



Original Research

Students' Appraisal of Ethiopian Secondary Schools' EFL Teachers on Task-Based Language Teaching Implementations

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the appraisal of students regarding the implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT) by their EFL teachers within Ethiopian secondary schools. A total of 175 students were randomly selected from four distinct high schools in Addis Ababa to provide a comprehensive overview. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were gathered through student questionnaires and classroom observations. The quantitative analysis, conducted using descriptive statistics, revealed that students generally hold a favorable view of TBLT. Nonetheless, their feedback indicated a lack of consistent application of task-based methodologies by teachers. Classroom observations corroborated these findings, showcasing a predominant reliance on traditional, structured instructional methods rather than TBLT. This study underscores the disparity between students' positive attitudes towards TBLT and the actual pedagogical practices observed, thereby highlighting the need for further research and enhancements in language teaching strategies within Ethiopian educational settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Prabhu (1987) made a paradigm shift in the Bangalore Project towards on-site language teaching. Brown (2009) claims that Prabhu's communication teaching project in Bangalore was an important milestone towards this new paradigm of language teaching. Many scientists and researchers, such as Tarone and Yule (1989), also point out that the results of this project indicated that TBLT could be a potential replacement for existing methods dating back to the 1980s. Regarding the researcher's knowledge, no attempt was made to adapt it to the Ethiopian context. However, other researchers have confirmed the applicability and adaptability of this approach in EFL/EL2 classrooms. It is important to mention Benson (2015), one of the language-oriented-

-researchers who performed TBLT with empirical tests. Other researchers who have performed TBLT with empirical testing are reported by Shi (1998). They compared the importance of teacher-led negotiation and group negotiation, which also confirms the credibility of TBLT. The study found that through meaningful group work, interaction is encouraged, and ultimately, L2 learning takes place.

Similarly, the effect of interaction during task performance on promoting comprehension in L2 learners was studied by Pica et al. (1996). According to the report, the participants in this study were sixteen English-speaking advanced students studying French as a Foreign Language at the University of Hawaii. The result of this study showed that the language produced by the

participants during the simulation was typical of meaning negotiations.

Finally, Lopez (2004) conducted an experiment based on task-based instructions in two classes of a private school in southern Brazil and found that students who used task-based instructions (TBI) learned more effectively because they used the English language to do things: get information, solve problems, and talk about personal experiences. Lopez clearly demonstrated one of the benefits of teaching our students with the TBLT approach/method. He concluded that students exposed to real language were able to deal with real-life situations when encountered outside of the classroom.

Lopez also recommended that teachers receive training before using TBLT in the classroom, especially teachers who teach English as a foreign language. The current researcher has also proved the need for giving the TBLT teaching method training to EFL teachers during data collection. It has always been assumed that the effectiveness of learning in general and of foreign language learning in particular depends on students' motivations and attitudes. Educational psychologists and language acquisition specialists emphasize the importance of students' personal characteristics and attitudes toward language learning, students' self-perceptions in relation to their educational activities, their resilience, and the motivation that affects their achievement (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The explanations above make it clear that no matter how committed teachers are to teaching and improving their students' language skills, the result will be unattainable if students' beliefs and motivations are not included in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, due attention should be paid to students' perceptions and credited with developing a positive attitude towards language learning.

Teachers should support the learning process by imparting to students the knowledge they have gained from schools and experiences. This requires teachers to use a student-centered teaching methodology while considering the culture of the community to care for the cultures of the students.

Many researchers in this field believe that identifying these cultural aspects leads to a warmer, friendlier, and better relationship between teachers and students by reducing cultural distance. Furthermore, teachers must also be fair in correcting mistakes, in order not to overwhelm or overcorrect a student (Lee, 2005).

Similarly, Siskin and Nunan (1990) mentioned that paying attention to students and their perception of the learning process is extremely important to carry out educational innovation, so just examining teachers' perception and classroom practice is not enough to say something about the implementation of task-based language teaching. This is because the concepts of teaching and learning are inseparable.

As discussed briefly in the issues raised, at the local level, despite some sparse research on TBLT, students' perceptions and students' feedback on the implementation of TBLT in the context of the Ethiopian EFL, particularly in Addis Ababa secondary schools, have yet to be adequately explored. Therefore, this article examined in detail teachers' and students' perceptions and student feedback on the implementation of task-based language teaching in the classroom. As a matter of fact, teachers' perceptions affect their actions in the classroom, and students can be influenced by their teachers' approaches to language teaching. Researchers have validated the idea that perceptions affect actions, and actions in turn affect perceptions. Thus, perception and action interact and configure each other in a context. Similarly, students' perceptions can be related to their previous experiences. Therefore, perceptions are based on experience and are linked to context.

Finally, TBLT is a contemporary evolution of teaching English in the classroom. It is a learner-centered classroom for communicative language teaching in most parts of the world, especially where English is taught as a foreign language. For example, Huth and Taleghani (2005) surveyed high school teachers and found that teachers reported that the task-based approach to teaching English motivated students and that it was suitable for group work. Similarly, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol

(2007) interviewed EFL teachers at the University of Thailand who reported that students became more independent in their learning after implementing TBLT as a teaching method in their classrooms. The teachers also reported that the students had acquired academic skills that they could use in other courses.

Next, in connection with Ethiopian EFL teaching and learning practices and TBLT's research gaps, and how the current study intends to fill the gaps are briefly discussed in the next section.

Since Task-based Language Teaching methodology is a new teaching method that is hardly practiced in Ethiopian ELT, the study makes a paramount contribution to solving the problem of teaching methodology in Ethiopia, indicating the benefits of teaching TBLT in EFL classes to students whose language competencies are jeopardized. In addition, teachers of English and syllabus designers would benefit from the results and the recommendations of the study; it may provide them with some useful insights to teach the language skills communicatively and by implementing Task-based Language Teaching, and help syllabus designers to design a Textbook on the TBLT framework.

Finally, this research will work as a baseline and foundation for more research on the area of Task-based language Teaching, which the current researcher presumes is a new area of study for Ethiopian EFL.

Statement of the problem

Although issues concerning teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions towards TBLT have received considerable interest from educational researchers worldwide, no sufficient studies have been conducted at Addis Ababa University Department of Foreign Language and Literature to deal with students' feedback on EFL teachers' TBLT practices. Nevertheless, although they are not published and listed under the references of this article, a few researchers have studied Task-based Language teaching approaches and their effects on English language Skills, which include writing and reading, in Ethiopian Universities and Secondary

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July. –Sep, 2025, 14(3), 81-92
Schools. The result reveals that task-based Language Teaching is practical. However, he pointed out his reservations about implementing the Task-based Language Teaching based on its fundamental principles. Thus, taking into account the studies discussed above, it can be concluded that TBLT is certainly beneficial to the EFL students.

Given the lack of research mentioned above, this study aims to examine students' perceptions and feedback on the task-based language teaching practices of secondary school teachers in Addis Ababa.

Research questions

More specifically, this study was designed to examine EFL students' appraisal of EFL teachers' TBLT practices and their perceptions of TBLT manifestations in the classroom by answering the three research questions listed below:

1. What perceptions do higher secondary students have of Task-Based Language Teaching/Learning?
2. How do students perceive their teachers' implementation of TBLT?
3. To what extent do students' perceptions align with their teachers' TBLT practices?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Research Sample and Design

The descriptive survey that involved 175 participants focused on students' perceptions and their reaction to teachers' implementation of TBLT. The data were collected through a qualitative and quantitative research design. The study was conducted from March 10 to March 29/2021.

The Research Sampling Procedure

The research participants were from four senior secondary schools in Addis Ababa. The schools were chosen through a lottery system. The classes were selected randomly to fill the questionnaire. Similarly, the teachers assigned to each class were also asked whether it was

possible to observe their classes. As teachers showed their cooperation in starting the distribution and collection of the questionnaire, again, they showed their consent for the observation of the classes. It is believed these Schools are representatives of Addis Ababa Senior Secondary Schools. In short, the design of the study was descriptive research, which applied a qualitative and quantitative research approach.

Data Collection Instrument

In order to get hold of satisfactory information for this study, data were collected through questionnaires and classroom observations.

Data Collection Procedure

The study was descriptive survey research, which focused on the actual classroom teaching practices and perceptions of students on teachers' implementation of TBLT through a qualitative and quantitative research approach. It was conducted from March 10 to March 29/2021.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

The students' questionnaire, which consists of 33 questions, is categorized into three groups; in the first category, there are 1- 14 questions. These questions are about students' perception of TBLT practices made by their teachers. Secondly, in the second category, there are Items listed 1-9. Here, the students were asked to give their reflections on the general teaching methodologies teachers are employing in the English classrooms. Finally, in the third category, Items 1-13 are listed. Then, descriptive statistics were provided using SPSS Version 26 to analyze the gathered data. In addition, to analyze whether the two groups of participants have the same perceptions towards

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July. –Sep, 2025, 14(3), 81-92
their teachers' task implementation or not, the two groups' means were also compared using a one-way ANOVA data analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected from the observation, the notes were grouped into themes to document how the teacher implemented TBLT. The responses were then discussed. For simplicity, the researcher coded the visited classes as CL1A (classroom 1A) & CL1B (classroom 1B); CL2A (classroom 2A) & CL2B (classroom 2B); CL3A (classroom 3A) & CL3B (classroom 3B); and CL4A (classroom 4A) & CL4B (classroom 4B). A total of eight classrooms were observed. During the observations, checklists were used and analyzed along with the researcher's field notes recorded during the process. Regarding the study's reliability and validity, the checklist was discussed with eight EFL teachers from the selected secondary schools and was used during the pilot study. After making a minor adjustment, the tool was employed.

In the first part of the observation checklist, which holds ten listed questions, the focus is on the types of task-based activities that took place in the observed classrooms. The second part of the checklist is about the teachers' role. However, it is not part of this report. It is used for the main study report. The third part of the checklist has a direct relationship with students' activities and is included in the report of this article. Under this sub-section, there are seven questions to be observed during a classroom visit. Out of the seven questions, six are all about students' activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of background variables of participants who participated in this study. A total of 175

participants were involved in this study, of which the majority (65.1%) were female and the remaining and minorities, 34.9% were male. Almost one-third of participants (33.1%) were in the age range of 19 and above years old,

66.9% were in the age range of 18 and younger. Regarding the educational level of participants, relatively, the majority, 57.1%, of participants were grade 12, whereas the remaining, 42.9% were grade 11.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Background Variables

Background variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	61	34.9
	Female	114	65.1
	Total	175	100.0
Age	<= 18.00	117	66.9
	19.00+	58	33.1
	Total	175	100.0
Level of Education	Grade 11	75	42.9
	Grade 12	100	57.1
	Total	175	100.0

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics results of the variables. As can be seen from **Table 2**, the mean value of students' perception about TBLT was 92.34 with a standard deviation of 13.32. The hypothetical mean score of perception was 78. This means that in 26 items of a 5-point Likert scale, the possible score ranges from 26 ($26 \times 1 = 26$) to 130 ($26 \times 5 = 130$), and the hypothetical mean score becomes 78 ($26 \times 3 = 78$). The calculated mean score

(92.34) was greater than the hypothetical mean score (78). This implies that the level of students' perception about TBLT was high. However, the level of students' views on the implementation of TBLT by their teachers was less than their respective hypothetical mean score value, which implies that the students' views on teachers implementing TBLT were low.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Item	N	H**. Mean/Test Value	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception	175	78	92.3429	13.31610
Views on Implementing TBLT	175	24	19.1371	5.85785

H** = Hypothetical mean

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was used to explore the relation between background variables and the dependent variable (Students' Perception about

TBLT). Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance, and there was no serious violation noted.

Table 3

ANOVA Statistics for Mean Difference between Groups of Background Variables on Students' Perception about TBLT

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	F	Sig.
Gender	Male	61	94.4426	11.17665	1,173	2.346	.127
	Female	114	91.2193	14.24983			
Age	<= 18.00	117	93.6239	12.72977	1,173	3.311	.071
	19.00+	58	89.7586	14.18958			
Educational level	Grade 11.00	75	95.0533	11.37196	1,173	5.581	.019
	Grade 12.00	100	90.3100	14.32642			

Table 3 shows that a one-way between-group analysis of variance was conducted to explore whether there was a statistically significant mean difference between groups of background variables on Students' Perception about TBLT.

The Table also shows that there was a statistically significant mean score difference between the groups' educational level on the dependent variable, Students' Perception about TBLT. Grade 11 students (M = 95.0533, SD = 11.37) had a higher perception of TBLT than

grade 12 students (M = 90.31, SD = 14.33). However, there was no statistically significant mean score difference between groups of background variables like gender and age.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was used to explore the relation between background variables and dependent variables (Students' View on Implementing TBLT). Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance, and there was no serious violation noted.

Table 4

ANOVA Statistics for Mean Difference between Groups of Background Variables on Students' Views on Implementing TBLT

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	F	Sig.
Gender	Male	61	19.6066	5.85741	1,173	.600	.440
	Female	114	18.8860	5.86841			
Age	<= 18.00	117	19.6667	5.57585	1,173	1.073	.302
	19.00+	58	18.7400	6.05800			
Educational level	Grade 11.00	75	19.5862	6.52938	1,173	.508	.477
	Grade 12.00	100	19.1371	5.85785			

A one-way between-group analysis of variance was conducted to explore whether there was a statistically significant mean score difference between groups of background variables on Students' Views on Implementing TBLT. Table 4 shows that there was no statistically significant mean score difference between groups of all background variables (gender, age, and educational level) on the dependent variable (Students' View on Implementing TBLT).

Classroom Observations

Based on the checklist, section 1, part 1, out of ten activities to be observed, two of them were practiced: an introduction of the new lesson and a presentation. In these tasks/activities, students were involved. However, the tasks were not practiced in pairs/group work.

Checklist section 1 part 1 students' interaction analysis

In the checklist section 1 part 1, one of the activities to be observed was to see whether students interact with one another and elicit genuine information from each other while performing tasks (Item no.6). One of the reasons the teachers told the researcher (during an interview with teachers) was directly connected to the COVID-19 PROTOCOL. One of the teachers tried to excuse himself by saying, "It is because the protocol prohibits gathering or sitting side by side; we teachers are not allowed to put students in pairs/groups by the school authorities". Another shortcoming noticed during the observation was that the three phases of the task-based language teaching framework (pre-task, post-task) were not implemented. As discussed in the Review of Literature, TBLT bases itself on tasks, and the three phases of TBLT are crucial elements for teaching meaning-based language

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July. –Sep, 2025, 14(3), 81-92

teaching. Nevertheless, in the observations carried out in eight classes, the instructions given were carried out rather successfully. However, the students were not engaged in the task, and the teacher did not divide the class into pairs/groups. As observed in most classes, the method of teaching in the CL3 (1) was a structured language teaching method. Students did not brainstorm on the topic they learned. Equally, the situation in CL3 (2) was not different from the former. In this class, there was no student collaboration interaction, the students were not engaged in the task, and the teacher did not divide the class into pairs/groups. Still, another drawback observed during the observation was the lack of emphasis on fluency.

Checklist section 1 part 2 - teachers' role analysis

The second part of the checklist is about teachers' roles. Under this part, there are seven items to be observed (see the checklist). As a result, it was found that teachers give instruction and tolerate learners' errors. Out of these seven items, in most of the classrooms visited, only two items, namely "Does the teacher give instruction? And "Does the teacher tolerate learners' errors?" was observed to be implemented in the classrooms. Besides, the third item of the second part of the checklist, some of the teachers were observed monitoring the activities given in the classrooms.

Checklist section 3 part 1 – students' activities analysis

The third section of the observation checklist deals with students' activities. There are seven items to be checked during the observation. As the checklist reveals, out of the seven questions listed, which deal with students' activities, in

CL (classroom), approximately 25 % of the students' activities were found to be practiced during the observation. The number of students who actively participated was also very few; probably only 1/3 rd of the students were partially engaged in the activities. In addition, a few students use only English to carry out the activities in pairs/small groups. Besides, students did not report their work at all at the end of the task. However, reporting to the class after the task is one of the main features of TBLT. The students also did not brainstorm on the topic they learned. In CL2(1), except that a few students engaged in the task/activities they were told to perform, in most cases, the same shortcomings observed in CL1(2) are exactly what happened in CL2(1); students never report their work at the end of the task, and not much collaboration was seen during the class session.

The observer's final comment from his field notes

The final part of the checklist was devoted to the final comments of the observer. Two of the notes the researcher wrote are read as follows:

As far as TBLT is concerned, the teaching approach of the EFL teacher I observed Today is far from the method of teaching based on expectations. Only a few students Interaction among themselves was observed. Only a few students respond to the teacher.

What was practiced was a conventional teaching method- rule-based, followed by vocabulary teaching (CL4), an observation report read from the researcher's field note. Nevertheless, although the teacher did not directly implement TBLT, the methodology was used.

He implemented partly a communicative approach and a structure-based methodology.

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July. –Sep, 2025, 14(3), 81-92
The teacher found that the class was not interactive and participatory, and students failed to respond to some of the questions raised by the teacher (CL2 (1) observation report read from the research field).

Other positive sides worth mentioning during observation were that some teachers give general comments to students as a whole (checklist item 25), some teachers go around the classrooms to assist students' learning (checklist item 26), and the topics for the lessons were more or less familiar to the students.

To sum up, all the inquiries listed in the checklist helped the researcher to be aware of the teacher's methods of teaching in general and TBLT in specific, and how they reflect their views of TBLT in the actual classroom situations. Furthermore, the results of the data gathered from the observation helped the researcher to triangulate the analysis with the other data gathered from the instruments (questionnaire).

Discussions

Overall, when participant students were asked about the extent of teachers practicing the tasks mentioned (e.g., Table 3), their average mean score showed that their EFL teachers practiced those tasks hardly ever.

Under the second part of the checklist, which deals with teachers' roles, there are seven items to be checked. However, out of these seven items, in most of the classrooms visited, only two items, namely "Does the teacher give instruction?" And "Does the teacher tolerate learners' errors?" was observed to be implemented in the classrooms. Besides, some of the teachers were observed monitoring the activities given to the students in the classrooms as well.

A further point is that the participants were asked whether students believe the textbook(s) they are currently learning with play a vital role in improving their language proficiency. The data revealed students' dissatisfaction with the participants' learning material. Research evidence suggests that textbooks play an indispensable role in improving language proficiency (Baldeh, 1990; McArthur, 1996). However, students show dissatisfaction with their textbooks, which will jeopardize the teaching and learning process.

The result of qualitative data (data collected from the classroom observations) revealed that among the eight classrooms observed (2 classrooms from each sample school), several shortcomings were observed. For instance, the teaching methods implemented in all the observed classrooms were structured-based teaching methods, which are similar to the teaching methods that had been implemented twenty/thirty years ago. Tasks/activities of the Task-based Language teaching materialization, except on a few occasions, were not implemented during the observation sessions.

The findings of this study have various pedagogical implications in Ethiopian ELT. Firstly, the findings of the study can be useful for EFL teachers, material developers, and syllabus designers. Secondly, if the stakeholders mentioned here take rigorous action in changing the teaching methodology of the current practices into TBLT and other active-teaching methods, the researcher of this study is optimistic that Ethiopian ELT will be changed like other countries that implemented TBLT into their language policies, as mentioned in the introduction of this article.

While Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) presents a valuable opportunity to reshape the pedagogy and curriculum within a country, several important factors must be

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July. –Sep, 2025, 14(3), 81-92

considered. First, it is crucial to help students understand that TBLT emphasizes a meaning-focused approach to language learning, rather than a rule-based one. Given that many students are primarily grade-oriented, this shift in perspective could pose a challenge for them to fully embrace TBLT and cultivate independent learning habits (Liu & Xing, 2016).

Second, students must be aware of the objectives behind each task to foster motivation and encourage positive perceptions of the new instructional program. Third, task-based teaching requires creativity and adaptability, which may be difficult for educators who are accustomed to traditional teacher-centered methods and have had limited exposure to more innovative practices (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Ferrao, 2012)

To address these challenges, it is essential to provide EFL teachers with comprehensive training in Task-Based Instruction and Teaching. This training can be offered as either on-the-job or off-the-job professional development. Ultimately, this article emphasizes that, in light of these potential obstacles, key stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Education in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (MOE of FDRE), must take thoughtful action to initiate meaningful changes in English language education in Ethiopia.

The benefits and effects of TBLT in this study were elaborated on in the review of the literature. Firstly, TBLT develops learners' capacity for self-improvement and self-autonomy. It also encourages learners' intrinsic motivation. Second, TBLT provides a cooperative learning environment, which at the same time improves learners' interactive communication skills and autonomy.

Further, TBLT improves learners' organizing skills and critical thinking, and changes their attitudes toward English learning. As revealed in several publications, TBLT changed the passive, teacher-centered class into an active, student-centered class, which highly enhanced students' engagement in a second/foreign language learning, especially where learners have little chance to expose themselves to an English-speaking environment (Zhao et al., 2024). Finally, though implementing TBLT in the teaching of EFL is advantageous, it should be applied prudently, considering many factors, including levels of students, feasibility of tasks, curriculum, time settings, and teachers' level of proficiency, among others.

Recommendations

The current researcher strongly recommends that EFL teachers should practice the most common type of tasks, which include listing tasks, and *practices of comparing and contrasting tasks*, among others, to enable students to overcome the lack of communicative competencies, which have been reported in numerous research studies locally and globally.

In addition, the present researcher calls upon other researchers in the field, and Curriculum designers and syllabus/ Textbook writers to promote the teaching of the English language through Task-based language teaching to be included in our language policy to overcome the existing problems mentioned in the introduction of this Article. As mentioned earlier, most parts of the World, such as Malaysia, China, and Korea, brought tremendous results in their English language teaching after applying TBLT, the most recent teaching approach that emerged after Communicative Language Teaching.

Furthermore, the current researcher recommends that the concerned bodies take invigorating steps to revitalize the teaching of the English language in Senior Secondary Schools by providing EFL teachers with on-the-job training focusing on TBLT to overcome the gaps identified by this research. On the other hand, the concerned bodies need to exert maximum effort to sustain the good practices of EFL teachers to motivate them to work harder.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Tarekegn Mekonnen: Conceptualization, Data Collection, Model Development, Analysis & Writing Original Draft. **Melaku Wakuma:** Data Analysis & Model Validation, Supervision, Review & Editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

The authors explained the objectives of the study and obtained approval from Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Data Availability

The data used in this study are available upon request.

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