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Article

Navigating Task-Based Language Teaching: A Qualitative Study of Chinese University EFL Students' Classroom Experiences and Perceptions

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Abstract: This qualitative study examines Chinese university EFL students' classroom experiences and perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 purposefully selected students at a public university in China and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show three key features of the learner experience. First, students often followed a preparation-performance sequence. Second, tasks were commonly done through peer collaboration. Third, students' emotions often shifted from anxiety to satisfaction during tasks. Students also constructed clear meanings from these experiences, which shaped their motivation and engagement. Many came to see English as a practical tool for communication. They reported a stronger sense of achievement when tasks included step-by-step support from teachers and peers. Interest, enjoyment, and a sense of classroom community also helped maintain engagement. The main contribution is an integrated framework that explains successful TBLT implementation from the student perspective. It brings together contextual and personal factors that students identified as enabling (e.g., supportive task design and interest-driven engagement) or constraining (e.g., time pressure and low self-confidence). The framework suggests that TBLT success depends on alignment between classroom conditions and learners' internal dispositions. Practical teaching suggestions are offered based on students' perspectives to support TBLT adaptation in similar contexts.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching; Chinese EFL Students; Student Perceptions; Classroom Experience; Qualitative Study

1. Introduction

The global focus on communicative competence has strongly shaped current English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching [1]. In this context, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has become an important approach. It is based on the principle that learners develop language by engaging in meaningful, goal-oriented tasks. During these tasks, they often need to negotiate meaning [2,3]. TBLT is now widely discussed and used in many teaching settings. It has gained particular attention in Asia, where it is often seen as a shift away from traditional teaching that mainly emphasizes language forms [4]. However, strong theoretical principles do not automatically lead to successful classroom practice. The effectiveness of TBLT depends greatly on the specific conditions and the local educational context where it is implemented.

Since the 1980s, English has been widely included in mainstream education in China. As a result, it has become the most studied foreign language in the country [5]. Within this established context, English teaching has gone through several stages and has adopted different teaching methods. Among them, TBLT has received growing

attention. This is largely because it is expected to support second language development through meaning-focused work on tasks [6]. However, TBLT in China cannot be discussed only at the level of theory. Its classroom use needs to be understood within the specific conditions of Chinese higher education. College English classes often have large class sizes [7]. They also operate in a strong exam-oriented culture [8]. In addition, teacher-centered teaching remains common in many classrooms [9]. These features can both limit and shape learner-centered teaching. They create key questions about how TBLT is implemented in real classrooms and how students experience it under local constraints in China. To understand the practical use and effectiveness of TBLT in this complex setting, it is necessary to examine learners' perspectives closely.

Research on TBLT in the Chinese EFL context has mainly focused on system and teaching issues. Common topics include teacher beliefs [10,11], curriculum adaptation [11,12], and broad challenges in implementation [13]. As a result, learners' perspectives have received less attention. In particular, there is still limited empirical work on students' attitudes toward TBLT. Less is known about how students think TBLT is carried out in class. Their personal experiences during task-based lessons are also under-researched. These learner-related elements matter because they can influence students' willingness to participate, their motivation, and their learning outcomes in English courses [14]. Therefore, it remains unclear how Chinese EFL students understand the value of TBLT and what factors influence their engagement in task-based English classes. To understand these learner-related issues, a research method is needed that can collect detailed accounts of students' experiences and the meanings they attach to them.

To address this gap, this study conducts an in-depth qualitative investigation of Chinese university EFL students' lived experiences and perceptions of TBLT. It uses in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture students' classroom experiences and their interpretations. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Chinese EFL university students describe their lived experiences of participating in task-based language teaching in English classrooms?
2. What meanings do students construct from these experiences, and how do these perceptions influence their motivation and engagement?
3. What contextual and personal factors do students identify as enabling or constraining their learning in task-based language teaching?

The novelty of this study lies in its direct focus on learners' perspectives, which helps address the research gap identified above. Its contributions are reflected in two areas. At the theoretical level, the study develops an integrated framework. This framework explains that successful TBLT implementation depends on a good match between supportive classroom conditions and learners' internal dispositions. At the practical level, the findings offer empirical guidance for improving task design, clarifying teachers' roles, and strengthening classroom support in TBLT.

2. Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews key studies on TBLT. It begins with the main theories and core concepts of TBLT. It then summarizes research on classroom implementation. Special attention is given to common challenges in EFL settings, including the Chinese context. Next, it reviews studies on learners' perspectives. This part shows that detailed evidence on students' lived experiences is still limited. Overall, the chapter provides the background and rationale for the present study.

2.1. Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations of TBLT

TBLT is a well-known teaching approach under the broader framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Its theory highlights practical language use and classroom interaction. The goal is to help students build language proficiency for real-world communication [15]. A core idea of TBLT is that language learning is supported when learners work on meaningful, goal-oriented tasks [16]. In a task, learners use the target language to reach a clear outcome. The main focus is on the meaning and communication, not only on language forms [17]. Learning is therefore linked to task completion, and performance on the task becomes an important sign of learning. Different types of tasks can also help motivate learners. TBLT is often seen as a development of CLT because both approaches stress language use that is close to real-world communication [18]. However, TBLT has a distinctive

feature. It uses the "task" as the basic unit for course design and classroom teaching. This shifts attention away from traditional, form-focused methods such as Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP). In PPP, teachers often present grammar first. They then provide controlled practice before asking students to produce language more freely. In TBLT, meaningful communication and task completion come first. Attention to form is added when learners need it during the task.

2.2. Implementation of TBLT in EFL and Chinese Contexts

Studies on TBLT implementation in EFL contexts around the world report several common challenges. One issue is the pressure of exam-oriented education systems. In such settings, communicative tasks may be seen as less directly useful for standardized tests [19]. Another challenge is the need for change in teachers' beliefs and classroom roles when moving to TBLT [20]. Practical constraints are also reported, especially when teachers try to manage task-based activities in large classes [21].

In China, interest in TBLT has increased since it was formally introduced in the late 1990s. This trend has been supported by national curriculum guidelines. For example, the guidelines issued in 1993 and 2000 clearly encouraged task-based approaches in English teaching. At the same time, research in China has expanded. Most studies have examined system-level and teaching-related factors. Common topics include how to adapt curricula to include tasks, whether textbooks match TBLT principles, and teachers' readiness and beliefs about this shift [11, 20, 22]. Within this context, a key teaching goal is to move from teacher-centered lessons to more student-centered classrooms. The teacher is expected to act more as a guide and to support learner autonomy. TBLT also places more emphasis on meaningful communication in real situations, rather than focusing mainly on grammatical forms.

However, most existing studies take a top-down view and focus mainly on a teacher-centered perspective. As a result, there is still limited in-depth qualitative research on how learners experience TBLT in class and how they interpret these experiences.

2.3. The Learner's Perspective

The previous sections have introduced the key principles of TBLT and the context for its implementation. Research that examines learners' perceptions in this area is mainly qualitative. Common methods include interviews and reflective journals. These studies often report mixed attitudes. On the positive side, students value the interaction and communication in TBLT. They link this to practical learning and better real-world language use. At the same time, students report several concerns. These include limited learner autonomy, anxiety during tasks, and not enough support from teachers while doing the tasks [23, 24]. Overall, this research provides a basic picture of how students view TBLT.

However, these qualitative studies also have limits, which reduce what is known about learners' experiences. Many of them are part of larger classroom action research projects. Their main goal is often to evaluate teaching effects, not to provide a long and detailed analysis of learners' subjective experiences [15, 25]. As a result, the findings often summarize attitudes in general terms. They less often describe what students actually go through while working on tasks in a TBLT classroom. More research is still needed that focuses mainly on learners. In particular, few studies examine how students engage with tasks step by step during lessons, how they build personal meanings from these interactions, and which contextual or personal factors they see as important in this process. This gap is especially clear in Chinese university EFL education.

Overall, existing studies provide an important foundation for understanding learners' general attitudes towards TBLT. However, many of them focus on evaluating teaching outcomes or giving broad summaries of attitudes. A key gap remains. There is still a lack of focused and systematic qualitative research in the specific context of Chinese university EFL classrooms. More evidence is needed on how students take part in tasks step by step, how they experience task work in real time, and how they build meanings from these experiences. It is also unclear how contextual conditions and personal factors work together during this process. This gap makes it difficult to understand how TBLT is carried out in everyday classroom reality and what it actually brings to individual learners from a learner-centered view.

Therefore, the present study provides a focused and systematic qualitative inquiry into these underexplored aspects of learners' experiences and learning processes. It draws on detailed student narratives and examines them in depth. In this way, the study clarifies how learners experience TBLT in the classroom and responds directly to

the research gap identified above.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the study. To examine Chinese university EFL students' lived experiences and perceptions of TBLT, the study uses a descriptive qualitative design. Semi-structured interviews serve as the main data source. The chapter then explains the research design, participants and sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis steps, and the measures used to ensure research rigor.

3.1. Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study used a qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm aims to understand the meanings that people give to their experiences in specific social contexts [26]. In line with the research aim, the design was informed by phenomenological principles. It focused on participants' lived experiences and the perceptions they built from them. This approach gave priority to detailed and descriptive accounts from the participants' own perspectives.

This phenomenological orientation is realized through an interpretative phenomenological approach. It emphasizes analyzing how participants understand their experiences, focusing on the depth of that understanding. Thematic analysis was used for systematic coding. Within this process, the interpretation of themes was guided by exploring the meaning and essence of learners' lived experiences, which directly answers the research questions.

Consequently, semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method of data collection. This method supported an in-depth examination of the research questions. It also allowed flexibility during the interview process, which helped capture participants' individual perspectives and identify emerging themes.

3.2. Participants

The study was conducted in the first semester of the 2025–2026 academic year at a university in central China. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. The main requirement was that the students were currently enrolled in a university-level EFL course where the teacher confirmed that task-based principles were used in regular lessons. To obtain diverse viewpoints, variation in self-reported English proficiency and academic major was pursued. Recruitment continued until subsequent interviews produced no new themes pertinent to the research questions. Based on this principle and guidance from qualitative methodologists [27], a final sample of 15 participants was considered sufficient.

The participants were enrolled in a compulsory course titled An Integrated Course. The course aimed to develop students' overall English proficiency. Assessment was based on classroom attendance and presentations (20%) and a final examination (80%). In this course, TBLT was used as the regular teaching approach. Each unit usually contained a communicative task. The department-level adoption made sure that TBLT was used consistently across the whole program. The sample size was consistent with common practice in phenomenological research. This type of research emphasizes data saturation through detailed analysis of lived experiences, rather than statistical generalizability [28]. All participants provided informed consent, and pseudonyms were used throughout to protect their privacy.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews (see **Appendix A**). An interview protocol was developed with open-ended questions aligned with the three research questions (e.g., "How does participating in these activities influence your motivation to engage in English class? Does it increase or decrease your willingness to participate actively? Can you provide an example?"). Each interview lasted between 15 and 20 min. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached, indicating that additional interviews provided no new themes relevant to the research questions. To help participants express their views clearly, all interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the participants' first language. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then sent back to participants for member checking, so they could confirm the accuracy of the content. A semi-structured format was used throughout. It ensured that all key topics

were covered in each interview. At the same time, it allowed follow-up questions when participants raised new or relevant points.

3.4. Data Analysis

The interview transcripts formed the dataset for analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process followed the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012) [28]: (1) familiarization with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) writing the report.

This analysis followed a step-by-step process. After initial coding, codes that were similar in concept were put into larger groups. The categories were subsequently refined and analytically interpreted through continuous comparison within the dataset, resulting in the formulation of definitive themes that directly responded to the research questions. **Table 1** shows how this process goes from codes to categories to a final theme, with information about how the data is handled at each step.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis Progression.

Analytic Phase	Key Action & Data Considerations	Analytic Outcome at This Phase
Initial Coding	Action: Line-by-line coding of transcripts. Data Extract: "I rehearsed the oral presentation repeatedly... before delivering the explanation in class." (S10)	Code: Out-of-class rehearsal
Forming Categories	Action: Grouping codes based on conceptual similarity. Data Considerations: The codes Out-of-class rehearsal, Peer preparation (from other extracts), and Mental rehearsal all pertained to actions taken prior to the in-class task performance.	Category: Pre-Task Preparation Behaviors
Defining the Theme	Action: Interpreting the category's relationship to broader patterns in the data. Data Considerations: When this category was compared with data on in-class collaboration and reported changes in emotions, it showed a recurring temporal pattern across participants' accounts.	Final Analytic Theme (Addressing RQ1): Preparation-Performance Sequence

The research questions guided theme development throughout the analysis to ensure that the final structure of the themes directly addressed students' descriptions of their experiences (RQ1), the meanings they constructed and the things that motivated them (RQ2), and the factors they perceived as enabling or constraining their learning (RQ3).

3.5. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Several steps were taken to strengthen the study's trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, and transferability. Credibility was supported through member checking. Dependability was addressed by keeping an audit trail, which recorded key analytic decisions and changes in codes over time. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research setting, participant backgrounds, and examples of tasks used in class. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview. The consent form explained the study purpose, procedures, and possible risks and benefits. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms and by removing identifying information from the transcripts. All data were stored on a secure, password-protected server.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of the interview data. The findings are organized around the three research questions. The analysis highlights patterns in how students described their participation in tasks, how they interpreted their experiences, and what factors they reported as influencing learning in the TBLT format. To protect privacy, all participants were anonymized. Extracts labelled S1–S15 are included to support each theme with participants' own words.

4.1. Descriptions of Participation in TBLT English Classrooms

This section addresses Research Question 1 by reporting how students described their involvement in TBLT lessons. The findings outlined the main activities and learning processes in the English classroom. Students' ac-

counts suggested that their experiences were not isolated events. Instead, they described a structured process with a clear sequence of actions, strong reliance on peer collaboration, and changing emotions that often moved from initial anxiety to later satisfaction.

4.1.1. The Sequence of Preparation and In-Class Performance

Students consistently described their experience as a two-phase sequence. The first phase took place outside class and focused on preparation. Typical work included making presentation slides (S1), searching for information (S8), or rehearsing dialogues (S10). The second phase happened in class, where the preparation led to a communicative performance. As S10 explained, "I was in charge of the English introduction for the tourist attractions. My group and I practiced many times before we presented it in class." S9 also reported, "I practiced again and again before class". Overall, this preparation-to-performance sequence shaped how students understood their participation.

4.1.2. Task Execution as a Collaborative Process

Students described task work as social and cooperative. They repeatedly reported that completing tasks required coordinated work with peers, rather than working alone. Their accounts also showed several common forms of collaboration. First, students brainstormed ideas together. For example, in a formal email task, S3 noted that "everyone joined in and shared many useful ideas". Second, they divide the work to produce a shared product, such as a poster (S8). Third, peers offered support during performance. S11 gave a clear example: "When I got stuck and couldn't find the right words, my desk mate passed me a note with some key words and quietly reminded me of a sentence pattern." Overall, working toward a shared goal through peer support was a central part of students' experiences.

4.1.3. The Co-Occurrence and Sequencing of Affective States

Students often described both positive and negative emotions, and these feelings were usually linked to different stages of a task. A common pattern appeared across accounts. Many students started with negative emotions, but these emotions often turned more positive after the task was finished. At the beginning, students frequently reported nervousness (e.g., S4, S6, S13) or worry about making mistakes (e.g., S2, S7). After successful completion, they often reported satisfaction, pride, or stronger confidence. This suggests that emotional outcomes were closely related to completing the task. S4's account showed this change clearly: "At the start, I was really nervous, and I even forgot some words. But later, I finished the interview smoothly. After that, I felt my speaking really improved, and I was very happy." In a similar way, S5 reported "a strong sense of achievement and pride" after completing a first task. Overall, this shift from anxiety to satisfaction was a recurring feature in students' descriptions.

4.2. Interpretations of Experience and Links to Motivation and Engagement

This section addresses Research Question 2. It examined the meanings students developed through their participation in TBLT and how these meanings related to motivation and engagement. Three main interpretations emerged. Students reported a changed view of the purpose of English, a stronger sense of ability after dealing with challenges, and increased motivation linked to autonomy, enjoyment, and a sense of community.

4.2.1. Perceived Shift in Language Learning Purpose

A key interpretation was a shift in how students viewed English. Many students no longer saw it only as an academic subject learned out of context. Instead, they began to see English as a practical tool for communication. This view contrasted with their description of traditional classes, which they often linked to "memorizing vocabulary and grammar" for tests. In their accounts, TBLT was different from test-focused teaching. Students felt that traditional methods treated English as a set of rules to remember, while TBLT treated it as a skill to use. They valued TBLT because it helped build practical communication ability. They also described tasks as practice for real-life situations, such as giving travel advice (S10) or explaining cultural differences (S14). S10 expressed this contrast clearly, saying that "the task-based classroom made English feel like a real tool for communication." This change was strengthened by tasks that simulated real interactions. For example, S14 described preparing an English pre-

sentation to introduce the Spring Festival to "foreign friends." The student used simple props and taught classmates festival greetings and said it "got the whole class more involved." Overall, these accounts suggest that students came to see English not only as grammar and vocabulary for exams, but also as a way to communicate meaningfully and take part in social and cultural exchange.

4.2.2. Enhanced Self-Assessment from Successful Task Completion

Students often treated successful task completion, especially after an initial struggle, as evidence of improving ability. This experience increased their confidence and made them more willing to join later tasks. They also linked their success to support during the task. This support included clear help from group members (S7) and corrective feedback from the teacher (S15). S7 explained the role of peer support: "My group members helped me practice sentence by sentence. When we finished, I felt a strong sense of achievement." S15 also valued teacher feedback because it helped the student "remember it clearly." In addition, S12 reported "a strong sense of achievement when I could use what I learned in real practice," especially after having to improvise in a dialogue. Overall, overcoming difficulties with support was often seen as proof of ability, which strengthened confidence for future engagement.

4.2.3. Reported Sources of Increased Motivation and Engagement

Students linked higher motivation to three main sources. The first was autonomy. Students felt more motivated when they could choose topics based on personal interest (S1). The second source was enjoyment. Several students described tasks as "very interesting" (S4, S10) and "pretty fun" (S6), which made participation feel easier. The third source was a sense of community. Productive teamwork was strongly motivating. As S2 stated, "I could really feel the teamwork. Everyone took it seriously, joined in, and learned something, and that felt great."

4.3. Factors Influencing the Learning Experience

This section addressed Research Question 3 by summarizing the factors students reported as shaping their learning experience in the TBLT format. The findings were grouped into two dimensions: contextual and personal. Within each dimension, students identified both enabling and constraining factors. Together, these factors described the main conditions that influenced how students learned and participated.

4.3.1. Contextual Factors Enabling Learning

Students highlighted several enabling conditions in the TBLT classroom environment. One important condition was task design. Students described tasks as new, well-organized, and connected to real-life language use. This was reflected in examples such as the "mind map gallery report" (S13). As S10 stated, "I think the tasks the teacher designed, and that are close to real life, were really useful." Supportive group work was also seen as essential. Students valued groups where everyone took part and where members helped each other when needed. For example, S2 noted that "everyone actively joined the defense". S11 also described peer support during difficulties, such as a classmate passing a note with keywords. In addition, students often emphasized the teacher's role in supporting learning. This included giving clear instructions and providing feedback that helped improve without causing embarrassment (S15). Students also mentioned that teachers used strategies to build a motivating classroom atmosphere (S8).

4.3.2. Contextual Factors Constraining Learning

Students also reported several contextual constraints that limited their learning experience. The most common issue was time pressure. Students felt that there was not enough time for full preparation before class, and not enough time to complete tasks well in class. As S1 said, "The time was quite tight. This method was helpful, but if we had more time to prepare, the results could be better." S14 gave a similar comment: "Sometimes we just did not have enough time." The second constraint is related to large class size and classroom management. In large classes, many groups are discussed at the same time. Students felt that the teacher could only check a small number of groups, so others received little guidance. S3 described this situation: "In several classes, the teacher did not come to our group at all, and the feedback after the task was always quite general." S1 also noted, "Because there were so many students and the schedule was tight, the teacher couldn't pay attention to every group, and not every group got

a chance to present." These reports suggest that large class sizes reduced access to detailed support and feedback in a TBLT setting. The third contextual constraint was task difficulty. Some tasks were seen as too complex, such as translating texts with many unfamiliar words (S15). Students noted that difficult tasks could block learning if support was not sufficient. As S9 stated, "Some tasks are really hard. If the teacher does not give enough help, the task difficulty will affect my learning."

4.3.3. Personal Factors Enabling Learning

Students also highlighted several personal factors that enabled learning. One key factor was interest-driven engagement. When a task matched personal interests, students reported a stronger willingness to spend time and make an effort. As S1 explained, "My own interests mattered a lot. If I could choose a topic I liked, I felt much more motivated." S9 described a similar point: "If I'm interested in the goal, I'm willing to spend time practicing again and again." Another enabling factor was strategic self-control during learning. Some students reported that they tried to work with the language more actively, rather than depending too much on quick tools. For example, S4 mentioned reducing the use of automated translation in order to understand and think independently. In the same way, S6 described holding back the impulse to "ask my team members or the teacher right away, or even use online tools," and trying to solve problems first. A third factor was an adaptive and resilient mindset. Students described accepting mistakes as a normal part of learning (S5). They also reported being able to adjust during tasks, such as improvising when needed and supporting peers in group work (S12).

4.3.4. Personal Factors Constraining Learning

The most frequently reported personal barrier was low confidence in speaking English, which often led to anxiety in class. Students repeatedly linked negative views of their own speaking ability with stronger anxiety during task performance. S2 described this connection clearly: "My biggest problem is that I'm not confident about speaking English. When I have to speak in front of others, I get nervous easily and feel embarrassed, so I cannot express myself well." Similar feelings were reported by other students, who said they felt "very nervous" (S6, S13) or "panicked" (S1) when they needed to perform. Another barrier was students' perceived gaps in proficiency. Many students felt that limited fluency or vocabulary reduced their participation. Some directly stated that "my oral English is not good" (S2). Others reported moments when they could not remember the right words (S14). For these students, anxiety and perceived skill limits often appeared together. As a result, they sometimes hesitated at the start of tasks or felt unprepared when the task began (S11).

4.4. Thematic Analysis Summary

Table 2 summarizes the analytical process and shows how the representative data extracts are related to the final analytical themes presented in this chapter, following Braun and Clarke's (2012) [28] thematic analysis approach.

Table 2. Summary of Thematic Analysis.

Analytical Focus (Chapter 4 Structure)	Illustrative Data Extracts	Final Analytical Themes
Dimensions of Lived Experience (4.1)	"My group and I practiced many times before we presented it in class." (S10) "I practiced again and again before class." (S9)	Preparation-Performance Sequence
	"Everyone joined in it and shared many useful ideas." (S3) "My desk mate passed me a note with some key words and quietly reminded me of a sentence pattern." (S11)	Collaborative Task Execution
	"I was really nervous… But later I finished the interview smoothly… I was very happy." (S4) "A strong sense of achievement and pride." (S5)	Sequencing of Affect (Anxiety-Satisfaction)
Constructed Meanings and Motivational Links (4.2)	"… made English feel like a real tool for communication." (S10) "Prepared an English presentation to introduce Chinese Spring Festival…" (S14)	Shift in Language Learning Purpose
	"I felt a strong sense of achievement." (S7) "A strong sense of achievement…" (S12)	Enhanced Self-Assessment from Success
	"Choose a topic of interest." (S1) "Tasks are very interesting." (S4, S10) "I could really feel the power of teamwork." (S2)	Motivation from Interest, Enjoyment and Community

Table 2. *Cont.*

Analytical Focus (Chapter 4 Structure)	Illustrative Data Extracts	Final Analytical Themes
Enabling and Constraining Factors (4.3)	**A. Contextual Factors Enabling Learning**	
	"The mind map gallery report was innovative." (S13) "I think the tasks… were really useful." (S10) "Everyone actively joined the defense." (S2)	• Supportive Task Design
	"Peers offered prompts." (S11) "Teacher provided clear instructions and feedback." (S15)	• Supportive Group Dynamics
	"Teacher employed strategies to foster a motivating atmosphere." (S8)	• Effective Teacher Facilitation
	B. Contextual Factors Constraining Learning	
	"Time was quite tight." (S1) "Sometimes we just did not have enough time." (S14)	• Time Pressure
	"In a large class… feedback was very general." (S3) "Because there were so many students… the teacher couldn't pay attention to every group…" (S1)	• Large Class Size
	"During the translation process, we encountered many unfamiliar words, and the task was a bit difficult…" (S15) "Some tasks are really hard… the task difficulty will affect my learning." (S9)	• Task Difficulty
	C. Personal Factors Enabling Learning	
	"My own interests mattered a lot. If I could choose a topic I like, I felt much more motivated." (S1) "If I'm interested in the goal, I'm willing to spend time practicing again and again." (S9)	• Interest-Driven Engagement
	"I reduce reliance on automated translation." (S4) "I will unconsciously want to seek help from my team members … But in order to improve myself, I am restraining such thoughts." (S6)	• Strategic Self Control
	"I normalized mistakes as part of my learning." (S5) "I think I have the capacity to improvise and support peers during collaborative tasks." (S12)	• Adaptive and Resilient Mindset
	D. Personal Factors Constraining Learning	
	"My biggest problem is that I'm not confident… I get nervous easily and feel embarrassed…" (S2) "I was very nervous to speak." (S6, S13)	• Low Self-Confidence and Anxiety
	"My oral English is not good." (S2) "My vocabulary is not sufficient, so sometimes I suddenly can't recall a certain word and get stuck." (S14) "The combination of anxiety and perceived skill deficits resulted in initial hesitation or a sense of being unprepared when tasks began." (S11)	• Self-Perceived Proficiency Gaps

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the study findings and interprets them in relation to the three research questions. It first considers how Chinese EFL university students described their lived experiences of participating in TBLT English classrooms. It then examines the meanings students constructed from these experiences, and how these perceptions shaped their motivation and engagement. Next, it discusses the contextual and personal factors students identified as enabling or constraining learning in TBLT. The discussion links these results to the theoretical background and previous research reviewed in Section 2. It also explains how the present study supported, extended, or refined existing understanding.

5.1. Elaborating the Complexity of the Learner's "Lived Experience"

This study addresses a gap in the TBLT literature. Prior work has offered few in-depth and process-focused accounts of learners' lived experience. Many qualitative studies have mainly reported general attitude summaries [15,25]. In conclusion, the present findings provided a detailed picture of how students' experiences developed across task stages. Across cases, a clear pattern was identified: preparation was followed by performance. This pattern fits a key idea in TBLT, that learning is supported through task completion. More importantly, the findings highlight learner-initiated preparation outside class. Students often prepare themselves before the in-class task. This phase has received limited attention in earlier research on learner experience. The data also showed that task performance was strongly collaborative. Students described actions such as brainstorming ideas and giving peer support. These accounts suggest that peers provided important support and built understanding together through interaction. Another key point is the emotional change reported by students. Many reported anxiety at the

beginning but described satisfaction after finishing the task. This provides a more dynamic view of affect in TBLT. It also suggests that learners' emotions are linked to different stages of the task.

These findings address the research gap described in Section 2.3. That section highlighted a need for detailed and process-oriented accounts, rather than mainly evaluative summaries. Previous learner-focused studies have mostly reported evaluative data on student perceptions [23,24]. In contrast, the present study drew on interview data and examined students' reported engagement with TBLT. The analysis focused on three parts of this engagement process. It examined the strategies students reported using during preparation. It also examined how they described collaborative interaction during task work. In addition, the analysis examined students' emotional responses across the task process. In this way, the study provided an empirically grounded account of the learning process that earlier literature called for. Therefore, a key teaching implication is to recognize the preparation phase as a normal and valuable part of the task cycle, and to support it with clear guidance. The shift from anxiety to satisfaction should not be treated as an obstacle. Instead, it can be understood as a normal part of task participation that can be managed and supported through instruction.

5.2. Meaning-Making as the Core Mechanism for Motivational Engagement

The findings help explain how students' motivation changed over time. Many students began to see English less as an exam subject and more as a practical tool. This supports a key TBLT principle: authentic use and meaningful communication [17]. It also provides a clear learner-based rationale for the value of TBLT. This point is important in an exam-oriented education system, where communicative approaches often face tension [8]. The value of developing practical English communication ability thus became a core motivator, making English language learning feel directly relevant to students' personal and social worlds. Another key result relates to self-assessment. Students were better able to assess their own progress after experiencing supported success. Two types of support were central: peer interaction and teacher feedback. This shifts attention from task design alone to the social support around the task. It also adds a learner-centered perspective to discussions of the teacher's changing role in TBLT [20].

Finally, students linked higher motivation to personal interest, enjoyment, and a sense of community. This shows how TBLT can activate key factors for sustained engagement. The analysis also suggested that these sources of motivation were connected, rather than separate. Autonomy can support intrinsic motivation when task content connects with learners' personal relevance. It can transform external requirements into self-directed engagement. The sense of enjoyment suggests that a well-designed task can be rewarding in itself. Furthermore, the sense of community underscores collaborative learning as an important motivator. Together, these factors make students more willing to participate actively. When the class builds a supportive environment together, engagement can shift from an external requirement to autonomous learning.

This analysis links directly to the theoretical foundations reviewed in Section 2.1. The data supported a core principle of TBLT: meaningful communication can promote learning [16,17]. The finding also clarified how this worked in the present context. Students actively build meaning during tasks. In particular, many students began to see English as a practical tool for communication. This shift helped turn task participation into stronger motivational engagement. This emphasis on learners' meaning-making responds to the need raised in Section 2.3. That section called for research that goes beyond evaluative summaries and examines how learners form personal meanings [15,25]. The findings also speak to the implementation challenges discussed in Section 2.2. When students developed their own reasons for learning, this could reduce the impact of exam-oriented pressure. In this way, the study offers a concrete and learner-centered view of how to support TBLT in exam-focused settings [19]. Therefore, teachers should design meaningful tasks and also set aside time for discussion and reflection. Students can consider how the task relates to their real-life use of English. Such reflection can help students develop a more lasting view of effective English learning.

5.3. Toward an Integrated Framework of Influencing Factors

This study brought together a detailed set of learner-identified factors, including both enabling and constraining factors. Constraints such as time pressure and large class size were described clearly in students' accounts. These were not treated as abstract barriers. Instead, the narratives showed their direct effects on task preparation and on students' sense of support. In this way, the findings provided empirical support for the practical difficulties

reported in earlier implementation studies [21]. These constraints point to a key implementation gap. They show how practical conditions, such as limited time and large class size, can directly weaken individual attention.

The findings place the teacher's role beyond basic instruction. The teacher also served as a key task designer, facilitator, and provider of feedback. This role supported students' task engagement and helped build positive group interaction. It also helped reduce students' anxiety, which shows the practical value of the teacher's changing role in TBLT [20]. Together with well-designed tasks and supportive peer dynamics, these contextual factors create a supportive environment. They lower learners' emotional barriers and provide scaffolding from task preparation to successful communication.

The findings identified several personal factors, including interest-driven engagement, low self-confidence, and anxiety. These factors suggest that implementation involves both learner agency and learners' vulnerability. When students were interested, they could draw on their own resources to take part, explore tasks, and achieve success within the TBLT framework. In contrast, low confidence, anxiety, and perceived gaps in ability appeared to be closely linked. They could strengthen each other and become internal barriers. As a result, some students may not fully participate in communicative tasks.

The integrated framework developed in this study builds on the discussion in Section 2.2. It confirms the significance of recognized contextual challenges (e.g., large classes). It also shows how students experienced their effects in practice. Importantly, the framework brings together parts of the literature that are often talked about separately. Earlier research has examined contextual issues in implementation, such as large classes [21] and the teacher's role [20]. Other work has focused on learner psychology, such as anxiety [23,24]. In the present framework, contextual factors (for example, teacher facilitation) and personal factors (for example, low self-confidence and anxiety) were placed in one interactive system, based on student accounts. This made their links clearer. Overall, the framework offered a more complete explanation of why TBLT works well in some cases. Success depended on the fit between external support and learners' internal conditions. The framework can also guide classroom implementation. It suggests that TBLT is more likely to succeed when external support is adjusted to learners' different needs and characteristics.

6. Conclusion

This chapter is organized into three parts. First, it summarizes the main findings in relation to the research questions. Next, it outlines the theoretical and practical implications. Finally, it states the study's limitations and suggests directions for future research.

6.1. Overall Conclusion

This study examined Chinese university EFL students' classroom experiences and perceptions of TBLT. Using qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews, it addressed three research questions. First, it documented how students described their lived experiences of taking part in TBLT lessons. Second, it explored the meanings students built from these experiences and how these perceptions shaped their motivation and engagement. Third, it identified the contextual and personal factors students reported as enabling or constraining their learning in TBLT.

Across the three research questions, the findings show that students experienced TBLT as a process, not a single classroom activity. For Research Question 1, participation was commonly described as a preparation-performance sequence. Many students did substantial work before class, while class time focused on task completion and presentation. Their accounts also emphasized collaborative task execution. Peer interaction was central to planning, negotiating meaning, and delivering outcomes. Within this process, students reported a clear sequencing of affect (from anxiety to satisfaction). Anxiety often appeared at the start, especially before speaking, but satisfaction increased after successful completion and feedback. For Research Question 2, students constructed several meanings that shaped motivation and engagement. A key pattern was a shift in the language learning purpose. English was increasingly understood as a tool for communication, rather than only exam content. Students also reported enhanced self-assessment from success. When tasks provided step-by-step support, small successes helped students judge progress and build confidence. Many students further linked engagement to motivation from interest, enjoyment, and a sense of community. Interest and enjoyment sustained effort, and a sense of community reduced fear of mistakes and encouraged participation. For Research Question 3, students identified factors that enabled and

constrained learning at both contextual and personal levels. Contextual enablers included supportive task design, supportive group dynamics, and effective teacher facilitation, which supported preparation and in-class communication. However, time pressure, large class size, and task difficulty often limited preparation time and reduced individual support. At the personal level, interest-driven engagement, strategic self-control, and an adaptive and resilient mindset helped students stay involved. In contrast, low self-confidence, anxiety, and self-perceived proficiency gaps were often linked and worked as internal barriers to full participation in communicative tasks.

In conclusion, from the perspective of Chinese university EFL students, the findings suggest that TBLT works best when supportive classroom conditions match learners' internal dispositions. By highlighting student voice, the study developed an integrated analytical framework to address gaps in the literature on learners' lived experience. This framework represents the main theoretical contribution. It links key contextual and personal factors within students' learning experiences and shows how they relate to each other. The framework also helps explain students' meaning-making processes in TBLT. At the same time, it offers practical guidance for adapting TBLT principles to real classroom conditions. This match between supportive classroom conditions and learners' internal dispositions offers teachers a practical focus for implementing TBLT in complex settings. Future research can build on this study by examining the framework with empirical data and further developing it, especially by exploring how its elements interact in classroom practice.

6.2. Implications

Based on the integration of the findings (Section 4) and the literature (Section 2), this study identifies clear implications for TBLT practice and for future research in Chinese university EFL contexts. A key practical implication is that TBLT is more effective when external classroom conditions are strategically aligned with learners' internal dispositions. This point is consistent with students' reports that participation depended on both classroom support and personal readiness, such as self-confidence, interest, and willingness to speak.

For pedagogical practice, the results suggest that the out-of-class preparation stage should be made visible and valued. Many students treated preparation as the first step of task participation, and it supported later performance in class. Teachers can support this stage by giving clear preparation goals and workable materials. Task design can also draw on students' interests, because interests help sustain effort and increase engagement. In class, the teacher's role remained important. Teachers need to facilitate interaction, manage group work, and provide timely feedback, especially in large classes where individual attention is limited. Group work should be structured, because supportive peer dynamics reduce anxiety and help students stay involved. At the same time, classroom feedback should aim to build confidence rather than only point out errors. Importantly, the study indicates that two forms of support are central to motivational engagement. Teachers need to help learners move from anxiety to satisfaction during tasks. They also need to guide post-task reflection so learners can strengthen their meaning-making. Finally, the findings suggest a practical requirement at the curriculum level. Teachers, curriculum designers, and administrators need to ensure adequate time for the full task cycle, including preparation, execution, reporting, and feedback. This may reduce the time pressure that students often describe.

For researchers, this study points to several priorities. First, further work is needed to examine how students' perceptions of TBLT develop over time, and how early experiences shape later engagement. Second, mixed-methods studies could help test relationships between key classroom conditions (e.g., feedback, task difficulty) and learner factors (e.g., self-confidence, anxiety). Future studies could also compare learners across proficiency levels and across disciplines to see whether the same pattern holds in different contexts. Future research should examine the integrated framework proposed in this study using empirical evidence. The aim is to refine the framework and clarify the changing relationships among its components.

6.3. Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. First, the findings may be affected by self-reported bias. Some students may provide responses they think the researchers expect. The interview data may also be influenced by recall bias. Second, the study did not include classroom observations. As a result, the study cannot triangulate students' reported experience with objective data on actual task implementation and teacher-student interaction. Third, the study was conducted within a single university. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other institutions or different student populations.

These limitations suggest several directions for future research. First, to reduce self-reported bias and strengthen the research design, future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach. For example, interviews could be combined with surveys to validate and extend the qualitative findings. Classroom observations could also be added to provide direct evidence of how TBLT is implemented. Second, to address the single-research-context limitation, future research should conduct comparative studies across different types of institutions or geographical regions. This would help to test and refine the integrated framework. Third, future research could include teachers' perspectives to develop a deeper understanding of TBLT implementation, in particular, it could examine how teachers perceive the enabling and constraining factors of TBLT implementation in their own classrooms.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, T.G.; methodology, T.G.; analysis and interpretation, T.G.; resources, T.G.; writing—original draft preparation, T.G.; writing—review and editing, T.G., H.H., and H.H.I.; supervision, H.H. and H.H.I. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Part I: Describing Lived Experiences

Q1: We are discussing your experiences in task-based English classes. Please think of one specific class session you remember clearly, in which you took part in a task (such as a group discussion, role-play, or project). Please describe this class in detail. Start from the beginning: what was the task topic and goal, what did you and your classmates do and say during the task, and how did the class end?

Q2: Based on this session and your other experiences, how would you compare a typical task-based English

class with a more traditional English class (for example, the teacher explains grammar and students do exercises)? What feels most different to you personally?

Part II: Constructing Meanings and Perceptions

Q3: Based on your experiences, what do you think are the most valuable aspects of learning English through tasks? On the other hand, what are the main challenges or disadvantages for you?

Q4: How does participating in these activities influence your motivation to engage in English class? Does it increase or decrease your willingness to participate actively? Can you provide an example?

Part III: Identifying Influencing Factors

Q5: Many factors can affect how we experience a class. What outside the classroom (e.g., exams like CET-4/6, future plans, societal expectations) or inside the classroom (e.g., group dynamics, teacher's role, task design, time pressure) factors make these task-based activities more or less effective or meaningful for you?

Q6: Thinking about yourself personally, are there any of your own characteristics, habits, or feelings that make participating in these task-based activities easier or more difficult for you? (e.g., your confidence in speaking, preference for working alone or in groups, anxiety about making mistakes, personal goals in learning English, etc.)

Q7: If you could suggest one change to make task-based learning better for students in your context, what would it be and why?

Part IV: Closing

Q8: Based on our conversation today, is there any other aspect of your experience with task-based English learning that we haven't covered, but you feel is important for me to understand in order to see the full picture?

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