Chapter 2
Hong Kong Secondary School English Teachers' Beliefs and Their Influence on the Implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract This chapter explores the implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in Hong Kong secondary classrooms, identifying the teaching beliefs held by Hong Kong secondary school English teachers and examining the influence of their beliefs on their implementation of TBLT.

The present study draws curriculum developers' attention to the power of teacher beliefs in implementing a curriculum innovation, which is often neglected when introducing educational changes. It also provides them with practical implications for initiating curriculum innovation of a similar nature in future.

Keywords Teachers' beliefs • Task-based language teaching • Secondary school • Implementation

1 Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) was introduced to Hong Kong secondary school English teachers in the *Syllabus for Secondary Schools English Language (Secondary 1–5 [Years 7–12])* prepared by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) in 1999 and is supposedly now being carried out in English classrooms in Hong Kong secondary schools. Although it has been more than two and a half decades since Prabhu (1987), the founder of TBLT, first advocated the approach in the Bangalore Project, some secondary school English teachers in Hong Kong still consider it new as it involves teaching practices which are very different from those

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they are used to in the oral-structural approach and those they have attempted in communicative language teaching (CLT). The current study reveals the actual implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms and the language teaching beliefs held by Hong Kong secondary school English teachers. It gives insights into the influence of teachers' beliefs concerning the implementation of a curriculum initiative. The mutually dependent relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices suggests that teachers do not simply adopt any curriculum innovations advocated by the Education Bureau, but adapt an innovation in accordance with their teaching beliefs.

2 Tasks and TBLT

The discussion about the intended TBLT below helps readers understand the theoretical framework and the research design of the current study.

2.1 Comparing the Oral-Structural Approach, CLT and TBLT

TBLT is somewhat different from CLT and is very different from the oral-structural approach. The three different English language teaching approaches can be seen to form a continuum, with a focus on memorization and habit formation in language learning at one end and a focus on learning to communicate by communicating at the other end. CLT and TBLT are at the end focusing on learning to use language meaningfully and appropriately through real communication, while the oral-structural approach is at the other end focusing on automatic and accurate control of basic language items and language skills by drilling and memorizing.

In TBLT, the aims are a balanced development towards accuracy, fluency and complexity and an enhancement of learners' communicative effectiveness. There are numerous interpretations and orientations to TBLT. For example, Ellis (2003) proposes task-supported language teaching and task-based language teaching. Nunan (2004) refers to these two approaches as a weak interpretation of TBLT and a strong interpretation of TBLT. In a weak version of TBLT, form-focused work and tasks are the main learning activities. A typical lesson starts with a focus on linguistic elements and controlled practice and ends with a pedagogical task. The teacher takes the role of a facilitator. In a strong version of TBLT, however, tasks are the main learning activities. A typical lesson begins with relevant exposure to the topic and introduction of the task, followed by task completion and presentation, and finishes with language analysis and language practice. The teacher plays different roles at different times.

2.2 Tasks and TBLT in Hong Kong English Language Curriculum Documents

TBLT has, since 1999, been adopted in the Hong Kong English language curriculum by the Hong Kong education authorities as the preferred methodology for English language teaching. It was introduced to secondary school English teachers as a teaching strategy in the *CDC Syllabus for English Language (Secondary 1–5)* (1999). In 2002, it was highlighted again as an approach to learning and teaching in the *CDC English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)*. It will continue to be a major teaching approach or strategy in Hong Kong English language teaching (ELT) and has been stated as such in the *Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4–6)* (2007).

As described in the official curriculum document, the *CDC Syllabus for English Language (Secondary 1–5)* (1999), a task has the following critical features:

1. A task has a communicative purpose.
2. It focuses primarily on meaning.
3. It involves authentic and real-world language use.
4. It has a context from which the purpose for using language emerges.
5. It involves learners in cognitive processes.
6. It results in a product.
7. It requires learners to draw upon their framework of knowledge and skills.
8. It provides opportunities for learners to manipulate specific language features, develop language skills, practise the integrated use of language, acquire language development strategies and use language meaningfully and creatively. (pp. 43–44)

TBLT, according to the official curriculum document, aims at motivating learners to enhance their language proficiency and explore and experiment with the language by completing tasks. Tasks are, therefore, the core units of planning and instruction. Besides tasks, supporting exercises which focus on language items or skills needed for the tasks may be given. In addition, the provision of authentic theme-based instructional materials is recommended. TBLT follows the sequence of pre-task, while-task and post-task, with grammar learning being integrated as necessary at each stage. In TBLT, the teacher mainly takes the role of facilitator while learners play the role of active participants.

The type of TBLT delineated in the official syllabus appears to be a strong version of TBLT (Nunan 2004; Willis 2000). It has the critical features of a strong version of TBLT for the following reasons. First, tasks are the core units of planning and instruction. Second, the structure of a lesson reverses the conventional order – relevant exposure to the topic and introduction of the task, task completion and language analysis and language practice. Third, an English teacher plays different supporting roles at different times in the English classroom.

3 Language Teaching and Language Teachers' Beliefs

Examining the influences of teaching beliefs on teaching practices has become a common theme in recent implementation studies of language teaching.

3.1 Influences of Language Teachers' Beliefs on Language Teaching

There is a consensus among researchers that language teachers' teaching beliefs have a significant impact on their pedagogical practices. Beliefs about literature and language, beliefs about the learning and teaching of literature and language, beliefs about learners and beliefs about teacher roles, all have an impact on language teaching practices, such as goals for instruction, teaching content, choices of activities, instructional approaches and learning materials. The beliefs held by language teachers are generally consistent with their classroom practices (Andrews 2003; Farell and Kun 2008; Farell and Lin 2005; Feryok 2008; Huang et al. 2001; Johnson 1992; Nunan 1992; Phipps 2010; Phipps and Borg 2007; Wang 2006; Wolf and Riordan 1991). In line with prevailing research trends, it is noted that, when studying the implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms, it is essential to focus on the language teaching beliefs of English teachers.

3.2 Teacher Beliefs

Teacher beliefs, in Borg's (2001) view, refer to "teachers' pedagogic beliefs or those beliefs of relevance to an individual's teaching" (p. 187).

Calderhead (1996) proposes five main categories of teacher beliefs: beliefs about learners and learning, beliefs about teaching, beliefs about subject, beliefs about learning to teach and beliefs about self and the teaching role. Beliefs about learning to teach have been excluded from the present study as the focus of the present study is on in-service English teachers who are already qualified teachers. In other words, the present study investigates English teachers' beliefs about the English language, their beliefs about teaching English language, their beliefs about learning English language, their beliefs about the role of English teachers and their beliefs about English learners.

4 Design of the Study

The three research questions of the current study are:

1. What are the language teaching beliefs of Hong Kong secondary school English teachers?

2. How is TBLT implemented in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms?
3. How do the language teaching beliefs held by Hong Kong secondary school English teachers influence their pedagogical practices?

A collective case study was adopted in the current study. Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews, classroom observation and document analysis. Inductive data analysis was conducted so as to identify the language teaching beliefs of Hong Kong English teachers, to reveal how they implemented TBLT and to investigate the influence of the former on the latter.

4.1 Participants

The literature review shows that teachers' experience with formal knowledge, teachers' teaching experience and students' capability affect teachers' beliefs (Richardson 1996). The selection criteria of the participants in the current study were therefore as follows:

1. All ten participants were teaching in secondary schools using English as the medium of instruction.[1]
2. Five of the ten participants were more experienced in English language teaching (10 years or above); the other five were less experienced (3–8 years).
3. Five participants were English majors in their first degree while the other five were non-English majors.

Potential participants were identified from English teachers who the researcher knew personally or through recommendations by gatekeepers such as colleagues or teaching practice supervisors.

The current study, focusing on EMI schools, where students are better in English, gives insights into the actual implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong. It is assumed that, if the implementation level of TBLT in EMI schools was low, it would be much lower in CMI schools. Table 2.1 summarizes the academic background and teaching experience of the ten participants in the current study.

The ten participants' classes ranged from Secondary 1 (Year 7) to Secondary 4 (Year 10). The range of levels was selected with a view to presenting as broad a picture as possible of how TBLT was implemented in different forms in Hong Kong secondary schools.

[1] EMI schools must have at least 85 % of their Secondary 1 (Year 7) intake being able to learn through English. In EMI schools, all subjects are taught in English; hence, students in EMI schools have adequate exposure to authentic English and their English standard is comparatively higher than those in Chinese medium (CMI) schools.

Table 2.1 Participants' academic background and teaching experience (N = 10)

Teaching experience → ↓ Academic background	Less experienced (3–8 years)	More experienced (10 years or above)
An English first degree	2	3
A non-English first degree	3	2

4.2 Data Collection Methods

Interviews, classroom observation and document analysis were employed in the current study. Past studies have shown that these are powerful methods for exploring teachers' teaching beliefs as well as their classroom practices (So 2004; Tam 2005).

For each participant, there were initial interviews, pre-class-visit interviews and post-class-visit interviews. Semi-structured interviews, using general interview guides, were carried out in the current study.

To capture teachers' language teaching beliefs and their classroom practices, passive participation classroom observation was also adopted. For each participant, at least two of their English lessons were observed, with classroom observation focusing on the actual implementation of TBLT in two dimensions:

1. Subject matter (objectives, syllabus and instructional materials)
2. Role or behaviour (learner roles, teacher roles, activity types and structure of a lesson)

In addition to interviews and observation, the current study included document analysis. The researcher in the current study analysed the documents of English Departments, such as year plans, departmental minutes, schemes of work, handouts, worksheets and assignments. The document analysis in the current study aimed to investigate how TBLT is actually being implemented in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms, to infer the language teaching beliefs held by Hong Kong secondary school teachers and to explore how English teachers' language teaching beliefs affect their classroom practices.

4.3 Data Analysis Methods

Inductive data analysis was adopted in the current study (Hatch 2002). The researcher first transcribed the interviews verbatim and converted the interview field notes to protocols. Regarding the classroom observations, the researcher also converted the videotaped data and field note data to protocols. The researcher then read through the transcripts, protocols and documents in order to see what topics tended to recur. Next, the researcher identified the domains and categories and assigned them a code.

The transcripts, the protocols and the documents were subsequently reread and the data supporting the domains and the categories were coded. After that, searches were performed for themes and patterns within domains and across domains. Interrelationships between themes and patterns within and across domains were then determined. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the relationship between themes and patterns, and data excerpts supporting the claims were identified through further reading.

5 Implementation of TBLT and English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs

The researcher in the present study examined Hong Kong secondary school English teachers' teaching practices and investigated their implementation of TBLT. She also explored English *teachers' beliefs and the influence of their teaching beliefs on their teaching practices.*

5.1 Implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong Secondary English Classrooms

The ten English teachers taught in different ways. Their teaching practices might be divided into five types: TBLT, TBLT mainly plus exercises, TBLT plus a weak version of CLT, a weak version of CLT mainly plus TBLT and an oral-structural approach (Table 2.2).

The categorization was based on data collected from classroom observation mainly. Data collected from interviews was used as supporting evidence. As the researcher had asked the English teachers that they continue to teach as usual, the lessons observed were assumed to be typical of the lessons they usually taught.

Table 2.2 Teaching practices of the ten participants

Teaching practice	Case	Teacher
TBLT	1	Miss Gau
	3	Miss Lau
	10	Mr. Chau
TBLT mainly plus exercises	6	Mr. Ting
TBLT plus a weak version of CLT	2	Miss Heung
	5	Miss Keung
	9	Miss Yeung
A weak version of CLT mainly plus TBLT	7	Miss Pun
An oral-structural approach	4	Miss Fong
	8	Miss Wong

In other words, they were representative of their teaching style. To give a clear picture of what each type of teaching practice is, a typical case from each teaching type will now be presented.

5.1.1 TBLT

Three English teachers used TBLT, with Miss Gau one of them. Miss Gau used TBLT in all the three Secondary 4 (Year 10) sessions observed. At the beginning of the session on gender equality, Miss Gau showed a PowerPoint presentation with the pictures of female celebrities and elicited from students that the celebrities are independent and powerful women. She then held a whole-class discussion on the reasons for International Women's Day. Next, she conducted a survey on whether students thought men or women have higher status in Hong Kong. After that, she asked students to discuss three questions in groups about the general differences between men and women, the roles they play in family and gender equality in Hong Kong. Ten minutes later, Miss Gau arranged for a spokesperson from each group to give at least one point for each question. She wrote the points and relevant vocabulary on the blackboard.

The English teachers adopting TBLT taught language items and vocabulary closely related to the tasks and let students explore the tasks themselves. They followed the sequence of input, production and reporting and feedback. They used authentic materials as stimuli. They played different roles at different times, with their main role that of facilitator, while they made their students be active respondents and participants.

5.1.2 TBLT Mainly Plus Exercises

Mr. Ting adopted TBLT most of the class time. The two Secondary 2 (Year 8) sessions observed were on the poem "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout would not take the garbage out" in *Daybook of Critical Reading and Writing*. In the first session, Mr. Ting asked the students, in groups, to give examples of sensory words and literary devices which they had learned in a poem about war. He then requested students to read the poem "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout would not take the garbage out" and write response notes on their own. Next, he told students, in groups, to discuss the literary devices found in the poem and their functions and to draw a picture about the poem. In the second session, Mr. Ting organized a group competition, in which students answered the questions about repetition, rhyming words, sensory words, exaggeration and themes. Subsequently, he asked students to finish drawing a picture about the poem. He informed students that their pictures would be displayed and they would explain their drawings to the class in the coming session.

Mr. Ting's teaching practice could best be described as TBLT mainly with exercises. He made students learn the literary devices and their functions, and the theme of the poem through group discussions and the drawing task. He adopted the sequence of input (revision on literary devices), production (group discussions and drawing) and reporting (picture display and explanation). He acted as a facilitator and a

monitor most of the time and as a language adviser if necessary. His students were active participants in the lessons. Although Mr. Ting's teaching practices were mostly in line with TBLT, the group competition was in the form of a question-and-answer exercise. What Mr. Ting did implies he gives tasks always and exercises occasionally.

5.1.3 TBLT Plus a Weak Version of CLT

Three English teachers adopted TBLT and a weak version of CLT. Miss Heung belonged to this group. The first two Secondary 1 (Year 7) sessions observed were on picture composition on a stray dog following two students home. In the first session, Miss Heung distributed a hand-out with four pictures and briefed students about the group discussion. The students were told to use wh-questions to generate ideas and write down their ideas on a poster. Students then carried out the discussion. In the second half of the session, group leaders presented the ideas for the first picture. In the second session, group leaders told the rest of the story while the rest of the class commented on the stories presented. After that, students referred to the posters and wrote their stories.

The third session observed was on talking about size and weight. The targets of the session were to ask questions about size and weight and to talk about size and weight. The structures "How + adjective + verb-to-be + pronoun?" (e.g. How tall are you?) and "Pronoun + verb-to-be + answer + adjective" (e.g. I am 153 cm tall) were introduced. First, Miss Heung worked out the questions, the answers and the grammar rules with the students on the blackboard. Second, she explained the grammar notes in the hand-out. Third, she told students to complete a questionnaire by using the target structures. Finally, she invited some students to report their findings to the whole class. At the end of the lesson, she assigned several exercises on the target structures in the workbook.

English teachers using TBLT and a weak version of CLT consolidated language functions by assigning tasks. They acted as a monitor, language adviser and facilitator, while their students actively participated, as presenters and commentators. These English teachers, however, sometimes taught grammar explicitly. The lessons were mainly going through the points in the grammar hand-out, leaving very little time for students to complete communicative activities. Even though the students had done the communicative activities satisfactorily, they still assigned exercises in the workbook for students to practise the structures. It appeared that, when these English teachers were teaching sentence patterns, explicit grammar teaching and grammar exercises were dominant, while tasks were subsidiary.

5.1.4 A Weak Version of CLT Mainly with TBLT

Miss Pun adopted a weak version of CLT in the three Secondary 2 sessions observed. She conducted various types of language activities for students to practise and apply the target language items. In the first session, students wrote passive voice sentences

based on a picture of a busy restaurant. They then proofread some sentences with problems related to passive voice on the worksheet. Finally, they created passive voice sentences using the words provided on the worksheet. In the second session, there were three activities. First, students sorted eight pictures into two groups: words with short vowel E and words with long vowel E. They also created an amusing story using words with short vowel E. These learning activities suggest that Miss Pun asked students to do structural activities first and then functional activities, which followed the sequence in a weak version of CLT, from controlled practice to freer practice.

No evidence of TBLT was found in the three sessions observed. Miss Pun's response to the hypothetical situation of teaching a letter of complaint, however, suggested that she does in fact use it in her daily teaching at times.

> Researcher: If you were asked to teach students how to write a letter of complaint, how would you teach?
>
> Miss Pun: First of all, I will give them a situation. Just say almost in every school, nobody is happy with the canteen. So I will take them there to jot down anything that they are not happy with. And then come back with all the notes together. I will show them an example of letter of complaint. I will ask them which parts they think should be included in their letter, what kinds of sections there are, how they should be placed, the format and so on. We have to talk about making a complaint without being rude, how not to offend anyone, and what kinds of things they want in return. (Miss Pun: initial interview)

For writing, Miss Pun first provides an authentic situation. Students then come up with some ideas. Next, they read writing samples and discover the format and content. After that, Miss Pun introduces the language and style. Finally, students write their own piece.

The data collected from classroom observation and interviews suggest that Miss Pun's English lessons focused on forms and were filled with lots of communicative activities and exercises, plus some tasks on occasions.

5.1.5 An Oral-Structural Approach

Two English teachers took the oral-structural approach. Miss Wong was one of them. The Secondary 2 session observed was on the myth "Circe and Odysseus" in *World of English Book 2*. The first half of the session was reading aloud and vocabulary learning. Miss Wong and the class took turns to read some lines in "Circe and Odysseus". Reading stopped from time to time as Miss Wong explained the vocabulary to students, in English mainly, but supplemented with a little Cantonese at times. She told students to underline the vocabulary in the book and repeat the words after her. In the second half of the session, students completed the blank-filling questions on the vocabulary worksheet on their own. At the end of the session, Miss Wong assigned homework. She told her students to write the definitions of the words listed on the vocabulary worksheet in the vocabulary book.

The English teachers adopting oral-structural approach acted as an instructor, teaching students the language items and vocabulary, while their students were passive learners, listening to their instruction, giving short answers to their questions and doing worksheets individually.

Among the ten English teachers, only four English teachers (Miss Gau, Miss Lau, Mr. Chau and Mr. Ting) implemented TBLT to a great extent. The others tended to use TBLT when teaching writing and speaking and adopt a presentation-practice mode when teaching reading, listening, language items and vocabulary. As a conclusion, it can be said that TBLT is implemented to a limited extent only by the ten English teachers.

5.2 Hong Kong Secondary English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs in TBLT

A clearer picture of the English teachers' beliefs in TBLT can be formed by comparing their teaching beliefs mentioned in the interviews with the characteristics of TBLT stated in *CDC Syllabus for English Language (Secondary 1–5)* (1999). Table 2.3 shows the beliefs of TBLT principles held by the ten English teachers.

The above discussion reveals that, despite learner roles, there are great discrepancies between the ten English teachers' language teaching beliefs and the TBLT principles as stated in the official documents. Teachers' teaching beliefs influence their classroom practices. The discrepancies above, therefore, could be a factor for the English teachers' limited implementation of TBLT, as discussed in the previous section.

6 Discussion

The previous section has indicated that, in this case study, TBLT is implemented only to a limited extent in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms. English teachers' teaching beliefs appear to be a major factor.

6.1 Hong Kong Secondary English Teachers' Implementation of TBLT

As we have seen, the results of the current study reflect that the level of implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms is low.

Among the ten participants in the current study, three adopt TBLT, two use an oral-structural approach and the other five mix TBLT with other teaching strategies. The ten participants therefore adopt only some of the TBLT practices stated in the *CDC Syllabus for English Language (Secondary 1–5)* (1999) – although to a greater or lesser extent.

Table 2.3 Beliefs of TBLT principles held by the ten participants

Dimension	Belief	No. of teachers
Aim of English	To stimulate a natural desire in learners to improve their language competence by challenging them to complete meaningful tasks	2
	To provide opportunities for learners to experiment with and explore both spoken and written language through learning activities, which are designed to engage learners in the authentic, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purposes	0
Teaching content	Tasks are the core units of planning and instruction	0
	Tasks help to achieve, develop or reinforce language items, communicative functions, skills and attitudes	0
Instructional materials	Authentic materials should be used in English lessons	6
Learning activities	There should be a combination of tasks and supporting exercises which focus upon and practise specific elements of knowledge, skills and strategies needed for the tasks	4
Unit or lesson structure	The sequence of pre-task (presentation), while-task (production) and post-task (practice) should be followed when teaching English	3
	Grammar learning can take place before a task, during a task and after a task	0
Teacher roles	English teacher should be a facilitator in students' English learning	5
	English teacher should play a supportive role all the time	1
	English teacher should be a monitor in the English classrooms	3
	English teacher is a designer, selector and adapter of tasks	0
Learner roles	Learners take the central role in learning and are responsible for their own learning, and that they give as well as take in the learning process	10
	Learners can be the decision makers of the learning content	1
	Learners can decide learning objectives, learning process, evaluation, etc.	0
Theories of language learning and teaching	Language learning should be experiential	2
	Learning process is as important as the product	4
	Tasks enable learners to construct their knowledge of language structures and functions and to develop their language skills	0

The ten participants teach in secondary schools using English as the medium of instruction, where students have higher English proficiency, are academically more able and have greater exposure to English in their daily school life. Given that participants' implementation of TBLT is found to be limited in such schools, it might therefore be inferred that, in the other three quarters of the secondary schools in Hong Kong – which use Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI), where students have a lower English standard and less exposure to English in their daily school life – English teachers will most likely implement TBLT to a somewhat lesser extent than that discussed in this chapter.

The findings that TBLT is implemented only to a limited extent in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms might not be too surprising in the light of past studies on CLT, the Target-Oriented Curriculum (TOC) (Clark et al. 1994) and TBLT.

Among the few studies investigating Hong Kong English teachers' implementation of a curriculum innovation, those related to CLT have shown that CLT has not taken root in Hong Kong English classrooms (Chau and Chung 1987; Evans 1996). Carless' (1994, 1998, 1999, 2002) studies of TOC and TBLT have shown that both approaches have been implemented to a limited extent in Hong Kong primary English classrooms.

These past studies have shown that Hong Kong English teachers have not implemented any former curriculum innovation to its full extent. This is confirmed by the current study.

6.2 Influence of Hong Kong Secondary School English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs on Their Implementation of TBLT

The implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms seems to be problematic. Although it has been advocated for over 15 years, the findings of the current study show that there is no significant improvement in the implementation of TBLT despite the fact that the Education Bureau, the Curriculum Development Institute and teacher training institutes have put in a substantial amount of effort and resources promoting it. The limited implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms can be attributed to many factors, teacher beliefs being a major one, which is delineated in the current study.

6.3 Incongruence Between Hong Kong Secondary School English Teachers' Beliefs and TBLT Principles

The teaching beliefs held by the ten participants in the current study are quite conventional and conflict with TBLT principles, resulting in their limited implementation of TBLT. Table 2.4 shows some of the conventional and conflict beliefs held by the ten participants in the current study.

Besides holding conventional beliefs, the ten participants in the current study believe in some, but not all, TBLT principles, as is outlined in Table 2.3.

Owing to the incongruence between their teaching beliefs and TBLT principles, only three participants of the current study adopt TBLT, five implement it partially and two rarely use it. It seems that the limited implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong secondary English classrooms can be attributed to the fact that the English teachers do not believe in the advantages of tasks as the core units of planning and instruction.

Table 2.4 Conventional and conflict beliefs held by the ten participants

Dimension	Belief	Teacher
Beliefs about English	English is rule-governed	Mr. Ting
	English as a subject involves grammar mainly	Miss Pun
Beliefs about teaching approaches	Students don't know what they have learned in TBLT	Miss Fong
	The oral-structural approach has a strong framework for students to follow	Miss Fong
Beliefs about teaching content	Writing should focus on accuracy rather than fluency	Miss Heung
		Miss Keung
		Miss Yeung
Beliefs about instructional materials	Textbooks lay a sound language foundation	Mr. Ting
Beliefs about learning activities	Exercises can equip students well for assessments	Mr. Ting
	Drills are good for weak students	Miss Heung
	Learning activities should be related to public examinations	Miss Fong
Beliefs about learning English	Grammar must be taught explicitly	Miss Heung
		Miss Keung
		Miss Yeung
	Formal instruction is necessary in Hong Kong context, especially on grammar	Miss Heung
		Miss Yeung
Beliefs about teacher roles	The main role of a teacher is of an instructor	Miss Fong
		Miss Wong

The results of the current study suggest to curriculum developers that if teachers' beliefs are incongruent with the principles underlying the curriculum innovation, there will be a failure in implementation.

6.4 Influence of Central Beliefs or More Strongly Held Beliefs

The researcher in the current study finds that, even though the English teachers' beliefs are consistent with TBLT principles, they may not implement TBLT to its full extent, because their central beliefs and more strongly held beliefs may have an overriding influence.

For example, Mr. Ting favours TBLT and thinks tasks are good learning activities:

Researcher: Why do you think it (TBLT) is better?
Mr. Ting: Less boring for me and for them. And also I think I can evaluate their response better. It's easier for me to evaluate their response. (Mr. Ting: initial interview)
Researcher: What learning activities do you prefer, drills, exercises, communicative activities or tasks?
Mr. Ting: I prefer communicative tasks. (Mr. Ting: initial interview)

Mr. Ting believes TBLT is more interesting and it helps him to assess students' performance. He also believes tasks are advantageous. In classroom observations,

however, he conducted a competition, in which the questions asked were like those found in exercise, such as "What are the food items found in this poem?" "Is there repetition in this poem?" "What are the rhyming pairs?" (Mr. Ting: classroom observations 1–2 field notes). His practice was due to the influence of two central beliefs: first, that English lessons are to equip students well for assessment and, second, that exercises can prepare students well for assessment. In the post-class-visit interview, Mr. Ting told the researcher that he uses exercises in order to get students ready for examinations or standardized tests. Mr. Ting has confidence in TBLT and tasks but did not use TBLT to its full extent in the lessons observed because of his central beliefs about the aim of English lessons and the effectiveness of exercises.

The findings of the current study explain to curriculum developers why teachers hold the beliefs consistent with the curriculum innovation, they may not fully implement it. It is mainly due to the overriding influence of their central beliefs or more strongly held beliefs.

6.5 Influence of Contradictory Beliefs

Besides central beliefs, the results of the current study suggest that contradictory beliefs impede the English teachers' implementation of what they believe in.

In the initial interviews, Miss Yeung told the researcher that a teacher's teaching is not important in learning English.

> Researcher: Is explicit teaching or discovery learning more suitable for your students?
> Miss Yeung: Discovery learning leaves a deeper impression on learners, it is better. (Miss Yeung: initial interview)

Miss Yeung believes that discovery learning is better than teaching explicitly the language items to students, which is in line with TBLT principles. In classroom observations, nonetheless, formal instruction was found.

In Miss Yeung's grammar lessons:

1. Miss Yeung used PowerPoint to show students how to use the prepositions of location to describe where people or things are.
2. She did some practices with students orally.
3. Students looked at a picture in the textbook for two minutes. They then covered the picture and wrote as many sentences as they could, using prepositions of location in three minutes.
4. Miss Yeung taught students to use gerunds and to-infinitives to talk about what they like and dislike through a set of PowerPoint slides.
5. Students did some practices orally.
6. Students proofread an email in the textbook, in which gerunds and to-infinitives were found. (Miss Yeung: class observation 2 field notes)

A reason for this was the impact of her contradictory beliefs.

> Researcher: Do you think formal instruction is a necessary condition for learning English?
> Miss Yeung: Yes, in Hong Kong.

Researcher: Why?
Miss Yeung: In Hong Kong, English is a second language, some even say it becomes a foreign language. Anyway, students use Cantonese mainly in daily life. An English-speaking culture has not been developed in the society. Middle class students may have more exposure to English in general. Students don't use English much outside school. It is necessary for them to learn English with a teacher in school and the teacher guides them to enhance their English after class. (Miss Yeung: initial interview)

Miss Yeung thinks that learning English independently in daily life does not work with Hong Kong students and that formal instruction is necessary for Hong Kong students.

The findings of the current study show curriculum developers that teachers may not practise what they believe because of the overriding influence of contradictory beliefs.

7 Conclusion

The results of the present study indicate that the teachers' teaching beliefs do not change accordingly to the principles underlying a curriculum innovation, which is a major factor impeding its implementation.

Researchers have argued that changes in teachers' beliefs lead to changes in teaching practices, which is important for successful implementation of a curriculum innovation (Marsh 2004; O'Sullivan 2002). Successful implementation relies on congruence between teachers' beliefs and the principles underlying the innovation (e.g. Li 1998; Stipek et al. 2001). Richardson (1996) and Li (1999) claim that changing teachers' beliefs about an innovation can occur through teacher education programmes.

The author of the present study found that the teaching beliefs of the English teacher (Mr. Chau) who had taken a one-term course on TBLT in his master's degree programme were congruent with TBLT principles, whereas the English teachers who had received little or no training in TBLT had a somewhat mixed feeling towards TBLT. It would appear that receiving training in implementing a curriculum innovation is important to changing teachers' beliefs, which may result in their adoption of the innovation.

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