as a monitor and facilitator and without an explicit focus on form.

Planning stage, during which learners prepare to report their task outcome, allowing for limited attention to form and teacher support for accuracy.

Report stage, where learners present the outcome of the task to the class, and the teacher provides feedback on both content and language use.

Language focus stage (post task), comprising analysis and practice, in which learners reflect on language features emerging from the task and practice relevant forms, vocabulary, or pronunciation.

Each checklist item was evaluated using a binary (Yes/No) format to determine whether the corresponding task-based feature was present in the activity. This systematic approach allowed for a transparent and replicable evaluation of the extent to which textbook activities adhered to TBLT principles.

To ensure content validity, the checklist was reviewed by two experts in TBLT and language pedagogy. Based on their feedback, several items were refined for clarity and alignment with the theoretical frameworks before the instrument was finalized and applied to the textbook analysis.

### *Classroom Observation*

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to investigate teachers' practical implementation of TBLT, thereby addressing Research Question 2. Each of the ten participating teachers was observed in two instructional sessions, with each session lasting approximately 60 minutes. The observations focused on an entire instructional unit that included at least one speaking task from the textbook. All observation sessions were video-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and systematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns in how teachers enacted, adapted, or abandoned the textbook-based tasks during classroom practice.

### *Interview*

A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of TBLT in relation to Research Question 2. The interview questions were organized into three thematic sections aligned with teachers' observed classroom practices. The first section targeted teachers who implemented tasks as designed (e.g., "What factors encouraged you to use the task as originally planned?"). The second section focused on teachers who modified tasks into more traditional exercises (e.g., "Why did you feel the need to adapt the task, and how did this adaptation better suit your teaching context?"). The third section addressed teachers who omitted the tasks altogether (e.g., "What reasons influenced your decision not to implement the task during the lesson?"). This structure allowed for targeted probing while ensuring that teachers' stated perceptions were directly connected to their actual instructional practices observed in the classroom (see Appendix A).

### *Procedure*

First, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed to explore teachers' perceptions of TBLT. The protocol was developed prior to conducting the interviews, as part of the initial planning phase of the study. The sequence of the research design followed this order: first, the protocol was prepared, then 10 teachers were recruited, and after identifying an upcoming unit with a speaking task, the researchers scheduled classroom observations. The teachers were observed and video-recorded during the unit to document their instructional practices. Afterward, the interviews were conducted to collect teachers' perceptions. To avoid any bias in the interviews, teachers were informed that the focus of the study was on general teaching methodologies rather than specifically on TBLT. A total of 10 interviews were held, one with each participant. To accommodate their schedules and geographical locations, these interviews were conducted virtually using platforms

such as Skype, Google Meet, or WhatsApp, based on individual preference and convenience. Each interview lasted for an average of 30 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Farsi, the shared native language of the researcher and participants, to promote comfort and allow for nuanced expression. The interview atmosphere was kept informal and friendly to encourage genuine dialogue. The researchers assured participants of confidentiality and the absence of right or wrong answers, and allowed the conversations to extend as long as needed to foster candid responses. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent.

The data from both phases were then prepared for analysis. All video recordings of classroom observations and audio recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim. The resulting data from both sources underwent a qualitative content analysis, which involved systematic coding and categorization to identify emergent themes. As regards the use of data triangulation, to mitigate any potential threats to validity, several measures were taken. First, multiple data sources (observations and interviews) were triangulated to cross-verify the findings, ensuring that any inconsistencies between the teachers' stated perceptions and actual classroom practices were carefully examined. Second, the interviews were conducted after the classroom observations, which minimized the risk of participants altering their responses based on observation. Additionally, member checking was implemented by allowing teachers to review the interview transcripts for accuracy, further ensuring the credibility of the data. These steps helped strengthen the validity of the findings and provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices.

#### 4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study, structured according to the two research questions. First, it reports on the analysis of classroom implementation (RQ1), followed by a detailed presentation of teachers' perceptions and the factors influencing their practice (RQ2). To enhance clarity, data sources (observations and interviews) are specified, and excerpts are labeled for ease of reference.

##### Research Question 1: Implementation of Textbook Tasks

To examine the extent to which teachers implemented the task-based activities in the Family and Friends textbook, each teacher was observed teaching one unit containing a designated speaking task. The results, summarized in [Table 2](#), reveal a significant gap between the availability and the implementation of these tasks.

**Table 2: Implementation of Textbook Tasks by Teacher**

Teachers	Number of tasks in his/her unit	Number of tasks implemented
T1*	1	0
T2	1	0
T3	1	1
T4	1	0
T5	1	0
T6	1	0
T7	1	1
T8	1	1
T9	1	1
T10	1	0

\*T: teacher

As shown in [Table 2](#), only four out of ten teachers (T3, T7, T8, T9) implemented the textbook task as presented. The remaining six teachers either omitted the task or replaced it with a different activity. The qualitative observations provided further nuance, illustrating three distinct patterns of implementation: full implementation, task substitution, and the use of non-task activities.

### *Pattern 1: Full Task Implementation*

Teacher T3 successfully implemented the textbook task, which involved students creating a picture frame of animals and presenting their likes and dislikes. Although T3 was not consciously applying TBLT theory, the activity met key TBLT criteria, including a focus on meaning, a real-world outcome, and the integration of multiple language skills ([Ellis, 2003](#)).

#### • **Observation Excerpt 1 (T3's Class):**

**Teacher:** "OK, first, um, Nicki, your turn please, start."

**S:** "OK teacher. It's a cow. I like cows. It's a crocodile. I like crocodile. It's a cat, dog, and chicken. I like. Finished teachers."

**T:** "Wow! Excellent. Thank you. I like cats and dogs, too. They're beautiful."

### *Pattern 2: Task Substitution*

In some cases, teachers replaced the textbook task with their own communicative activities. For instance, T1 skipped the assigned task but introduced a creative game called "Truth or Myth," which involved students sharing stories and peers guessing their validity. This substitute activity organically included a pre-task (planning at home), a task cycle (sharing and questioning in class), and a language focus (feedback), thereby aligning with TBLT principles ([Ellis, 2003](#)).

During the "Truth or Myth" activity, students took turns sharing personal stories, with some participants presenting fictional tales. As one student, S2, shared a story about a childhood experience, T1 prompted the class with, "Do you think this is true? What makes you believe it or doubt it?"

S2: "When I was five, I swam across a river on my own."

T1: "That's an interesting story! What did you use to swim across? Was it deep?"

S2: "Yes, it was deep, but I was a good swimmer."

T1, responding to the students' questioning: "Hmm, I'm doubtful. If you swam across, what would have happened if you had gotten tired?"

The class continued to ask follow-up questions, and T1 used these to guide a language focus on conditional structures, offering correction and alternative sentence forms as the discussion unfolded.

### *Pattern 3: Implementation of Non-Task Activities*

Several teachers conducted activities they labeled as "tasks" that were, in fact, traditional drills. For example, T6's "speaking task" was a controlled, teacher-led exercise where a student described clothing in a picture.

- **Observation Excerpt 2 (T6's Class):**

T: "Now Pam, look at this picture again. So, look at number 1. What is she wearing?"

S: "She's wearing a pink dress, and uh, and tall um, tall socks. [White socks]."

T: "[long, yeah?] She's wearing a pink dress and long white socks. Yeah?"

S: "Aha, long, long white socks."

T: "Very good. Yeah. She's wearing a pink dress and long white socks. Yeah, thank you.

OK, so, and now look at number 2. What is she wearing?"

S: "She's wearing a green scarf and purple skirt."

T: "Yeah, so, she's wearing a green scarf and purple skirt. And also, look at the boots."

S: "She's wearing brown boots."

T: "Yeah, she's wearing brown boots. Yes? she's wearing brown boots. Yeah. OK, thank you."

This interaction was entirely form-focused, with the teacher providing constant correction and modeling. It lacked a genuine communicative goal, problem-solving element, or a non-linguistic outcome, illustrating a fundamental misinterpretation of TBLT where any oral practice is equated with a task.

This observation indicates that the activity, though called a "speaking task," did not meet the criteria for task-based language teaching. Instead of facilitating genuine communication, the teacher-directed interaction focused on correct language forms, with the student producing predictable, controlled responses. This reflects a common confusion between simple speaking practice and authentic TBLT, highlighting a need for training to help teachers differentiate between mechanical exercises and communicative tasks that engage learners in meaningful language use.

### **Research Question 2: Teachers' Perceptions and Understanding of TBLT**

The interview data revealed teachers' perceptions and understanding of TBLT, which helps explain the implementation patterns observed above. The interviews revealed a widespread misunderstanding of what constitutes a task. While 70% of teachers expressed positive attitudes towards TBLT, their definitions often conflated tasks with mechanical exercises. A sample of interview extracts with T5 and T6 is also provided here to highlight teachers' misconception of a task and equating a task with drills and activities.

- **Interview Excerpt 1 (T5):**

**Researcher:** "What kinds of tasks do [the worksheets] contain?"

**T5:** "For example, matching words to their pictures."

**Researcher:** "Do students have interactions while doing the tasks?"

**T5:** "No. But we want them to read and check their answers afterwards."

**Interview Excerpt 2 (T6):**

**T6:** "I designed a task myself a few sessions ago... Several words had to be written under their categories in a table... students shouted their categories. No sentences were made."

These excerpts show that teachers like T5 and T6 equated tasks with form-focused drills, lacking a communicative outcome.

Both T5 and T6 equated tasks with mechanical exercises such as matching items or categorizing words—activities that lack a communicative goal, interactional exchange, or an outcome beyond the completion of form-focused drills. Their responses reveal a tendency to view any classroom activity as a “task,” regardless of whether it involves meaning-focused communication or learner autonomy. This misconception reflects a broader issue in TBLT implementation, where the theoretical distinction between *tasks* and *exercises* is not well understood in practice. Such findings underscore the need for explicit teacher education and professional development to clarify the defining features of genuine tasks, including a clear communicative purpose, learner interaction, and focus on meaning rather than form.

The results of the study indicated discrepancies between teachers’ positive perceptions of TBLT and their actual implementation of TBLT in the classroom. While 70% of teachers (7 out of 10) expressed a positive attitude toward TBLT in the interviews, only 40% successfully implemented TBLT as prescribed in the *Family and Friends* textbook. This discrepancy appears to stem not from a fundamental misunderstanding of task-based teaching but from the challenges teachers face in real-time classroom settings. These challenges may include factors such as classroom management, time constraints, and the pressure to cover the curriculum, which often prevent teachers from fully adopting the task-based approach. Below, the key findings are presented thematically:

The data indicated a prevalent limited comprehension of TBLT among the participants. A substantial majority, 80% of the teachers, struggled to articulate a precise definition of TBLT or to differentiate between true tasks and conventional exercises. This lack of clarity persisted despite some teachers having received prior training. The interviews revealed specific misconceptions about TBLT, which were highlighted in teachers’ responses. For instance, Teacher T5 shared:

"I see tasks as just practice activities, like matching words to pictures. It's just about practicing vocabulary, not about communication."

This view reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of TBLT, where the focus is meant to be on meaning-based communication, not form-focused drills. Similarly, Teacher T6 described tasks as unstructured “free production,” saying:

"Tasks are about students creating something on their own. It's like just giving them the freedom to speak or write whatever they want."

Such responses reveal a tendency to equate any classroom activity with a task, regardless of whether it involves interaction, communication, or meaningful language use.

Conversely, Teacher T1 demonstrated a clearer, more nuanced understanding of TBLT, stating:

"A task is a communicative activity with a real-world outcome. It's not about just practicing a structure; it's about getting students to use the language in a meaningful way, to communicate something they need to express."

This indicates a deeper understanding of the principles behind TBLT, which include the focus on meaning, interaction, and communicative outcomes.

These findings collectively highlight a fundamental confusion regarding the core principles of TBLT. Despite positive attitudes towards its potential benefits, many teachers did not fully grasp

the distinction between form-oriented exercises and genuine tasks. This points to a critical gap in teacher training that needs to be addressed for more effective TBLT implementation.

The data also revealed a spectrum of implementation reflecting varied comprehension of TBLT. At one end, four teachers (T3, T7, T8, T9) implemented tasks fully, though their motivations varied. For example, Teacher T3 explained:

"I do the tasks the way the textbook shows because it's part of the curriculum. I'm not sure if it's the best way, but it fits with what we need to cover."

This suggests that some teachers follow TBLT guidelines out of compliance with the syllabus, rather than a deep understanding of the approach. At the other end of the spectrum, three teachers (T4, T5, T6) failed to implement TBLT effectively, viewing form-focused drills as legitimate tasks. Teacher T4 stated:

"I skip the tasks in the book. Instead, I use exercises like matching words with definitions because I believe that's the best way to help students remember vocabulary."

Such a view underscores the disconnect between the theoretical understanding of TBLT and its practical application in the classroom.

Several barriers to TBLT implementation were also identified. Institutional constraints were a recurrent theme, with teachers noting that the prescribed syllabus offered limited room for task-based activities. Teacher T7 shared: "The syllabus doesn't give us enough time for tasks. We're supposed to cover so many topics, and sometimes there's no time to do a task properly."

This issue of time pressures was echoed by other teachers, who highlighted the rush to cover content and prepare students for exams as significant obstacles to meaningful task completion.

Another important barrier was resistance from students and parents, particularly when homework tasks were perceived as "extra" and disrupted preparation for exams. Teacher T6 explained: "When I give students homework that involves projects or group work, parents complain that it's not useful for their exam preparation."

Moreover, resource limitations also affected the implementation of tasks, especially for projects like the "volcano" task, where necessary materials were unavailable. Teacher T7 noted: "Some of the tasks in the book, like the volcano project, are just impractical. The students don't have the materials they need, so it's hard to do them."

Finally, a misalignment between textbook tasks and students' proficiency levels was cited as another challenge. Teacher T5 commented: "The tasks in the book are sometimes too difficult for my students. They don't have the language skills to complete them, so I end up simplifying the task."

These insights demonstrate that the textbook's tasks, while designed to promote communicative competence, often do not align well with students' actual proficiency levels, further complicating task implementation.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study reveals a critical paradox in Iranian EFL classrooms: while teachers express positive perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a significant divide exists between their beliefs and their actual classroom practices due to conceptual, contextual, and practical challenges. The findings not only confirm established patterns in the literature but also highlight context-specific nuances that contribute to a broader understanding of the perception–practice gap in second language (L2) teaching (Borg, 2003; Farrell, 2015).

The observed discrepancy between teachers' positive perceptions of TBLT and their actual implementation is not an isolated issue. While this pattern is well-documented in Asian contexts

(Zheng & Borg, 2014), it resonates with a broad body of research across diverse global settings, illustrating that such divides are common in educational innovations. Similar gaps between teacher cognition and practice have been reported in areas such as grammar teaching (Borg, 2003), communicative language teaching (Karim, 2004), and the integration of technology in classrooms (Lu, 2023). In the present study, while 70% of teachers praised TBLT's communicative benefits, many fundamentally misinterpreted tasks as either drill exercises or unstructured free production. This misalignment reflects an underlying issue in teacher education: emphasis is often placed on the "why" of a methodology rather than the "how." Teachers may be convinced of the benefits of task-based teaching but lack the practical strategies needed for effective application, which creates a gap between theoretical understanding and actual practice (Carless, 2007; Ellis, 2003).

The barriers to TBLT implementation observed in this study align with challenges reported globally, including rigid syllabi, exam-oriented pressures, and limited resources (Akmal & Angga, 2020; Carless, 2009; Zheng & Borg, 2014). However, the Iranian context introduces unique challenges that intensify these constraints. Parental resistance emerged as a notable factor: unlike in some East Asian contexts, where parental pressure focuses primarily on academic achievement, Iranian parents actively opposed TBLT homework, perceiving project-based tasks as distractions from exam preparation. Additionally, a practical challenge arose from the misalignment between tasks in the Family and Friends textbook and classroom realities. Teachers reported that tasks were often too advanced, irrelevant to students' proficiency levels, or logistically impractical, as exemplified by T7's experience with the "volcano project." These findings highlight the need for contextual adaptations of TBLT materials to ensure tasks are feasible, relevant, and meaningful for learners (Basturkmen, 2012).

The present findings confirm that belief–practice mismatches are not merely a matter of teacher motivation or attitude but reflect complex interactions among conceptual understanding, institutional structures, and practical constraints (Borg, 2003; Farrell, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). Conceptually, some participants held partial or surface-level understandings of what constitutes a pedagogic task, limiting their ability to operationalize TBLT principles. Contextually, institutional pressures—including prescribed materials, exam-oriented curricula, and time limitations—restricted opportunities for flexible, learner-centered approaches. Practically, large class sizes and limited professional support further constrained teachers' instructional choices (Carless, 2007; Ellis, 2003).

An intriguing finding was the emergence of "unconscious competence" in approximately 30% of participants (T1, T3, T8). These teachers successfully implemented TBLT principles despite limited theoretical knowledge, relying on pedagogical creativity and intuitive strategies. Examples include T1's "Truth or Myth" game and T3's adaptation of the animal photo-frame task, which facilitated authentic interaction and meaningful engagement. This phenomenon aligns with research on teacher expertise, which emphasizes that effective teaching is often rooted in experiential knowledge rather than formal instruction (Borg, 2006). Teachers demonstrating unconscious competence represent an underutilized resource for professional development: their strategies can serve as models for peers, providing concrete examples of TBLT implementation in real classrooms.

The study underscores the importance of bridging the gap between teachers' positive perceptions and their classroom practices. Teacher education programs should provide explicit guidance on implementing TBLT, including concrete examples that distinguish tasks from exercises, such as those found in the Family and Friends series. Furthermore, professional development initiatives can leverage the strategies of unconsciously competent teachers to promote peer learning, offering practical insights that enhance teachers' ability to translate theoretical understanding into effective practice. Addressing both conceptual and contextual

barriers will be essential to facilitating sustainable adoption of TBLT principles in Iranian EFL classrooms.

Overall, the study reinforces established understandings of the belief–practice mismatch in L2 teaching while offering a nuanced account of how this tension manifests in a specific sociocultural and educational context. By situating teachers' practices within the interplay of conceptual understanding, institutional structures, and practical constraints, the findings contribute to a context-sensitive interpretation of TBLT implementation and suggest pathways for improving alignment between teacher cognition and classroom practice.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the complex dynamics surrounding the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the Iranian EFL context, revealing a consistent gap between teachers' positive perceptions and their classroom practices. The findings demonstrate that this divide is driven not by a lack of appreciation for communicative methodologies, but by a confluence of conceptual misunderstandings, contextual constraints such as exam pressure and rigid syllabi, and practical obstacles including resource limitations and parental resistance. A significant, and perhaps hopeful, finding was the emergence of "unconscious competence," where a subset of teachers successfully fostered communicative language use through intuition and creativity, suggesting that practical, experience-based knowledge is a powerful, albeit underutilized, asset.

The implications of these findings are multifaceted and call for coordinated action. For teacher education, the results underscore an urgent need to move beyond theoretical advocacy toward hands-on training that equips educators with practical strategies for adapting and implementing tasks within existing curricular constraints. For policymakers and curriculum developers, this study highlights the critical importance of aligning high-stakes assessments and standardized materials with the principles of TBLT to create a coherent ecosystem that supports, rather than hinders, communicative language teaching.

One key implication of this study is the need to enhance teacher training programs by providing explicit guidance on task-based language teaching. Specifically, professional development courses should focus on clarifying the nature of tasks, their underlying principles, and how they differ from exercises, using concrete examples such as tasks in the Family and Friends textbook. By equipping teachers with both the theoretical understanding and practical strategies, such training could help bridge the gap between teachers' positive perceptions of TBLT and their actual classroom practices, supporting more effective and consistent implementation.

To build upon this research, several promising avenues for future inquiry emerge. Longitudinal studies are needed to investigate the long-term impact of redesigned teacher training programs on actual classroom practice. Further research could also productively explore cross-contextual comparisons, such as between private and public schools, to understand how different institutional cultures influence implementation.

A vital line of inquiry should focus on examining the relationship between teachers' perceptions of TBLT and their pedagogical decision-making, including how beliefs, prior experiences, and professional identity shape classroom practice. The limited number of participants in this study (N=10) can be another line of focus for further studies which use mixed methods design to explore the perception, practice, and measure the tangible effects of TBLT on student learning outcomes and language proficiency. This would help connect teacher cognition with measurable student achievement.

Finally, investigating the role of key stakeholders—such as parents, curriculum designers, and teacher educators—through studies on textbook adaptation and parent education initiatives could illuminate how perceptions and expectations beyond the classroom impact the success of communicative methodologies. Addressing these areas would provide a more holistic understanding of the factors that determine the success or failure of pedagogical innovation, offering concrete strategies for bridging the persistent theory-practice divide and realizing the full potential of task-based learning in diverse EFL contexts.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Checklist of Implementation of Tasks

	Task implementation ((Samuda & Bygate, 2008); (Willis & Willis, 1997)).	Yes	No
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-task</li> <li>– Teacher introduces topic and task</li> <li>*The “teacher explores the topic with class, highlights useful words and phrases, helps students understand task instructions and prepare”</li> <li>Task cycle</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task</li> <li>– Students carry out the task</li> <li>*Learners work in pairs or groups, use procedures with input, TL structures and vocabulary.</li> <li>**Teacher must be a monitor, helper, and time-keeper.</li> <li>***There is no focus on form.</li> </ul>		
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>– Students plan how to report on task outcome</li> <li>*Learners can focus on form and teacher can use corrections.</li> <li>**Students prepare an oral or written report of the outcome of their discussions, with the teacher now providing help with language.</li> </ul>		
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report</li> <li>– Students report back to class</li> <li>*Teacher is a moderator while individual groups present the reports they have prepared to the whole class, with the teacher giving feedback on both content and form.</li> <li>** The report stage can be audio- or video-recorded so the students can review their presentations.</li> </ul>		
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language focus</li> <li>– Analysis and Practice</li> <li>Analysis: Students examine and discuss specific features of their text or transcript of the recording. It can include explicit feedback on the students’ speech, including their pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary.</li> <li>Practice: learners rehearse new words, phrases and patterns that occurred in the data.</li> </ul>		

### Appendix B: Interview Questions

Teachers who used tasks in the coursebook:	Teachers who changed the nature of tasks into exercise, drill, activity, etc., or replaced the tasks with another activity.	Teachers who skipped the tasks in the textbooks.
1)What are the advantages of using tasks in your class? How does it improve your teaching? 2)How can you distinguish a task from other kinds of activities, exercises, drills?	1)How do you think using tasks affects your class? 2)How can you distinguish a task in your textbook? 3)What causes you to change the tasks in the textbook? What do you think is the problem with them?	1)How can you distinguish a task in your textbook? 2)What prevents you from using tasks in your class?