

Investigating the Effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching: A Comparison of Task-Based and Traditional Methods in Improving Language Skills

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Abstract

This research paper explores whether Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is better than old-school methods like the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and Direct Method for learning languages. By comparing TBLT with these traditional methods, we aim to see which one helps learners improve their language skills more effectively. Using an experimental research approach, we collected data from learners who experienced both TBLT and traditional methods. We used tests to measure language skills before and after the experimentation and gathered feedback from learners. Results show that although TBLT is more helpful in improving speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills compared to traditional methods, there is still a need to use methods like GTM depending on the learners' context. TBLT involves interactive tasks that encourage real communication, making learning more engaging and independent. Traditional methods, on the other hand, focus more on memorization and rules. This study suggests that TBLT is a more efficient approach to learning languages, emphasizing the importance of practical, learner-centered methods in language education. However, sometimes it is better to use an eclectic approach to cater to the students' required needs. Depending on the context and available resources, combining several different teaching methods or an eclectic way is the best strategy for maximum efficacy.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), Direct Method, Language learning, Language teaching methods, Experimental Research, Learner-centered Approach, Eclectic Approach

Introduction

Language teaching methodologies have evolved significantly over the years, reflecting advancements in pedagogical theory, and shifting educational paradigms. This research explores the notion that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a prominent approach, offering a departure from traditional methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), and the Direct Method. Hence, understanding the distinctions between these methodologies is crucial for analyzing language education practices and optimizing learning outcomes. Before moving on, it is crucial to understand each of the methods mentioned in this research paper.

The experiment worked using the Task-Based Language Teaching TBLT, Grammar Translation Method GTM, and the Direct Method. The Eclectic approach is also significant to be understood.

Task-Based Language Teaching: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a communicative approach to language instruction that emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks to promote language acquisition. Tasks are activities designed to elicit authentic language use, requiring learners to engage in real-life communication scenarios. Unlike traditional methods which often prioritize rote memorization and rule-based learning, TBLT focuses on promoting language fluency and accuracy through meaningful interaction and problem-solving. In contrast, traditional methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and Direct Method represent more conventional approaches to language teaching.

Grammar-Translation Method: The Grammar-Translation Method or GTM emphasizes the memorization of grammar rules and the translation of texts between the target language and the native language, with limited emphasis on communicative competence. Students learn through rote memorization, extensive grammar drills, and translation exercises. The method involves the teacher presenting grammatical explanations, followed by students practicing these rules through written exercises and translations of literary texts. Despite its thorough focus on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary development, it has been criticized for neglecting speaking and listening skills, as well as for being less engaging and motivating for learners. The Grammar-Translation Method's reliance on the native language for explanations and translations often results in limited practical proficiency in the target language.

Direct Method: The Direct Method advocates for direct association of meaning with the target language, bypassing translation, and focusing on oral communication skills. Classes are conducted in L2 or the target language, aiming to make the students learn through reinforcement and

continuous use of the target language. Also known as the “Natural Method”, it emphasizes direct exposure to the target language without using the learner's native language for explanations or translations. In the Direct Method, instruction is conducted entirely in the target language, focusing on everyday vocabulary and conversational phrases. Grammar is taught inductively, with rules inferred through practice rather than explicit instruction. Oral communication skills are prioritized, with a strong emphasis on listening and speaking through interactive activities such as question-answer exchanges, role-playing, and real-life simulations. This method encourages students to think and communicate directly in the target language, promoting natural language acquisition similar to first language learning. Although the Direct Method effectively develops oral proficiency and listening skills, it has been critiqued for its less systematic approach to grammar and writing and can be challenging to implement in larger, mixed-ability classrooms.

Eclectic Approach: The Eclectic Approach to language teaching is a flexible method that combines elements from various language teaching methodologies to create a customized and adaptive learning experience. Unlike rigid, single-method approaches, the eclectic approach allows teachers to draw on techniques and activities from multiple sources, such as the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, Task-Based Language Teaching, and more, tailoring their strategies to the specific needs, goals, and contexts of their students. This approach emphasizes the importance of adapting to different learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and proficiency levels, integrating grammar, vocabulary, communication skills, and cultural awareness in a balanced way. Teachers using the eclectic approach might incorporate grammar drills and translation exercises for structural accuracy, along with conversational practice and real-life simulations to enhance communicative competence. The versatility of this method makes it particularly effective in addressing the diverse challenges and objectives in language education. However, it requires skilled teachers who can thoughtfully select and implement the most appropriate techniques, and its success depends heavily on their ability to blend various methods cohesively and effectively.

As language teaching continues to evolve, educators are increasingly exploring the effectiveness of TBLT compared to traditional methods in promoting language proficiency. This research seeks to contribute to this ongoing dialogue by systematically examining the impact of TBLT on language skills development and comparing it with traditional methodologies. By evaluating the strengths and limitations of each

approach, this study aims to provide insights that inform pedagogical practice and enhance language learning outcomes.

This research aims to thoroughly compare the above-mentioned methods of language teaching and reach a suitable conclusion as to which method would be most appropriate in the modern pedagogical realm of language-related studies.

We have conducted experimental research based on real-life classroom environments where students have been exposed to all the above-mentioned methods of language teaching, and their knowledge of chosen language skills has been tested before and after teaching.

Literature Review

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has gained significant attention in recent years as an effective approach to language instruction. In contrast to traditional teaching methods, TBLT focuses on engaging learners in real-life tasks to facilitate language acquisition. Research has shown that TBLT can enhance learners' communicative competence, vocabulary acquisition, and grammar development (Long, 2015; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2007). Research has shown that TBLT promotes learner autonomy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). TBLT encourages learners to engage in authentic language use, fostering creativity and comprehension (Ellis, 2003). In contrast, GTM and Direct Method focus on grammar rules and language forms, potentially limiting learners' creative expression and comprehension abilities (Krashen, 1981).

Studies have also highlighted the importance of considering learners' individual differences, learning styles, and motivation in language instruction (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Deci & Ryan, 2000). TBLT's flexibility and adaptability make it an effective approach for catering to diverse learner needs (Littlewood, 2004).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) claimed that the goal of language teaching is to develop "Communicative Competence" in learners and pay attention to all four language skills. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 2007). "CLT is best, and many other new methods have been derived from it, CBLT, TBLT, and Competency-Based Language Teaching Brown (2007, p.241) Tasks are the basic and core units of planning and instruction in TBLT (Ellis, 2000) TBLT emphasizes meaningfulness, interaction, cooperation, peer feedback, and natural language use (Nunan, 2001; 2004). Language learning is dynamic and non-linear, attention to meaning is crucial for language acquisition, and exposure to authentic situations facilitates language learning (Ellis, 2003;

Lightbown & Spada, 2006). It is recognized as a cognitive approach with the potential to shape the future of language teaching (Johnson, 2001). It aims to promote critical thinking skills and accelerate language learning by immersing learners in content-rich contexts (Stoller, 2002). It is better to learn about something rather than focusing solely on language, using language as a vehicle for learning subject matter (Brinton et al., 1989; Crandall & Tucker, 1990). CBLT integrates language and content instruction and specificity of language in context (Genesee, 1994). TBLT is built on the principles of communicative language teaching, emphasizing learner-centeredness, authenticity, and interaction (Nunan, 1989). By incorporating real-life tasks, TBLT provides learners with opportunities to use language in meaningful contexts, developing their ability to communicate effectively (Brown, 2007).

TBLT also faces challenges, such as the need for careful task design, teacher training, and assessment methods (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015). Moreover, TBLT may not be suitable for all learners, particularly those with limited language proficiency or learning difficulties (Brown, 2007).

In conclusion, the literature suggests that TBLT is a promising approach to language teaching, offering several advantages over traditional methods.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to compare the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with traditional methods including the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and the Direct Method. Participants were selected from language learners enrolled in language courses where both TBLT and traditional methods were implemented. The study included a pre-test to assess baseline language proficiency levels across various skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Following the pre-test, participants engaged in TBLT and traditional method instruction over a set time.

Quantitative data were collected through post-tests administered after the completion of both TBLT and traditional method instruction. These post-tests were designed to measure language proficiency growth and compare the effectiveness of the two instructional approaches. Additionally, qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations and learner feedback surveys to provide insights into learner experiences and perceptions of each method.

Data analysis involved statistical comparison of pre-and post-test scores to determine the extent of language skill improvement in each instructional context. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to

identify patterns and themes related to learner engagement, autonomy, and perceived effectiveness of TBLT versus traditional methods.

This mixed-methods design allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of TBLT on language learning outcomes, combining quantitative measures of proficiency growth with qualitative insights into learner experiences and perceptions.

The details of the study are as follows:

1.1 Study Design:

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods.

1.2 Research Type:

Experimental/Action Research

1.3 Population:

7 and 8 grade students at a well-known private school in Islamabad

1.4 Sample Size:

30 students in each class, a total of 60 students (30 in the TBLT group and 30 in the traditional methods group)

1.5 Sampling Technique:

Random sampling

1.6 Data Collection:

- Pre-test: Administered to assess baseline language proficiency levels
- Post-tests: Administered after TBLT and traditional method instruction to measure language proficiency growth
- Classroom observations: Conducted to gather qualitative data on learner experiences and perceptions
- Learner feedback surveys: Administered to gather qualitative and quantitative data on learner experiences and perceptions

1.7 Data Analysis:

- Quantitative data: Statistical comparison of pre and post-test scores to determine language skill improvement
- Qualitative data: Thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to learner engagement, autonomy, and perceived effectiveness of TBLT versus traditional methods

1.8 Experimental Design:

- TBLT Group/ Group A: Received instruction using the Task-Based Language Teaching approach
- Traditional Methods Group/ Group B: Received instruction using the Grammar-Translation Method and Direct Method

1.9 Duration:

The study lasted for 2 weeks, with 1-2 hours of instruction per day.

1.10 Materials:

- Language learning materials and resources
- Pre-test and post-test assessment tools
- Classroom observation checklist
- Learner feedback survey questionnaire

1.11 Ethical Considerations:

- Informed consent obtained from participants
- Confidentiality and anonymity maintained
- No harm or discomfort caused to participants

Findings/ Results:

This study investigated the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) compared to traditional methods (Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Direct Method) for language acquisition among grade 7 and 8 students. The experimental design involved two groups: Group A (GTM and Direct Method) and Group B (TBLT). Teaching sessions were divided into the following components:

Punctuation: Contrary to expectations, students in Group A demonstrated a better understanding of complex punctuation rules when taught through GTM, with a step-by-step translation into Urdu. Although Group B showed good performance in task-based activities, the GTM approach proved slightly more effective in teaching grammar concepts, as evident from the worksheet assessments. Since punctuation was taught using several rules, GTM proved fruitful and the students learned better by translating these rules into Urdu, and then memorizing them.

Parts of Speech and Literary Devices: Similar results were observed for these grammatical concepts. While TBLT included engaging tasks, students in Group A utilized rote memorization and comparison with Urdu when taught through GTM, leading to greater grammar acquisition. For example, when teaching “noun”, the students were asked to think of “ism” in Urdu and then compare the two. This strategy proved to be more useful

than engaging students in tasks and activities before the concepts had solidified in their minds.

Poetry: The Direct Method and TBLT were used to teach literature, including Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice". Group A applied the Direct Method, writing their understanding of the poem, themes, and rhyme scheme. Group B employed TBLT, reciting the poem aloud, working on oral skills, and then completing worksheets. This involved activities like identifying metaphors, writing verses with the same rhyme scheme, and creating an original poem. Consequently, Group B demonstrated a better grasp of poetic concepts, creative skills, and confidence in their knowledge.

Comprehension Skills: The third part of the experiment focused on comprehension skills. Students read a passage about Lake Baikal and completed tasks accordingly. Group A (Direct Method) explained the passage in English and answered questions. Group B (TBLT) engaged in activities like comparative reading, cultural perspectives, and travel blog writing. These tasks involved finding texts comparing Lake Baikal to other bodies of water, reading, and interpreting literary works inspired by the lake, and imagining a travel blog visit to Lake Baikal.

Overall, these findings suggest that while TBLT showed promise in certain areas, the traditional methods (GTM and Direct Method) were more effective in teaching grammar concepts and punctuation. However, TBLT excelled in promoting creative skills, confidence, and comprehension abilities, particularly in the poetry and comprehension tasks. The best solution was to combine all three methods to ensure the best student learning.

Teachers' Feedback: Apart from recording results through our own teaching experiment, we also interviewed several English teachers in the school, to receive their feedback.

Questions:

1. Have you been trained to use certain methods and approaches to impart knowledge to your students? If yes, how long was your training period, and how effective did you find it in equipping you with the required skills for this method/approach?
2. How effective do you find this method when teaching? Is the student feedback satisfactory for you? How so?
3. How has your overall experience been as an English language teacher concerning students' language acquisition, proficiency, and general feedback?

4. Are you satisfied with the resources/equipment your institution provides you with, to fulfill your teaching requirements?
5. How autonomous are you as a language teacher and how much freedom is given to you by the institution to teach students creatively?
6. What changes would you like to make if you were given the authority?
7. What would you recommend to future English language teachers regarding the different methods/approaches and their implementation?
8. If you were to use only one method for the rest of your teaching career, which method would you opt for? Why?

Answers:

- Most teachers (50%) favored an eclectic approach. They found it easier to combine several strategies, allowing them to cater to all students' needs effectively. This indicates a recognition of the diverse learning styles and preferences within their classrooms. By adopting an eclectic approach, these teachers aim to create a flexible and inclusive learning environment that addresses various learning needs.
- A significant portion of teachers (30%) favored TBLT. They believed that engaging students in creative tasks led to better language acquisition. This preference highlights an emphasis on active learning and meaningful language use. These teachers prioritized task-oriented activities that simulate real-life language use and promote communicative competence among students.
- A small percentage of teachers (10%) preferred traditional methods. They were accustomed to these methods and found it easier to combine both the target language and the native language to help students understand concepts better. This preference reflects a more conventional approach to language teaching, which may include grammar-translation or audiolingual methods. These teachers value structure and clarity in instruction, utilizing familiar techniques to facilitate learning.
- A minority of teachers (10%) were unaware of any specific approach by its name. Instead, they taught according to the classroom environment and needs. This indicates a pragmatic approach to teaching, where teachers adapt their instructional methods based on situational factors and student requirements. These teachers prioritize responsiveness and flexibility, tailoring their teaching strategies to suit the unique context of each class.

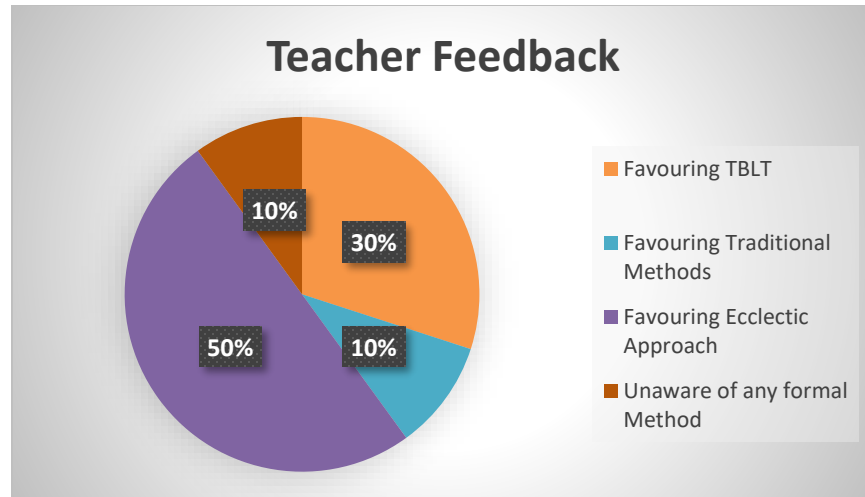


Figure 1: Teacher Feedback

Students' Feedback: We also surveyed the students to record their preferences when it came to learning English via different methods and approaches.

Questions:

1. Have you found this teaching experiment effective? How?
2. Which method did you find the most effective when learning?
3. Did you feel creative autonomy when engaging in classroom and homework tasks?
4. Do you think English should be taught more traditionally or innovatively?
5. Does solving tasks and exercises ignite learning interest in you?
6. Do you find it easier to acquire the target language using your native language?
7. Do you think a combination of different activities and methods should be used when teaching, catering to different needs?

Answers:

- Nearly half of the students (45%) favored an eclectic approach to language learning. They found it easier to learn different concepts in different ways. While they acknowledged the benefits of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) for understanding grammar and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) for learning poetry, they also enjoyed participating in engaging tasks and learning through direct

target language instruction. This preference suggests a recognition of the value of variety and flexibility in the learning process, allowing students to adapt their approach based on the nature of the material.

- A significant portion of students (35%) favored TBLT. They were drawn to engaging in creative tasks, which evoked interest and led to better language acquisition. This finding underscores the importance of active participation and meaningful language use in the learning process. Students who preferred TBLT valued opportunities for authentic communication and hands-on learning experiences.
- A minority of students (15%) favored the GTM. They found it easier to learn English when taught using their native language. This preference suggests a reliance on familiar instructional methods and a preference for explicit grammar instruction. These students may value the clarity and structure provided by the GTM, particularly when grappling with complex grammatical concepts.
- Only a small percentage of students (5%) were in favor of using the Direct Method exclusively. They found motivation in stepping out of their comfort zone and using the target language directly. Additionally, they noted that it boosted their confidence. This preference highlights the importance of immersive language experiences and opportunities for authentic communication. Students who favored the Direct Method valued the chance to practice and develop their language skills in real-life contexts.

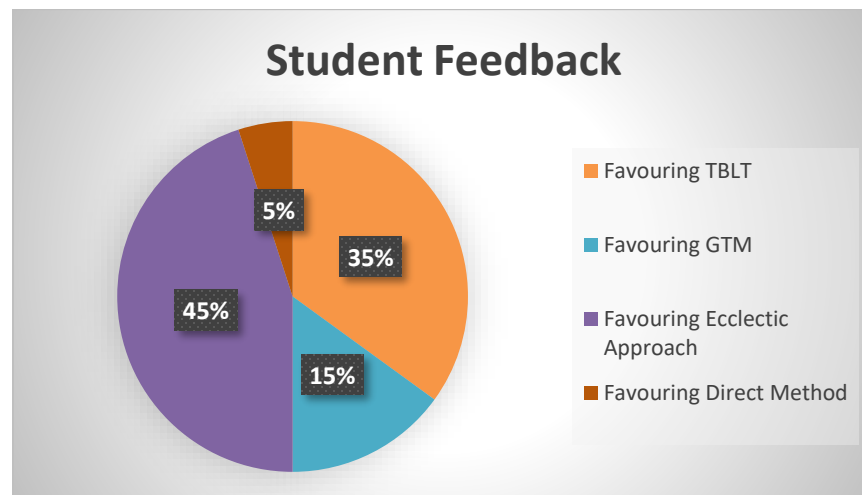


Figure 2: Student Feedback

Classroom Observations:

Observation Area	Criteria	TBLT	Traditional Methods
Classroom Layout	Flexible seating arrangement for group work and interaction	✓	
	Traditional rows or fixed seating		✓
Cleanliness and Organization	The classroom is clean and well-organized	✓	✓
Safety	Safety protocols are in place and followed	✓	✓
Preparation and Organization	The teacher is well-prepared with task-based materials	✓	
Assessment	Use of formative assessment through task performance	✓	
	Use of quizzes, tests, and traditional assessments		✓
Active Participation	High level of student participation in tasks	✓	
	Participation in traditional Q&A and discussions		✓
On-task Behavior	Students stay on-task during task-based activities	✓	
	Students are dependent on the instructor for learning		✓
Collaboration	Frequent student collaboration and group work	✓	
	Limited collaboration, more individual work		✓
Teacher-Student Interaction	Frequent, interactive feedback during tasks	✓	
	Feedback primarily through direct instruction		✓
Student-Student Interaction	High level of student-student interaction and peer feedback	✓	

	Limited student-student interaction		✓
Clarity of Objectives	Objectives linked to real-world tasks	✓	
	Objectives linked to curriculum standards		✓
Feedback	Continuous, formative feedback during tasks	✓	
	Periodic feedback through assessments and corrections		✓

Analysis/Discussion:

Analysis/Discussion: The findings of this study reveal a nuanced picture of the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) compared to traditional methods (Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Direct Method). While TBLT excelled in promoting creative skills, confidence, and comprehension abilities, particularly in the poetry and comprehension tasks, GTM and Direct Method demonstrated superiority in teaching grammar concepts and punctuation.

The results suggest that TBLT is certainly more effective in many areas, such as:

- Fostering creativity and critical thinking
- Encouraging active learning and engagement
- Developing comprehension skills and cultural awareness

However, GTM and Direct Method have their importance when keeping context in mind. Specifically, when teaching grammatical concepts, using the native language of the learners (Urdu, in this case) proved more effective in helping them grasp complexities better. This supports the idea that learners' first language can facilitate second language acquisition.

Additionally, our research highlights the significance of considering available resources and context when selecting a teaching approach. In this study, the traditional methods were more suitable for teaching grammar concepts, while TBLT was more effective for promoting creative skills and comprehension. This suggests that an eclectic approach, which combines elements of different methods, might be the most effective way to cater to the diverse needs of learners.

An eclectic approach allows teachers to adapt their instruction to the specific context, learner needs, and available resources. This flexibility is crucial in language teaching, as learners' needs and abilities vary widely. By incorporating elements of TBLT, GTM, and Direct Method, teachers can create a balanced and comprehensive language program that addresses multiple learning objectives.

Notably, some teachers in this study were unaware of any formal methodology and were using an eclectic approach unknowingly. This highlights the need for better teacher training, awareness, and resources for both students and teachers. By recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of different methods, language teachers can create an optimal learning environment that fosters language acquisition, creativity, and critical thinking. Furthermore, teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of adapting teaching approaches to the specific context and learner needs, rather than relying solely on a single methodology. This will enable teachers to make informed decisions about their teaching practices and create a more effective and inclusive language learning environment.

Conclusion:

This research paper investigated the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) compared to traditional methods (Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Direct Method) in teaching English language skills to grade 7 and 8 students in a private school in Islamabad. The study employed an experimental design, with two groups of students taught using different methods.

The findings suggest that TBLT is more effective in promoting creative skills, confidence, and comprehension abilities, particularly in poetry and comprehension tasks. However, GTM and Direct Method demonstrated superiority in teaching grammar concepts and punctuation, especially when using the native language (Urdu) to facilitate understanding.

This study highlights the importance of considering the learners' context, resources, and needs when selecting a teaching approach. An eclectic approach, which combines elements of TBLT, GTM, and Direct Method, may be the most effective way to cater to the diverse needs of learners. This flexibility is crucial in language teaching, as learners' needs and abilities vary widely.

The results of this study have implications for language teaching practices and teacher training programs. Language teachers should be encouraged to adapt their instruction to the specific context, learner needs,

and available resources. Teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of eclectic approaches and provide teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement them effectively.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the ongoing conversation about language teaching methodologies, emphasizing the need for flexibility, adaptability, and a learner-centered approach. By recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of different methods, language teachers can create an optimal learning environment that fosters language acquisition, creativity, and critical thinking. Ultimately, the goal of language teaching is to empower learners with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Recommendations:

1. Language teachers should be encouraged to use an eclectic approach, combining elements of TBLT, GTM, and Direct Method, to cater to the diverse needs of learners.
2. Teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of adapting instruction to the specific context, learner needs, and available resources.
3. Further research should investigate the effectiveness of eclectic approaches in different language teaching contexts and learner populations.
4. Language teaching practices should prioritize learner-centered approaches, creativity, and critical thinking to prepare learners for success in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.
5. Language teachers should be provided with ongoing professional development opportunities to learn about and implement innovative and evidence-based teaching methods, such as TBLT, to enhance their teaching practices.
6. Educational institutions should allocate sufficient resources and support for language teachers to design and implement task-based language teaching and other learner-centered approaches.
7. Language teaching curricula should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with contemporary language teaching methodologies and learner needs.

8. Assessment and evaluation methods should be reformed to prioritize authentic language use and task-based assessments, rather than solely relying on traditional testing methods.
9. Technology integration should be encouraged to facilitate language teaching and learning, such as using online resources, multimedia materials, and communication tools to enhance task-based language teaching.
10. Collaborative research and partnerships between language teachers, researchers, and educational institutions should be fostered to investigate effective language teaching practices and share best practices.
11. Language teaching should prioritize intercultural competence and global citizenship education to prepare learners for successful communication and collaboration in diverse cultural contexts.
12. Educational policies should support and promote language teaching and learning as an essential component of education, recognizing the critical role of language in shaping learners' futures and societal progress.

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