



## **Grammar Instruction through Task-Based Language Teaching: Pakistani EFL Teachers' Cognitions and Practices**

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### **Abstract**

The research and implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Pakistan remain relatively unexplored, with the approach neither explicitly favoured nor rejected by language teachers and institutions. To gain insights into teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and pedagogical practices regarding TBLT, this study investigates the cognitions and practices of English language teachers in grammar instruction through TBLT at the undergraduate level in Pakistani universities. A qualitative research approach was adopted, involving 20 English language teachers from five public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and stimulus recall discussions. The results indicate that while most teachers claimed familiarity with TBLT—primarily based on conceptual understanding rather than formal training—a smaller subset of teachers (n=6) with English literature background exhibited limited comprehension of the approach. Despite this, the majority expressed support for integrating TBLT into Pakistani English language classrooms, albeit with an awareness of contextual challenges. Many participants perceived TBLT as a meaning-focused approach, potentially unsuitable for explicit grammar instruction. Moreover, a significant discrepancy was noted between teachers' stated beliefs and their observed classroom practices, with only two teachers demonstrating partial implementation of TBLT. The findings highlight a prevailing ambiguity among teachers regarding TBLT. Based on these insights, the study recommends comprehensive teacher training to facilitate the effective integration of TBLT in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Language teaching in higher education, language teacher cognition, grammar teaching practices, task-based language teaching

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## Introduction

Over the past few decades, researchers have delved into the underlying beliefs and cognitive processes, referred to as cognition, which impact teachers' instructional decisions. Various studies (e.g., Baker, 2014; Chinda & Hinkelman, 2023; Nassaji et al., 2023) have explored teacher cognition across different language domains, including pronunciation teaching, vocabulary instruction, language assessment, and corrective feedback. However, there is limited research on teacher cognition related to teaching grammar through task-based language teaching (TBLT). Furthermore, the pursuit of effective English language teaching (ELT) methodologies in Pakistan, where little emphasis is given to modern language teaching methods, makes this phenomenon more intriguing.

One of the primary objectives of ELT in Pakistan is to equip learners with the ability to communicate effectively in the country's non-native English environment. Historically, the GTM has dominated classroom practices; however, there has been a recent shift towards more communicative methods, especially at the university level where teachers have significant autonomy in teaching and assessment (Akram, 2017). This results in diverse ELT practices, with pedagogies often blending traditional methods with communicative approaches. It is worth noting the absence of consensus on any single method, as teacher preferences and practices vary depending on factors such as university requirements, assessment formats, class size, available resources, and more importantly their own language learning experiences (Ahmed & Mahmood, 2024). While some teachers diligently adhere to predefined course outlines, which often lack specific teaching process guidance, others work with minimal structure, relying only on broad course objectives (Bashiruddin & Qayyum, 2014).

On the other hand, the last two decades have witnessed a global shift in second language research and pedagogy towards TBLT. However, effectively implementing TBLT presents challenges, for instance, a lack of task-based textbooks, limited teacher training opportunities, large class sizes, and curriculum constraints (Liu & Ren, 2021). These limitations are also evident in Pakistani university English language classrooms. Additionally, existing research on TBLT in Pakistan primarily focuses on comparing its effectiveness to traditional methods in improving student outcomes (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2017). While some studies explore teacher perceptions of TBLT utilisation (e.g., Ullah et al., 2020), they lack an in-depth analysis of the broader context. Therefore, a research gap remains in areas such as teachers' understanding of TBLT

and the perceived opportunities and challenges associated with its implementation.

To address this gap, this study investigates the cognitions and practices of Pakistani university EFL teachers regarding grammar instruction through TBLT, employing classroom observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews. It explores teachers' perceptions of TBLT's potential for undergraduate English language instruction, analyses the factors influencing their decisions to adopt or reject TBLT practices, and examines the alignment between their cognitions and actual classroom practices.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Foundations of Task-based Language Teaching

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), also known as task-based instruction (TBI), has emerged as a prominent methodology in recent years (Chen & Wang, 2019). Grounded in communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, TBLT emphasises engaging students in meaningful tasks that utilise the target language (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 2003). The primary focus of TBLT is on fostering fluency in the target language, and assessments often prioritise *task* completion over isolated grammatical accuracy (Skehan, 1998; Hashemi, 2012). The definition of “task” in TBLT has been a subject of ongoing scholarly discussion (e.g., Ellis, 2018b, p. 23; Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Long, 2015; Nunan, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007). For instance, Nunan (2004) distinguishes between pedagogical tasks, which are classroom activities designed to foster student comprehension and production, and target tasks, which refer to real-world activities that may not necessarily involve language use (pp. 1-16). Ellis (2003, p. 2; Ellis et al., 2020, pp. 9-17) offers a more comprehensive definition of a task, highlighting four key characteristics. The task a) prioritises conveying meaning effectively in the target language, b) inherently includes a gap, such as information, reasoning, or opinion, that students must bridge through communication, c) itself provides the linguistic resources students need for completion, d) concludes in a non-linguistic outcome, such as a product or a solution.

TBLT positions the teacher as a facilitator, primarily observing and guiding students as they complete the task, intervening only when necessary (Niemeier, 2017). This student-centred approach stands in contrast to traditional methods where the teacher plays a more directive role. Furthermore, the syllabus in TBLT serves as a flexible framework rather than a rigid structure. For instance, Ellis et al. (2020) emphasise that

the syllabus is an “operational construct,” providing teachers with options to tailor tasks to their specific instructional contexts (p. 175).

Emphasising the importance of TBLT, Long (2015) identifies several criteria for a successful language learning approach, including theoretical grounding, accountability, relevance, learner-centeredness, and functionality. Furthermore, he argues that TBLT is widely considered to possess all these characteristics (p. 14). While TBLT has received some criticism (e.g., Seedhouse, 2005; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005; Widdowson, 2003), many researchers (e.g., East, 2021; East, 2017b; Ellis, 2018a; Long, 2015; Willis & Willis, 2007) laud its effectiveness in engaging learners in real-life language use. However, East (2017a) cautions about a potential gap between the theoretical underpinnings of TBLT and its practical implementation in classrooms. Additionally, as noted by Liu and Ren (2021), the philosophical foundation of TBLT lies in social constructivism, which views knowledge as constructed by individuals within a social context (p. 3). Furthermore, TBLT aligns with experiential learning principles by offering learners autonomy, a contrast to some traditional pedagogical methodologies (Kolb, 2015). This student-centred approach, where the teacher acts as a facilitator and monitor, fosters a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Despite having a positive attitude, teachers generally lack an in-depth understanding of TBLT, which is a less explored phenomenon, particularly in the Pakistani context (Ahmed & Mahmood, 2024). Therefore, this research attempts to address a gap in the existing literature by examining the cognition of English language teachers regarding TBLT in the Pakistani context.

### **Language Teacher Cognition**

Language teacher cognition (LTC) encompasses personal aspects of language teachers, such as knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, feelings, emotions, attitudes, and thoughts, which significantly influence their instructional practices (Borg, 2019, p. 192). In recent decades, the exploration of LTC has gained significant momentum, focusing primarily on understanding teachers' beliefs about teaching various language elements such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (e.g., Baker, 2014; Chinda & Hinkelman, 2023; Nassaji et al., 2023). However, Borg (2019) posits that LTC is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors, including personal, social, cultural, and historical aspects. He argues that most LTC research concentrates on teachers' cognitive processes while neglecting the broader contextual considerations that significantly shape teacher cognition (pp. 192-194).

Key areas of LTC research, as categorised by Gabillon (2013), include beliefs and classroom practices, beliefs about the teaching profession, beliefs about innovation, the nature of beliefs, and differences in beliefs. Despite its advancements, LTC research faces several challenges, such as the absence of standardised terminology, small sample sizes, and a narrow focus. Van den Branden (2016) argues that teacher plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of TBLT. He claims that the teacher gives life to TBLT, which signifies the importance of LTC in TBLT. Several studies (e.g., Barnard & Viet 2010; Costa, 2016; Tajeddin & Mansouri, 2024; Ullah et al., 2020) explored this area, highlighting the significance of teacher cognition in task designing and implementation. Xhaferi and Xhaferi (2013) emphasise the need for teachers to possess a strong understanding of task characteristics and their impact on learning outcomes. Similarly, Erlam (2016) underscores the importance of teacher knowledge about designing tasks. However, research also reveals challenges related to teacher cognition in TBLT. Barnard and Viet's study (2010) points out that teachers lack confidence or experience in implementing task-based approaches, potentially hindering effective classroom practice. Furthermore, Tajeddin and Mansouri (2024) highlight the need for ongoing professional development to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of TBLT effectively.

### **Grammar Instruction**

Grammar instruction can be categorised into two broad types: explicit and implicit instruction. Explicit instruction involves providing learners with clear information about specific grammar rules and how they operate, while implicit instruction does not attempt to make learners consciously aware of what they are supposed to learn (Ellis, 2015; Nassaji, 2017; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Studies (e.g., Baleghizadeh & Derakhshesh, 2017; Cunningham, 1990) that have compared explicit and implicit instruction, including different forms of explicit and implicit feedback, have generally found that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction. Some scholars, such as Doughty (2003) and Ellis (2008), have raised concerns about the validity of these research findings on language acquisition. They argue that these studies rely too heavily on explicit knowledge tests, which measure declarative knowledge, as the primary means of evaluating language proficiency. For instance, many of the studies included in Norris and Ortega's (2001) meta-analysis predominantly used explicit knowledge tests rather than assessments of spontaneous language use. The scholars note that almost 90% of the

studies employed non-communicative, discrete point, or metalinguistic tests to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional methods.

Long's (1991) distinction between focus on form (FonF) and focus on forms (FonFs) represents another widely acknowledged categorisation that has profoundly influenced our understanding of grammar instruction. FonFs entails the conventional method of language instruction, which is structured around dissecting language into discrete components and presenting them to learners in an isolated and contextually detached manner (Long et al., 2001; Sheen, 2002; Shintani, 2013). In contrast, FonF directs learners' attention to linguistic structures "as they naturally arise during lessons primarily centred on conveying meaning or communication" (Long, 1991, pp. 45-46). Despite the generally favourable impact of incorporating attention to form within meaning-centred classrooms, studies that directly compared "focus on form" and "focus on forms" instruction did not uncover a significant distinction between the two approaches. For instance, Norris and Ortega (2000) conducted a comprehensive analysis that juxtaposed "focus on form" studies, which incidentally teach linguistic structures within a context primarily focused on meaning, with "focus on forms" studies, which present language forms in isolation, removed from communicative contexts. Their findings indicated that both approaches exhibited similar effectiveness, yielding comparable effect sizes (FonF,  $d = 1.92$ ; FonFs,  $d = 1.47$ ).

The distinction made by Norris and Ortega (2001) between FonF and FonFs studies can be challenging to interpret because most studies categorised as FonF typically involve some form of explicit instruction. Nevertheless, a few more recent studies (e.g., de la Fuente, 2006; Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Shintani, 2013, 2015; Valeo, 2013) have conducted comparisons between these two types of instruction and found no significant differences between them. Interestingly, one significant distinction between traditional language teaching methods and TBLT is their respective focus on forms and form. If there is no significant difference between FonF and FonFs, then why is there so much debate over the use of TBLT? The reasons for advocating TBLT are that it emphasises meaningful communication (Ellis, 2003), focuses on real-world tasks (Nunan, 2004), integrates various language skills (Willis & Willis, 2007), is more learner-centred (Skehan, 1998), prioritises task completion over accuracy (Skehan, 1996), is flexible and adaptable in different contexts (Ellis et al., 2020), possesses strong theoretical foundations (Long, 2015), and evaluates task performance as an assessment practice (Long & Norris, 2000).

## English Language Teaching Practices in Pakistan

English has maintained its dominance in Pakistan since the country's inception, to the extent that researchers now commonly refer to it as ESL. However, it remains debatable whether English should be classified as an ESL or EFL in the country (e.g., Ahmad & Lanfeng, 2024; Jeevan et al., 2023). Students begin learning English as a second language (L2) from their early education in Pakistan; however, many undergraduate students appear to be incompetent in the English language – despite studying it for 11 to 12 years during their school education – especially those who have limited exposure to English in their environment (Baumgardner, 1990). In some regions of Pakistan, students commonly use their regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, etc., and learn Urdu as a second language, making English their third language in such cases. Most of these students lack proficiency in all four major English language skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Akram, 2017; Warsi, 2004). This indicates that the teaching of the English language in Pakistan at the secondary level does not yield the desired results. Generally, the primary source of learning English is the classroom, where English is predominantly taught through GTM (Nawab, 2012). Students memorise essays, stories, and letters. Only a handful of private schools provide a conducive environment for English language learning (Shahid, et al., 2022).

All of this makes it very challenging for university teachers to enhance students' English language skills, especially considering that students possess very little basic knowledge of English. Consequently, teachers face numerous issues, including the implementation of advanced approaches in their English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. Despite some initiatives taken by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, n.d.), little significant change has been noticed in English language teaching practices in the country. Irfan et al. (2022) reveal that the curriculum of English language in Pakistani universities is designed without the need and situation analyses and also lacks materials and program evaluation. ELT practices vary significantly among teachers, who generally adhere to course outlines for teaching content and assessing students' learning based on institutional policy. Similarly, Yasmin et al. (2019) find that, despite some teachers' awareness of innovative ideas of language learning such as self-directed learning, teachers are unable to implement such practices in their classrooms due to educational, socio-political, psychological, and cultural issues such as extra workload, outdated curriculum, lack of resources, motivation, confidence, and a sense of responsibility, among others. Similarly, Manan et al. (2017) argue that English teaching practices

in Pakistan are contrary to what is assumed and anticipated. Some other studies (e.g., Arif et al., 2021) also highlight the shortcomings of ELT practices in Pakistani higher education institutions. Among various factors contributing to these prevailing practices, teacher cognition is important, as researchers (e.g., Borg, 2006, 2019; Johnson, 2006; Li, 2019) argue that teacher cognition, generally shaped by their education and experiences, directly influences their actions in English language classes. Therefore, this study aims to understand teacher cognition regarding the TBLT method, with a specific focus on grammar instruction as English language teaching in Pakistan is predominantly centred around grammar instruction.

### **Background of this Study**

Most Pakistani university English language teachers hold an MPhil degree in English literature or linguistics, while a few possess an MPhil degree in ELT or TESOL. However, despite their prior educational specialisation in English, teaching predominantly occurs more traditionally. Generally, there are three English language courses at the undergraduate level recommended by the HEC: Functional English, Communication Skills, and Technical and Business Writing. Teachers deliver these courses based on their own teaching and learning exposure and their interpretation of the course outlines. Since the course outlines lack extensive details regarding teaching methodology, teachers often determine the approach and method of teaching themselves. Consequently, as the names of the courses suggest, these courses are taught using a mixed approach according to their contents. Sometimes, teachers focus on grammar instruction, while at other times, they emphasise oral proficiency using direct methods. There is little consensus among teachers regarding the teaching methods for these courses; furthermore, there is a notable lack of awareness among teachers of modern teaching methods such as TBLT (Zada, 2018). Although teachers may not be well-versed in the philosophy of TBLT, they may possess some basic knowledge of the TBLT framework due to a recent shift towards communicative teaching approaches at the university level. Moreover, there was some emphasis on improving English language teaching capacity by the HEC between 2004 and 2013 (Zaidi et al., 2020). Therefore, it would be interesting to explore the teacher cognition, mainly, their knowledge, beliefs, and attitude towards TBLT and assess how closely their practices align with TBLT principles while teaching grammar.

### **Research Questions**

The study specifically focuses on the following research questions:



1. What are the Pakistani teachers' cognitions about TBLT as a language teaching pedagogy?
2. How do teachers perceive using TBLT for teaching grammar to undergraduate students at Pakistani universities?
3. How do their teaching practices interact with their cognitions?

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The study achieves set objectives through qualitative research methodology. Since the objectives of the study were to know the teachers' cognitions and their practices about task-based language teaching and see how their practices are aligned with their practices, the researchers collected data in the form of classroom observation and interviews. Our selection of teacher participants employed a purposive sampling strategy, aiming for diversity in data and specifically focusing on institutional context. We recruited teachers from five universities within Lahore, encompassing both public and private sectors. The public sector institutions included the University of the Punjab and the University of Education. Private universities were represented by the University of Central Punjab, the University of Management and Technology, and Riphah International University. We sought informed consent from 25 teachers, ultimately obtaining participation from 20. Classroom observations of these 20 teachers were conducted to examine their practices in action, followed by interviews to explore their cognitions regarding TBLT. Considering the dynamic nature of cognition, we intentionally included teachers with varying experience levels, ranging from 2 to 15 years. The participants were teaching English language courses at the undergraduate level at the aforementioned universities. Furthermore, the respondents comprised an equal number of male (n=10) and female (n=10) participants. These educators held advanced degrees, including MPhil or MS degrees in English Literature (n=5), Linguistics (n=8), Applied Linguistics (n=4), and ELT/TESOL (n=2), as well as a PhD in Applied Linguistics (n=1). Notably, none of these teachers had participated in task-based language teaching (TBLT) training or studied any courses on TBLT.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection was conducted in two stages. First, classroom observations were employed to gather evidence on teachers' practices in task-based language teaching. These observations occurred in natural classroom settings, with the first author as a non-participant observer (Dörnyei,

2007). A semi-structured approach was used, combining elements of both structured and unstructured observation techniques (Cohen et al., 2007). To minimise observer reactivity, extended observation periods of at least one hour were implemented. Additionally, we assured teacher anonymity by providing only minimal information about the observed aspects to preserve natural teaching behaviours. Teachers were provided with minimal information about the observed aspects and were encouraged to conduct their lessons as they typically would. Additionally, they were assured of their anonymity. While live video recording would have been ideal for further mitigating reactivity, contextual limitations prevented its use. However, audio recordings of all observed lessons were captured using a mobile phone. Field notes were concurrently taken to supplement the audio data, as not all classroom interactions could be fully captured through audio alone. Pictures of material presentations and other teaching activities were also collected. Each teacher participant was observed once, with an average observation duration of 50 to 65 minutes.

The other data collection method employed was semi-structured interviews. Interviews were of two types: interviews on teacher cognitions about TBLT and stimulated recall discussions (Sanchez & Grimshaw, 2019) about observed practices. This approach aimed to avoid obtaining predetermined responses lacking depth and breadth in the participants' narratives (Dörnyei, 2007). The structured component of the interviews incorporated questions adapted and modified from Nishimuro and Borg (2013). The interview began by gathering background information from the teachers, including their prior English language learning experiences at the university level. The subsequent section focused on three key areas: teachers' general beliefs regarding TBLT, contextual factors influencing their practices, and any perceived discrepancies between their beliefs and their actual teaching methods. Later, stimulated recall interviews served as another data collection tool. These interviews were conducted concurrently with other interviews and scheduled shortly after classroom observations to maximise recall accuracy. While minimal prompts were required due to the recent observations, three main sources were utilised to stimulate participants' cognitive processes: audio recordings, classroom pictures, and field notes.

The data from observations and interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed into text using Microsoft Word's dictator and Otter.ai, a voice-to-text converter, ensuring transcription accuracy. The transcriptions were then analysed following general steps proposed by researchers (e.g., Clarke & Braun, 2017; Griffee, 2012). First, the data were grouped according to the research objectives. Next, codes were

defined, and themes were analysed using these codes with the help of MAXQDA 24 software. The major themes analysed included teachers' knowledge and beliefs about task-based language teaching (TBLT), the implementation of TBLT in Pakistani university ELT classrooms, the use or avoidance of TBLT by participants, and discrepancies between beliefs and practices.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Teachers' Understanding of TBLT**

The data analysis indicates that most teachers possess some level of understanding of task-based language teaching (TBLT), regardless of their educational background—whether an MPhil in English Literature, Linguistics, or Applied Linguistics. However, those with a degree in Applied Linguistics or ELT demonstrate a relatively better grasp of TBLT concepts, although their number is as low as two teachers. Additionally, in the Pakistani context, an MPhil degree in Literature and Linguistics—held by 18 out of 20 teachers in this study—has little focus on language teaching methodology. This is one of the obvious reasons why most teachers do not possess an in-depth knowledge of TBLT. Therefore, the data reveal that many teachers attempted to infer its meaning from the term itself, and some claimed they had heard of it but did not possess a detailed understanding.

Most teachers perceived TBLT as a language teaching method that engages students in performing tasks and expressed a positive attitude towards it, aligning with the findings of Liu et al. (2021) in the Chinese context. Nonetheless, their understanding of TBLT was superficial, showing minimal alignment with the theoretical and empirical discussions found in Ellis and Shintani (2013), Long (2015), Nunan (2006), and Willis and Willis (2007). For instance, most teachers (n=14) praised TBLT without providing a detailed description of tasks and the process of implementing them. Many conflated task-supported and task-based language teaching, indicating that while they are familiar with the term, they lack a thorough understanding of its principles (cf. Zada, 2018).

Teachers defined tasks as any activity conducted in English, such as carrying out interviews or giving presentations. However, they were uncertain whether these tasks were real-life scenarios or fabricated exercises typically used in communicative classroom teaching. Some teachers (n=7) consider traditional activities such as fill-in-the-blank exercises in grammar books as L2 tasks. This uncertainty indicates their limited understanding of the distinction between pedagogic tasks and real-

life tasks (e.g., Ellis, 2018b, p. 13). Similarly, approximately eight teachers perceived that TBLT prioritises function over form compared to traditional methods. In other words, these teachers advocated for a focus on meaning (FoM) rather than form, disregarding form-focused instruction, also indicated in Ahmed and Mahmood (2024). However, Ellis et al. (2020) argue that while methodological differences exist regarding the “focus on form”, there is a growing consensus on the importance of attending to form, even as meaning remains the primary focus (p. 17). This notion is supported by Heydarzadeh et al. (2018), who compared FoF and FoM, finding FoF to be more effective. For instance, Rafia states:

Most linguists focus on the functions of language rather than its structure, so task-based language teaching is one of the methods that help students perform specific functions. It essentially represents an advanced form of the communicative approach, wherein students are assigned tasks to complete using language. Therefore, I prefer this approach because it is innovative and effective.

Additionally, teachers' responses suggest a perception of TBLT as similar to the direct method (cf. Naik, 2013). Consequently, when advocating for TBLT, they often contrasted it with traditional methods like the Grammar-Translation Method. Considering other pedagogical aspects of TBLT, some teachers ( $n \approx 6$ ) also expressed that TBLT fosters collaboration among students by engaging them in collective tasks. This aligns with one of the methodological principles suggested by Long (2015). Additionally, a few respondents view TBLT as a student-centred approach, a perspective supported by Ellis et al. (2020). Moreover, these teachers consider TBLT appropriate in the Pakistani context. As Tehseen asserts, “Since English language communication can be found in real Pakistani contexts, engaging students in communicative tasks is beneficial.” Such findings suggest that a small group of teachers have some understanding of TBLT; however, it is rarely practised. For instance, classroom observations revealed that only two teachers implemented a partial TBLT approach, primarily focusing on writing skills for grammar instruction. A majority ( $n=11$ ) adhered to traditional methods, while seven teachers employed the PPP method (Table 1). These findings underscore a significant discrepancy between teachers' professed beliefs about TBLT and their actual classroom practices.

Table 1 *Overview of Participants' Teaching Practices*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>More Detail</b>	<b>% of the Use of L1</b>
Intizar	Active and passive	Traditional method	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	90
Shakir	Subject-verb agreement	Traditional method	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	80
Suhail	Conjunction	PPP	Skill integration, exercises, focus on language	10
Faiza	Parts of a sentence	PPP	Focus on forms, terminology	40
Tayaba	Parts of speech	Traditional method	Skill integration, exercises, focus on language	10
Aadil	Subject-verb agreement	Traditional method	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	10
Rafia	Sentence structure	Traditional method	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	90
Uzma	Subject-verb agreement	Traditional method	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	90
Zainab	Punctuation	PPP	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	40
Tehseen	Parallelism	Traditional method	Focus on forms,	60

Sheraz	Parts of a sentence	Traditional method	exercises, terminology Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	50
Ali	Writing - general grammar	TBLT	Focus on skills, implicit grammar teaching,	50
Ishfaq	Parts of speech	Traditional method	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	60
Khan	Writing - general grammar	TBLT	Skill integration, exercises, focus on language	10
Janhzeb	Parts of a sentence	Traditional method	Focus on forms, terminology	50
Shabana	Writing - general grammar	PPP	Skill integration, exercises, focus on language	10
Sidra	Tenses	PPP	Focus on forms, exercises, terminology	80
Mustafa	Parallel structure	PPP	Skill integration, exercises, focus on language	80

In conclusion, it can be argued that while teachers in Pakistani universities are aware of TBLT as a modern teaching pedagogy, they lack a comprehensive understanding of its principles and applications. Their

understanding of TBLT is somewhat superficial and not necessarily grounded in research or practice.

### **Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Instruction Through TBLT**

One primary objective of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of TBLT for grammar instruction, given the predominant focus on grammar in Pakistani English language teaching. While most teachers viewed TBLT as suitable for oral communication, they generally preferred traditional methods for grammar. These findings align with previous research (e.g., Ali & Ali, 2018). However, a minority recognised TBLT's potential for grammar instruction, consistent with Yildiz and Senel (2017).

Regarding grammar teaching methods, explicit instruction was favoured by most, with a smaller group supporting task-based approaches. As Long (2015) emphasises, differentiating between FonF and FonFs is crucial for distinguishing TBLT from traditional methods. However, most teachers (n≈14) exhibited a limited understanding of this distinction, mirroring Sharif's (2021, pp. 14-15) findings on teachers' uncertainty about "what to teach" and "how to teach". A few teachers demonstrated a grasp of implicit grammar teaching, integrating grammar into communicative activities. Nevertheless, the majority's practices aligned closely with traditional, FonFs approaches.

For instance, Adil's teaching exhibited a PPP structure, despite his expressed support for a different approach during the interview.

Although my understanding of FonF and FonFs is not entirely clear, I believe that teaching grammar implicitly through integration with communicative tasks, such as writing an email using specific grammatical structures, can be more effective. This approach is preferable to teaching parts of speech, clauses, and phrases in isolation, without incorporating them into meaningful communicative activities.

Teachers (n=14) consistently prioritised grammatical components like parts of speech, punctuation, phrases, and clauses as the foundation for their grammar lessons. Their instructional approach typically involved initial explicit teaching followed by reinforcement through practice activities. When further queried about instructional methodologies, teachers emphasised the role of exercises in student engagement. These exercises were commonly administered in class or as homework (cf. Akram, 2017, p. 13). For example, Suhail advocated for the use of grammar exercises, stating:

A general practice at our university is that I rely on grammar exercises sourced from reputable international grammar books, such as “Oxford Practice English Grammar” by John Eastwood. Additionally, I generally present grammar to the students as it is generally presented in these books. I believe that to increase students’ grammar knowledge and proficiency, they should be made to practice grammar exercises found in such grammar resources. Moreover, it is also useful to explore online platforms to access additional exercises.

Teachers expressed varied approaches to assessing grammar knowledge. While some favoured traditional methods such as multiple-choice exercises, which also aligned with their regular assessment practices, others advocated for using writing tasks for grammar assessment. The emphasis on teaching grammatical terminology, supported by nearly 15 teachers, often correlated with assessment practices. For instance, Sheraz believes:

Yes, it is very much important because they are students of language. So, while assessing the language, they must be able to know the functions of different words. I believe that they should not memorise, but rather have a clear understanding of all of it.

Assessing terminology and forms in isolation is easier, especially when class sizes are larger, a common challenge in implementing TBLT in the Asian context, as highlighted by Ji (2017, p. 158).

### **Teachers’ Cognitions about Implementing TBLT for Grammar Instruction**

Most teachers (n=12) appear optimistic about the possibility and necessity of implementing TBLT for grammar instruction at Pakistani universities. This perspective is also supported by several studies (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2021; Rashid, 2017; Tahir, 2023), which suggest that TBLT can be effectively implemented at various levels to teach English in the Pakistani context. However, while most teachers agree on the potential for implementing TBLT, some exhibited uncertainties about its practical implementation. For instance, despite scholarly debates on the issue, some believe that TBLT prohibits the use of the mother tongue (L1), which may complicate task-based language learning activities in the Pakistani context. Ellis et al. (2020) argue that whether L1 should be used or avoided in TBLT classes is debatable. Similarly, Hung (2012) suggests that L1 can be utilised in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, provided it does not impede the L2 learning process.



Furthermore, many teachers perceive opportunities for implementing TBLT in their English language classes. They believe there is a natural space for adopting a language teaching method, as it is common among teachers to adhere to specific methods for effective English language instruction. However, they also acknowledge the potential challenges in implementing TBLT. For instance, Tayaba expressed:

I believe that teachers never rely solely on one method and often incorporate multiple methods in their classroom teaching. TBLT can indeed be effectively implemented by assigning different tasks to students in every class, thereby emphasizing the practical application of language skills similar to real-life contexts. Despite the availability of sufficient time and flexibility in the classroom environment, implementing such approaches can be challenging at times, particularly due to large class sizes.

Despite expressing enthusiasm for TBLT implementation in Pakistani universities, most teachers (n=13) identified several challenges. Large class size, as discussed above, a prevalent issue in the Asian context (Ji, 2017; Mushtaq, 2023), emerged as a significant obstacle. While the average undergraduate class size is around 40 to 60 students, private universities often enroll even larger cohorts, particularly in programs like DPT and BSCS. Insufficient classroom facilities, as highlighted by Sumaira, further compounded these difficulties. For instance, most of the public sector universities lack modern resources in language classes, for instance, internet, multimedia, heater or air conditioner, etc. Moreover, a lack of teacher training in TBLT posed an additional barrier to its widespread adoption.

### **Reasons for Using or Avoiding TBLT**

Many teachers claimed to incorporate elements of TBLT into their grammar instruction, expressing readiness to implement it whenever feasible. However, a notable discrepancy emerged between teachers' perceptions of TBLT and its actual implementation. Teachers often equated any assigned task or assignment with TBLT, demonstrating a misconception about the approach. This perception is widespread among teachers and highlights a common gap between TBLT theory and practice (Bygate, 2020). Despite the widespread use of tasks and assignments, classroom observations revealed a significant discrepancy between these activities and authentic TBLT tasks. Consequently, the observed teaching practices could not be classified as TBLT.

Despite divergent interpretations of TBLT among teachers and researchers, some teachers believe that they implement TBLT for reasons

such as (a) its focus not solely on forms, unlike traditional teaching methodologies. For example, Uzma responded:

One of the dilemmas in Pakistan is that students may understand the mechanics of the language, such as grammatical rules, but they struggle with the practical application of language skills in communicative activities. For instance, while students may know that they need to add an "S" with a singular subject in the present indefinite tense, they often encounter difficulties when it comes to engaging in communicative tasks.

Similarly, (b) a few also highlighted that TBLT offers a more communicative approach compared to previous methodologies. (c) Some also emphasised that TBLT engages students in active tasks rather than passive reading and writing, aligning closely with the core philosophy of TBLT. (d) Another important aspect discussed by most teachers is that TBLT maintains students' interest and motivates them to learn, which is crucial for L2 learning.

Teachers with a background in literature (n=6) demonstrated limited awareness of TBLT. While they reported involving students in performing tasks, they were uncertain whether these tasks aligned with TBLT principles. This group of teachers did not appear to advocate for TBLT, although most agreed on the importance of engaging students in task-based activities. This may be due to their limited familiarity with TBLT.

It can be noted that teachers employ TBLT based on their individual cognitions and understanding of the approach. Additionally, it is concluded that teachers who rely on traditional teaching methods may incorporate certain tasks and perceive their teaching as somewhat aligned with TBLT. However, most of them support TBLT as a potential language teaching method in the Pakistani higher education context.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

TBLT is one of the well-researched teaching pedagogies in modern language education and is widely practised for teaching second languages. Given its potential applicability in the Pakistani context, this study aims to investigate teachers' cognitions about TBLT and its utilisation. The findings reveal that teachers possess some understanding of TBLT and perceive the potential for its implementation for grammar instruction at the undergraduate level in Pakistani universities. Despite their somewhat limited understanding, teachers generally endorse the use of TBLT in teaching English language. Therefore, it is implied that teachers may

readily embrace TBLT in their classrooms if provided with adequate training, materials, and support. Based on the study's findings, we recommend that Pakistani universities' management take the initiative in implementing suitable methodologies for English language teaching and organise teacher training programs on methodologies like TBLT. While the Higher Education Commission has previously invested resources in improving English language teaching conditions in Pakistan (Higher Education Commission, n.d.), there has been little focus on adopting appropriate teaching methodologies. Therefore, the study recommends that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) prioritise the adoption of effective teaching methodologies at the university level in Pakistan. Additionally, since this study includes participants solely from Lahore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies incorporating participants from other cities to ensure broader representation.

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## **Appendix**

### ***Interview Protocol and Post-Observation Discussion***

Teachers were generally asked the following types of questions; however, the exact questions varied across teachers depending on their responses to certain questions and observations made in their classes.

#### **Section I: Introduction and Learning Experiences**

##### **1: Background**

- Background Information
- Years of ELT experience
- Educational Background

##### **2: Experience of Learning the English Language**

1. Can you describe your experiences of learning English grammar? How did you learn it: during language studies, your teaching experience, or never learnt?
2. Are you familiar with any theories of second language acquisition (SLA)?
3. What are your perspectives on utilizing tasks to teach grammar to English language learners?

#### **Section II**

##### **3: General Beliefs about Teaching Grammar through Tasks**

1. Do you think grammar instruction is necessary to acquire English?
2. Do you think students should be taught grammar in English courses at the undergraduate level?
3. What is the role of grammar in language teaching?
4. Are you the proponent of teaching grammar explicitly or implicitly focusing more on communicative task completion than on focusing on grammatical forms?
5. Do you follow any particular method of English language teaching?

- a. Which is the most suitable method of language teaching in your opinion?
6. How do you define a “task” in English language teaching?
7. What are your beliefs about integrating grammar instruction within task-based language teaching or task-supported language teaching?
8. Can you discuss specific grammar tasks you use in your ELT classes?
9. What are the benefits of teaching grammar through tasks compared to traditional methods?
10. What challenges have you encountered when implementing grammar tasks in your teaching?
11. Do you perceive TBLT as a potential language teaching approach for teaching English at the undergraduate level in Pakistan?