

Task-Based Language Teaching Training Program: Vietnamese Private Language Center Teachers' Beliefs¹

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Abstract

While Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been widely researched and accepted as a potentially powerful teaching method in language education around the world, research examining the teachers' beliefs about the impacts of a training on TBLT to date has remained limited. In Vietnam, studies on this topic were scarce (Nguyen & Jaspaert, 2021). This study thus investigates the Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in-service teachers' beliefs about the impact of a TBLT training program. To collect data, classroom observations followed by semi-structured interviews were conducted with five volunteer teachers. The findings showed that the teachers generally had strong beliefs in the usefulness of the TBLT training program for professional development, and their willingness to pursue TBLT teaching. Although there exist barriers hindering this TBLT training program, many teachers expressed interest to undergo more TBLT training in the future. The findings in this study are expected to provide some insightful pedagogical implications for developing a TBLT training program for in-service teachers in the similar context of language education in Vietnam and other EFL settings.

Resumen

Si bien la enseñanza de idiomas basada en tareas (TBLT) ha sido ampliamente investigada y aceptada como un método de enseñanza potencialmente poderoso en la educación de idiomas en todo el mundo, hasta la fecha la investigación que examina las creencias de los docentes sobre los impactos de una capacitación en TBLT ha seguido siendo limitada. En Vietnam, los estudios sobre este tema fueron escasos (Nguyen & Jaspaert, 2021). Por lo tanto, este estudio investiga las creencias de los profesores en servicio de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) vietnamitas sobre el impacto de un programa de formación TBLT. Para recopilar datos, se realizaron observaciones en el aula seguidas de entrevistas semiestructuradas con cinco profesores voluntarios. Los hallazgos mostraron que los maestros en general creían firmemente en la utilidad del programa de capacitación TBLT para el desarrollo profesional y estaban dispuestos a continuar con la enseñanza TBLT. Aunque existen barreras que obstaculizan este programa de capacitación TBLT, muchos docentes expresaron interés en recibir más capacitación TBLT en el futuro. Se espera que los hallazgos de este estudio proporcionen algunas implicaciones pedagógicas esclarecedoras para el desarrollo de un programa de capacitación TBLT para profesores en servicio en el contexto similar de la educación de idiomas en Vietnam y otros entornos de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Introduction

Successful learning in a foreign language like English depends much on appropriate teaching approaches and TBLT is one of them (Van den Branden et al., 2009). Since the 1980s, TBLT has gained its potential in terms of both fostering learners' second language acquisition and promoting their communicative competence (East, 2018). In fact, TBLT has gained its success in the field of language teaching in different teaching contexts like in Belgium (Van den Branden, 2006), or Asian contexts such as in Thailand (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; 2010), and in Japan (Cadierno & Robinson, 2009; Robinson, 2007). Although much value of TBLT has been recognized in literature both theoretically and practically, it is still hard to confirm what makes TBLT successful (Hall, 2017) and whether it could be effectively implemented in practical classroom-based conditions.

The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has recently attempted to promote innovative reforms in English language teaching including, for example, introducing a "learner-centered and communicative task-based" teaching method (Ministry of Education and Training, 2006, p. 14) or implementing a new ten-year English teaching curriculum which places a strong focus on developing

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learners' language competence (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). Accordingly, it is hoped that these activities might contribute to the overall quality of English language teaching in Vietnam and foster Vietnamese learners' English language skills, which, in turn, could promote intercultural and international communication.

However, it is worth mentioning that the implementation of TBLT in difficult contexts like Vietnam, where the features of language teaching and learning are said not to be in favor of TBLT (e.g., teacher-centered education, form-based instruction, learners' passive learning styles, etc.) (Nguyen & Pham, 2016), is challenging due to many barriers (Adams & Newton, 2009). Among them, it is believed that training teachers on TBLT should be a challenging task but a significant contributing factor to the success of TBLT implementation due to the fact that the teachers are key and direct agents in educational innovations (Van den Branden, 2009a). Although research on TBLT training for teachers has been frequent in different contexts (Carless, 2004; East, 2012; Han, 2018; Van den Branden, 2009b), little or no research has rigorously investigated how the targeted group of in-service teachers working at English private centers in Vietnam respond to the TBLT training. In other words, the trained teachers' beliefs toward the TBLT training were not well-addressed. Therefore, the findings of this study could help inform pedagogical implications and possible suggestions for TBLT training in Vietnam and similar contexts.

Background

Task-based language teaching: Overview

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) appears "as a potentially very powerful language pedagogy" in many countries (Van den Branden et al., 2009, p. 1), and the term of task in TBLT has placed an influential stake in language education (Samuda et al., 2018). However, the question raised here is what makes a task. In the literature, definitions of a task vary depending on its scope and formulations. Generally speaking, a task is considered to be the main unit for defining language learning goals (Bygate et al., 2001). A task is also considered the main unit of analysis for organizing educational activities (Willis, 1996). Van den Branden (2006) states that a classroom task should be derived from target tasks, which are things that learners are expected to do in their real lives, for example negotiation for meaning in real-life situations.

TBLT is said to be a communicative-oriented teaching approach. In fact, TBLT does not "chop up language into small pieces, but takes holistic, functional and communicative 'tasks', rather than any specific linguistic item, as the basic unit for the design of educational activity" (Van den Branden, 2006, p. 5). Under this perspective, language learners are given much opportunity to work with real-life tasks; and as a result, they are said to fully engage in intensive interaction (Long, 2015). Thus, TBLT is consistent with a learner-centered education (Long, 2015; Van den Branden, 2006). Another principle of TBLT is that it aims at not just developing learners' fluency, but also their linguistic accuracy (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Norris, 2016). Van den Branden et al. (2009) state that TBLT "allows, even encourages – a focus on form in view of optimizing the learning potential of task-based educational activities" (p. 6). In this respect, Van den Branden (2016) supposes that placing a focus on explicit form-based instruction is also an integral part of TBLT.

Regarding the framework of TBLT, there are three stages: *pre-task*, *task cycle* and *language focus* (Willis, 1996). In the *pre-task* stage, the teacher starts the topic by using different techniques such as brainstorming ideas, using pictures, or personal experience to introduce the lesson and promote learners' motivation. Moreover, different activities to help learners learn new words or phrases are intentionally given. The teacher, in this stage, has to ensure that the learners understand task instructions so that they can continue the learning process smoothly. The *task cycle* stage includes three phases of task, planning and report (Willis, 1996). In the task phase, the teacher gives learners particular tasks to help them use the target language. The teacher acts as monitor or facilitator to encourage learners to do the tasks and support them by all means. During the planning phase, learners are required to prepare a report for the whole class or they rehearse what they will say while the teacher acts as a language adviser to promote the activity. During the report phase, the learners present their speech or display their products to the whole class. The teacher may act as a chairperson to select who will speak next, and accordingly they will give comments on the contents. In the *language focus* stage, Willis (1996) states that the teacher normally reviews the activity in which the language form is intentionally included, gets students' attention of useful language form or selects key language items from the report stage for an analysis. The teacher might also organize activities such as memory challenge games, sentence completion activity, choral repetition of the phrases, etc. for the learners' practice. From a TBLT perspective, it is possible for the teacher to look back on learners'

performances, which then allows him/her opportunities to better think about particular strategies that learners used in their learning, specific questions that they raise or issues that they were struggling with (Van den Branden, 2016).

Teacher teaching beliefs and teaching practices

Teachers play a key role in the success of an innovative diffusion (i.e., TBLT) since they directly facilitate teaching activity and work with learners in actual classroom conditions (Van den Branden, 2016). However, it seems that teachers prefer to consider their own ways of teaching, not exactly from what they are exposed through available proposed research-based findings (Van den Branden, 2009a). East (2012) conducted a study investigating EFL teachers' enactment to a TBLT reform in New Zealand. He concluded that the teachers were still at different stages of transition to TBLT. The teachers showed different levels of accepting TBLT through a range of support and guidance that had been given. Zheng and Borg (2014) investigated how three secondary school teachers in China implemented a TBLT curriculum into their classroom-based teaching practices. By doing this, the researchers could measure the cognitive and contextual factors that shaped teachers' decisions in applying TBLT. The results showed that various perspectives were evident. While one of the three teachers, who was the most junior, closely implemented the TBLT curriculum, the senior teachers did not. This provides evidence that the experienced teachers tended to rely on their beliefs about collective and individual teaching experiences to tailor their methods to what they perceived as most beneficial for their teaching (Van den Branden, 2016).

Van den Branden (2009a) states that the path from teachers' beliefs to teachers' actions is hard to observe, or even unobservable, since it depends on many factors mediated by different agents and conditions such as teachers' teaching activities, approaches or a certain amount of chaos. In this respect, we believe that there is a need to conduct research to investigate what teachers actually do in their TBLT teaching practice, especially while they are being trained in TBLT. Moreover, addressing the beliefs and factors that shape teachers' instructional decisions is direly needed.

English language teaching in Vietnam

In Vietnam, English is taught to learners through two primary systems: *English inside formal education* and *English outside formal education*. In the first system, English is given nationally to learners as an elective subject in primary school and as a compulsory subject in both secondary school and tertiary level under a strict management of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). Since the focus of the current study setting is on the second system, English outside the formal education (hereinafter referred to as private English language centers), its main features will be described.

The system of private English language centers develops rapidly in Vietnam, particularly after the country joined the World Trade Organization in 2007 due to a high demand of English use throughout the country. Together with English inside the formal education, these private centers contribute to offering a variety of English courses (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL, General English, etc.) to meet the demand of certain groups of learners. With regard to education policies, these private centers are allowed to develop their own curriculum, choose materials and teaching methods, recruit teaching staff, etc. This kind of non-formal educational sector, according to Vietnamese Education Laws, must work under a close supervision and strict control of the Provincial Department of Education, an official local unit of the MoET, to guarantee their well-organized and legal education activities. Given that operating mechanism, we assume that this current study might provide related stakeholders, such as researchers, teacher trainees, and teacher trainers with insights and support to give TBLT training at their own best convenience.

TBLT in private English language centers in Vietnam

In response to an educational reform to improve Vietnamese learners' communicative English language skills proposed by the MoET of Vietnam (Ministry of Education and Training, 2006) which states that "communicative skills are the goals of the teaching of English [...] education should be learner-centered, communicative task-based" (p. 14), several attempts to seek effective teaching methods, implement a new curriculum together with developing a pilot English textbook series, train or retrain teachers to meet the demands of teaching have been undertaken (Hoang, 2016). However, the above-mentioned reform activities have not brought about expected results yet. In fact, traditional grammar-based teaching and learning styles still exist and continue to dominate language teaching (Nguyen & Pham, 2016). This reality likely suggests that it is necessary to seek an alternative teaching method which can satisfy the government's reform goals as well as learners' needs at private language centers.

It is assumed that TBLT is a potential choice for a method of language teaching in the context of Vietnamese private English language centers since its basic principles (discussed above) are properly well-matched with the reform goals of the Vietnamese MoET. Nevertheless, as reported in literature, the implementation of TBLT in an Asian context has faced a number of challenges (Adams & Newton, 2009). In Vietnam, Duong and Nguyen (2021) conducted a study investigating the challenges secondary school teachers' have faced while implementing TBLT. They concluded that both objective challenges (e.g., class size, incompatibility between the curriculum and TBLT principles, etc.) and subjective challenges such as the lack of ability in assessing TBLT performance were found. At the high school level, Barnard and Nguyen (2010) explored the extent of convergence between teachers' beliefs about TBLT and their teaching practice. They found that the teachers showed their inability in implementing TBLT teaching due to their lack of TBLT training. In a recent study on TBLT at tertiary level, Nguyen et al. (2018) identified five big concerns of TBLT implementation, and these included the discrepancy between the current policies of language teaching at the school level and the reform goals proposed by the MoET, the issue of large class size, students' negative attitudes in learning and time limitations. It is noted that although a lot of research has been done in different educational levels in Vietnam, very little has been done in private language centers, especially related to teachers' beliefs about the training of TBLT.

Recognizing the importance of promoting a TBLT training program for in-service teachers and the dearth of research on TBLT training for Vietnamese in-service teachers in private English language centers, this study aims to explore the teachers' beliefs about the TBLT training program. In addition, suggestions for an effective training program on TBLT were addressed. The only research question (RQ) posited for this study is formulated as follows:

RQ: What are the beliefs of Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers towards the TBLT training program?

Methods

Research design

This study is an exploratory study investigating how Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers perceived TBLT after training. To achieve this overall goal, the study employed a qualitative approach to gain in-depth and more detailed understanding of the collected data (Creswell, 2014). To collect data, open-ended questions were used in a semi-structured manner, using inductive probing – “asking questions that are based on the interviewee's responses and simultaneously linked to the research objectives” (Guest et al. 2013, p. 114). It is noted that using a semi-structured interview as a tool in qualitative approach enables the researcher to encourage the participants to provide more insightful data on their practices in a comfortable and exploratory manner (Creswell, 2012).

Participants

Five EFL in-service teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4 & T5) volunteered to participate in this study. It should be mentioned that all of the five teachers were female due to the fact that only female teachers responded to the call to voluntarily participating in the study. The age range of the participants was from 24 to 29. Regarding the criteria for selecting the participants, they had to be full-time teachers working at a private English language center. Prior to the study, these teachers had no prior knowledge of TBLT or any experience in TBLT teaching. Regarding their teaching experience, three teachers had had four year's experience of teaching EFL while the other two had had two year's experience.

TBLT training program

The training program of TBLT in the current study consisted of two phases. In the first phase, the teachers were given TBLT-related materials for a reading purpose. Together with the trainer, they frequently had meetings for discussions on TBLT issues for two months. On meeting days, the teachers shared what they had read and were encouraged to ask questions if they were unsure of anything. The trainer, with the key role as facilitator throughout the training program, explained and clarified the issues. In addition, he did regular checks (by raising questions and situations) to see whether the trained teachers fully understood the issues. By doing so, the TBLT theories could be effectively mastered by all teachers (Van den Branden, 2006).

In the second phase, the trained teachers had to perform TBLT teaching in a real classroom setting for four months. It should be mentioned that the students were teenagers, ranging in age from 13 to 15 years. Before teaching, the teachers had to prepare the TBLT lesson plans which were carefully checked by the

trainer to ensure that TBLT teaching principles were fully applied and to help the trained teachers learn more about TBLT teaching. While teaching, the teachers had to take notes about TBLT-related issues in teaching diaries for later discussion. Regarding the post-teaching activity, the trainer sat together with all of the trained teachers in both face-to-face and online meetings to finalize tasks that they had gone through, as well as to share their experienced and feedback about TBLT teaching. Classroom observations were conducted by the trainer to see how the teachers changed in their TBLT teaching throughout the training program.

TBLT teaching and teaching materials

In TBLT teaching, the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are fully integrated in one teaching lesson. About the teaching sequences, all lessons were designed based on a three-stage phase of *pre-task*, *task cycle* and *language focus* (Willis, 1996). A sample of a TBLT lesson teaching can be seen in Appendix 1. Prior to teaching, the trainer and the trainee teachers had to sit together and discuss about the lesson plans, including criteria for selecting or designing materials as well as other teaching materials for each unit. These materials were selected from different sources such as textbooks, magazine, and newspapers, provided they followed TBLT teaching principles and were approved by the trainer. The teachers were allowed to flexibly use available sources they thought useful and practical for their TBLT teaching. Totally, each of the teachers had to teach 16 units throughout the training (see Appendix 2).

Data collection

First, one of the researchers emailed all the participants to provide an information sheet about the study and seek their voluntary participation. Five teachers agreed to participate by signing a consent form in which important information about the study as well as possible risks and benefits of taking part in the study were clearly stated. They were fully informed about the content of the study and activities that they had to be involved in and that they could ask questions if they were unclear about or withdraw at any time without the researcher's legal rights being affected. Also, the participants were fully informed that they could be observed, trained, and their voices recorded during the discussion.

This study took place within six months from January to June, 2021. Prior to the official implementation of TBLT teaching in practical classrooms, the trained teachers had spent two months learning about theories of TBLT under the guidance of the trainer.

In the next phase, the trained teachers had to perform their TBLT teaching in classroom-based teaching practices under the supervision of the trainer. During the training, the trained teachers were also observed four interval times (weeks 4, 8, 12, and 16) by the trainer, and each observation lasted for 90 minutes.

Soon after the participating teachers had completed the training program on TBLT, a semi-structured interview was conducted to investigate their beliefs toward the training program. To achieve flexibility and consistency in the interview, a list of open-ended and flexible questions called *aide memoire* were used (McCann & Clark, 2005). The examples of these questions include *Do you think the TBLT training program is useful for your TBLT teaching practices?; Do you want to apply TBLT to your classrooms? Why?/ why not?; Do you want to participate in more TBLT training courses in the future? or What do you think are barriers for TBLT training program?.* The interview was conducted in Vietnamese, the first language of the interviewees in order for them to easily express their opinions (Creswell, 2012; Okamura, 2006). All the data was recorded for further analysis.

Data analysis

Regarding the qualitative data collected from the interview, the analysis adopted a thematic analysis method (Charmaz, 2006) to explore teachers' beliefs about the TBLT training program. The collected responses were first transcribed and then translated into English by the researchers, and they were then checked by an independent translator to ensure their original meanings. The interview data were coded through an iterative process, and the emerging themes were grouped to answer the research question. However, only the related interview information was included in the manuscript for a better understanding of the research findings.

Results and Discussion

Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers' beliefs towards the TBLT training program

The findings from the semi-structured interview revealed four issues related to teachers' beliefs about the TBLT training program: (1) teachers' beliefs toward the usefulness of TBLT training, (2) teachers' willingness

to implement TBLT teaching after the training, (3) teachers' desire to take part in future similar training courses on TBLT teaching, and (4) teachers' issues about taking TBLT training.

Teachers' beliefs toward the usefulness of TBLT training

Regarding the question, asking that, "*Do you think the TBLT training program is useful for your TBLT teaching practices?*", the results showed that all the teachers (n=5) believed that the training was useful in terms of promoting teachers' understandings of TBLT teaching principles and skills. T2 said that she strongly believed that she would be able to carry out her own TBLT teaching. In the same vein, T1 added that:

For me, this training program is useful in terms of enriching my understandings of TBLT teaching principles. I think that this approach is extremely useful for my teaching practices as well.

Similarly, T3 shared:

After the training, I can design and teach according to TBLT teaching principles. I can perform my TBLT teaching role in a proper manner. I succeeded in encouraging students' language use and promoting their learning motivation. Yes, the training was very useful.

T5 stated that she learned a lot of new things related to TBLT teaching expertise while T4 said:

I think that during the training program I was able to expand my understanding of TBLT concepts. I believe that my mind was changed positively in favor of TBLT.

From the interview information, it can be seen that the teachers believed that the TBLT training program enhanced their ability in applying TBLT, as well as promoting their teaching and learning activity. This could have resulted from the training the teachers were given, not only theoretical presentation of TBLT, but the opportunity to practice TBLT teaching at the classroom level (Van den Branden, 2006). Simultaneously, under the close supervision and support of the trainer, together with extensive discussion and sharing of activities organized by the whole team throughout the training, the teachers could acquire expertise in regard to TBLT teaching (Van den Branden). Such scaffolded training could account for these in-service teachers' strong beliefs about the usefulness of the TBLT training after the training. This finding is in line with the suggestion by previous researchers (Liu & Gui, 2020; Liu & Xiong, 2016) who stated that when teachers understand what TBLT is or how to design and implement a TBLT lesson, they became more confident and motivated in the TBLT training program. Furthermore, their initial positive feelings towards TBLT might result in their favorable beliefs in the benefits of the training program for their professional development.

Teachers' willingness to implement TBLT teaching after the training

In response to the question in the interview which asked "*Do you want to apply TBLT to your classrooms? Why?/why not?*", the answers showed that all of the teachers were willing to promote TBLT implementation if they could be offered favorable conditions. For example, T1 said that TBLT was an effective method to help motivate students' language use. Therefore, she was willing to apply TBLT in her teaching. She stated:

I will definitely promote TBLT teaching if my boss allows it and offers me favorable TBLT teaching conditions. (T1)

In addition, T4 said:

TBLT makes my teaching better compared to traditional grammar-based teaching methods. So, if favorable conditions can be timely given such as a flexible syllabus or freedom in selecting teaching materials and assessment methods, I will surely pursue TBLT for my teaching.

Similarly, T5 decided to consider TBLT as a key means for her professional development. She stated:

I think I will apply TBLT because it brings many benefits to students. To me, gaining more teaching experience, particularly TBLT teaching, will definitely help develop my professional development of language teaching.

Teachers' wish to take part in future training courses about TBLT teaching

With regard to teachers' opinions on whether or not they wish to take part in more similar training courses on TBLT teaching, the results showed that the teachers said they would be excited to join. In particular, T1 said:

I think there should be more training courses on TBLT implementation to help teachers gain more insightful and deep understandings of this method. We still have many things to deal with TBLT, I guess.

In the same way, T2 said:

TBLT must be adapted to Vietnam where teaching and learning conditions are different from where TBLT was first originated. Therefore, we need more training programs to learn about it.

Additionally, T5 said:

I think promoting more TBLT training courses for teachers is a must. Through the training, I believe that the teachers can learn about TBLT and its related issues. By intensively involving in the discussion, implementation and sharing activities, we can improve our knowledge and teaching performances.

As mentioned above, TBLT can serve as a potentially powerful language pedagogy due to its communicative and learner-centered teaching principles (Van den Branden et al., 2009). In addition, the training program can provide teachers with best conditions and opportunities to explore their TBLT teaching ability from preparation to practice and back-up reflection activities. In this study TBLT related issues were actively tried out in practical classroom-based level. The teachers showed their trust and positive beliefs in promoting TBLT teaching and TBLT training in the future as well (East, 2012). However, the teachers believed that they would not be able to implement TBLT successfully if they were not given enough conditions for TBLT teaching such as flexible teaching time or materials the teachers could revise or adapt (Carless, 2007). Therefore, it is suggested that policy makers and educational leaders should take these issues into consideration so as to create best conditions for teachers to pursue TBLT teaching.

Teachers' concerns in taking part in TBLT training

Regarding the teachers' problems in taking this TBLT training, these teachers reported that they were not offered enough authentic context to encourage their students to practice English both inside and outside the classroom. On the classroom side, for instance, T2 and T3 said that due to the shortage of time and available authentic materials, they struggled to create real life tasks to let their students practice the language. Dealing with opportunities to use English outside the classroom, these teachers admitted that this opportunity was too limited at their workplace, which is similar to what Liu and Guo (2020) reported. In particular, T5 said:

It is quite challenging to create real life target tasks used in the classroom. You know most of the tasks in the given textbook are not authentic enough to allow students to acquire the language properly. Also, students have no place to practice English after class, even when they are still at the Center.

In this respect, it is suggested that there is a need for providing the trained teachers with favorable conditions for TBLT teaching not only inside the classroom, i.e., real-life materials, more teaching time, etc. but also outside the classroom (Zhang, 2007). As stated in Liu and Guo's (2020) study, some of the teachers in their study created "English corner" for students after class or encouraged them to watch original English videos at home. In fact, creating a friendly-English speaking environment at the center or establishing English coaching teams with active members who purposefully interact with students after class could be worth considering.

Another concern reported by the teachers was that students seemed to be accustomed to the traditional way of learning in which they tended to be spoon-fed rather than being active learners. This problem was also reported by Nguyen et al. (2006) in their study on the influence of Confucian Heritage Culture on Vietnamese learners' language learning. In fact, as shared by T2, her students were reluctant to participate in discussion. Also, T4 stated:

I realize that the students seemed to be quiet, attentive, and reluctant to express themselves whenever I pushed them to cooperative tasks. Being a facilitator and following learner-centered teaching, I could encourage them to join the activity. However, it can be seen that students still relied heavily on me and the given materials.

Sharing a similar view, T1 said:

My students preferred to take notes and listen tentatively to others rather than actively participating in discussion or sharing activities.

She said she had to go around the classroom and remind them many times, but this seemed not to work well in the long run. It is therefore, suggested that together with training teachers about TBLT, the analysis of students' needs and motivations should also be taken into consideration. As Long (2015) stated, TBLT is radically learner-centered as "the course content is determined by students' needs" (p. 325). Therefore, students' needs and motivations should be effectively evaluated. Furthermore, by establishing good rapport with students, related stakeholders at the language center (i.e., the teachers, staff, even administrators) could be able to get close to students, and that will give them a better opportunity to talk about meaning-based learning styles, cooperative learning, communicative approach or TBLT-like learning. By doing so, it is believed that the students might change their minds toward learning contributing to the success of the TBLT training (Long, 2015).

Conclusion

This study tried to explore what beliefs Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers at a private language center held when responding to a TBLT training program. By employing classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, the study found that the teachers showed positive beliefs toward it. These findings were encouraging because they indicated the success of this scaffolding training program on TBLT. This tends to suggest that more TBLT training courses should be promoted in Vietnam in general and at private English language centers in the country in particular. However, the results of this study also revealed certain difficulties that the teachers faced in the TBLT training program. It is therefore important for the policy makers, the head educators, and other related stakeholders of English private centers to think of giving conditional support for both the trainer and teachers so that they would be able to promote TBLT training programs more effectively.

Although the present study achieved its research aims to a great extent, several limitations still exist. First, the research is just limited to five EFL teachers, which is a small number of participants. Thus, the results of this study can hardly be generalized to other populations. Furthermore, the training course lasted for only six months while the participants needed more time to experience and adapt TBLT in their own teaching. Longer periods of time for applying TBLT after the training courses should be provided to help teachers to explore TBLT and address its related issues more properly. Last but not least, only the semi-structured interviews and four observations for each teacher's teaching demonstration were conducted to collect data for this study. It would be better if future studies included more regular observation activities in order to learn about teachers' application of TBLT. Moreover, to provide a complete picture of TBLT training programs, this study also suggests that similar future studies should be conducted on other groups of participants (e.g., university teachers or high school teachers). Also, studies on factors hindering the success of TBLT training programs at different teaching levels in Vietnam should be taken into consideration.

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APPENDIX 1

A sample of a TBLT lesson teaching

TBLT lesson sample – Integrated skills

Topic: Phone conversations

Pre-task phase

- Students were asked to watch and take notes on a short video named "Daisy's hotel ramblings". Then, the teacher encouraged students to talk and discuss about it in a free manner.
- The teacher interfered with students sometimes and asked questions, shared opinion to promote interaction as well as encouraged the conversation flow. After that, the teacher quickly introduced the topic of the lesson and gave a clear and informative instruction on how to conduct the subsequent activities.

Task cycle phase

- Students worked in two groups watching a short scene cut from the video of 'Daisy's hotel ramblings'. One group was assigned to find out structures of making a phone call and the other group had to take notes of ways of leaving a message. Then, the students in each group had time to work in a small project, designing a poster including all information they had been asked to do before.
- The teacher walked around, took notes, and gave help when necessary.

Planning stage

- o The students in each group discussed within their group about their products and assigned speakers who presented their products to the other groups and the teacher. Then, each group presented their posters. Together with the class, the teacher elicited and encouraged the students to involve in the activity.
- o After poster exhibition activity, the teacher gave each group some more handouts and notes, then asked them to revise, take notes and prepare for the next activity in which each individual student had to come to see a friend, reporting everything about the task they had been taken so far.

Reporting stage

- o Each student took turns to report what (s)he had worked on before to another one, then they shared notes, had further discussions on the topic.
- o Each student played a role-play activity, making an unreal phone call, with other classmates. Teachers would then randomly pick up any pair for modelling.

Reporting backstage

- o Students (divided into two equal groups in number) were asked to choose a friend to make a real phone call conversation (using Zalo call). One student took the role of a hotel receptionist while the other one is a customer. The teacher organized and observed the activity.

Language focus phase

- The teacher summarized the outcomes of the lesson.
- The teacher explicitly corrected students' mistakes, taught grammar rules, words or phrases necessarily included in the lesson.
- Students noted teachers' comments on specific linguistic items (grammar rules, words/phrases) and other advice.

APPENDIX 2***Description of units for teaching***

| Units | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Describing people | 9. Reading books |
| 2. Films | 10. Travel |
| 3. Clothing and fashion | 11. Sports |
| 4. Shopping | 12. Hobbies and interests |
| 5. Music | 13. Asking for and giving directions |
| 6. Phone conversations | 14. My favorite food |
| 7. Meeting new friends | 15. Family |
| 8. Weather | 16. My favorite idols |
