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**RESEARCH REPORT**

# Exploring the Idea of Task in the Context of the Young Language Learner Classroom

**AUTHORS**

Veronika Timpe-Laughlin, Bianca Roters, and Yuko Goto Butler

# ETS Research Report Series

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## ETS RESEARCH REPORT

# Exploring the Idea of Task in the Context of the Young Language Learner Classroom

Veronika Timpe-Laughlin<sup>1</sup>, Bianca Roters<sup>2</sup>, & Yuko Goto Butler<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ETS Research Institute, ETS, Princeton, New Jersey United States

<sup>2</sup> PH Ludwigsburg, Ludwigsburg, Germany

<sup>3</sup> University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania United States

Originating in adult education, the approach of task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been promoted in young language learner (YLL) education. However, its application often encounters challenges due to varying interpretations of what constitutes a “task.” Previous research has repeatedly highlighted gaps in teachers’ understanding of tasks, often reducing them to mere exercises rather than opportunities for genuine communication. A potential issue could be that some of the criteria of a task as defined in the literature that focuses on adult second/foreign language (L2) learners do not necessarily apply or may need to be modified in YLL education. For example, tasks have traditionally been defined as having “authenticity,” but this may vary, as YLLs are often engaged in play and driven by imagination. Additionally, for children, school represents their “real world,” so their concept of an “authentic” task may differ from that of adult L2 learners, who may be attending classes to improve workplace skills. In this study, we aimed to explore the concept of task in the context of teaching an additional language to YLLs in primary education. Utilizing a Delphi method, 16 well-known experts who work at the intersection of applied linguistics, TBLT, and YLLs participated in three rounds of data collection via email. After providing written definitions of a task and its characteristics in the YLL classroom in Round 1, the experts rated each other’s definitions on a 4-point Likert scale and provided comments on the definitions in two subsequent rounds. Additionally, we conducted follow-up interviews with a subsample of the participants ( $n = 6$ ) relative to a particular task characteristic: “authenticity.” Using both quantitative and qualitative analyses, we identified key aspects from the data, including task characteristics, learner considerations, and implementation details. Findings showed a distinction between “activity” and “task,” with the latter being understood as featuring certain characteristics. Accordingly, a task in the YLL classroom has a goal orientation, an orientation to meaning rather than linguistic form, a need for YLLs to use their L2 repertoire, a type of information gap, and a real-life connection. While largely congruent with the concept of task in the L2 adult literature, the experts particularly highlighted a learner-oriented approach to tasks that stresses cognitive, social-emotional, and affective development of YLLs. In particular, experts highlighted the significance of imagination as part of children’s authentic world. Thus an “authentic” task for adults may reference a “real-world” domain, whereas an authentic task for YLLs may reference an imaginary one. We discuss the findings and emphasize that the concept of task in YLL education should be broadened to include aspects of imaginary worlds and make-believe.

**Keywords** primary education; task-based language teaching (TBLT); real-life communication; second/foreign language; young language learner (YLL)

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Over the past two decades, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been adopted and implemented in many second and foreign language (L2) educational contexts around the world (Bygate et al., 2015; Long, 2015). As an approach to pedagogy, TBLT centers on the idea that “communicative tasks” are key to learning an additional language. In the literature for L2 adult learners, a *task* is a well-defined construct or unit of analysis (see, e.g., Long, 2015). For instance, to be labeled a “task,” an activity needs to be goal oriented, authentic (i.e., it needs to be representative of real-life communication), and meaning focused. Additionally, a distinction is made between (a) target tasks, that is, tasks that specific learners should be able to perform outside of the classroom using the additional language as a result of learning, and (b) pedagogic tasks, communicative activities done in the L2 classroom (or another educational setting) that aim to build learners’ competencies in performing the target task (Bygate et al., 2015; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). As such, tasks have come to be deployed in a variety of educational contexts for teaching, learning, and assessment.

**Corresponding author:** V. Timpe-Laughlin, E-mail: vlaughlin@ets.org

In recent years, the TBLT approach has also expanded in young learner (YL) education (Ellis, 2020; Shintani, 2014). However, what a task is and what it is not is still an issue (e.g., Carless, 2003; Heidrich-Uebel & van Gorp, 2023). For instance, Carless (2003) examined how teachers implemented TBLT in elementary schools in Hong Kong. He found that, in general, teachers had a rather insufficient understanding of what a task is. As a result, the tasks they implemented did not produce genuine communication but rather practice comparable to exercises. More recently, similar issues with TBLT have been reported in other learning contexts, such as in the Netherlands and Belgium (e.g., Vandommele *et al.*, 2018; Van Gorp & Verheyen, 2018). Potential issues could be (a) the sheer multitude of definitions that highlight varying criteria of the concept task and (b) that some of the criteria of a task as defined in the literature that focuses on adult L2 learners do not apply or may need to be modified. For example, features like the “authenticity of a task” may be different given that YLs are oftentimes engaged in play and driven by imagination. Additionally, school constitutes the “real world” for children; thus the idea of what it means for a task to be “authentic” may be different for YLs and for adult L2 learners, who may attend a class to improve skills for the workplace. Hence, to this day, the notion of task in the young language learner (YLL) classroom is not clearly defined (see also Ellis, 2020). By bringing various experts together, we aim to contribute to a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes an authentic task for YLLs—an understanding that, we hope, will aid researchers and practitioners in providing enriching language learning experiences for YLLs.

## Literature Review

As the “father of TBLT,” Long (1985, 2015) put forth a definition of the term *task* that is generally in line with the non-technical, real-world use of the term. He described tasks as “the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between” (p. 89). Accordingly, tasks are

real-world activities people think of when planning, conducting, or recalling their day. That can mean things like brushing their teeth, preparing breakfast, reading a newspaper, taking a child to school, responding to e-mail messages, making a sales call, attending a lecture or a business meeting, having lunch with a colleague from work, helping a child with homework, coaching a soccer team, and watching a TV program. Some tasks are mundane, some complex. Some require language use, some do not; for others, it is optional. (p. 6)

Long argued that real-world tasks (i.e., target tasks) constitute a logical and suitable unit of analysis for the development and implementation of L2 curricula, syllabi, materials, and instruction because they are activities students need or will need to be able to do in the target language.

### Task: A Multifaceted Concept

Following Long’s (1985) original description, several definitions of *task*—oftentimes denoting pedagogic tasks—have been proposed in the context of L2 learning. As Appendix A shows, definitions of *task* vary considerably in scope up to a point where van den Branden (2006) noted that “almost anything related to educational activity can now be called a ‘task’” (p. 3). Following van den Branden’s categorization, some definitions describe tasks along the lines of language learning goals (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bygate *et al.*, 2001; Krahne, 1987), while others refer to them primarily as pedagogical activities that engage learners in language use (Byrnes & Manchón, 2014; Nunan, 1989, 2004; Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1998; Tomlinson, 2011). Additionally, some refer to tasks as exercises (Breen, 1987; Lee, 2000), whereas others clearly contrast the notion of task with the idea of “exercise,” explaining the idea of task by means of what it is not (e.g., Jackson, 2022).

However, despite the variability, certain characteristics or criteria are repeatedly put forth across different descriptions and definitions of *task* in the literature. For example, out of the 58 definitions listed in Appendix A, 44 refer to tasks as activities that are *goal oriented* in that they have a specific objective or purpose, although there is no consensus across definitions whether that objective or outcome is linguistic or nonlinguistic in nature. Second, 35 descriptions highlight that for an activity to be labeled a “task,” it requires learners to *use the L2* during task engagement. Third, 29 of the definitions mention a *focus on meaning* as a key feature. Finally, 19 of the definitions mention a *relationship to the real world*—a relatively low number given that such a relationship is the starting point for the very idea of TBLT as outlined by Long (1985). In sum, although there is variability in the scope and depth of definitions of *task*, certain criteria, such as goal

orientation, language use, focus on meaning, and real-world connection, repeatedly emerge across different definitions, providing a starting point for more in-depth explorations into the multifaceted concept of task in language teaching and learning.

### Understanding of Task Among Teachers of Young Language Learners

Despite these characteristics, though, uncertainty remains about the concept of task, especially among teachers of YLLs (Carless, 2003; Erlam, 2015, 2016; Erlam & Tolosa, 2022; Littlewood, 2004; Van Gorp, 2023). For instance, in multiple case studies, Carless (2001, 2002, 2003) investigated how primary school teachers in Hong Kong with varying years of teaching experience implemented TBLT as a new approach to teaching English as a foreign language. In addition to observing that several of the classroom activities resembled exercises (i.e., activities focused on the rote practice of specific language forms) rather than tasks, Carless (2003) reported teachers' varied understandings of task as shown in the following teacher quotes:

1. "Task is an activity; in the task pupils should have the chance to use the language meaningfully but not just to read after the teachers or repeat something, after the task the pupils should consolidate what they have learnt."
2. "Task mainly has objectives and it can link the pupil ability of understanding, conceptualising, that kind of communication."
3. "I think the most important thing is that I have to get them to do something by themselves and to work out something on their own independently of the teacher." (p. 490)

These quotes display very different and distinct understandings of a task. Whereas Quote 1, as Carless (2003) noted, "refers to a number of relevant aspects of tasks" (p. 490), Quotes 2 and 3 show incomplete understandings of the idea of a language learning task.

A similarly diverse understanding of task among primary and secondary teachers was reported by Erlam (2015, 2016) and Erlam and Tolosa (2022), who investigated how 48 in-service teachers perceived TBLT after participating in a 12-month professional development (PD) program that encouraged them to implement a task-supported approach to language teaching. By means of learning logs and journals, as well as telephone interviews, Erlam and colleagues documented the teachers' learning about TBLT, noting that some participants were still somewhat unclear about what a task was after completing the program.<sup>1</sup> Erlam (2015), for instance, reported the characteristics mentioned by varying numbers of teachers when they referred to the notion of task during the post-PD interviews. Accordingly, teachers noted that a task must have an outcome, goal, or objective (52%); a relationship to the real world (46%); an information gap (42%); and a focus on meaning (23%) and that learners should rely on their own resources (15%) when engaging in a task (see Erlam, 2015). Taken together, reports like those by Carless and, more recently, by Erlam and colleagues have shown that teachers make sense of tasks relative to specific characteristics or criteria they associate with the concept but that there is considerable variability in understanding the characteristics and, by extension, the notion of task overall—a finding that Erlam and Tolosa (2022) argued "might impact on teachers' ability to use tasks in their practice" (p. 13). In short, a limited understanding of the characteristics of a task may make it particularly challenging for teachers to design tasks themselves (see also Erlam, 2016).

### The Notion of Task in the YLL Literature

In the TBLT literature that focuses on YLLs, the concept of task has received attention insofar as there appears to be a debate about the extent to which the notion of task for the YLL classroom is different from the idea of task in adult L2 learner contexts. Although Pinter (2015) originally noted that "one way to think about classroom tasks/pedagogic tasks for young learners is that they can be the same as those designed for adults" (p. 119), she later added that "under close scrutiny some adult definitions and conceptions of L2 language tasks do indeed seem problematic for children" (p. 141). The idea of "authenticity," or connection to the real world outside of the classroom, is a case in point. For children, school constitutes the "real world," or as Cameron (2001) put it, "7 and 8 year olds have little need to book holiday accommodation or even give directions" (p. 30) in the target language. That is, children may not even have much immediate use for the target language outside of the classroom, except during occasional holiday travels abroad or when they engage in online gaming and other uses of technology (see also Butler & Timpe-Laughlin, 2024). These target language use (TLU) domains are

rather limited and may not suffice for informing a full needs-based syllabus (see Cameron, 2001; Megías Rosa, 2004). Moreover, as Cameron (2001) pointed out, their “adult lives and possible needs for the language are still too far away to give content to lessons” (pp. 30–31).

Additionally, children’s characteristics and needs have been highlighted as impacting the idea of a task for the YLL classroom. For instance, Cameron (2001) argued for “dynamic congruence” in that activities and contents should be selected and implemented relative to “the children’s age and socio-cultural experience” (p. 30). Accordingly, she classified activities such as “take the register or sing songs” (p. 31) as congruent with the children’s lives and thus meaningful for YLLs. Along similar lines, Megías Rosa (2004) argued that

an activity disguised as a game is reality for a child; fantasising and imagining are also real things for them. In other words, with young learners the meaning “to bring the classroom and real life closer together” has a special connotation as activities themselves can be motivating and very close to the child’s world. (p. 213)

A similar element of engagement and motivation has been included by Ellis and Shintani (2014), who proposed that for an activity to be called a task, it would need to meet the following four criteria: (a) focus on meaning, (b) feature an information gap of some kind, (c) require learners to utilize their linguistic repertoire, and (d) be engaging. In particular, Criterion 4, which Ellis (2020) further described as the need for “learners [to be] primarily engaged in achieving the outcome of the task” (p. 12), touches upon the idea of a task needing to be motivating and engaging for YLLs.

In sum, the immediate needs of YLLs and, by extension, what constitutes “real” or “authentic” TLU may be different from those of L2 adult learners and not immediately obvious. Additionally, children’s characteristics and needs, such as age and sociocultural context, appear to play a role in the idea of a task put forth in the YLL literature. In particular, aspects like engagement, motivation, and play- or game-based activities have been highlighted. Thus, in Cameron’s (2001) words, it “seems appropriate that tasks can be defined as classroom activities. However, not all activities that take place in a classroom will qualify as tasks; an activity can be any kind of event that children participate in, but a task has further features” (p. 31). Given these considerations put forth in the literature, we aimed to explore further the idea of a task in the context of the YLL classroom in general and the idea of “authenticity” (i.e., relationship to the “real world”) in particular. We specifically focused on YLLs in primary school (i.e., children between approximately 6 and 14 years of age) given that previous studies (e.g., Carless, 2003; Van Gorp & Verheyen, 2018) noted issues in primary school teachers’ understanding and implementation of tasks.

To that end, we put forth the following two research questions:

1. According to YLL/TBLT experts, what constitutes a task in the primary school classroom?
2. What constitutes “authenticity” for a task in the primary school language classroom?

## Methodology

To develop a better understanding of the characteristics that constitute a task in the YLL classroom, we conducted a Delphi study to collect the “[v]iews and knowledge of expert consultants” (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2011, p. 316). The Delphi technique is a structured, iterative process between a researcher or a group of researchers and a panel of experts with the goal of building consensus among panelists relative to a particular topic. Experts generally take three to four rounds of questioning to arrive at a consensus (Deardorff, 2006; Hsu & Sandford, 2007). All rounds are designed to achieve consensus among panelists, with an interest in the opinions of the entire group rather than the individuals (Scheibe *et al.*, 1975). Following previous Delphi research, consensus is assumed when the majority of panelists arrive at a particular judgment (see, e.g., Deardorff, 2006; Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Scheibe *et al.*, 1975). However, a lack of consensus after several rounds also constitutes “very important information” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 97). In fact, Scheibe *et al.* (1975) stated that “one of the original objectives of Delphi was the identification of areas of difference as well as areas of agreement within the participating group” (pp. 280–281).

The Delphi technique with written communication via email—as deployed in our study—has several advantages for consensus building. First, it allows researchers to bring a geographically diverse group of experts together in a time- and cost-effective way. Second, as Deardorff (2004) highlighted, the anonymous, “structured nature of the process allows all members to contribute equally without dominance by a few” (p. 96; see also von der Gracht, 2012). Third, the written



format allows participants to reflect upon the issue, while the response data can also be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively (Oakley, 2001). Finally, it can be combined with additional methods to probe deeper into specific aspects that may come up during the Delphi process (Deardorf 2004, 2006).

## Participants

In a two-step process, we identified and summoned a panel of 16 geographically diverse scholars with expertise and experience in TBLT and YLLs. First, we conducted a brainstorming session to identify as many experts as possible known to be in the field of TBLT and YLL. Then, we systematically perused the author lists of flagship journals (e.g., *TASK*) as well as book series, such as the series *Task-Based Language Teaching: Issues, Research and Practice*, published by John Benjamins, to identify additional experts (henceforth, *experts* and *panelists* will be used interchangeably). A list of 18 scholars was identified based on three criteria: (a) held a doctoral degree, (b) worked in academia in areas related to language education, and (c) had published at the intersection of TBLT and YLLs (defined here as primary school-aged children). Out of the 18 scholars who were identified, contacted, and invited to participate in the study, 16 from North America, Europe, and Asia provided their written consent for voluntary participation.

## Data Collection Process

The data collection consisted of a Delphi process and subsequent follow-up focus group interviews. First, all 16 experts answered three rounds of questions distributed via email (see Figure 1 for a visual representation of the Delphi process). All panelist responses were provided in writing via an online Qualtrics survey. First, they responded to the following open-ended question: “In your view, what is a ‘task’ in the primary school classroom? Please provide a definition that is as comprehensive, detailed, and complete as possible. Feel free to give examples.” The research team compiled all written definitions into another survey and sent it back to the panelists, who were then asked to react to the definitions collected during Round 1 in the form of (a) rating the definitions on a Likert-type 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 4 (*agree*) and (b) elaborating on their respective comments in writing. Round 3 was another iteration of Round 2 to fine-tune the responses. Throughout the data collection process, participants remained anonymous to each other to reduce respondent bias. A senior-level research scientist with previous experience utilizing Delphi methodology served in a monitoring role during the data collection. This expert provided conceptual guidance and reviewed the wording of questions and instructions that were sent to the expert panelists, thus limiting researcher bias (for previous use of monitoring teams, see Clark & Wenig, 1999; Deardorf 2004; Leibowitz, 2002).

Given that “consensus is one of the most contentious components of the Delphi method” (von der Gracht, 2012, p. 1528), we followed a two-pronged approach to determine the number of rounds and when to complete the iterative Delphi process. Like in most Delphi studies that found that “three iterations of questioning are typically sufficient to identify consensus” (Fan & Cheng, 2006; Linstone & Turoff 1975), we concluded the Delphi process after three rounds of questioning. We came to that conclusion based on (a) the Likert scale ratings, which increasingly cemented agreement around one of the definitions, and (b) the comments provided by participants, which started to repeat arguments and included remarks such as “Again, I agree, but ...” or “Again, needs to ...,” thus indicating that additional rounds of questioning and commenting would not have added to understanding (for other Delphi studies following a similar approach, see, e.g., Fan & Cheng, 2006; MacCarthy & Atthirawong, 2003).

Additionally, six of the 16 experts were invited for an interview to achieve additional clarity and consensus relative to the aspect of “authenticity.” The six experts were invited for follow-up interviews because they had explicitly mentioned “authenticity” in their original definitions during the first part of the study (i.e., the Delphi process). Five of them participated in a focus group interview, and one had an individual interview due to global time scheduling constraints. In preparation for the semistructured interviews, participants received two documents via email: (a) the focus group protocol, which included the questions that would be discussed, and (b) a slide deck with four different example tasks that were provided in the Delphi study as examples from the experts. Thus, interviewees could familiarize themselves with the questions and read the examples that would be used during the focus group and interview sessions (see Appendix B). The two focus groups—completed with three and two experts, respectively—and the interview, which lasted on average 45 min, were conducted remotely via Zoom and were audio recorded.

## Analyses

### The Delphi Study

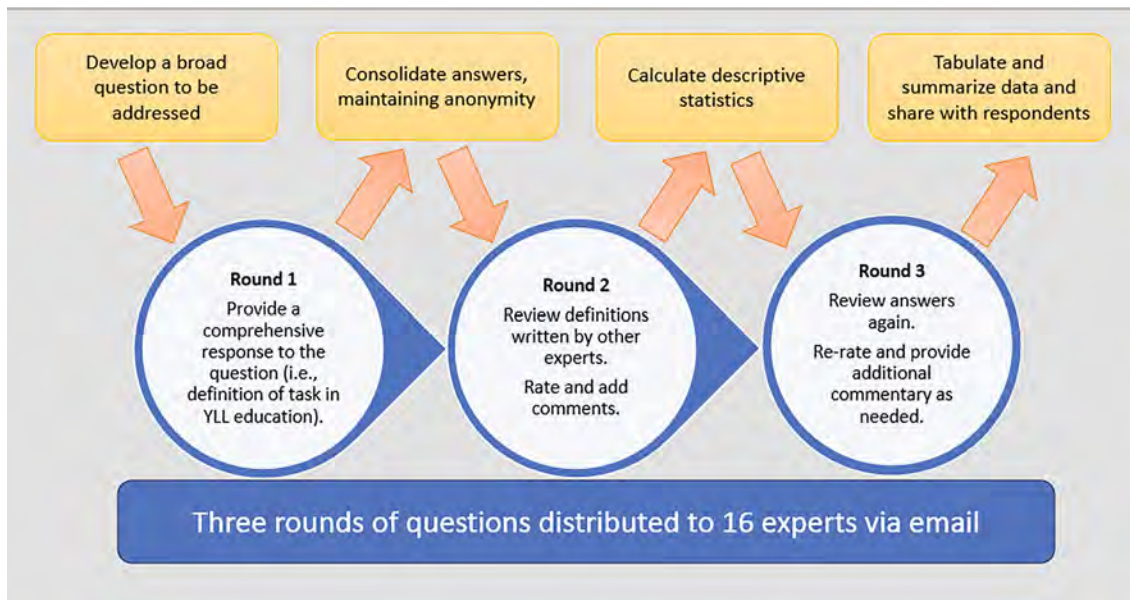
In the first round of the Delphi study, the experts responded to the following question: “In your view, what is a ‘task’ in the primary school classroom? Please provide a definition that is as comprehensive, detailed, and complete as possible. Feel free to give examples.” As Appendix C shows, we obtained 16 definitions with varying levels of detail. To obtain an initial overview, we conducted a frequency count of content words across all 16 definitions. As Table 1 shows, among the most frequently used content words and/or concepts—other than *task(s)*—were *learner/learners/YLs* ( $n = 44$ ), *language* ( $n = 31$ ), *outcome/goal/target* ( $n = 27$ ), and *meaning orientation* ( $n = 23$ ). In addition, although to a lesser degree, the definitions also included a number of content words that are oftentimes used in relation to YL characteristics, such as *motivating* ( $n = 5$ ), *interest(s)* ( $n = 5$ ), and *age-appropriate* ( $n = 3$ ), as well as words related to task implementation, for example, *feedback* ( $n = 4$ ) and *scaffolding* ( $n = 3$ ).

Drawing upon this word frequency analysis, one of the researchers applied the procedure of initial, axial, and selective coding (Friedman, 2012) to develop a coding scheme that included three main categories with several subcomponents: general characteristics of a task, YLL characteristics, and factors related to task implementation (see Appendix D). Two of the researchers then deployed the coding scheme to code the 16 definitions, applying a code any time a given aspect was

**Table 1** Content Word Frequencies Across Definitions

Content word	<i>n</i>
task	83
young learners	44
language	31
outcome/goal/target	27
meaning-focused	23
activity	16
primary	15
classroom	11
communicative	11
authentic	10
complete	7
linguistic	7
school	7
teacher	7
challenge	6
children	6
learning	5
resources	5
motivating	5
interest(s)	5
feedback	4
perform	4
structure	3
content	3
context	3
design	3
example	3
games	3
groups	3
individually	3
instructions	3
age	3
scaffold	3
complexity	2
engaging	2
input-based	2
negotiate	2
purposeful	2
background	2
characteristics	2





**Figure 1** The Delphi technique used in this study was an anonymous, structured, iterative process between the group of researchers (yellow squares) and a panel of experts (blue circles) with the goal of building consensus among panelists relative to a particular topic.

mentioned in the definition. Inter coder agreement between the two coders across all codes was 87.6%. Disagreements were resolved via a subsequent consensus coding, with the third researcher functioning as adjudicator.

Additionally, after Rounds 2 and 3 of the Delphi study, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for the Likert-scale responses, which were shared with the participants. Then, definitions were rank-ordered by mean rating received to identify agreement or disagreement. Finally, the additional comments provided by the experts in reference to the definitions were reviewed and summarized, and representative responses were extracted as a means of capturing and documenting opinions in the words of the expert panelists (see Figure 1).

### Follow-Up Interviews

The focus group conversations and individual interviews, aimed at exploring further the idea of “authenticity” in YLL tasks, were transcribed verbatim. Following Miles et al. (2014), the transcripts were reviewed iteratively, and a content-analytic summary table was established (see Appendix E). Additionally, representative responses were extracted as a means of capturing and documenting response patterns in the words of the experts.

## Findings

The study aimed to explore how experts who work at the intersection of applied linguistics, YL education, and TBLT would define the concept of a task in the context of the primary school language classroom. In addition to obtaining insights into the general concept of a task in YL education, we aimed to investigate in more detail features of the concept that have been highlighted in the adult literature but may require additional attention in YL contexts, such as “authenticity” and the relationship of tasks to YLs’ “real life.” In what follows, we first present the results from the Delphi study before sharing the findings from the focus group interviews.

### The Delphi Study: Constitutive Components of Task in the Primary, YLL Classroom

Overall, the 16 definitions obtained in Round 1 of the Delphi study featured descriptions of tasks with varying levels of detail (see Appendix C for all definitions rank-ordered relative to the level of agreement among participants across the three rounds). Interestingly, the average agreement ratings decreased for all definitions across the three rounds of the Delphi study, suggesting an increasingly critical reflection by participants.

Noticeably, only the following description of “task” obtained agreement ratings from all participants after the third round of the Delphi study:

A task is an activity which requires the learner to do something—that is purposeful and meaningful in nature, appropriate for the learner’s background characteristics, and ideally reflects activities from a relevant “real-life” target domain—in order to achieve a particular goal/outcome. The activity typically contains a set of instructions and a description/visualisation of a scenario with some sort of issue/gap that needs addressing/solving.

In the context of language learning, a task requires the learner to use language in a purposeful and meaningful (communicative) manner, in order to achieve a particular (communicative) goal/outcome. The learner’s attention while completing the task is primarily on meaning (rather than on linguistic form) and “real-world” language use. Depending on the task, the activity can be conducted alone, in pairs or groups. Tasks can be seen to exist on a continuum, from weaker (e.g. partly meaningful real-world outcomes) to stronger (e.g. exclusively meaning-focused, real-world outcomes).

In addition to the agreement ratings, we observed various aspects across definitions and related commentary that either seemed to be largely supported across participants or highlighted discrepancies and points for further discussion. First, we observed that only one participant equated the terms *task* and *activity* (ID13), whereas 12 participants explicitly referred to a task as an activity with specific qualifying features, as shown in “Excerpts 1.” Note that three participants did not explicitly mention “activity” in their definitions.

#### Excerpts 1

- “A task is an activity which requires the learner to do something—that is purposeful and meaningful in nature” (ID01)
- “A task is an activity that you complete through language” (ID16)
- “Tasks are learning activities that aim to provide learners the opportunity to use a second language as a tool for communication” (ID14)

That is, the majority of participants distinguished the terms *task* and *activity* by qualifying the former as an activity with particular features, thus suggesting an alignment with Cameron’s (2001) stance that every task is an activity, but not every activity can be regarded a task.

As Table 2 shows, the 16 definitions included different aspects that can be roughly grouped under three distinct categories: (a) general characteristics of a task, (b) YL characteristics that need to be considered in relation to designing tasks for primary school learners, and (c) aspects related to implementing tasks in the primary school language classroom. With regard to the first category, 12 participants (75%) noted that tasks have a clear goal or outcome. To achieve that goal, learners need to draw on their linguistic repertoire, as eight participants highlighted (50%); that is, they need to draw on receptive and/or productive target language skills relative to the task and on their target language proficiency.

Although the use of L2 skills seemed to be relatively synonymous, there appeared to be some discrepancy regarding the need for learners to *produce* L2 output to achieve the goal or outcome. For example, only two participants (ID14 and ID12) highlighted the idea of input-based tasks in their definitions, that is, tasks that involve learners’ L2 listening and/or reading skills but do not require L2 output (see Ellis, 2020). In the comments collected in Rounds 2 and 3 of the Delphi process as reactions to the definitions, input-based tasks were referenced 11 times across six participants, highlighting diverse stances regarding the need for a task to require learners to produce L2 output (see “Excerpts 2”).

#### Excerpts 2

- “I agree also [with] the need to recognize that tasks can be input-based as well as production-based.” (ID05)
- “Not all tasks require completion with language (e.g. TPR [total physical response] only requires language as input).” (ID06)

Table 2 Categories Emergent From the Definitions

Category	Feature	Examples	n
General characteristics of a task	Goal and outcome	<p>“[I]n order to achieve a particular goal/outcome”</p> <p>“There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e., the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).”</p> <p>“Tasks should have a communicative outcome.”</p>	12
	Use of learners’ linguistic resources (i.e., receptive and productive skills)	<p>“Tasks have a communicative goal, a non-linguistic outcome.”</p> <p>“Learners should largely rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.”</p> <p>“Tasks are learning activities that aim to provide learners the opportunity to use a second language as a tool for communication.”</p> <p>“Task is an activity (or a set of activities) enabling YLs to comprehend, express, and negotiate meaning in a FL.”</p> <p>“Tasks can be input-based. An input-based task still should follow the key four criteria of tasks but does not require the learners to produce the L2, it requires the learners to use their own resources by comprehending the L2.”</p>	8
	Meaning orientation	<p>“A task in the primary (L2) classroom will be a meaning-oriented activity.”</p> <p>“A task involves a primary focus on meaning.”</p> <p>“A task is meaning-oriented.”</p>	7
	Gap	<p>“There should be some kind of ‘gap’ (i.e., a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).”</p> <p>“The task should have some gap that needs to be filled in with information that the child has to discover.”</p> <p>“involves different kinds of information or opinion gaps”</p> <p>“It has a gap of some kind — something that those doing the task have to work out or find out.”</p>	7
Relationship to “real life”/authenticity		<p>“reflects activities from a relevant ‘real-life’ target domain”</p> <p>“relates to their everyday lives”</p> <p>“reflects language use outside the classroom”</p> <p>“It has some relationship to the kinds of activities that the learners might do in other aspects of their lives beyond the classroom (authenticity/relationship to the real world).”</p>	6
	Opportunities for differentiation	<p>“Tasks in primary school may make use of the principle of ‘suspension of disbelief by creating fictional worlds’ (think of Harry Potter; adventure games; detectives, SciFi and Fantasy stories and other storyline approaches) that challenge the students to perform tasks that nevertheless connect to real-world target tasks.”</p> <p>“It provides choices in terms of language and content and accounts for different competence levels.”</p>	2

Table 2 Continued

Category	Feature	Examples	<i>n</i>
Characteristics of young learners	Learners' background characteristics/needs	“appropriate for the learner's background characteristics”	5
	Learners' age and cognitive and affective development (e.g., attention span, working memory)	“task is short and focused to suit YLs' affective and cognitive characteristics” “crucial importance that primary classroom tasks be age-appropriate” “that could be adjusted to the different age-ranges that comprise the concept of ‘childhood’”	4
	Young learners' particular interests	“focused to suit YLs' affective and cognitive characteristics” “related to the children's interests” “interests (e.g., in the here and now things as well as in the world of magic, in what their peers think, etc.)”	4
	Young learners' needs (e.g., fun, playful enjoyment, physical movement)	“fun, sharing some characteristics of games and other playful activities” “A good task caters for YLs' needs (e.g., to be physically active, to participate in interactive playful activities with peers, to be successful, to feel important to and accepted by the FL teacher and peers).”	2
	Potentially low language proficiency	“free production of the target language, which is often too demanding for young learners, particularly those with low proficiency”	2
Task implementation	Method (individual, pair, group work)	“applying this term to any activity (in any area of the curriculum) which children might engage in—individually, in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class”	5
	Role of the teacher (i.e., planning, providing guidance, facilitating, giving feedback, scaffolding, modeling the task)	“A task in primary school needs to be scaffolded—but I consider that to be ‘outside’ the task, a part of language teaching methodology.” “feedback ... from the teacher” “The teacher's role is to scaffold YLs' <i>only</i> when they get stuck and to give them contextualized feedback.”	4
	Task repetition	“a need for recycling of both task types and topics over the primary grades” “Repeat the task; there is a lot of evidence emerging from the literature that young learners <i>enjoy</i> repetition when it is on their own terms.”	2
	Curriculum/materials	“any activity (in any area of the curriculum) which children might engage in”	1

*Note.* FL = foreign language; L2 = second language; YL = young learner.

- “I am not sure whether I correctly understand what is meant by input-based. I do think that working with tasks should include language production. If the learners’ proficiency is low they will need language support.” (ID16)

The third and fourth most frequently mentioned characteristics of a task featured across the definitions were a kind of “information gap” ( $n = 7$ ) and a focus on meaning as opposed to linguistic form ( $n = 7$ ). Accordingly, a task should feature “some kind of gap” (ID15) that requires YLLs to exchange or share information. In other words, the information gap aims to motivate engagement for YLLs to work toward a specific goal or outcome. As they do so, learners should focus primarily on meaning rather than on linguistic form; that is, the learners should be focused on the content matter while using language as a tool to achieve a given outcome or goal. As ID07 noted, “language serves to achieve [the outcome] but is not an end in its own right.”

Finally, six participants noted that a task should have some kind of “authenticity/relationship to the real world” (ID04). As hypothesized in the original motivation for this study, this aspect appeared to be the least clearly conceptualized across participants. While two definitions put forth a connection to “real-life” or “real-world” target tasks (ID01; ID15), others noted a need to reflect language use outside of the classroom “in real-life situations” (ID08), featuring a distinction between situational and interactional authenticity. Also, terms such as “meaningful,” “purposeful,” and “real world relevance” (ID02) were included across the definitions. In addition to being mentioned in the definitions, this task characteristic garnered 20 comments by eight participants in the second and third rounds of the Delphi study, with one participant critically noting the following:

What is a “real-world task”? This concept needs careful definition. If it is meant the task should correspond to a “target task,” I do not see this a necessary defining feature as in many teaching contexts it will not be possible to identify “target tasks” for young learners. (ID05)

Along similar lines, another participant wondered

what the “real-world relevance” could mean for young learners (particularly in an FL context) when, in most cases, there would not be many anticipated situations where the learners use their L2 in the real world. (ID14)

Nevertheless, there was the distinct idea of a task needing to be relevant and meaningful for YLLs—an aspect that seemed closely interconnected with the YL characteristics.

In addition to the general characteristics of a task, the definitions included several YL characteristics that experts felt needed to be taken into consideration in designing and, arguably, implementing tasks in the primary school (language) classroom. Overall, five participants either highlighted in a summative way that tasks need to be “appropriate for the learner’s background characteristics” (ID01) or identified specific characteristics in more detail. Among these characteristics, four participants put forth a YLL’s age as a proxy for cognitive and affective development. They emphasized that it is of “crucial importance that primary classroom tasks be age-appropriate” (ID03), that is, a task would need to be “short and focused to suit YLLs’ affective and cognitive characteristics” (ID03). Additionally, tasks should allow YLLs to be physically active, engage in game-like activities aligned with or “related to the children’s interests” (ID03), and cater to YLLs’ motivation and positive self-image. For example, ID03 noted that “[a] good task caters for YLLs’ needs (e.g., to be physically active, to participate in interactive playful activities with peers, to be successful, to feel important to and accepted by the FL teacher and peers”). Finally, given the varying and developing L2 abilities of YLLs, two participants pointed out the need for a task to allow for differentiation—an aspect related to the discussion of whether tasks can be input based or should require L2 output. Accordingly, one participant commented that a task “provides choices in terms of language and content and accounts for different competence levels” (ID16).

Finally, the definitions featured aspects related to implementing tasks in the YLL classroom. Four definitions included remarks related to the role of the teacher, five participants mentioned methodology in their definitions (i.e., whether tasks should be carried out “individually, in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class” [ID06]), and two definitions referenced the need for task repetition as an aspect related to implementing tasks in the primary school classroom. For instance, four definitions highlighted the teacher as central in terms of providing scaffolding and feedback. ID03 noted that “the teacher’s role is to scaffold YLLs *only* when they get stuck and to give them contextualized feedback”—a comment reminiscent of the focus on form idea (see, e.g., Long, 2015).



To summarize, the analysis of 16 definitions of *task* for the primary school classroom categorized the features mentioned into three main groups: (a) general task characteristics, (b) characteristics related to YLLs, and (c) aspects pertaining to task implementation in primary school language classrooms. In the first category, the definitions emphasized the importance of tasks having a clear goal or outcome, with language skills being crucial. However, there was a discrepancy regarding the necessity for learners to produce target language output to achieve the goal. Input-based tasks, focusing on L2 listening and/or reading skills without requiring L2 output, generated diverse perspectives among participants. Additionally, the definitions featured aspects such as an “information gap” and a focus on meaning over linguistic form in tasks for YLLs. Finally, the least clearly conceptualized aspect across definitions was the requirement for tasks to have “authenticity/relationship to the real world.” In the second category, experts emphasized to varying degrees the importance of considering YL characteristics, including age appropriateness, physical activity, alignment with interests, motivation, and differentiation based on diverse L2 abilities. Finally, aspects related to task implementation included the role of the teacher, the methodology of task execution, and the need for task repetition, with an emphasis on the teacher’s role in providing scaffolding and feedback. Overall, the Delphi study revealed diverse perspectives on defining language learning tasks for YLLs, especially concerning the role of L2 output and a task’s relationship to the real world.

### Interviews: Exploring Further the Notion of “Authenticity”

As shown in Appendix E, two main facets emerged in the focus group and interview discussions, including “authenticity as things people do in real life” and “authenticity as related to relevance and meaningfulness.” Additionally, these two broader perspectives were further qualified and explored as the discussions centered on aspects such as (a) the distinction between situational versus interactional authenticity, (b) authenticity as a culturally mediated concept, (c) challenges regarding the identification of real-life tasks for primary school students, (d) the role of imagination and make-believe, and (e) student engagement as a potential indicator of a task’s authenticity. In what follows, we outline the two perspectives and related aspects mentioned. We draw on excerpts and quotations from the discussions to represent the viewpoints and considerations shared in the interviews, thus aiming to display the considerations of the six experts regarding “one of the messiest constructs there is” (ID15)—authenticity.

The first perspective denotes that a task is authentic if it is “kind of related to what you do in the real world” (ID08). This notion of tasks as “things people do in real life” was shared by five of the six experts. One expert noted that when they used “authenticity,” they were “using Long’s task definition [of] task as things we do in daily life. Very simple” (ID02). Explaining further, this expert added that “an authentic task for primary school students would be those that they are likely to do, or they are doing in their daily life.” Another participant added that, primarily, “authenticity, in the first place, is that you can imagine a setting or a context in which somebody might be doing that kind of task and it also tends to imply that the person is engaged in some sort of action” (ID01). Thus, five experts appeared to agree with this viewpoint of “authenticity” referring to a connection to real life, that is, a context outside of the classroom.

Further refining the idea of authenticity as a task’s representation of real life, four participants across all interview groups put forth Bachman and Palmer’s (1996) distinction between situational and interactional authenticity to “have a little bit of a grasp on it [i.e., authenticity]” (ID15). For example, ID04 clearly highlighted the distinction of situational authenticity, “where you’re trying to replicate within the task or within the assessment task something that might be related to what goes on in the target language use domain or in the real world,” from interactional authenticity, where “the task itself doesn’t have to replicate an authentic scenario, but draws on the type of interactional language and skills and strategies that somebody might use to be able to maintain an interaction.” Along similar lines, ID01 argued that “there might also be different dimensions to authenticity; ... authenticity in terms of the setting of a task and in terms of the interaction levels of a task.” In a qualifying remark, ID15 noted that “we also know that the outside world is not fully reproducible in a classroom. So, we are creating simulations,” which need to represent either situationally or interactionally “things that students of a particular age read about, write about, talk about, listen to.” Hence authenticity is—as ID15 summarized—“making that real world or external and internal real-world connection to children’s lives in their own specific cultural context.” ID15 further exemplified this distinction between situational and interactional authenticity in reference to a “Monster task” (Appendix B, Example Task 1) that was shared by one of the participants in the Delphi study, highlighting it as follows:



Like with the description of the monster. I love the idea. OK. So, you have a favorite monster, describe that, draw it, color it, give it a name, ... and they display them and discuss them. That's fine. But ... describe the monster so that your fellow student can draw it. That's where for me it loses authenticity, it becomes instructional ... You just described it and drew a picture of it. Why would you now go to that ... which Bachman would call "interactional authenticity"? Why would you now ask your fellow student to draw that? It's already there, you've drawn it. You've created it. Do something now with it. You can then describe it to the rest of the class, or you can discuss it, which is the better monster. Or you can think of a story where all these monsters have a role to play, and the teacher tells the story, and the children do something actively with those descriptions or with the pictures, but don't ask them just merely to talk about it now. I'm going to describe my monster, and you're going to draw it. And then we're going to compare it. That's an instructional activity that loses authenticity. (ID15)

Hence participants made a distinction between situational and interactional authenticity, while considering these concepts primarily from the viewpoint of the learner. For instance, also criticizing the final step of describing the monster, ID03 argued that

authenticity implies a kind of purposeful dealing with language from the point of view of the learner in terms of what they're doing is relevant to them at a certain point when they are doing it. And it's also meaningful for them. They somehow see some reason for doing it.

In reference to this learner-oriented view of authenticity, participants also discussed how to identify real-world tasks for primary school students, stressing that it becomes paramount to identify students' interests and what they do outside of the classroom. For instance, after highlighting that the idea of a task being related to real-life activities was quite simple, ID02 quickly raised the question "But then, what are the things that children would do at that primary school age?" — a question also put forth by another expert (ID04) in another interview context. Building a bridge to language learning, ID15 underscored that there are tasks that do not require language use and tasks that do. The latter would then need to be identified to be used as or inform the development of language learning tasks. In particular, that participant commented that

there are things like ... you brush your teeth. No language required there. But you go out, you go to a shop, if it's a clothing shop or a comic book store, or whatever, you kind of browse through these materials, you might engage in the conversation about it. Those are all real-life things that children do. (ID15)

A particular aspect that was raised in relation to a task's real-life relationship was the importance of imagination and make-believe among young, primary school learners. Tasks for older language learners may relate to concrete real-life tasks (e.g., a job interview for a class of English as a second language learners who are about to enter the job market). By contrast, children's worlds and lives tend to include more imaginary and make-believe elements; as one participant put it, "to some extent figurative or imaginary task may even be more real life than real life" (ID02). Three other participants also highlighted that "suspension of disbelief is very important when we deal with young learners" (ID03) given their age, a point that ID15 elaborated on more comprehensively, highlighting that

children also have this imaginary world. They have this world where they play, where they read books, they kind of like, lose themselves in stories, they come up with these role-plays whatever they play store, they play school, and all of that also provides a very fruitful ground to think about tasks that connect to that real or imaginary world of children. And we can ask them we can tap into that. I think there is a disconnect where we leave the authenticity is when we school or pedagogize the materials too much ... We've turned them into pedagogical materials for again language teaching, and learning purposes, and that's where they lose that connection that Long always talks about it are the things that we do in real life ... The big point is that children could be able to get in play in imagination and actual in real world. I think that's an important addition to the authenticity, to recognize this is something that motivates children that they feel is very relevant to them.

This idea of relevance is at the core of the second perspective we have discussed, that is, a task's authenticity as tied to it being relevant and meaningful for the learner. Although several participants noted that they had "difficulty in clearly

demarcating a difference between meaningful and authenticity” (ID02), they did agree that relevance and meaningfulness were closely related, yet distinct from the idea of authenticity. For example, ID04 argued that

a meaningful task for me is something that does relate concretely to the experiences of the particular people who are completing that task. I’m not really convinced of meaningful and authentic, as necessarily synonymous if you’re doing something that’s authentic, then implicit in that is that it’s meaningful. But you may be doing something that’s meaningful, but you know, doesn’t necessarily represent something that is situationally authentic, for example.

That very same point was raised by ID15 in the context of another focus group who argued that “an authentic task is probably meaningful. I’m not sure if every meaningful task is authentic.” Thus the participants distinguished between a task’s authenticity and a task’s meaningfulness, noting that the latter appeared to be a broader concept. Although a few participants provided their understandings of what exactly they meant by “meaningful” (see Appendix E), there appeared to be no general consensus among participants. Thus the question of what the concepts of “meaningfulness,” “relevance,” and “purposefulness” exactly mean in relation to tasks in YLL classrooms remained unanswered, leaving these ideas open for further conceptualization and empirical investigation.

An aspect that was included in several comments about a task’s relevance was the idea of learner engagement as an observable indicator of perceived meaningfulness. For example, ID02 argued that “there should be some interesting element there to ensure some degree of task engagement, otherwise it’s not meaningful.” Building on this idea, ID03 added that “you just see that they are engaged because it’s authentic for them. Engagement to me would be kind of proof that something is meaningful, authentic, and relevant.” Thus participants argued that engagement may serve as an indicator of whether learners regarded a task as relevant and meaningful and, by extension, potentially authentic.

Finally, all participants agreed that what constitutes an authentic task varies relative to context and the learners involved. They argued that “there’s certainly an age factor to the type of things that students might do authentically” (ID04). Similarly, ID03 noted that it is “important that authenticity—however, whichever elements we include—changes with age, so what is [or] what may be authentic for the first grader may not be so authentic for [a] second or third grader, so [it] changes with age because learners change.” In addition to age, ID01 emphasized that authenticity not only “differs according to age, but potentially also, according to some extent to individual ... Therefore, the voice of the young learners themselves is critical.” Thus, a task’s authenticity may be considered a “moving target” that varies relative to the learners and the larger (sociocultural) context in which the educational experience is delivered, or as ID02 put it, “what is authentic, in one context may not be authentic in another.”

To summarize, the exploration into the multifaceted concept of authenticity in educational settings, particularly within primary additional language education, underscores the intricate balance between real-life applicability and the relevance and meaningfulness of tasks to YLLs. This exploration, enriched by expert insights, distinguishes between situational and interactional authenticity, emphasizes the importance of contextually resonating tasks, and highlights the critical role of learner engagement as a measure of a task’s meaningfulness and authenticity. The discussions revealed that authenticity, far from being a static attribute, is dynamically shaped by the learner’s age, background, and personal experiences, making it essential for educators to continuously adapt and align educational tasks with the evolving realities of their students. Ultimately, the insights shared in the interviews not only deepen our understanding of authenticity but also challenge us to think creatively about how we can design educational experiences that are truly meaningful, engaging, and reflective of the complex world of YLLs.

## Discussion

We aimed to explore the concept of task in the primary school language classroom while zooming in on features that may—as the relevant literature suggests—be different from features of tasks for adult learners. Using the Delphi methodology, we asked 16 well-known experts who work in applied linguistics, in TBLT, and with YLLs to provide a written definition of the notion of “task in the primary school classroom.” The definitions and the subsequent responses and judgments received in three rounds of the Delphi study featured considerable diversity among experts relative to the concept of task—an observation that is very much in line with the wealth of definitions of *task* put forth in the TBLT literature.

Thus, Ellis's (2009) statement that "the definition of a task has proved problematic" (p. 227) still seems to hold, and it may always be partly intuitive "to figure out how 'tasky' the task is" (ID15).

Nevertheless, two areas of general agreement were observed after the third round of the Delphi process. First, participants agreed that there is a clear distinction between task and activity. Only one definition equated tasks with activities, noting that they see "the potential for applying this term [i.e., task] to any activity (in any area of the curriculum) which children might engage in" (ID13; see Appendix C). Interestingly, this definition, which also happened to be the one to garner the least amount of agreement among participants, was the only one that received comments from all 16 participants—primarily about the lack of distinction between task and activity. In short, participants emphasized that an activity requires certain qualifying attributes to constitute a task.

The second observed consensus among participants was one definition that obtained agreement ratings from all experts, even after three increasingly critical rounds of judgment. Highlighting tasks in general as well as in the language classroom, the definition describes a task as

an activity which requires the learner to do something—that is purposeful and meaningful in nature, appropriate for the learner's background characteristics, and ideally reflects activities from a relevant "real-life" target domain—in order to achieve a particular goal/outcome. The activity typically contains a set of instructions and a description/visualisation of a scenario with some sort of issue/gap that needs addressing/solving.

In the context of language learning, a task requires the learner to use language in a purposeful and meaningful (communicative) manner, in order to achieve a particular (communicative) goal/outcome. The learner's attention while completing the task is primarily on meaning (rather than on linguistic form) and "real-world" language use. Depending on the task, the activity can be conducted alone, in pairs or groups.

Tasks can be seen to exist on a continuum, from weaker (e.g. partly meaningful real-world outcomes) to stronger (e.g. exclusively meaning-focused, real-world outcomes).

As such, it features several attributes pertaining to the general characteristics of a task (e.g., a [communicative] goal or outcome, L2 use, a focus on meaning, a gap) as well as aspects of task implementation in the language classroom (e.g., alone, in pairs, and as a group). The general characteristics that distinguish a task from an activity were also featured to varying degrees across the other definitions—echoing earlier findings, such as those of Erlam (2015). For example, most definitions highlighted the need for tasks to have a clear goal or outcome ( $n = 12$ ), to require learners to use their linguistic resources ( $n = 8$ ), to be meaning oriented rather than form focused ( $n = 7$ ), and to feature some sort of information gap ( $n = 7$ ). Additionally, six definitions emphasized the need for tasks to be authentic in the sense that they need to have a relationship to learners' real lives outside of the classroom, while also providing opportunities for differentiation ( $n = 2$ ). While these features are reminiscent of the task characteristics that can be found in the L2 adult literature (see, e.g., Appendix A), the definition also highlights the idea that a task needs to be "appropriate for the learner's background characteristics," highlighting the idea that it needs to be tailored relative to the characteristics of a given learner group.

In reference to YLLs, several definitions put forth specific YL characteristics and child development factors that would need to be considered for primary school learners, including young learners' age as a proxy for cognitive, social, and affective development; young learners' interests and needs (e.g., fun, play, enjoyment, and physical movement) as well as the potentially low L2 proficiency as specific aspects that would need to be considered in developing and implementing tasks (see Table 2). However, not all definitions accounted in detail for the specific characteristics, at times referring to them in a summative manner as "learner background characteristics" or "age" (Table 2). Thus, future research may explore further which specific characteristics impact task design and implementation. Nevertheless, experts underscored the critical importance of tailoring tasks to the multifaceted profiles of YLLs, taking into account not only their developmental stages but also their individual interests, motivations, and language proficiency levels to facilitate effective and engaging language learning experiences that align with the diverse realities of young learners' lives.

In addition to features on which experts appear to agree, the definitions and subsequent commentary provided in Rounds 2 and 3 also suggested areas of disagreement among experts, especially regarding the need for L2 output. For instance, while one participant argued that "output should be language-related, for example a drawing that can be explained," another participant highlighted the requirement of L2 output as "a major problem in TBLT," arguing that "any definition, especially for young learners, must include input-based tasks." Yet another participant pointed

out that “not all tasks require completion with language (e.g. TPR only requires language as input).” Despite these different positions among experts, it can be noted that the definition on which the experts agreed only emphasizes that a task in the YLL classroom “requires the learner to *use* language” (our emphasis). In other words, using language can mean drawing on both receptive and productive L2 skills. For instance, some tasks require learners to process only the target language input they receive and would thus constitute input-based tasks (see, e.g., Ellis & Shintani, 2014), whereas others may require YLLs to produce target language output. This diversity of expert opinions and the nuanced distinctions between the need for receptive and productive language skills underscore the complexity of defining tasks in TBLT. It suggests that the current consensus on the necessity and nature of L2 output in TBLT is far from settled. Consequently, future research may investigate this aspect further given that there still appears to be a considerable amount of disagreement among experts over the need for L2 output in TBLT and whether to include it in the definition for tasks for YLLs. Additionally, there is a pressing need for further research to explore the efficacy and practicality of incorporating both input-based and output-driven tasks in the YLL curriculum, aiming to reconcile these expert viewpoints and enhance our understanding of optimal task design for language acquisition in YLL classrooms.

Finally, the notion of “authenticity” in tasks designed for the primary school classroom, as highlighted by YLL/TBLT experts, underscores a pivotal aspect of TBLT that merited closer examination. The divergence in understanding and applying authenticity—ranging from direct connections to “real-life” tasks to broader interpretations that encompass meaningful engagement with the language outside the classroom—reflects the complexity of integrating real-world relevance into language learning for young learners. This variation suggests that authenticity in the context of YLLs extends beyond mere simulation of adult real-world tasks to encompass activities that resonate with the learners’ immediate worlds, interests, and potential uses of the language. The critical comments from participants, questioning the feasibility and practicality of identifying “target tasks” for young learners, further illuminate the challenges in defining and applying authenticity in diverse teaching contexts.

Interestingly, none of the provided definitions included reference to a “needs analysis”; however, as it is closely connected to the identification of “authentic target tasks,” it was discussed in the focus group interviews. It was stipulated as critical to consider that aspect further in the context of primary school education, noting that how a needs analysis should be conducted *with* and *for* YLLs needs to be determined, along with what elements would need to inform task selection, design, and implementation (standards, curricula, school objectives, children’s interests, child development factors, etc.). These insights imply that authenticity should not be rigidly tied to specific “real-world tasks” but rather should be fluidly interpreted to include tasks that are purposefully designed to be meaningful and engaging for young learners, fostering a connection to the language that transcends the classroom environment. This nuanced understanding of authenticity highlights the need for a careful, context-sensitive approach in task design, one that considers the unique characteristics and real-world relevance for young learners, thereby enhancing the efficacy and engagement of TBLT in primary education settings.

In sum, the discussion surrounding the definition of a task in the primary school classroom, as explored through the Delphi methodology with well-known experts in applied linguistics, TBLT, and YLLs, reveals a rich tapestry of perspectives that both converge and diverge in significant ways. The process has underscored previously put forth observations regarding the problematic nature of defining “task,” highlighting the need to stipulate precisely types of tasks and, in particular, the distinction between target tasks as vehicles for identifying real-world purposes and situations for children’s language use and pedagogic tasks, which emphasize aspects of learning that instruction is designed to bring about in relation to target tasks—a distinction that is also important for teachers. However, despite differing viewpoints, particularly concerning the role of L2 output, the consensus reached on key characteristics of tasks—such as their purposeful, meaningful nature and the necessity to align with learners’ backgrounds—affirms the importance of a nuanced approach to task design. This consensus, alongside the areas of ongoing debate, points to the evolving nature of TBLT in YLL contexts and the critical need for further research, because, as Ellis (2009) noted, “for TBLT to work, teachers need a clear understanding of what a task is” (p. 241) and what types of tasks can be used effectively to inform and implement YLL instruction. Thus, future investigations should aim to explore further the complexities of L2 output, the need for and balance between input-based and output-driven tasks, and how these elements impact language acquisition among YLLs. Such research is essential for refining our understanding of TBLT and enhancing its efficacy in primary school classrooms,

ensuring that tasks not only engage young learners but also support their developmental and linguistic needs in a manner that is both meaningful and effective.

### Concluding Remarks

In this exploratory study, we investigated the concept of task in the context of the YLL classroom, focusing specifically on aspects that were identified in previous literature as potentially different from definitions provided relative to adult L2 learners (Cameron, 2001; Megías Rosa, 2004; Pinter, 2019). While experts who participated in our study highlighted several task characteristics that were also featured in the general concept of a (language) task in the L2 adult literature (e.g., a clearly defined goal/outcome, an information gap, a focus on meaning), they noted that specific aspects, such as a task's authenticity, meaningfulness, and purpose, may require a more nuanced consideration in YLL contexts to account for the unique characteristics, real-world experiences, and needs of YLLs. Additionally, the study revealed areas of disagreement relative to the concept of tasks in the YLL classroom, such as the need for producing target language output. These areas should be examined further to gradually approach a more general consensus among experts in terms of what constitutes a task—a much-needed consensus if teachers are to successfully implement TBLT in various YLL contexts.

Finally, we need to acknowledge a few limitations of our study. First, we did not include a clear reference to the primary school “*language*” classroom in the initial question that was sent to the expert panel. Given that we had selected experts who worked in TBLT and thus in language education, we did not consider it critical, assuming that the experts would respond by drawing on their language education backgrounds. However, three experts noted uncertainty as to whether a definition was to be made for a communicative task. For example, one expert wrote, “noticing that the term ‘language’ is not used here. So it would seem that the meaning that you are trying to capture is the nonspecialist meaning of task.” Although most experts did not seem to have an issue with it, the unclear or unconcise wording may have skewed some panelists’ responses or judgments. For example, the task characteristic “using the L2” was highlighted by only 50% of the participants, a potential underestimate given the confusion among some panelists. This percentage would most likely have been higher had the initial question been more specific. Second, our data consisted solely of the written responses provided by the expert panelists during the Delphi study. Thus, as Deardorff (2004) emphasized, the “quality of the data was reflective of the time and priority given to the study by the expert participants” (p. 113). Finally, panelists were all from academia, which may have created a cultural bias. Future research could repeat a similar investigation with additional stakeholder groups including teachers and YLLs, potentially even bringing different groups together to gauge the groups’ understanding of what constitutes a “communicative task” in the YLL classroom, to better understand perceived challenges, and ultimately to promote a dialogue that can aid the advancement of effective implementation of tasks and TBLT in YLL classrooms.

### Endnote

- 1 Note the prominent quote by one of the participating teachers that became the title of Erlam’s (2016) publication “I’m Still Not Sure What a Task Is.”

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Definitions of *Task* in the L2 Literature

Author(s)	Year	Definition of <i>task</i>
Long	1985	See text
Richards et al.	1985	“Any activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language i.e. as a response. For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, and listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of a variety of different kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make teaching more communicative ... since it provides a purpose for classroom activity which goes beyond practice of language for its own sake.” (p. 289)
Crookes	1986	“A piece of work or activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research” (p. 1)
Breen	1987	“Any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. ‘Task’ is therefore assumed to refer to a range of workplans which have the overall purposes of facilitating language learning—from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making.” (p. 23)
Candlin	1987	“One set of differentiated, sequencable, problem-posing activities involving learners’ cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu.” (p. 10)
Krahnke	1987	“The defining characteristic of task-based content is that it uses activities that the learners have to do for non-instructional purposes outside the classroom as opportunities for language learning. Tasks are distinct from other activities to the degree that they have non-instructional purposes.” (p. 59)
Prabhu <sup>b</sup>	1987	“An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was regarded as a ‘task.’” (p. 24)
Nunan	1989	“A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (p. 10)
Long and Crookes	1991	“Target tasks learners ultimately need to be able to handle, and then allow the tasks teachers and learners work on in the classroom, i.e. the pedagogic tasks.” (p. 4)
Stern	1992	“Communicative exercises [that] ... provide opportunities for relatively realistic language use, focusing the learner’s attention on a task, problem, activity, or topic, and not on a particular language point” (pp. 195–196)
Carroll	1993	“Any activity in which a person engages, given an appropriate setting, in order to achieve a specifiable class of objectives, final results, or terminal states of affairs” (p. 8)
Long and Crookes	1993	“They [pedagogic tasks] will be increasingly accurate approximations (according to criteria such as communicative success, semantic accuracy, pragmatic appropriacy, and even grammatical correctness) to the target tasks ... Since target tasks will usually be more complex than their related pedagogic tasks, increasingly accurate approximation will normally imply students addressing increasingly complex pedagogical tasks.” (pp. 40–41)
Bachman and Palmer	1996	“An activity that involves individuals using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular situation” (p. 44)
Skehan	1996	“A task is taken to be an activity in which meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the real world, task completion has some priority, and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome.” (p. 38)

## Continued

Author(s)	Year	Definition of <i>task</i>
J. Willis	1996	<p>“Tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.” (p. 23)</p> <p>“A task is seen as a goal-oriented communicative activity with a specific outcome, where the emphasis is on exchanging meanings, not producing specific language forms.” (p. 64)</p>
Williams and Burden	1997	“Any activity that learners engage in to further the process of learning a language” (p. 168)
Dörnyei and Kormos	2000	“‘Tasks’ usually refer to communicative language activities in which purposeful communication, authentic situations and active learner engagement are key concerns.” (p. 276)
Lee	2000	“A classroom activity or exercise that has: (a) an objective obtainable only by the interaction among participants, (b) a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction, and (c) a focus on meaning exchange; (2) a language learning endeavor that requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, and/or produce the target language as they perform some set of workplans” (p. 32)
Bygate et al.	2001	<p>“An activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective” (p. 11)</p> <p>“An activity, influenced by learner choice, and susceptible to learner reinterpretation, which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective” (p. 11)</p>
Cameron <sup>b</sup>	2001	<p>Classroom tasks for children learning a foreign language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have coherence and unity for learners (from topic, activity and/or outcome)</li> <li>• have meaning and purpose for learners</li> <li>• have clear language learning goals</li> <li>• have a beginning and end</li> <li>• involve the learners actively (p. 31)</li> </ul>
Dörnyei	2002	“Learning task as a complex of various goal-oriented mental and behavioural operations that students perform during the period between the teacher’s initial task instructions and the completion of the final task outcome” (p. 139)
Carless <sup>b</sup>	2003	<p>“Task includes five elements ... : <i>a purpose</i> or underlying real-life justification for doing the task, involving more than simply the display of knowledge or practice of skills; <i>a context</i> in which the task takes place, which may be real, simulated or imaginary; <i>a process</i> of thinking and doing required in carrying out the task, stimulated by the purpose and the context; <i>a product</i> or the result of thinking and doing, which may be tangible or intangible; <i>a framework of knowledge, strategy and skill</i> used in carrying out the task.” (p. 486)</p>
Ellis	2003a	“A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been converted. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive and oral or written skills.” (p. 64)
Littlewood	2004	“I will consider two dimensions that are crucial to understanding tasks (now broadly defined). The first dimension is the continuum from focus on forms to focus on meaning, which underlies the definitions mentioned in the previous section. The second is the degree of learner-involvement that a task elicits.” (p. 321)
Luoma	2004	“Tasks are activities that people do, and in language-learning contexts tasks are usually defined in terms of language use.” (p. 30)

## Continued

Author(s)	Year	Definition of <i>task</i>
Megías Rosa	2004	<i>Refers to J. Willis (1996) and Cameron (2001): "Tasks can be defined as language activities but that not all activities can be named as tasks." (p. 212)</i> <i>Follows Crookes and Chaudron (2001): "We agree totally with the definition of task provided by Crookes &amp; Chaudron 2001:33: task will apply to a separate element of a lesson that is primarily geared to practising language presented earlier (or otherwise learnt), usually involving students working with each other, to achieve a specific objective." (p. 212)</i>
Nunan	2004	"My own definition is that a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle, and an end." (p. 4)
Sánchez	2004	"They are goal-oriented or goal-guided activities. Performance is evaluated depending on the achievement or not of the goal." (p. 51) "Tasks in real life are fully holistic." (p. 51) "A TBA takes real world tasks as the source and model for pedagogical action. The question must then be posed: In which way can real world tasks 'enter' the classroom and be adapted to it?" (p. 52)
Shehadeh	2005	"While there is no clear agreement on what should constitute an overarching definition of a task, a consensus seems to be emerging over the central characteristics, in particular for pedagogic (as opposed to purely research) tasks ... We can use the following as our basic definition: A language learning task is
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an activity</li> <li>• that has a non-linguistic purpose or goal</li> <li>• with a clear outcome</li> <li>• and that uses any or all of the four language skills in its accomplishment</li> <li>• by conveying meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use" (pp. 18–19)</li> </ul>
van den Branden	2006	"An activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language" (p. 4)
D. Willis and Willis	2007	<i>Chose Skehan (1998) to be the most complete definition of task-based teaching: "A task is an activity in which ...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meaning is primary</li> <li>• learners are not given other people's meanings to regurgitate</li> <li>• there is some sort of relationship to comparable real world activities</li> <li>• task completion has some sort of priority</li> <li>• the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome" (p. 12)</li> </ul>
Pica	2008	"Task-based instruction is characterized by activities that engage language learners in meaningful, goal-oriented communication to solve problems, complete projects, and reach decisions." (p. 71)
Samuda and Bygate	2008	"A holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning through process or product or both" (p. 69)
Thomas and Reinders	2010	<i>Following Ellis (2003b): "Six 'criterial features' suggested by Ellis (2003, pp. 9–10): tasks involve a plan for learner activity; they have a primary focus on making meaning; they engage with real-world authentic language use; they focus on any or all of the four language skills; they engage learners in cognitive skills in order to accomplish them; and they have a defined communication-based learning outcome." (p. 2)</i>



## Continued

Author(s)	Year	Definition of <i>task</i>
Wicking	2010	<i>Follows</i> “Skehan (1998), who defines task as an activity in which: (a) meaning is primary, (b) there is some communication problem to solve, (c) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities, (d) task completion has some priority, and (e) the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome. To Skehan’s five criteria just mentioned, I would add one more: (f) a task is a workplan.” (p. 467)
Tomlinson	2011	“Activities in which the learners are asked to use the target language in order to achieve a particular outcome within a particular context (e.g. solving a problem; planning a meeting; selecting candidates for an interview).” (p. xvi)
Shintani <sup>b</sup>	2012	<i>Follows Ellis (2003b)</i> : “That is, it had a primary focus on meaning, there was a gap, the learners had to make use of their own linguistic resources (in this case receptively), and it had a clearly defined outcome. The task was input-based; that is, it required learners to listen to input and demonstrate their understanding non-verbally. However, production was not prohibited and, as we will see, the young learners engaged quite actively in the task.” (p. 41)
Byrnes and Manchón	2014	“Performing tasks requires language users to communicate functional messages to a specified listener/reader in order to attain a particular goal.” (p. ix) “Tasks then are intended to have a material impact on the kinds of meaning-making processes that students engage in, at the same time contextualising and motivating the language features they work with.” (p. ix)
Ellis and Shintani <sup>b</sup>	2014	“1. There must be a primary focus on meaning (i.e. learners should be mainly concerned with decoding and encoding messages not with focussing on linguistic form). 2. There is a ‘gap’ of some kind that motivates the exchange of information or opinions. 3. Learners have to rely on their own linguistic resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic) in order to complete the task. 4. Learners are primarily engaged in achieving the outcome of the task.” (p. 135)
Shintani <sup>b</sup>	2014	“Input-based tasks need to meet Ellis’ (2003) four defining criteria for a ‘task’: (1) meaning is primary (i.e., the task requires the learners to comprehend or convey messages that serve a real communicative purpose), (2) there is some type of gap (e.g., an information gap), (3) learners are required to use their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to communicate, and (4) there is some outcome other than simply the display of correct language. In the case of (3), learners use their own linguistic resources in conjunction with contextual information to process the input they are exposed to in an input-based task.” (p. 281)
Bygate <i>et al.</i>	2015	“Task indicates language-learning activities in which students are required to use language with a primary focus on meaning, in order to achieve some communicative outcome.” (p. 1) “Tasks are intended to provide communication challenges so as to make relevant and motivated the introduction and practice of new language, and to offer contexts which help learners to interpret, learn, and apply new language for meaningful communicative purposes.” (p. 2)
García Mayo <sup>b</sup>	2015	“Task has been defined in various ways ... but most researchers would agree that it can be considered as a language learning activity which is focused on meaning, has a clear goal or outcome and fosters authentic language use.” (p. 1)
Long	2015	See text
Pinter <sup>b</sup>	2015	“Tasks for children should have coherence and unity, meaning and purpose, a clear language-learning goal, a beginning and an end, and they should involve the learners actively.” (p. 119)
Van Gorp and van den Branden <sup>b</sup>	2015	<i>Follows van den Branden (2006)</i>



## Continued

Author(s)	Year	Definition of task
Erlam	2016	<i>Follows Ellis (2003b) and Ellis and Shintani (2014)</i>
Nikolov <sup>b</sup>	2016	"Tasks should focus on meaning (not form) and allow young learners to communicate with their peers and their teacher." (p. 74)
van den Branden	2016	<i>Follows van den Branden (2006)</i>
Ahmadian and García Mayo	2018	"Tasks as meaningful, outcome-oriented activities which induce learners to incidentally pay attention to form" (p. 2)
Van Gorp and Verheyen <sup>b</sup>	2018	<i>Follows van Gorp and Bogaert (2006)</i>
Vandommele et al. <sup>b</sup>	2018	Results of their study: focus on core principles of a task, promote learning by doing, provide input and opportunities for output, focus on form (see p. 188)
Pinter <sup>b</sup>	2019	"At its core a task is always seen as a meaning-focused, purposeful language activity with a well-defined end point and outcome." (p. 141)
Ellis <sup>b</sup>	2020	"This definition contrasts tasks with mechanical exercises or drills." (p. 141) <i>Refers to Ellis and Shintani (2014):</i> "1. There must be a primary focus on meaning (i.e. learners should be mainly concerned with decoding and encoding messages not with focussing on linguistic form). 2. There is a 'gap' of some kind that motivates the exchange of information or opinions. 3. Learners have to rely on their own linguistic resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic) in order to complete the task. 4. Learners are primarily engaged in achieving the outcome of the task." (p. 12) "Designing input-based tasks involves considering the choice of topic, the non-verbal devices that are central to the tasks, the pre-selection of target language, the verbal input for the task, and the task outcomes." (p. 4)
Zhu <sup>b</sup>	2022	<i>Follows van den Branden (2006) and Ellis and Shintani (2013)</i>
Kolb and Schocker-von Dittfurth <sup>b</sup>	2021	"Learners' needs and what they consider to be a meaningful activity is the central starting point for any task you ask them to do in class." (p. 43)
Bui and Tai <sup>b</sup>	2022	"A task is meaning-oriented, requires certain linguistic resources, involves some communicative gap, exhibits some degree of real-world relevance." (pp. 2–3)
Erlam and Tolosa	2022	"Tasks, which require learners to process language for meaning, can be designed to help with this process and so to promote language learning." (p. 5) "In a task, meaning is primary; there is a goal; activity is outcome-evaluated; and there is real-world relationship." (p. 44)
Jackson	2022	<i>Mainly follows Bygate et al. (2001):</i> "There is a difference between target tasks, or real-world activities learners ultimately aim to accomplish in their target language, and pedagogic tasks, which are instructional activities derived from target tasks. During engagement in pedagogic tasks, learners 'use language, with an emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective' (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001, p. 11). This basic definition incorporates many others that have been offered over the years. According to it, the following practices would not fittingly be described as tasks: (1) learning about the target language without actually using it, such as when listening to an explanation of it in one's first language; (2) using the language mechanically rather than meaningfully, as in the memorized dialogues or choral repetition associated with the audio-lingual method; and (3) using language meaningfully but without any overt goal, as in free conversation." (p. 4)

<sup>a</sup>Task definitions were identified based on a literature review in which we extracted 206 publications that focused on tasks in a broad sense. These publications were then manually reviewed for definitions. We included only those publications that defined *task*.

<sup>b</sup>Reference has a specific focus on young learners.

## Appendix B: Delphi Study—Authenticity

### Protocol for Expert Interviews

#### I: Greeting and Introduction (approx. 2 min)

- Purpose: Welcome experts and express appreciation for them taking the time to participate
- To be included in welcome:
  - Quick description of the project and the purpose of the interview
    - Sample script: *We've asked for this interview so that we can learn more about the notion of "authenticity" as it relates to tasks for young language learners (i.e., primary school age).*
- Clarify that Bianca and Yuko will remain silent as observers

#### II: Utilities (approx. 2 min)

- Purpose: Setting the stage for the interview
- Setting the stage:
  - Confidentiality: Highlight definition of confidentiality
    - Sample script: *Your answers will not be shared with anyone in your workplace and will be used anonymously (e.g., by means of anonymized quotes) for research purposes only.*
  - Recording: Highlight the presence of recording equipment
    - Sample script: *As noted in the email, the interview will be recorded. Are you OK with video recording, or would you prefer audio only?*

#### III: Questions (approx. 25 min)

- Purpose: Discuss the idea of "authenticity" as it relates to tasks for young language learners (i.e., primary school age)
- Sample script:
 

*In the responses we collected in the Delphi study, the idea of "authenticity" remained underdefined. Therefore, we would like to discuss the following questions:*

  1. *What does it mean for a task in the primary school language learner context to be "authentic"?*
    - Prompt: *Show task examples (see PPT slides)*
      - *To what extent are those "authentic"?*
  2. *In many of the definitions, the idea of a task needing to be "meaningful for children" (i.e., primary school children) was brought up. What do you mean by "meaningful for children"?*
  3. *What is the distinction between "authentic" and "meaningful" in the context of tasks for primary school language learners?*
  4. *What is "authenticity" in TBLT in the context of the primary school language classroom?*

#### IV: Thank you (approx. 1 min)

*Thank you for your participation. We will now analyze the responses, finalize the paper, and share it with all of you.*

### Examples of Tasks Provided by Experts in Round 1 of the Delphi Study

#### Example Task 1

With reference to the primary foreign language classroom, tasks are more frequently designed to be completed in pairs or small groups. For example, 6-year-olds might be asked to individually draw and colour their favorite monster and give it a name. From this, they might then have the task of describing their monster to a partner in the FL for them to draw. The two monsters could then be displayed and discussed by the children—helping each other to describe them in a mix of languages. The teacher's role would be to monitor the progress of the pairs/groups, providing scaffolding as appropriate and conducting informal evaluations through observation and monitoring.

*Example Task 2*

For example, in a primary school classroom, picture placement tasks (either one way or two way) with pairs working together to place items within a scene or spot the difference work for this purpose. For younger students, so, too, do tasks in pairs or small groups, such as “playing shop” with shopping lists that require a degree of negotiation; using toy animals to set up farms or zoo animals in cages according to certain rules; completing a matrix, e.g., animals and their characteristics and/or environments where they live; identifying and counting shapes.

*Example Task 3*

Tasks in primary school may make use of the principle of “suspension of disbelief” by creating fictional worlds (think of Harry Potter; adventure games; detectives, sci-fi and fantasy stories, and other storyline approaches) that challenge the students to perform tasks that nevertheless connect to real-world target tasks. In my own experience, these kinds of projects or storyline thematic units work well and create high engagement with the task and the language it provides or necessitates. They also provide a good frame(work) for introducing integrated language skills tasks. One example is where the students engage themselves to solve the mysterious disappearance of a woman. They read the diary/agenda of the woman and letters that they find in a house, interview neighbors, and look for clues in a story that the woman was reading. They write a missing persons bulletin and letters to find out more about her life. They find out how to get to a particular place where the missing person was seen last, etc.

*Example Task 4*

For example, I’m going to describe five animals in a picture. Point to the animals one by one (picture of a zoo, jungle, farm). Once we are finished, let’s count how many you got right.

## Appendix C: Definitions and Comments

*Definition 1*

A task is an activity which requires the learner to do something—that is purposeful and meaningful in nature, appropriate for the learner’s background characteristics, and ideally reflects activities from a relevant “real-life” target domain—in order to achieve a particular goal/outcome. The activity typically contains a set of instructions and a description/visualisation of a scenario with some sort of issue/gap that needs addressing/solving.

In the context of language learning, a task requires the learner to use language in a purposeful and meaningful (communicative) manner, in order to achieve a particular (communicative) goal/outcome. The learner’s attention while completing the task is primarily on meaning (rather than on linguistic form) and “real-world” language use.

Depending on the task, the activity can be conducted alone, in pairs or groups.

Tasks can be seen to exist on a continuum, from weaker (e.g. partly meaningful real-world outcomes) to stronger (e.g. exclusively meaning-focused, real-world outcomes).

**Mean (Round 2): 3.63**

**Mean (Round 3): 3.50**

*Comments (Round 2)*

- A useful definition of a task for young learners that takes good account of key concepts informing the task-based literature.
- I agree with all, but for me the final point could be connected with the difference between real-world (or preparation for real-world) tasks and pedagogic tasks.
- OK but to my mind misses some essential features of a task, namely, it should involve some kind of gap that motivates work towards the communicative outcome and learners should have to rely on their own linguistic resources to achieve the outcome. What is a “real-world task”? This construct needs careful definition. If it is meant the task should correspond to a “target task” I do not see this a necessary defining feature as in many teaching contexts it will not be possible to identify “target tasks” for young learners.

- The definition is fine for the concept of task but, if I am not wrong, the questions we were asked to answer was the following: What is a task for a primary school classroom? What I miss in this definition is precisely how tasks can be tailored for primary school learners.
- Very comprehensive.
- No clear differentiation between task and activity.
- I agree with this definition except find the idea of the weaker task unclear — what are “partly meaningful real-world outcomes”?
- Also quite detailed.
- Some indication of how tasks in the primary classroom might differ from those at secondary/tertiary level would be helpful — or, at least, a reference to the importance of tasks being age-appropriate.
- I have doubts about what “purposeful and meaningful in nature” means and how different or similar this is to “real-life.” Sometimes we do things with young learners that are not necessarily a replica of the real world. If you think of writing, for example, it is difficult to imitate the real world as a young learner does not really have a need to write.
- This is a great definition. I can relate to this 100%. I like the introduction of a scenario!

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	0	0
2	0	0
3	50	8
4 Agree	50	8
NA	0	0

Note. NA = not applicable.

*Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- How tasks should and can be age appropriate is not included. Otherwise, the first general part is probably not needed.
- I do miss how tasks can be tailored for primary school learners. We were requested a definition of tasks for primary school learners.
- I still think it is a good definition, but I understand the need to discriminate a little further with respect to the age of the learners.
- The age appropriateness of the definition is not addressed.
- Yes, I agree with this definition.
- I like the comprehensiveness of this definition, although I agree that adding something about the learning potential or some kind of gap that motivates work towards the communicative outcome would be a good addition.
- The phrase “purposeful and meaningful” may sometimes be irrelevant for young children, given their ability to suspend disbelief and operate in an entirely fantasy world at times. Thus, tasks may be meaningful (to them!) and, on occasion, may or may not be purposeful.
- It is a good definition except that the nature of a task being goal oriented and forms being acquired accidentally can be added.
- In contrast to some of the comments, I do think that real-world tasks can also be realized in primary school classrooms—example for writing tasks would be for example a postcard or a shopping list, a recipe, etc. I would change the wording weaker–stronger, but I like the idea of a continuum, since all classroom-based activities are to some extent not real-world activities.

**Definition 2**

A task is an activity that—you complete through language: Tasks that primary school children do with language could be for example buying ice cream, solving a puzzle or calling a friend to ask whether he or she could come over to play.—is meaningful and relevant for the children: It relates to their everyday lives and accounts for learners’ individual interests and needs. The task “presenting my favourite pet” could therefore include a variety of (also unusual) pets.—has a clear communicative purpose and an audience: for example presenting a role-play or making a video about our school for a

partner class abroad—reflects language use outside the classroom: The language used to complete the task should be similar to language used outside the classroom.—activates learners’ resources and gives them opportunities to show what they can already do with language. It provides choices in terms of language and content and accounts for different competence levels. Some learners might present their pet in complex phrases, others in one-word utterances or they might rely on the language structures provided.

**Mean (Round 2): 3.56**

**Mean (Round 3): 3.06**

#### *Comments (Round 2)*

- A useful definition of a task for young learners that takes good account of key concepts informing the task-based literature.
- With the addition of the notion of “gap,” I would fully agree with this definition.
- This is very good especially as each definitional point is accompanied by examples. I think this is a good approach if we are to move towards some broadly acceptable definition. But some tightening of language is needed—for example, “complete through language” would apply to a fill-in-the-blank exercise.
- I like this definition because it has illustrated the major characteristics of tasks but having the young learner in mind.
- Very comprehensive and thoughtful.
- I’m wondering about the points “activates learners’ resources and gives them opportunities to show what they can already do with language.” What if they are beginner learners in an FL context who have zero or very limited resources (i.e., L2 knowledge), so there is almost nothing they can do with the L2?
- What I greatly appreciate about this definition is the centrality of the learner. What I see as key elements of a task are sometimes expressed through examples in this definition, rather than explicitly stated, which makes it a bit more indirect as a definition.
- This definition is too specific to be a definition. For example, the audience of tasks can be the class, it is still a task. Buying ice cream? I don’t quite see the point.
- Not all tasks require completion with language (e.g., TPR only requires language as input).
- A nice, multifaceted definition of a task. What I would like to add is that a task does not only reflect language use outside the classroom, but also has a real-world purpose.

#### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- A definition of what a task is must include all tasks for young language learners. This text has too many diversions.
- Good definition but I would add the importance of tasks having a gap in knowledge that needs to be filled.
- The notion of “gap” might need to be included.
- I also think it requires the inclusion of “a gap.”
- As has been noted above, what about the “gap” criterion? Perhaps the proposer could think about the gaps inherent in talking about pets—what classmates do not yet know about someone?
- Great that it includes examples. But this definition demonstrates a major problem in TBLT, namely that tasks should always involve output. Any definition, especially for young learners, must include input-based tasks.
- I like this definition but I agree with one of the comments, that there is no mention of a communicative gap. So for example, in producing a role-play for an audience, where is the incentive for the audience to engage with the role-play, i.e., work to understand it? If there is no reason for the audience to listen, the role-play, for me, could be an example of an outcome that is not separate from the use of language. In my own research, teachers realized the limitation of students producing “products” (books, role-plays) where there was no evidence that the “audience” had engaged with the product. They concluded that there was no “gap.”
- A good and very concrete description of tasks. I would expect a definition to be worded in more general terms. What I miss is the goal orientedness (although purpose is being mentioned) of the task and the idea of gap or learning potential: “stretching the language muscles.”

- As commented on above, I also consider that some tasks can be completed on the basis of a nonverbal response to oral instructions, e.g., “Simon says, touch your toes”; draw a dragon eating fire.
- This example involves most of the elements of a task except the “gap” to motivate language use and the relationship between meaning and form. If a more precise definition is provided in the first place before those concrete examples, it would be great.
- I think that even beginning learners can use their competences and engage in simple tasks, for example asking each other for their telephone numbers, or using nonverbal means to show understanding (can be completed through language would then refer to the language input).

### Definition 3

Tasks are learning activities that aim to provide learners the opportunity to use a second language as a tool for communication. A task is the central construct in TBLT. A task must satisfy four basic criteria (Ellis, 2003): The primary focus should be on “meaning” (i.e., learners should be mainly concerned with encoding and decoding messages not with focusing on the linguistic form). 2. There should be some kind of “gap” (i.e., a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning). 3. Learners should largely rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity. That is, learners are not “taught” the language they will need to perform a task although they may be able to “borrow” from the input the task provided to help them perform it. 4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e., the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right). Thus, when performing a task, learners are not primarily concerned with using language correctly but rather with achieving the goal stipulated by the task. Teachers generally think that tasks should be pair- or group work, involving learners’ free production of the target language, which is often too demanding for young learners, particularly those with low proficiency. However, tasks can be input-based. An input-based task still should follow the key four criteria of tasks but does not require the learners to produce the L2, it requires the learners to use their own resources by comprehending the L2. When the learners cannot comprehend the L2, the opportunity for learning arises in the way that the learners negotiate meaning or when the learner receives feedback (answer of the input) from the teacher.

Mean (Round 2): 3.50

Mean (Round 3): 3.25

### Comments (Round 2)

- A comprehensive definition of a task that takes good account of concepts informing the task-based literature, although perhaps too focused on one set of criteria.
- Agree with all, but feedback also can be provided by peers as well as the teacher.
- I agree with Ellis’s criteria. I agree also the need to recognize that tasks can be input based as well as production based. In an input-based task, the participatory structure of a task-based lesson is likely to be teacher–class.
- The definition is fine but too long (i.e., repeating the four criteria one can find in Ellis, 2003). What I like is the idea of input-based tasks for young learners but, again, one needs to be aware that at some point during the primary school years, the students will have to produce language.
- Very comprehensive and relevant to YL.
- I like the fact that this definition points out at the end that it isn’t exclusively about L2 production but that tasks can also be used with a focus on L2 comprehension.
- I have doubts about children relying on their “own resources.” Where is the line between their own or something modeled and followed?
- The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. The author appears to assume that the term *task* is only applicable in the language classroom. The reliance on Ellis (2003) is too general. Something more focused on the primary classroom is needed. The final paragraph seems to indicate that the author does not consider “completion of the task” to constitute an outcome if no language is produced. Surely, TPR activities can be classified as tasks (e.g., teacher leading a Simon Says game).



- I am not sure whether I correctly understand what is meant by input based. I do think that working with tasks should include language production. If the learners' proficiency is low they will need language support. Since interaction is a key criterion, pair or group work is very often involved.
- I think this definition lacks an important segment when it comes to YLLs—scaffolding or reference to the zone of proximal development. When the author says “learners should largely rely on their own sources,” with YLLs, this does not necessarily need to be the case—sometimes they need that bit of a push from a more knowledgeable person (peer, teacher, parent).
- What about monologic tasks? To me, drawing a picture and describing it for an audience is a task.
- This is a textbook definition of a task in TBLT, following Ellis's criteria and pointing to the difference between input- and output-based tasks. I do like the point that tasks are not always pair or group work.

#### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- After rereading this definition I wonder who our audience is. Who do we want to understand out definition of a task for the YL classroom and perhaps beyond? By using such elaborate language and drawing on a very general definition, we may not be helpful to people who really need to understand and use the definition in their daily practice.
- Overall a good definition, but I find it too tied to Ellis's (2003) definition.
- I like this definition a lot. I also think feedback from peers, as well the teacher, should be included.
- Agree with above comments that perhaps too focused on one set of criteria, and perhaps too long.
- I think the issue of a task requiring learners to use their own linguistic resources is quite central. Of course, this does not mean using their own resources in production but also in comprehension (as in input-based tasks). The best example of how this can be achieved is in Shintani's study. She used tasks (input-based) with six-year-old children and showed how she and the children scaffolded their understanding of the input. Any definition for young learners must acknowledge that the starting point has to be input-based tasks as a prelude to output-based tasks. We don't need reference to specific theories (e.g., sociocultural) in the definition. Ideally, the definition should be theory neutral.
- A textbook definition of task, including some important elements (input tasks, not always pair or group work), but not particularly geared to young learners.
- A greater stress on the possibilities for YLLs to complete the task without an oral response is needed here. As a definition, at present, this is too long. I suggest deleting Ellis's criteria and focusing more clearly on child development factors.
- This is a very comprehensive definition of a task in relation to young learners. I agree with it all.
- I am not so sure about the input-based tasks—what does this mean?

#### **Definition 4**

A task for the primary school classroom would be an activity that is clearly focused on meaningful elements related to the children's interests and that could be adjusted to the different age-ranges that comprise the concept of “childhood.” The task should have some gap that needs to be filled in with information that the child has to discover by himself/herself if the task is carried out individually. If the task is done collaboratively in pairs/small groups, then one child may have half of the information and the other child(ren) the remaining pieces so that by means of their exchange of ideas they complete the task. The tasks should have a communicative outcome, that is, the children should be able to see how the task helps them in their use of the target language in real-life situations. And, very importantly, it should be engaging and motivating.

**Average (Round 2): 3.50**

**Average (Round 3): 3.00**

#### *Comments (Round 2)*

- A focus on some aspects that I would consider core, such as “gap,” “outcome.”
- If combined with Ellis's definition and determining needs—I would fully agree.
- OK, but has some of the same problems with other definitions. Seems to see that a task needs to involve individual or pair/group work. It needn't. And what does “helps them to use the target language in real-life situations” mean?

- Very comprehensive with due consideration for YL.
- I note that this definition specifically focuses on YLs/primary school level.
- A good definition in the first part. However, I don't agree that a good definition of a communicative outcome is that "the children should be able to see how the task helps them in their use of the target language in real-life situations." To me this point puts the focus on language rather than on meaning, and the point of the outcome is that the language serves to achieve it but is not an end in its own right.
- Same gap point I don't think is always necessary.
- The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. The author's suggestion that tasks should be adjusted to different age ranges seems inappropriate since many tasks may be unsuitable for adaptation.
- Agree but the emphasis is on information gap tasks? Discovering information for oneself: What does this mean? If it is googling information about a place, is that a task?
- What about monologic tasks? Is googling information about a place and copying and pasting it a task? Or information getting and discovery were meant in a different way?
- I like this definition and that it highlights the fact that children should be able to see how the task helps them in their use of the target language in real-life situations. I gave it a 3 instead of a 4, because I think "gap" is underdefined. A gap is not only information that needs to be discovered. It can be a linguistic or cognitive gap or challenge pushing the children to use language in a new way.
- I believe this description is an actual description (I found others extremely long or way too short) and sticks to the major characteristics of a task for primary school learners. I would probably add that the gap referred to should be challenging—the level of challenge should be adjusted to the children's age.

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	0	0
2	19	3
3	62	10
4 Agree	19	3
NA	0	0

Note. NA = not applicable.

#### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- Again, some points are vague and the text is pretty long.
- A definition with an appropriate length and focused on young learners. The author should have added that the gap needs to be challenging.
- Again needs to include reference to a gap.
- I think one of the problems in arriving at a definition of a task is deciding what to include in the definition. To my mind the definition should enable us to decide what is a task and what isn't a task. That is why I think any definition of a task should be neutral concerning the age of the learner. A separate issue is "what is a good task for young learners?" This is an important question but it should only be asked once we have decided what a task is.
- I like this definition except find the definition of a communicative outcome problematic. As commented above, this seems to put the emphasis on language rather than on meaning.
- Again, a good definition and geared too YLL, however, by emphasizing the information gap tasks it narrows pedagogical tasks considerably and stays too close to tasks used in research. There are so many other task types that are relevant and meaningful in a classroom context.
- It's good to see that this definition/description includes the words "task" and "activity." It would be useful to clarify whether or not there is any meaningful distinction between the two, with reference to the primary classroom. I also feel that if an example of an information gap activity is to be mentioned, then an example of a collaborative, non-information-gap activity/task should be included.
- A very good definition that comprises most of the key elements of a task. At the same time, I find some over-reliance on productive tasks here. Input tasks are equally, if not more, important for beginner-level young learners.

- I don't agree with the gap that the child has to find out about. A task could be presenting their own pet, for example, so they would not necessarily look for information.

### Definition 5

A primary school FL classroom task is an activity (or a set of activities) enabling YLs to comprehend, express, and negotiate meaning in a FL while focusing on a communicative outcome and relying on their own resources (cognitive, experiential, and language). It is of crucial importance that primary classroom tasks be age appropriate: different task types, levels of language, cognitive challenge, and motivational potential would be appropriate at different grade levels (e.g., games involving physical movement in initial grades vs. banked cloze tasks focusing on familiar vocabulary in later primary grades). A good task caters for YLs' needs (e.g., to be physically active, to participate in interactive playful activities with peers, to be successful, to feel important to and accepted by the FL teacher and peers) and interests (e.g., in the here and now things as well as in the world of magic, in what their peers think), develops positive attitudes to FLs, and motivates them for FL learning. A good task is short and focused to suit YLs' affective and cognitive characteristics. A good task is meaning-focused and involves different kinds of information or opinion gaps related to things relevant to YLs (e.g., what toys YLs have at home and where they keep them). A good task is intrinsically motivating, i.e. YLs perceive doing the task as a reward in itself. Its motivational potential differs among YLs and across time depending on, for example, the level of challenge it presents, how engaging it is and how well YLs perform on it. A good task also needs to include the right level of cognitive challenge in addition to being intrinsically motivating. This is of paramount importance in teaching YLs because they normally progress at a slow rate. This slow rate implies a need for recycling of both task types and topics over the primary grades, requiring extra efforts to maintain YLs' motivation. A good task helps develop a growth mindset in YLs: their self-perception of task performance as well as teacher feedback should help make YLs aware that tasks that may seem a little difficult are doable thanks to the effort they invest, and that they are making progress in their FL learning. A good task needs to be introduced through pre-task activities which would generate YLs' interest and motivate them to. The teacher's role is to scaffold YLs' *only* when they get stuck and to give them contextualized feedback.

Average (Round 2): 3.44

Average (Round 3): 2.94

### Comments (Round 2)

- A comprehensive definition of a task for young learners that takes good account of concepts informing the task-based literature.
- I would probably put meaning focused first, but I agree with most other things except the need for pre-task activities—which really depends on the task and the learners familiarity with the task content and procedure.
- This definition hits all the key points. The definition would be applicable to any level of learners, not just primary. A key issue is how “cognitive challenge” can be operationalized.
- This is an excellent and broad-ranging definition of a task. The only problem I find with it is that it is extremely long for a definition.
- Well-knit and comprehensive on the one hand, a bit too focussed on “good” or ideal tasks on the other. May also consider pedagogical tasks that are not fully compatible with this definition or description but are still useful in the YL classroom.
- I agree with the various aspects of this definition, but note that it is specifically for YLs/primary school level.
- No clear differentiation between task and activity; teacher role is debatable.
- I basically agree with this definition but do not see that the following would be a task as it does not have a communicative outcome. Focused on semantic meaning it has the learner functioning as a language learner rather than a language user. banked cloze tasks focusing on familiar vocabulary in later primary grades
- A very long and detailed text, nicely done.
- The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. The author assumes the definition should apply only to the FL classroom, making no reference to the wider primary curriculum. Generally, this is a lengthy list of desirable attributes which would benefit from summarizing/improved organization.

- I would agree with most of the characteristics of tasks described here, apart from banked, clozed tasks — this could contradict the task criterion “choice” — a task does not necessarily be short, it can include a sequence of activities.
- This is a very long definition with a lot of detail. It sounds ideal but perhaps not all of these criteria could be met? I agree with the gist of it though.
- I agree with the gist of this but overall this is a very list of criteria. I doubt whether all this could fit in a definition.
- I do like this definition a lot. It focuses on the right task characteristics: interest, motivation, cognitive challenge, communicative outcome. I like the focus on physical tasks, the here and now and magic worlds. What I miss is a focus on “real-world” tasks. One of the examples given (a cloze activity with word bank) I would not consider to be a task. Also, there are so many other real-world-related tasks than the traditional information and opinion gap tasks.

### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- This text is formulated in the language I would assume the target audience (teachers of YLs) would be able to use.
- I agree with most of the information provided in this definition but I find it extremely long. I have doubts that it could be considered a definition.
- I’m also not convinced about “pre-task” activities, but it is a comprehensive definition appropriate for YL.
- I found this too long, and therefore harder to find my way through.
- My comment is the same as for the previous definition. The definition should enable us to decide what is a task and what isn’t. Then we can move on to what is a “good task” for young learners. This definition addressed the question “what is a good task?” not “what is a ‘task’?”
- I agree with the way tasks are defined but do not agree that the example of a cloze task constitutes a language task.
- A thoughtful definition of a task including most of the key concepts and topics. However, very lengthy, too focused on what a good task is, no mention of real world task, and by including the cloze activity, it clouds the distinction between activity and task.
- Although I have ranked this definition at 4, as a definition it is too long. It might benefit from subdivision, e.g., definition examples. I suggest the first five lines as the definition although I would rethink the final description of “banked cloze tasks.” This may be appropriate in contexts where high-stakes language tests occur at the end of the primary phase but in contexts where there are just two to three FL lessons per week I would expect to see more holistic, meaning-focused tasks for older primary school learners.
- I think this detailed description captures almost everything about a task! Well done. On the other hand, I wonder if the author is defining a “good task” or a “task” per se.
- I broadly agree with everything but this is almost like an essay. The longer the text, the less it can be considered a “definition.”
- I think the teachers’ role goes beyond providing help when the learners are stuck. I would not consider a cloze activity a task.
- I would omit the banked cloze example, though.

### **Definition 6**

I would like to highlight the three criteria used by the TBLT Language Learning Task Bank at Indiana University. Tasks have a communicative goal, a non-linguistic outcome and connect to real-world language use. Taken together they express the core idea of what a good task is. Additionally, I would like to add that tasks have to motivate students to do the task and complete it in a satisfactory way and provide a linguistic challenge, that is, pushes students to stretch their “language muscles.” In an intensive language program, I do not believe that all the tasks can or will be situationally authentic, but they need to be interactionally authentic and, precisely, motivate students to address the linguistic challenge while working toward a non-linguistic (target-task like) outcome. Tasks in primary school may make use of the principle of “suspension of disbelief” by creating fictional worlds (think of Harry Potter; adventure games; detectives, SciFi and Fantasy stories and other storyline approaches) that challenge the students to perform tasks that nevertheless connect to real-world target tasks.

Average (Round 2): 3.44

Average (Round 3): 2.56

*Comments (Round 2)*

- A focus on several aspects that I would consider core—goal/nonlinguistic outcome/real-world—but could have been elaborated, as an example given (of, say, how a Harry Potter task might work).
- In this (and actually a lot of the others) the antecedent of look at learner needs (wants and interests) seem to be completely overlooked.
- I think the definition misses two important criteria—the need for some kind of gap that motivates work towards the communicative goal and the need for learners to rely on their own linguistic resources (i.e., they are not provided with the language assumed to be required to perform the task). I agree that a task can be both situationally and interactionally authentic. This is much better than claiming a task should be a “real world task.”
- I think this definition contains the basics of what a task for the primary school should be. I liked the part in which the author states that “(tasks need to) motivate students to address the linguistic challenge while working toward a non-linguistic (target-task like) outcome.”
- The form of language cannot be forgotten.
- Quite comprehensive a definition. Maybe a mention of a “gap” proposed by Rod Ellis would help further enhance the definition?
- Example is not appropriate for primary school foreign language learners.
- What does nonlinguistic outcome mean here?
- The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. The author does not clarify whether the term *task* is applicable in the wider primary curriculum. The author’s reference to “intensive language programs” is not relevant to a general definition. The final example from the primary classroom seems to suggest that “suspension of disbelief” may be the only factor to take into account with this age group.
- I am not sure that suspension, disbelief, or fictional worlds can be a core part of the definition?
- I am not sure including fictional worlds could be part of a definition. Monologic tasks are not mentioned here.

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	19	3
2	13	2
3	63	10
4 Agree	6	1
NA	0	0

Note. NA = not applicable.

*Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- There are some recurring themes both in the definitions and in the comments. This definition draws on an authentic source. The main points are not really about age appropriate tasks. The comments seem to notice the same things.
- Overall a good definition but I think that the author should have narrowed down the fictional worlds referred to when we are talking about primary school children.
- Looking at this again, it seems a number of key aspects are missing. I take the point above about fictional worlds.
- Seems to be constrained by the three criteria used by the TBLT Language Learning Task Bank at Indiana University.
- Same issue—should the definition focus on what a task is or what is a good task for young learners? I think we can progress if we separate out these two questions rather than attempting definitions that lump them together.
- I like this definition but I think that the idea of a “communicative gap” could have been mentioned?
- Whereas this description echoes the key concepts of what constitutes a task, it needs to be rephrased more into a definition.
- The author sets the frame by referring to the Task Bank at Indiana State University and to intensive language programs. Since neither of these is relevant to the primary FL phase of learning, this is an unhelpful frame which gets in the way of any of the subsequent points made by the author.



- A good definition except for a lack of “gaps” that motivates language use among young learners. It would also benefit from some due consideration of the young learner contexts intended here.
- I would add the aspect of learner-centredness, and I am not sure whether suspension of disbelief is a must.
- Some key features are mentioned, but some others are not made explicit (e.g., gap).

### Definition 7

Assuming this is for language learning purposes, a task is an activity that focuses on using language for communicative purposes rather than one that practices a particular grammatical construction (meaning rather than form; fluency above accuracy). It has a gap of some kind—something that those doing the task have to work out or find out. It has some relationship to the kinds of activities that the learners might do in other aspects of their lives beyond the classroom (authenticity/relationship to the real world). It requires those doing the task to use language for themselves, rather than just using pre-learned language (although it does not preclude pre-learned language).

Average (Round 2): 3.31

Average (Round 3): 2.88

### Comments (Round 2)

- A succinct definition of a task for young learners, but one that nonetheless takes good account of concepts informing the task-based literature.
- Succinct—I agree with all and would add the Needs Analysis point related to my response to Definition 4.
- Again, we are back to “real-world tasks”—“some relationship to the kinds of activities that the learners might do in other aspects of their lives.” What is this “some relationship”? If you are teaching Chinese children in China, it will be difficult to identify any real-world tasks. Tasks can be “real world” where it is possible to identify target tasks but in many contexts they will not be.
- Like Definitions 2 and 3 above, in my opinion this one is also too general. It does not include information that is tailored to young learners.
- Well defined but it would be more comprehensive if a focus on the outcome is mentioned?
- Some clear outcomes are missing.
- The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. Some indication of how tasks in the primary classroom might differ from those in the secondary/tertiary classroom is needed.
- With definitions that mention the “gap,” is there space for monologic tasks?
- A nice description of what a task aims to be, with a focus on real-world purposes and a “gap” or challenge (learning potential).

### Additional Comments (Round 3)

- I agree with all the comments. Good that it is short, but some points are missing.
- Very general definition, not tailored for young learners.
- I agree with the comments here and elsewhere that a Needs Analysis should be included.
- Agree that this is a succinct definition of a task for young learners, but one that nonetheless takes good account of concepts informing the task-based literature. Monologic tasks can have “gaps.”
- This does focus on defining a task and not trying to tell us what a good task is. I think the tailoring to young learners should come when we address what a good task is, not what a task is. The idea of “relationship to the real world” crops up in several definitions but is vague. Any definition needs to say what this relationship is.
- Yes, no mention of an outcome though.
- I like this definition. Short and sweet. It misses a reference to motivation, and the distinction between a communicative activity and task may be not clear enough.
- Good to have a fairly succinct definition. I like the fact that this author views the terms *task* and *activity* as synonymous, although it does beg the question, “why do we need to talk about task-based learning at all at primary level”!

- I agree with all elements mentioned here. I gave a 3 instead of 4 because this is a generic definition but not one specific for younger learners.
- Relevance for learners is missing, I think.
- Nice and short as a definition, but I miss a focus on outcome.

### Definition 8

A task in the primary (L2) classroom will be a meaning-oriented activity that has a clear purpose (non-linguistic such as winning, finding the route on the map somewhere, preparing a short monologue for display, etc.) and can be completed individually or in interaction with one or more learners; — Such tasks will be fun, sharing some characteristics of games and other playful activities; as such they will have their own “momentum,” leading to a spontaneous desire on the part of the learner to try again, do it again, i.e. repeat the task; there is a lot of evidence emerging from the literature that young learners ENJOY repetition when it is on their own terms; — These tasks may be/could be “dynamic” tasks where the performance is mediated by technology so that recording the task offers immediate feedback and then the opportunity to do it again. One problem with any definition of a task for the primary classroom is that depending on the age, background, L2 proficiency, the teaching methods and materials that are familiar to the learners, and many other factors, different learners will enjoy, cope with and take interest in different tasks.

Average (Round 2): 3.31

Average (Round 3): 2.69

### Comments (Round 2)

- A comprehensive definition of a task for young learners that takes good account of concepts informing the task-based literature (meaning orientation/clear purpose). This definition also takes learner differences into account.
- It's not that I disagree with anything overtly, but some of the narrative seems a bit tangential to the definition of task.
- This definition manifests one of the errors we find in common thinking about tasks—namely that a task has to be done individually or in pairs/groups. Thus it excludes the possibility that tasks can be accomplished in teacher–class interaction, which with beginner learners would seem to be the main participatory structure required. Another point is that this commentary (as do some of the others include details about task implementation). But to my mind, if we wish to define a task, we need to focus on the task-as-a-workplan and consider issues to do with task implementation separately.
- Excellent definition, considering precisely those issues that will make a task for young learners meaningful. I agree with the final paragraph: It is very difficult to provide a definition of task for the primary school classroom because the worldwide scenarios vary tremendously.
- This is a thoughtful and creative definition. I wonder if we need to focus a bit on the nonlinguistic outcome aspect as defined by Ellis, which would give YL a sense of achievement.
- There is no mention of how the learners learn the L2 through in the task.
- This definition captures important characteristics of a task such as being meaning oriented and purposeful, but communicates other aspects more indirectly, such as context and learner appropriateness, tackling a gap, working towards a particular outcome.
- This definition does not include the notion of a communicative gap. The example of “preparing a short monologue for display” is not a nonlinguistic outcome. I think that it can be a task if those students asked to listen to the monologue are given a reason to listen—i.e., to find something out or to vote for the one they like best. The notion of gap again.
- Not quite to the point.
- The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. The author raises concerns related to engagement and motivation in the primary classroom. This needs rephrasing to clarify the high level of skill needed by a trained primary teacher in designing tasks which are both open ended and engaging.
- The second point about fun and enjoyment is key!
- This definition focuses on task characteristics that are often not part of a definition: repetition, enjoyment, technology mediated tasks, different interests depending on context.

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	0	0
2	38	6
3	56	9
4 Agree	6	1
NA	0	0

Note. NA = not applicable.

### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- I agree with the comments, although this definition also has key points.
- My main problem with this definition is that it does not include the notion of communicative gap.
- I also think some of this is tangential to the *definition* of a task.
- Is an activity that does motivate/cause fun now a task? For a start what motivates one child my not motivate another so we will arrive a definition that makes an activity a task for one learner but not another. This is not helpful. The issue of what a task is should be separate from whether the activity is motivating. Of course, we would hope that a task is motivating!
- Some good points mentioned in this definition but no reference to “gap” or “outcome.”
- There is a lot that I like about this definition. It addresses most aspects and gives some good examples. Whereas preparing a short monologue for display might not be considered a task by some, it all depends on the context and framing. There needs to be a clear reason, purpose why students engage in this, and a real audience for it. I like the reviewer’s comment that a task might be accomplished in teacher–class interaction. Having a good example of a task in all the types of participation structures might be a nice addition to a definition.
- As previously, I find that this definition accurately describes age-appropriate primary practice. I’m unsure why we need to describe such practice as “tasks” rather than “activities.”
- This looks more like a description of classroom activities for young children rather than “tasks” in a strict sense.
- Some important features of a task are mentioned, but others not clearly (e.g., gap, outcome), while there is emphasis on issues such as repetition, which is not a fundamental requirement of a task.

### **Definition 9**

For me Rod Ellis 4 conditions of task is most useful: 1. A task involves a primary focus on meaning. 2. A task has some kind of “gap.” 3. The participants choose the linguistic and non-linguistic resources needed to complete the task. 4. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome.

Average (Round 2): 3.13

Average (Round 3): 2.60

### *Comments (Round 2)*

- A useful definition, but I would have liked to read more about the writer’s voice/perspective and how this relates specifically to young learners.
- Says it all — and as true for YL as any others. Again, I would undertake a Needs Analysis before choosing or designing tasks to meet their needs.
- Maybe what is needed is a discussion of Ellis’s four criteria. For example, what exactly does “primary focus on meaning” entail? Ellis has also suggested that what is important is a focus on understanding/producing pragmatic meaning (i.e., a speech act) rather than just semantic meaning (i.e., deciding which word from a choice of four best completes an utterance).
- Of course I agree that those are the basic criteria that most teachers/researchers would agree with, but, as was the case with previous definitions, the author of this one did not seem to have primary school children in mind.
- I agree. Maybe a bit more specific for YL?

- I agree, but how these conditions could be applied to a task for young learners is not explained.
- I agree with these characteristics, assuming that it concerns tasks in the context of language learning. I do feel that this “bare bones” definition lacks recognition of the all-important role of the learner (and the need to consider the learner and their characteristics in relation to the task).
- I’ve seen meaningful tasks with no gap.
- Item 2 of this definition needs elaboration for readers unfamiliar with the field of TBLT. Referring simply to a “gap” is meaningless! Ellis’s definition takes no account of the primary classroom.
- I think a more specific way of defining the primary classroom task would be useful.
- I don’t think this can easily apply to YLLs, as I explained regarding Definition 5.
- So, does this definition imply that there are no differences between tasks for adults and young learners? Does not explicitly say so.
- This definition does not explicitly say whether task definitions for adults and young learners should be the same. It applied that they should?
- No comment. Textbook definition.

#### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- The key question is if we want to regurgitate what hotshots have stated or we want to come up with something meaningful for teachers of YLs.
- This is just a repetition of Ellis’s well-known criteria. The definition should have been adjusted to young learners’ needs.
- I agree with this, but also that it does require some inclusion in reference to YL.
- Too reliant on one perspective (“textbook definition”). I agree with the comment that I would have liked to read more about the writer’s voice/perspective and how this relates specifically to young learners. Also, as commented, to what extent does Ellis’s definition take account of the primary classroom?
- Yes, this focuses on what a task is and can serve as a starting point for the next question — what is a good task? I do not think that needs analysis should be mentioned in any definition of a task. Needs analysis may be needed in some situations to decide what tasks to include in a program, but it is not central to the definition of a task.
- Textbook definition, but we want to go beyond that or be more specific for YLLs.
- Absolutely meaningless in relation to what happens in the primary classroom!
- This is a generic definition of a task but it would benefit from due consideration of the young learner context.
- I think relevance for learners as a key element of a task is missing here.
- This sums up Ellis’s key characteristics, but the definition is probably too succinct to be easily accessible. It also misses a focus on learners.

#### **Definition 10**

A task is a meaning-oriented pedagogical activity with which learners engage to solve a problem and achieve a goal. There are 5 criteria: 1) A task is meaning-oriented, but not form-focused. 2) A task must encourage learners to use their L2 or FL (foreign language) to complete. 3) To achieve 2), a task must involve a “gap” for the learners to fill, such as an information gap or a reasoning gap. 4) There must be a non-linguistic outcome based on which learner performance is assessed. 5) There must be some real-world relevance to the task which encourages transferrable skills.

**Average (Round 2): 3.13**

**Average (Round 3): 2.81**

#### *Comments (Round 2)*

- A useful definition of a task for young learners that takes good account of key concepts informing the task-based literature.
- Agree with all but it can be form focused, just not forms focused. Comments as per above, needs of learners should be the antecedent to choosing or designing tasks.

- Criterion 2 is not specific to a “language task.” It would apply to a fill-in-the-blanks exercise. And we are back to the problem of what we mean by “real-world relevance.” I wonder too about whether all language tasks have nonlinguistic outcomes? What about a jigsaw task where the outcome is putting a story together? The outcome is clearly linguistic.
- One more definition which clearly takes into account the main characteristics of a task but has not considered how they would have to be tailored (if so) to the primary school learner.
- Perhaps the fifth point needs to be explained a bit more—what the “real-world relevance” could mean for young learners (particularly in an FL context) when, in most cases, there would not be many anticipated situations where the learners use their L2 in the real world.
- I would perhaps make the modal verb “must” less strong in Point 5. Ideally, this would be the case, but sometimes the real-world mapping may be somewhat less direct. I would also emphasize that real-world relevance should be seen in relation to the learners and their characteristics.
- Interesting clearly worded response. I would not insist on 3 and 4.
- The author has assumed that the term *task* may only apply to the language classroom. The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. No indication of whether there might be specific design features for tasks in the primary classroom is mentioned.
- Not explicit about whether this is the same or different as opposed to tasks designed for adult learners.
- I agree but this does not state whether tasks in primary/for young learners need to be different or not.
- Again, a textbook definition, although I prefer defining a “gap” as more open and not confine it to information or reasoning gap. See previous Comment 12.

#### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- I agree with the critical comments; not more insightful than many previous ones.
- Textbook definition, not really tailored for young learners.
- The fifth point needs to be explained a bit more in relation to young learners.
- Again I agree, but yes could include differentiation based on age.
- Again focuses on defining what a task is. The comments point to the central confusion in what we are doing, namely defining a task or defining what is a good task for young learners. Perhaps if we had been asked these two questions separately at the start we would avoid a lot of confusion.
- I like this definition and do think it delineates tasks from activities, if we take all criteria into account. Gap can be defined in a more inclusive and extensive way.
- Again, it appears that the term *task* is synonymous with *activities*. It is unclear why we need to call activities tasks! There is also no reference to ensuring that activities/tasks are age appropriate. For the primary classroom, this is particularly important.
- A comprehensive definition but again one lacks specific mention of the young learner context.
- Again, relevance for learners is missing.

#### **Definition 11**

A task is a goal-, product- and process-oriented way of teaching a foreign language with a meaningful communicative outcome. The task demands and potentials need to be transparent for learners and these goals must be differentiated through scaffolding (e.g. on the level of content complexity and linguistic complexity). Leading up to a target task and based on backward and competence-oriented planning, a workplan might include activities that foster skills and strategies needed to complete the target task or smaller tasks that invite learners to practice certain aspects in an integrative way.

Average (Round 2): 2.75

Average (Round 3): 2.13

#### *Comments (Round 2)*

- A focus on some aspects that I would consider core (e.g., meaningful communicative outcome), but could have been elaborated.



- This is succinct and clear, and encapsulates key aspects — but authentic/real-life language use seems to be overlooked, again as are learner needs.
- I do not see that this definition would help us to decide whether an activity is or is not a “task.” It confates “task-as-workplan” and implementation and it mistakenly equates a task with “target task.” It raises one interesting point — namely whether “activities that foster skills and strategies needed to complete a task” should also count as tasks.
- The definition is clear and complete but has not been tailored to the primary school, as requested.
- I agree with these principles but feel that it would be difficult to design a task for young learners based on this conceptual definition.
- I appreciate the focus on meaningfulness and communicative outcome in this definition. It does seem to look at task from a teaching angle, perhaps more than from a learning angle. I missed the highlighting of elements such as solving a gap/addressing an issue.
- Incomplete — no mention of focus on meaning.
- Unclear wording of many things.
- The author has assumed that the term *task* may only apply to the language classroom. The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. No indication of whether there might be specific design features for tasks in the primary classroom is mentioned.
- This definition sounds great but I think it is too general.
- This makes sense but I am not sure how to interpret the second sentence exactly. How will goals be differentiated through scaffolding?
- I don’t fully understand the second sentence. How will the goals be differentiated through scaffolding?
- A nice, well-structured definition. I would like to add a real-world purpose to the “meaningful communicative outcome.”

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	19	3
2	50	8
3	19	3
4 Agree	6	1
NA	6	1

Note. NA = not applicable.

#### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- I wish I could understand what this sophisticated wording means to say.
- The definition is clear and almost complete but has not been tailored to the primary school, as requested.
- Very conceptual and not specific enough to design a task for young learners
- A bit too general perhaps, need to talk about gap and “real-world” reference. Also requires reference to YL.
- As one commentator said, a focus on some aspects that I would consider core (e.g., meaningful communicative outcome), but could have been elaborated.
- Far too vague — does not help us decide what is a task and what isn’t.
- This definition is incomplete in my opinion. The distinction between target tasks and smaller tasks or activities is not clear. What is meant by a workplan here?
- A nice definition that focuses on some aspects overlooked in other definition: scaffolding, backwards design, and pedagogical tasks as building blocks. However, it lacks some other key concepts: motivation, gap, real-world purpose.
- As “a way of teaching,” this definition has many limitations for the primary FL classroom. Most significantly is the lack of any acknowledgment that activities in the primary classroom need to be engaging and, in some way, enjoyable. A class of 30 plus children is unlikely to be motivated unless these factors are present.

- The definition could be improved if the author takes the young learner characteristics, the gap that motivates language use, and the real-world relevance into consideration. I am afraid the distinction between a task and a conventional activities in the language classroom has been slightly overlooked.
- Relevance for learners is missing.

**Definition 12**

Hence, the task is an activity that consists of instructions and input and a certain output or deliverable. Sometimes the instructions are the input, but sometimes these are two separate things. An output is the learners’ response, something they produce, whether through body movement, speech, writing, coloring, matching, etc.—a reaction to the instructions/input. A task in primary school needs to be scaffolded—but I consider that to be “outside” the task, a part of language teaching methodology.

Average (Round 2): 2.47

Average (Round 3): 1.88

*Comments (Round 2)*

- A focus on some aspects that I would consider core—input/output/scaffolded—but could have been elaborated.
- Quite narrow and meaning should be emphasized.
- This definition seems to focus on “task” as a generic instructional activity rather than on “language task” as in the first two definitions. I am not entirely surprised as the initial question was unclear on this point.
- I find this definition too general. It is true that in the second part the author refers to the primary school setting but I think issues related to a task being motivating, engaging, challenging, age appropriate, etc. have not been included when they are crucial for that educational stage.
- The definition captures most of the essence of a task, but it could be enhanced by adding to it the “gap” that requires SL [second language] or FL use, a focus on meaning, and a real-world relevance.
- The definition does not mention “meaningfulness.” Memorizing a skit and acting a role-play, for example, could fall into this definition, but I don’t really think it is a “task.”
- I find this definition too broad. It could also apply to things such as exercises, performances, projects, ...
- Too little focus on task process.
- I’m not sure I can understand what is outside the task. Meaning-focused is a key term, it is missing.
- The author does not clarify whether there is a distinction between an activity and a task. The author does not clarify whether the term *task* is applicable in the wider primary curriculum. A clear emphasis on meaningful activities is missing.
- The output should be language related, for example, a drawing that can be explained.
- Perhaps an element more specific to primary classroom should be added.
- I agree with some of this but I think the difference between tasks and exercises is not quite clear when it comes to the examples. A matching activity might not be a task?
- In my opinion, this is a very limited language-driven definition of a task which focuses solely on input and output. I miss a focus on “real-world,” meaningful purposes, motivation, and cognitive/linguistic challenge.

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	19	3
2	75	12
3	6	1
4 Agree	0	0
NA	0	0

Note. NA = not applicable.

*Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- Comments make sense; not a very good definition.

- I find this definition too general. It is true that in the second part the author refers to the primary school setting but I think issues related to a task being motivating, engaging, challenging, age appropriate, etc. have not been included when they are crucial for that educational stage.
- The four or five criteria that other definitions include are all missing.
- Meaning focus and real-world focus are both missing. The activities are YL ones, but the “how” in relation to age is missing.
- Again, far too vague. But the author of this definition does make the important point about distinguishing what a task is from how it performed (i.e., methodology).
- I think that there are important criteria that are missing here (focus on meaning, gap). The idea of scaffolding is not “outside” the task in my opinion — it relates to the criterion that learners need to be able to rely on their own linguistic resources to complete the task.
- A very limited definition of task with a strong focus on input and output, without mentioning the interaction the task should give rise to. Does not distinguish a task from a language-related activity.
- Given the importance of attention to differentiation in the primary classroom, the requirement for scaffolding is likely to depend on the needs of individual learners. It’s useful to see a few examples of learner response which specifically relate to primary classrooms but I would like to see a stronger focus on meaningful activities for young children.
- I am afraid this definition is too broad and could mean many things in the classroom — even some of the “exercises” that are commonly found in L2 teaching.
- Meaning focus is missing; not sure what outside the task means.
- Quite general definition, focusing too much on input and output.

### Definition 13

Firstly, it has to be acknowledged that this term has taken on a specific meaning for some, working within the field of applied linguistics under the auspices of the movement towards Communicative Language Teaching Approaches (CLT). The theoretical frame was influenced by the early seminal work Prabhu in Bangalore, Southern India. Since then, the concept has been adapted to mean many things to many people! For me, taking the term more broadly in its applicability to the primary classroom, I see the potential for applying this term to any activity (in any area of the curriculum) which children might engage in - individually, in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class. In planning such an activity the teacher is likely to have an outline structure in mind, with a desired outcome(s). The task might be relatively fluid in design, or carefully structured with interim stages leading towards the completion of the task. In the design of such tasks, increasing opportunities for autonomy may be built-in as learners become more familiar with the concept of a task and gain confidence in taking ownership of both the design and desired outcome(s). Overall, I question whether there is a distinct difference in meaning between the terms “activity” and “task” in the primary classroom.

Average (Round 2): 2.38

Average (Round 3): 1.75

### Comments (Round 2)

- I found this definition to be too broad, but it does raise the issue of whether we are supposed to be talking about tasks in general or language learning tasks. I am focusing my responses on what I would perceive to be important for young learners’ language acquisition, but perhaps my responses should be on a broader definition.
- At a very general level this is OK, but there is a conflation of the concept of activities and tasks and I believe the term *task* is quite specific. CLT was the predecessor of TBLT and could involve exercises as much as tasks—so this definition just seems very dated and too general.
- I am very sympathetic to his response. One way of answering the question we were set is to see it as a request to define a “task” generically and if this is what was intended then this is a good definition. What this answer to the question pinpoints is the need to consider “task” as a generic construct and as a “language task” in task-based language teaching. Of course the generic definition does not really take us anywhere.
- The author clearly knows the literature! I think s/he has captured the essence [*sic.*] of what I believe a task for the primary school classroom should be. I like the idea that increasing opportunities for autonomy should be built into

the design of the tasks. Of course, debating whether the terms *activity* and *task* are or are not different is beyond the scope of the definition.

- I feel the definition is a little general to actually design a task for young learners.
- There are several aspects of this definition which I appreciate, such as being activity based, engaging, outcome oriented. Overall, I find this definition rather general, and I miss things such as being meaning focused and solving a gap.
- No clear differentiation between task and activity.
- This is a definition of an activity and not a task within the context of TBLT.
- This respondent took the task more like a test.
- Possibly, an activity may be ongoing, with no definitive ending, whereas a task may have a specified ending/outcome.
- I think that if we use the terms *task* and *activity* interchangeably, it is difficult to find characteristics of tasks. *Activity* would be an umbrella term for me.
- I think the primary classroom task definition should be specific to FL learning and teaching because these processes are different from teaching and learning other school subjects.
- I don't understand how autonomy can be built in (though sounds attractive). This describes the process rather than the actual task per se.
- This is more about the process rather than the definition?
- Although I agree with the middle paragraph, I do believe there is a distinction between an activity (language practice focus) and task (real-world focus).

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	38	6
2	50	8
3	13	2
4 Agree	0	0
NA	0	0

Note. NA = not applicable.

#### *Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- Someone has really put effort into showing a good understanding of the literature. How all this is age related is not clear.
- This “definition” reads like an answer to an exam and there is no clear distinction between task and activity.
- Too general.
- Too general and too dated.
- Too broad. Hard to relate back to language learning tasks.
- For too general—we could not use this to decide what is and what is not a task.
- I believe that there is a need to distinguish between a task and an activity.
- This description contains some interesting reflections on task but does not define it very well and does not enable a distinction between activity and task. I like the idea of autonomy, but that concept is more important to syllabus design than to the design of individual tasks.
- This is not a definition of task. Rather, it is a comment aiming to illustrate why there appears to be an attempt to label some/all primary language activities as “tasks.”
- I could understand why the author put it this way but I am sorry to say this is not the definition of a task as it conflates a task and activity.
- I don't think this is really a definition, for me it is too broad a description of different activities.

#### **Definition 14**

I notice that the term “language” is not used here. So it would seem that the meaning that you are trying to capture is the non-specialist meaning of task. In which case, I would say that a task is something that you give students to do, which has an outcome. The outcome will determine the completion of the task.

Average (Round 2): 2.25

Average (Round 3): 1.44

#### Comments (Round 2)

- I found this definition to be too short to provide any meaningful articulation of what a task should be, although the concept of “outcome” is included in the definition. Interestingly, the writer questions the context (is this about language?)—something that was also unclear to me when I did the first round.
- Strictly speaking this is true, but in terms of language learning tasks this argument is circular [*sic.*] and overlooks the meaning focus and the “gap” of tasks as above the needs of the learners. This could be applied to “exercises,” and they are not tasks!
- Well, here we are again—the problem with the question we were set. But I do not agree this can constitute a definition of a task as, for example, the definition would include “copying a dialogue,” which most surely is not a task.
- The author is clearly providing a very basic definition of a task because he himself/she herself considers that s/he was asked to provide the nonspecialist meaning of a task.
- I still think the definition is about a language learning task for young learners, by default ...
- I find this definition too broad. It could also apply to things such as exercises, performances, projects, any kind of instruction. I do appreciate the focus on an outcome.
- This defines a task but not a language task in the context of TBLT.
- This definition is fine; respondent is trying to avoid a trap in task of giving a definition.
- Since the initial question referred to the YL classroom, some reference to this should be included in the definition.
- It is not only something that you give students to do—they should be part of the process of negotiating the task (e.g., what the outcome or the topic is).
- I think a more specific way of defining the primary classroom task would be useful.
- I find this too brief. Give something to the students to do with any outcome?
- This a very brief. Anything you give with any outcome?
- I would qualify outcome here as a nonlinguistic outcome. I don’t think there needs to be a difference between a specialist and a nonspecialist meaning of *task*. As Long pointed out, looking at a task from the perspective of an applied linguist might “corrupt” (my word choice) your idea of what a task is.

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	63	10
2	31	5
3	6	1
4 Agree	0	0
NA	0	0

Note. NA = not applicable.

#### Additional Comments (Round 3)

- Not about YLs and their new language.
- Too brief. It has not been provided with YLs in mind.
- It is a very basic definition which needs more specific criteria.
- This does not really define *tasks* as I understand the word in a TBLT context and it does not reflect age differences.
- As one person has commented, I found this definition to be too short to provide any meaningful articulation of what a task should be, although the concept of “outcome” is included in the definition.
- Too vague.
- This is OK for the definition of a task—but not for the definition of a language task. The problem here is that it was not clear which we were asked to define.
- Too basic a description of a task.



- Since the original question did not refer to “a language task,” this definition is on the right lines. However, some clarification of the context is still needed—i.e., the primary classroom.
- This is a bit too broad a definition that overlooks several key aspects of a task such as a focus on meaning, information gaps, and some sort of real-world relevance.
- I think this is not enough, not every outcome relates to a task.

### Definition 15

I do not think one needs a definition that is specific to the primary school classroom. An activity is or is not a task irrespective of the context in which it is used although of course the content of a task will be context specific.

Average (Round 2): 1.92

Average (Round 3): 1.14

### Comments (Round 2)

- I found this definition to be too short to provide any meaningful articulation of what a task should be.
- I agree in principle, but the primary elements of a task as per Ellis (2003) should be encapsulated (in my opinion).
- Yes, why were we asked to define a “task for the primary school classroom”? Is it necessary to do this? Will we need a different definition of a “task” for the primary classroom and other classrooms?
- If I understand correctly, the author means that the core characteristics of a task are the same no matter the context. I partially agree because I do believe that young learners are a different type of population for which engaging and motivating activities should be a must.
- Author seems to miss the concept of TBLT/TBLL. No clear differentiation between task and activity.
- I agree with this point. However, it does not provide a definition of a task.
- Our task was to define *task*.
- While this does serve as an introductory definition, the TESOL/TEFL world has developed a tendency for over-labeling and -packaging pedagogical concepts—often for the purposes of marketing “a method.” As a minimum, therefore, I think at least some distinction needs to be drawn between tasks used in the primary and the secondary school classroom.
- I would agree with the aspect that characteristics of tasks do not depend on the age of the learners. However, I am not sure of what is meant by context here.
- I think there is a need for a definition of tasks specific to the primary school FL classroom. Many aspects of early FL learning and teaching have for decades been understood and researched unproductively because important differences related to learner age were not taken into consideration.
- The simplicity is attractive but I think the brief has been to try and think what might be different about young learners and the contexts where they operate?
- At a basic level I agree, but I thought that we were asked to consider what might be said about the younger learner and their context, if anything.
- The author makes a valid point. A task definition would probably be context independent. However, as previous definitions have shown, describing the context helps understand what tasks can look like in a particular context.

Value	Percentage	<i>n</i>
1 Disagree	75	12
2	13	2
3	0	0
4 Agree	0	0
NA	13	2

Note. NA = not applicable.

*Additional Comments (Round 3)*

- How is this a definition of *task*?
- We were requested to provide a definition of tasks for the primary school classroom. Research has shown that findings from studies within TBLT with adult participants cannot be uncritically extended to the YLLs.
- This is not a definition of a task.
- I do not feel as if I could do anything meaningful with that definition.
- This response was not intended to be a definition and the comments seem to recognize the fundamental problem is what we are doing — defining a task or describing what would be a good task for young learners.
- Too brief to be helpful.
- The author has a point, but some contextualization is needed for YLLs.
- Given the very different nature of learning in the primary classroom (as opposed to secondary or tertiary), I think some clarification of the ways in which an activity/task may differ in this context [is needed].
- I don't totally disagree with the author in fact. However, this is not a definition of a task but a response to whether we need a definition.
- Again, no real definition.

**Definition 16**

An activity: something children do as a pedagogical step towards learning or practicing something. It has a clear description of what children are expected to do, how, with whom, using what, and what the outcome is.

Average (Round 2): 1.75

Average (Round 3): 1.38

*Comments (Round 2)*

- I found this definition to be too short to provide any meaningful articulation of what a task should be, although the concept of 'outcome' is included in the definition.
- This doesn't really encapsulate any characteristics to me.
- Well, this makes just about any instructional activity a 'task'. It is far too vague.
- I did not like this definition because of the inclusion of the 'practicing something' part, which probably took me back to the idea of drilling - the total opposite of what a task should be.
- This seems to be more for a definition of an activity rather than a task.
- It sounds like a mechanical pattern practice could also fall into this definition.
- I find this definition too broad. It could also apply to things such as exercises, performances, projects, ... and any kind of instruction
- Too broad
- This defines an activity but not a task.
- Pretty much to the point.
- This is a clear, simple definition which may be applied to an aspect of the school curriculum for any age group.
- I am not sure what is meant by "a pedagogical step towards learning or practicing something". In my opinion, tasks have a communicative purpose in themselves, doing thing with language, not so much practicing language. There is also an element of choice involved, so there would not always be a clear description of what and with whom to do - although task instructions are obviously important.
- I think a more specific way of defining the primary classroom task would be useful.
- This may be too brief. Not sure what a pedagogic step is. If a learner is drilling a set of words with a partner, is that a task? An activity?
- I am not sure what the pedagogic step is. If a learner is drilling words with a partner to learn them, is that a task?
- In TBLT, pedagogical tasks are stepping stones to a target tasks, but, nevertheless, they should be tasks (and not mere activities). Activities that clarify what children are expected to do, how, with whom, using what, and what the outcome is, are probably tasks. However, only if they do not focus on practicing vocab or grammar.

*Additional Comments (Round 3)*

Looks too short compared to other more detailed definitions.

- This author describes an activity, not a task.
- The definition seems to include even a mechanical drill, which I believe, is not a task.
- This is not a definition of a task.
- Outcome is there, but otherwise I feel this gives me very little to work on by way of understanding what a (language use) task might be for the primary classroom.
- Far too vague
- I think that it is important to differentiate a task from an activity.
- I agree with the fact that a task needs to have a clear description of what children are expected to do, how, with whom, using what, and what the outcome is. However, this is not yet a clear definition of a task.
- It would be useful to add something to clarify how activities/tasks may differ in the primary classroom.
- Unfortunately, this definition lacks key elements of a task that most task researchers would stick to.
- For me, this would be the definition of an activity, not a task. It is too vague.

### Appendix D: Coding Scheme

1. General characteristics of a task
  - a. Goal or outcome
  - b. Use of learners' linguistic resources
  - c. Meaning orientation
  - d. Gap
  - e. Relationship to "real life"/authenticity
  - f. Opportunities for differentiation
2. Characteristics of YLs
  - a. Learners' age; cognitive and affective development (e.g., attention span, working memory)
  - b. Young learners' particular interests
  - c. Young learners' needs (e.g., fun, playful enjoyment, physical movement)
  - d. Potentially low language proficiency
3. Task implementation
  - a. Method (individual, pair, group work)
  - b. Role of the teacher
  - c. Task repetition
  - d. Curriculum/materials
  - e. Needs analysis

## Appendix E: Content-Analytic Summary Table

Participant	Authenticity as things we do in real life	Authenticity as relevance and meaningfulness	Situational vs. interactional authenticity	Authenticity as a cultural construct	Imagination/ make-believe	Engagement
1	<p>"I think an authentic task for primary school students would be those that they are likely to do, or they are doing in their daily life."</p> <p>"And secondly, I'm using Long's task definition. We have different, like Rod Ellis has four criteria for a task, but in Long's 2015 book, he defines task as things we do in daily life. Very simple. But then, what are the things that children would do at that primary school age? OK, so should be the primary consideration in terms of authenticity."</p>	<p>"Authenticity, in other words, in my understanding, is ... 'real world relevance' ... but relevance is a matter of degree. So we need to think how high the relevance is for it to be called 'authentic.'"</p> <p>"Difficulty in clearly demarcating a difference between meaningful and authenticity"</p> <p>"Meaning versus form meaningful, or whether the question is about how meaningful a task is for children. If it is the latter, then I would say ... what I can think about maybe two aspects. One is, the task is meaningful for children means it makes sense to the children. You make sense to the children. Maybe I have to clarify myself? What makes sense to children is they can understand that task."</p> <p>"There should be some interesting element there to ensure some degree of task engagement, otherwise it's not meaningful."</p> <p>"I like your idea. You said an authentic task should be meaningful, right. But a meaningful task may not be authentic."</p>		<p>"Authenticity is also a cultural and contextual context because what is authentic to Chinese children may not be authentic to American children or Japanese children."</p>	<p>"For younger children I think imaginary or not so real lives are actually more interesting to them, and that connects to our next question about meaningfulness ... I think to some extent figurative or imaginary tasks may even be more real life than real life."</p>	

Participant	Authenticity as things we do in real life	Authenticity as relevance and meaningfulness	Situational vs. interactional authenticity	Authenticity as a cultural construct	Imagination/ make-believe	Engagement
2	<p>“An important point like with what are things we do in daily life for that age for that young age, because there are things like, OK, so you step out, you brush your teeth. No language required there. But you go out you go to a shop, if it’s a clothing shop or a comic bookstore, or whatever you kind of browse through these materials, you might engage in the conversation about it. Those are all real-life things that children do.”</p>	<p>“I like the idea of the relevance, and it is a graded scale, right, like the authenticity.”</p> <p>“Probably an authentic task is probably meaningful. I’m not sure if every meaningful task is authentic ... But it’s very difficult to delineate, to demark from each other exactly.”</p> <p>“I was looking at your questions this morning just before, and I was like this is something deep to think about in a very deep way. This meaningful it’s full of meaning. But what is then? What are we referring to as meaning? Is it just like the linguistic aspect that an activity or a task is focused on meaning and not on form? So that it’s you kind of like delineated from ... you know it’s not focus is not on language in itself. To talk about language, to talk about form. There is meaning to it. So we talk about something that is meaningful. So it’s full of meaning— meaning in the linguistic sense compared to form versus its meaning-full. And I think that actually ties in with your relevance, ... it’s meaningful, so it’s relevant to children to talk about this and give meaning to it. But I feel I’m trapped here in semantic differences which are very difficult to disentangle.”</p>	<p>“I often fall back on Bachman like the difference between situational and interactional authenticity just to kind of have a little bit of a grasp on it.”</p> <p>“The situational authenticity is, you know, this is really 100% authentic. This is what they’re going to do in the outside world. But we also know that the outside world is not fully reproducible in a classroom. So, we are creating simulations. And I feel like these simulations need to be authentic. That at least there has to be this connection to the real world. There has to be the connection to what children or children of a particular age experience as ‘this is what I do in my daily life’ or ‘what I could do in my daily life.’ And I’m using authentic materials in the sense that these are things that students of a particular age read about, write about, talk about, listen to. I and although I feel still it’s a very difficult concept to pin down.”</p>	<p>“Authenticity is making that real-world or external and internal real-world connection to children’s lives in their own specific cultural context.”</p>	<p>“Children also have this imaginary world. They have this world where they play, where they read books, they kind of like, lose themselves in stories, they come up with these role-plays whatever they play store, they play school, and all of that also provides a very fruitful ground to think about tasks that connect to that real or imaginary world of children. And we can ask them we can tap into that. I think there is a disconnect where we leave the authenticity is when we school or pedagogize the materials too much we kind of like. We’ve turned them into pedagogical materials for again language teaching, and learning purposes, and that’s where they lose that connection that Long always talks about it, are the things that we do in real life.”</p> <p>“The big point is that children could be able to get in play in imagination and actual in real world. I think that’s an important addition to the authenticity, to recognize this is something that motivates children that they feel is very relevant to them.”</p>	



Participant	Authenticity as things we do in real life	Authenticity as relevance and meaningfulness	Situational vs. interactional authenticity	Authenticity as a cultural construct	Imagination/ make-believe	Engagement
3	“Authenticity, in the first place, is that you can imagine a setting or a context in which somebody might be doing that kind of task and it also tends to imply that the person is engaged in some sort of action.”	“And I guess there’s also with authentic tasks, there’s also some sort of purpose to it. So it’s not just about doing it for the sake of doing it or doing it for purely the sake of yeah, some sort of educational exercise. But there is some sort of broader relevance to it.” “In the majority of cases I thought meaningfulness and authenticity go together. But then I thought, perhaps in some cases there is a slight difference, but it’s very hard to think about when there is that difference. I think something sometimes something could be perhaps meaningful for instructional purpose but not necessarily authentic. And so, perhaps, though those are the cases where there is a distinction.”	“There might also be different dimensions to authenticity ... authenticity in terms of the setting of a task and in terms of the interaction levels of a task in terms of who they engage with what the topic is.”			“And it also tends to imply that the person is engaged in some sort of action.” “Enjoyment and authenticity ... I’m not sure these are the same, or one is part of the other; but I think these might be variables that correlate or interact with one another, and I don’t know it might in some cases be more than correlating, and might be sort of a cause–effect relationship in some situations even. But I would think, they might sometimes go together or influence each other.”
4	“Has to be kind of related to what you do in in the real world”	“For me authentic is actually meaningful but it’s hard for me to distinguish it.”				
5			“Not only the content is what is important to consider the task authentic, but also what it asks you to do. So this interactional thing, which I find rather important to complete the picture of not only what but also how and, of course, why?”		“Suspension of disbelief is very important when we deal with young learners.”	“So that learners want to do it because they think it’s good, it’s important and we feel it when we see that learners are engaged.” “You just see that they are engaged because it’s authentic for them.” “Engagement to me would be kind of proof that something is meaningful, authentic, and relevant.”

Participant	Authenticity as things we do in real life	Authenticity as relevance and meaningfulness	Situational vs. interactional authenticity	Authenticity as a cultural construct	Imagination/ make-believe	Engagement
6		<p>“A meaningful task for me is something that does relate concretely to the experiences of the particular people who are completing that task.”</p> <p>“I’m not really convinced of meaningful and authentic, as necessarily synonymous.”</p> <p>“If you’re doing something that’s authentic, then implicit in that is that it’s meaningful. But you may be doing something that’s meaningful, but you know, doesn’t necessarily represent something that is situationally authentic, for example.”</p>	<p>“My own take on authenticity and tasks is influenced by Lyle Bachman’s argument in the language testing literature where he differentiates between two types of authenticity. So, he talks about situational authenticity and interactional authenticity.”</p> <p>“Situational authenticity is where you’re trying to replicate within the task or within the assessment task something that might be related to what goes on in the target language use domain or in the real world ... And then there’s interactional authenticity where the task itself doesn’t have to replicate an authentic scenario, but draws on the type of interactional language and skills and strategies that somebody might use to be able to maintain an interaction.”</p>			

*Note.* We did not include a column for challenges regarding the identification of real-life tasks for primary school students given that these references were all embedded in the quotations featured in the column labeled “Authenticity as things we do in real life.”

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