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# Exploring Task-Based Language Teaching in EFL Contexts: Instructor Perspectives on Challenges and Effective Strategies for Enhancing Speaking Skills

Yuanyuan Wu , Nooreen Noordin \*  and Abu Bakar Razali 

Faculty of Educational Studies, University Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Malaysia

\* Correspondence: nooreen@upm.edu.my

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors perceive the use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in facilitating speaking skills in Chinese EFL contexts. The study employs a qualitative descriptive research design because it seeks to explore the perceived barriers and effective teaching methods associated with task-based speaking instruction. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data by interviewing twelve EFL instructors in universities and language institutions in China, which was complemented by reflective notes. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The results have shown that instructors are struggling with a number of problems, such as large class sizes, difficulties in assessing speaking achievement, lack of motivation among students, and limited institutional resources. Regardless of these limitations, the instructors mentioned using successful strategies such as task adaptation and scaffolding, flexible grouping techniques, and formative feedback practices to support student participation and communicative engagement. The findings indicate that TBLT has great potential to enhance speaking skills, but its effectiveness is highly reliant on whether the instructors can adapt the principles of tasks to the reality of contexts. The paper highlights the need to synchronize assessment activities with communicative purposes and institutional support of task-based pedagogy. Curriculum designers and policymakers are encouraged to develop flexible assessment systems and professional development programs that focus on enhancing the effective implementation of TBLT in EFL speaking instruction.

**Keywords:** Task-Based Language Teaching; Speaking Skills; EFL Instructors; Thematic Analysis; China

## 1. Introduction

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is widely recognized as an effective pedagogical theory in the field of communicative language teaching, which focuses on the application of meaningful tasks in the process of stimulating authentic language use and interaction. TBLT is based on the interactionist and sociocultural theories of language learning, which emphasize learners' involvement in goal-oriented tasks that reflect real-world communication. Such tasks promote fluency, negotiation of meaning, and pragmatic competence. Even in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, specifically in developing countries such as China, TBLT has become a growing concern as a possible answer to long-standing problems in developing speaking proficiency in learners [1].

Nonetheless, decades of English teaching have not provided Chinese EFL learners with a high level of oral communicative competence, particularly spontaneous speaking. The way English has traditionally been taught in China has focused on grammar translation, memorization of vocabulary, and performance on examinations at the cost of communicative competence. Although recent curriculum changes have promoted communicative language

teaching and learner-centeredness, classroom activities still remain teacher-centered and form-focused [2]. In that regard, TBLT is frequently referred to as a pedagogical compromise that can help to change speaking practice as drills into an interactive process.

Theoretically, TBLT concurs with the theories of second language acquisition that emphasize the importance of interaction, output and meaningful communication in the development of language. The interactionist theory suggests that learners can learn language better when they are already busy talking and communicating in a process where the meaning is to be negotiated. In its turn, sociocultural theory focuses on learning as a socially mediated process, where language development takes place through collaborative work and scaffolding [3]. The principles are operationalized through TBLT, where tasks, instead of the linguistic forms, are centralized in the teaching process, and language can be naturally learned when it is used in the desire to communicate.

Nevertheless, even with the solid theoretical foundation, the implementation of TBLT in EFL classrooms has proven complicated and uneven, especially in examination-oriented systems. In China, institutional, pedagogical, and contextual conditions tend to impede the implementation of task-based approaches by EFL instructors. Bulky classes, a shortage of teaching time, high-fixed curriculum, and evaluation systems that prioritize written accuracy over oral fluency pose a serious challenge [4]. Moreover, the lack of exposure to the English language outside the classroom environment and unwillingness of the learners to engage in oral practice because of anxiety or fear of making mistakes is another thing that complicates the task-based speaking instruction. While existing TBLT research in China has primarily focused on learning outcomes, such as the level of language proficiency and student engagement, little attention has been paid to instructors' perceptions of TBLT in Chinese EFL classrooms [5]. The literature gap is the absence of studies on the experiences of instructor implementing TBLT. This research adds a novel perspective to the existing literature by shedding further light on the practical realization of TBLT in a large-scale EFL setting through analyzing the challenges and approaches perceived by instructors.

The current studies on TBLT in China have focused largely on learner outcomes, experimental comparisons, or curriculum design, employing predominantly quantitative or quasi-experimental approaches. Although these studies have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of TBLT [6], they tend to overlook the lived experience and professional opinions of EFL instructors who have to implement theory into classroom practice. Instructors are at the forefront to mediate pedagogical innovations, changes in methodology to the contextual realities and instructional decisions on a moment-to-moment basis. Devoid of a subtle perception of the views of instructors, studies of TBLT run the risk of being out of touch with what happens in classrooms [7].

In addition, the development of speaking skills is the area of the TBLT pedagogy with its specific challenges. Speaking as opposed to reading or writing is spontaneous, interactive, and cognitively challenging. Objective evaluation of speaking performance, timely feedback, and fair involvement in the activities are the consistent challenges of instructors. In TBLT classrooms, the teacher needs to balance between fluency and accuracy, how to manage group dynamics and how to design the tasks that are not only communicatively meaningful but also linguistically adequate. The latter is exacerbated in EFL settings, where the proficiency levels of learners are heterogeneous, and there are few possibilities of authentic communication [8].

Qualitative studies conducted recently have demanded more focus on the beliefs, experiences, and teaching methods of instructors in the implementation of TBLT. This kind of research indicates that the perception of feasibility, effectiveness, and institutional support among instructors has a major impact on the implementation of task-based approaches in practice and how this may be implemented or not. This can be quite stressful to instructors in China, where educational reforms are achieved through top-down implementation, which tends to create conflicts between policy expectations and classroom constraints [9]. The way instructors cope with these tensions is of importance in understanding how to provide context-sensitive pedagogical advice.

However, despite the growing literature on TBLT, a significant gap remains in qualitative, instructor-focused research that explores the issues and effective methods related to improving speaking skills through task-based teaching in Chinese EFL classrooms. In particular, very little research has been done to examine instructors' perceptions of task-based speaking activities, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to make TBLT feasible and effective. This gap is particularly significant given the primary importance of speaking competence in global communication and the growing need for communicatively competent English users in the academic and professional spheres in China [10].

To address this gap, this research will seek to investigate EFL instructors' views regarding the use of Task-Based

Language Teaching for developing speaking in Chinese EFL classrooms. The proposed study will employ a qualitative research design to capture instructors' lived experiences, perceived challenges, and contextually informed strategies associated with task-based instruction in speaking. The study foregrounds instructors' voices to provide a realistic and practical picture of the workings of TBLT in actual classroom environments, as opposed to treating TBLT as an abstract approach.

In particular, the research questions discussed in this work are the following:

- (1) What are the perceived challenges among EFL instructors in China when implementing Task-Based Language Teaching to teach speaking skills to students?
- (2) How do instructors address these challenges and implement effective speaking instruction based on tasks?
- (3) What are the perceptions of instructors regarding the influence of TBLT on students' speaking engagement and communicative competence?

As RQ1 and RQ2 focus on the instructor-related aspects, namely, challenges and strategies in TBLT, RQ3 addresses student outcomes, including their engagement and speaking competence. Even though some overlap can be present regarding how the instructor views the progress of the student, RQ3 provides clear information about the impact of TBLT on students' actual speaking ability and their active involvement in language activities. Through answering these questions, the study will strive to contribute to the growing qualitative literature on TBLT, provide pedagogically relevant information to EFL instructors, and inform the curriculum designers and policymakers about the situational conditions necessary for successful task-based speaking teaching in China. Finally, the results should assist in developing more realistic, flexible, and instructor-inspired strategies for applying TBLT in EFL settings.

## 2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to understand the views of EFL instructors regarding challenges and effective solutions related to the application of Task-Based language Teaching (TBLT) in promoting speaking skills among Chinese EFL learners. The qualitative approach was considered suitable since the aim of the study was to describe instructors' lived experiences, professional judgments, and context-sensitive practices, as opposed to testing predefined hypotheses or quantifying variables. Qualitative inquiry enables an in-depth comprehension of complicated pedagogical phenomena as they are expressed in actual educational contexts, making it particularly suitable for investigating the instructional challenges and strategies associated with TBLT.

### 2.1. Research Design

The research design used was a qualitative descriptive study, which was based on the interpretive enquiry. This design was chosen as it allowed giving detailed and rich information about the perception and experiences of instructors without imposing a strict theoretical approach and manipulation of the experiment. Qualitative descriptive designs are very common designs in educational studies where the researcher is seeking to examine the instructional practices, beliefs and contextual limitations as the participants perceive them and thus the results of the study are kept close to data and still produce some meaningful pedagogical conclusions [11].

The study was dedicated to the interpretation, implementation, and modification of the task-based speaking activities by the EFL instructors in their particular institutional and classroom setting. In lieu of testing the efficacy of TBLT by comparing the outcomes of pre- and post-tests, the research focused on the comprehension of how and why instructors feel certain obstacles and what methods they think can be efficient. This design is in line with the research question, being exploratory and helps in coming up with practice-oriented recommendations.

### 2.2. Participants/Study Group

The sample comprised twelve EFL instructors from public universities and private language schools in eastern and central China. The instructors were chosen by purposeful sampling based on the following criteria:

- (a) Three or more years of experience in the teaching of EFL,
- (b) Prior exposure to or experience with Task-Based Language Teaching,
- (c) Regular teaching of a speaking-based course in English.

The sample consisted of seven female instructors and five male instructors, respectively, and their teaching experience was from 4 to 18 years. All the participants had at least master's degrees in applied linguistics, TESOL, or other similar areas, and four had doctorate degrees. The variability in the teaching experience and institutional affiliation enables the study to capture a wide spectrum of insights on TBLT implementation in various EFL settings in China [12].

### 2.3. Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, as they enabled participants to elaborate on their opinions while also ensuring consistency across interviews. An interview protocol was created on the basis of the research questions and existing literature on TBLT and speaking instruction. The interview questions focused on the experiences of instructors with task-based speaking activities, including perceived challenges, instructional strategies, student reactions, and institutional limitations [13].

The semi-structured format enabled flexibility in probing challenges emerging and motivating the participants to elaborate on their experiences. Interview questions were:

- What is your perception of Task-Based Language Teaching as far as speaking instruction is concerned?
- What challenges do you face when using task-based speaking?
- Which strategies have proven to be successful in addressing these challenges?

Reflective notes from participants were also gathered to complement the data collected through interviews. These notes provided additional information regarding classroom practices and instructional decision-making, serving as part of data triangulation.

### 2.4. Researcher Role

Qualitative research involves the researcher actively engaging in data generation and interpretation. The researcher was a non-participant interviewer and reflective analyst in this research. Although the researcher already possessed some academic background knowledge of TBLT and EFL pedagogy, personal assumptions were intentionally put aside and the researcher focused on the voices of participants.

The researcher took a supportive and neutral position in interviews and encouraged participants to share positive and critical perspectives. Reflexive memos were kept throughout the research process to record the new interpretations, choices of methodology, and researcher bias [14]. This self-reflexive work helped to increase the level of transparency and strengthen the validity of the findings.

### 2.5. Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted within three months. Potential participants were recruited with institutional permission, and the study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards and the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Email contacts were made, and eligible instructors were issued an information sheet elaborating on the purpose of the study, research procedures, and voluntary participation. All the participants were informed of the study information prior to the interviews. All interviews were carried out online through video conferencing systems in line with the time schedules and the geographical location of the participants.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 70 min and were in English since all the participants were fluent in English. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. After the transcription, the participants were given the opportunity to revise their transcripts in order to verify their accuracy and provide clarifications, which also aided member checking [15]. Electronic teacher reflection notes were gathered and analyzed with the transcripts of the interview to provide a deeper contextual insight.

In order to guarantee transparency in the data analysis procedure, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes in the interview data. Following the process of transcribing the interviews (Table 1), codes were assigned to label important excerpts. These codes were categorized into broader themes capturing the challenges and approaches described by instructors. The following table illustrates the relationship between certain interview excerpts and the corresponding codes and themes.

**Table 1.** Linking Interview Excerpts to Codes and Themes in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Implementation.

Excerpt	Code	Theme
"Large class sizes are difficult to manage."	Large class sizes	Classroom management challenges
"Students fear speaking due to anxiety."	Student anxiety	Student motivation and participation
"When students are aware they won't be tested in speaking exams, their engagement drops."	Low exam motivation	Student motivation and participation
"I always scaffold tasks by providing examples before students try them."	Task scaffolding	Task adaptation and scaffolding
"Group activities help students practice without feeling pressured to speak alone."	Group work, low pressure	Grouping and interaction management

## 2.6. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data through a systematic and iterative process. Initially, all the transcripts of the interviews and reflective notes were read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data. Some of the initial codes were then generated inductively with attention paid to repetitive notions of such issues as what, how, and why regarding TBLT in speaking teaching.

In the second stage, related codes were grouped into larger categories, which were refined into themes that captured main patterns in the accounts of the participants. Themes were revisited and refined to ensure internal consistency and specific differences between categories. In the process of the analysis, similarities and differences were identified through constant comparison across participants and institutional settings [16].

To develop analytical rigor, the excerpts of the data were repeatedly reviewed to make sure that the themes were based on the actual words of the participants. The final themes were used to present the findings, supported by direct quotations.

## 2.7. Credibility and Ethics

A number of measures were adopted to establish credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Member checking was also carried out through the sharing of interview transcripts with the participants to verify accuracy. Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources, such as interviews and reflective teaching notes. In addition, the coding decisions and thematic interpretations were reviewed by a colleague with experience in qualitative research, which is known as peer debriefing [17].

All participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality, and no identifying institutional data was disclosed. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could discontinue with the study at any time without negative consequence.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research. Recruitment of potential participants was conducted with institutional permission. The informed consent was obtained, and the participants' confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed before data collection. All data were safely stored and were utilized only for academic purposes. The research adhered to the accepted ethical principles of qualitative research, including respect for participants, voluntary participation, and transparent reporting.

## 3. Findings

This section provides the findings of the thematic analysis of the data from interviews and reflective notes. The results are then classified into great themes that depict the views of EFL instructors regarding the difficulties involved in the application of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in teaching speaking and the efforts they make to mitigate these difficulties in Chinese EFL classrooms [18]. All of the themes are backed up through direct quotes of participants to make the interpretations based on the data.

### 3.1. Overview of Emergent Themes

Data analysis led to four key themes: challenges-related and three strategy-related themes. **Table 2** gives a summary of the themes that were found during the study.

**Table 2.** Summary of Themes Identified from Instructor Interviews.

Theme Category	Themes	Codes (Example)
Challenges	Large class sizes and classroom management	"large class size", "group management", "unequal participation"
	Assessment of speaking performance	"difficulty in assessment", "lack of rubrics", "fluency vs. accuracy"
	Student motivation and participation	"student anxiety", "fear of mistakes", "lack of engagement"
Strategies	Limited institutional resources	"lack of time", "insufficient materials", "institutional support"
	Task adaptation and scaffolding	"task modification", "pre-task support", "scaffolding language"
	Grouping and interaction management	"pair work", "group roles", "flexible grouping"
	Feedback and assessment strategies	"formative feedback", "peer feedback", "post-task reflection"

### 3.1.1. Theme 1: Classroom Management and Large Class Sizes

Among the most mentioned obstacles were the high class size, which the instructors reported to be the biggest barrier to the effective teaching of task-based speaking. The majority of the participants mentioned teaching classes that consisted of between 45 and more than 60 learners, which led to the inability to control the work in the groups, guarantee equal contribution, and deliver individualized feedback when performing assignments [19].

As one instructor (Participant A) explained:

"In speaking activities based on tasks, you have to listen to the students, yet, when there are more than 50 students in the class, it will be nearly impossible to hear all the groups simultaneously."

A number of instructors indicated that large classes usually led to a disparity in participation where the more assertive students took over the discussions and the silent students had to sit back and keep their mouths shut. This state of affairs contradict one of the essential principles of TBLT active learner involvement through interaction.

Another participant stated:

"Some students detest other students with group work. They are there in person but they are not actually talking and they are not actually taking part."

Such findings indicate that although TBLT can be ideally applied to teaching speaking, in large EFL classes, it creates a challenge in terms of management issues, which demand a conscious change of the institution of instructions.

### 3.1.2. Theme 2: Problems with the Evaluation of the Speaking Performance

Speaking assessment also proved to be another primary challenge among instructors. The participants found it challenging to objectively assess students' speaking performance during task-based activities, particularly in terms of fluency, interactional competence, and task completion [20].

One instructor remarked:

"Students concurrently talk in groups when doing tasks. Speaking is extremely difficult to judge fairly since you cannot hear everybody."

Another observation made by instructors was the absence of standardized rubrics that would be consistent with TBLT principles. Most of them used informal observation or post-task summaries which they believed were not sufficient to reflect on the speaking skills of students.

Another participant noted:

"The exam system is still based on writing and grammar. Although we are using tasks in the classroom, speaking is not graded with utmost seriousness, hence students do not necessarily approach it with much seriousness."

This theme suggests the lack of correspondence between task-based pedagogy and the current assessment practices that place more emphasis on accuracy than communicative effectiveness.

### 3.1.3. Theme 3: Student Anxiety and Participation Challenges

It was discovered that the issue of student anxiety was an unending barrier in task-based speaking teaching. Though there were other instructors who found the interactive activity with students more productive, others indicated that the learners were usually not active because of anxiety, fear of making errors, or lack of confidence in their speaking skills [21].

Instructor Quotes:

“In most cases, students are afraid of losing face when they speak English. Even at work, they are concerned with mistakes and pronunciation. When the learners know that they are not to be examined by speaking during the exams, they do not find the need to be involved in the speaking work”.

These results indicate that the fear of errors and the fear of losing face have an important deterrent effect on participating actively in task-based speaking processes. Nonetheless, these issues did not prevent instructors from reporting that, with the proper scaffolding of tasks and their connection to the interests of students, students can be actively engaged.

### 3.1.4. Theme 4: Scarcity of Institutional Resources (Challenge Theme)

The scarcity of resources, time, teaching resources and institutional support was also mentioned as one of the obstacles to successful implementation of TBLT. The instructors complained about work loads and rigid curricula which left them with limited time to implement task-based speaking activities successfully. As one instructor explained:

“We need to get the textbook accomplished and put the students through exams. It is not always possible to have enough time cycles to perform the tasks”.

Other instructors also mentioned that insufficient professional development opportunities associated with TBLT also undermined their self-confidence when it comes to designing and implementation of speaking activities. They noted that they needed more institutional support, training, and resources to feel better prepared to make use of TBLT strategies.

### 3.1.5. Strategy Theme 1: Adaptation and Scaffolding of Tasks

To address these challenges, instructors said that they were modifying TBLT principles in their classroom practices. Strategies that were frequently employed to improve student participation were simplification of tasks, pre-task language support, and clear instructions of tasks.

As one instructor explained:

“I provide helpful expressions and illustrations to the students before the task. This makes weaker students feel freer to speak.”

Scaffolding was considered to be necessary to allow a balance of fluency and accuracy especially in lower-proficiency learners.

### 3.1.6. Strategy Theme 2: Grouping and Interaction Management

Instructors used flexible grouping in order to deal with large classes. Participation was usually achieved by pair work, fixed small group and assigned roles (e.g., leader, reporter) [22].

One instructor noted:

“The more students have distinct roles at a task, the more responsible they will be and the more they are willing to talk.”

Such strategies assisted the instructors in controlling the interaction in the classroom better and opened more chances to have a meaningful speaking practice.

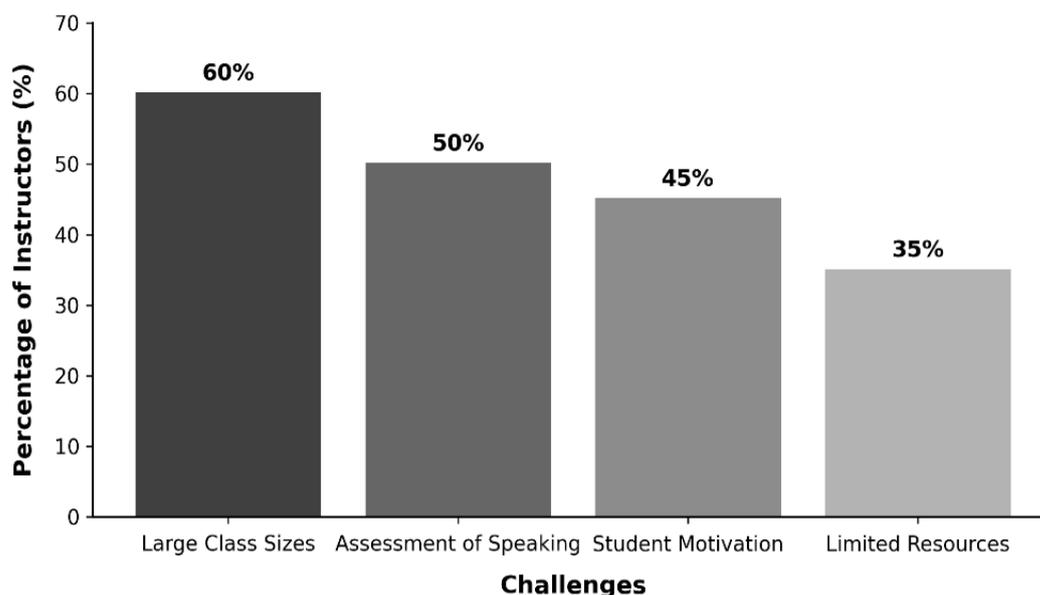
### 3.1.7. Strategy Theme 3: Feedback and Speaking Assessment Strategies

Instructors reported applying formative assessment methods instead of formal marking when undertaking tasks. Progressive feedback, peer feedback and reflection were desirable strategies [23].

One participant stated:

“I never correct students during conversation. I provide general feedback and address frequent issues after the task.”

**Figure 1** quantifies the identified challenges that are presented by instructors. The number of times that each challenge was raised was established by the number of instructors who cited the challenge so that we were able to view how many times each challenge was brought up during the interviews. As a demonstration, when five instructors referred to large class sizes as a problem it was listed as five times in the chart.



**Figure 1.** Instructor-Reported Challenges in Implementing TBLT for Speaking Skills.

Note: The number of challenges was measured by the number of various instructors who listed the challenge in the interviews.

**Figure 1** reports challenges with Large Class Sizes being the most frequent, followed by Assessment of Speaking, Student Motivation, and Limited Resources.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The section contains the presentation of the results based on the qualitative results and puts them into the context of the current literature on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, and the development of speaking skills. The discussion is an integration of views of instructors, theoretical and empirical research to interpret how task-based speaking teaching is implemented in the Chinese EFL context, the limitations that influence its application, and the pedagogical implications of the instructors' teaching methods.

### 4.1. Instructor-Perceived Challenges Interpretation

The results reveal that large class sizes present the greatest difficulty in the application of TBLT to speaking skills. This finding is consistent with previous research in EFL settings, which has identified the size of the classroom as a key challenge affecting the viability of both communicative and task-based instruction [24]. TBLT is based on interaction, monitoring, and feedback, which are increasingly difficult to manage in classes that include more than forty students. In the Chinese educational setting, in which large class sizes are typical in state institutions, the

challenges raised by instructors stem from structural limitations rather than reluctance to embrace pedagogical change.

The difficulty of evaluation of speech performance also highlights the strain between instructional systems that emphasize tasks and educational systems that focus on examinations. Although TBLT focuses more on communicative efficiency and fluency, the assessment activities in most of the Chinese EFL programs are still centered on written accuracy and standardization testing. The challenge of instructors with the evaluation of speaking during tasks is aligned with previous research that demonstrates the inconsistency between the instructional delivery and assessment systems. This lack of fit can decrease teacher confidence in the task-based test, as well as the motivation of students to perform the speaking tasks.

Another valuable aspect that was raised was the motivation and engagement of students, particularly regarding their anxiety, fear of mistakes, and the relatively low importance they have on speaking activities. The findings are also consistent with affective filter theory. According to the theory, emotional aspects can form a filter, which excludes the full involvement of the students in the process of language learning: anxiety, fear of failure, and lack of motivation. Stated differently, the process of processing and language production is impeded in learners when they are anxious or unsure. Sociocultural factors such as the fear of loss of face and the emphasis on accuracy can be very high in the Chinese EFL classroom setting, which can further intensify the unwillingness of students to talk. Although Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is designed to lessen these affective barriers by attentively paying attention to the meaning over the form, experience of instructors shows that tasks are not necessarily enough to mitigate the anxieties of students. It is still necessary to overcome these challenges, and proper scaffolding, namely the support of language and the ability to make the communication safe, is critical [25].

The problem of the lack of institutional resources, such as time limitations and the inflexible curricula, represents a wider structural problem in the application of learner centered approaches. According to the reports of instructors, heavy material and pressure of examinations limit the chances of having long cycles of tasks, which are crucial in successful TBLT. This observation is not new compared to prior studies undertaken in East Asian EFL settings, where policy-based support of communicative teaching does not necessarily lead to the creation of the conditions in the classroom [26].

## 4.2. Instructor-Reported Strategies Effectiveness

These obstacles notwithstanding, instructors found a number of approaches that helped them adjust TBLT principles to their teaching realities. Task adaptation and scaffolding proved to be quite useful in increasing the willingness of students to engage in speaking activities. The instructors could alleviate cognitive load and instill confidence among students by imparting language support before the start of tasks and by simplifying task demands. This result underlines theoretical viewpoints which place emphasis on the scaffolding when it comes to enabling meaningful interaction, particularly among lower-proficiency learners [27].

Flexible interaction management and grouping were also cited as effective strategies for managing large classes. The roles and assignments in groups and pair work enabled instructors to provide more speaking opportunities and accountability. Such practices are in line with sociocultural theories of learning, which view interaction and collaboration as the key to language development. These strategies seem to be important in the implementation of TBLT in overcrowded classrooms in the Chinese EFL context.

The fact that instructors favor formative and delayed feedback is indicative of the realization that there should be a balance between fluency and accuracy in the teaching of speaking. Instructors did not want to interrupt communicative flow too soon and cause anxiety in learners that is why they avoided correcting the learners during the working process. The post-task feedback and reflection were seen as more helpful towards language development in line with studies that assert delayed corrective feedback favors communicative classrooms. These strategies that involve assessment indicate that instructors are in a process of bargaining between ideals of pedagogy and the demands of institutions.

## 5. Conclusion

This qualitative study investigated EFL instructors' perceptions of TBLT in enhancing speaking skills in Chinese EFL classrooms, focusing on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to facilitate implementation.

The findings of this paper indicate that TBLT can be a feasible method of improving speaking in the classroom of EFL learners of Chinese when instructors have flexibility to tailor tasks to the contextual limitations. Instead of applying TBLT as a strict formula, an instructor is a mediator who reacts to the principles of specific tasks to fit the small size of a classroom, the characteristics of a learner, or the requirements of assessment. This conclusion supports the opinion that pedagogical innovation is a context-specific and professionally-agency dependent phenomenon.

It is also emphasized in the study that assessment practices should be adjusted in accordance with communicative objectives. The effects of TBLT can be minimal without the introduction of speaking skills into the evaluation systems within the institutions. Task-based assessment and speaking rubric-oriented professional development programs may assist instructors in overcoming this gap.

## 6. Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides some useful insights into EFL instructors' perceptions of TBLT in China, several limitations should be acknowledged:

**Sample size:** The study employed a small sample of twelve instructors, which can be a limitation to the research. Although in qualitative research, it is not expected that the results will be generalized in a statistical manner, the sample size is too small to generalize the findings to the broader EFL context in China.

**Self-reported data:** The data were mainly collected through self-reported interviews, which by nature are subject to biases by the participant, including social desirability bias or reflective biases. The responses given by instructors may have been the ones that they thought were expected or socially acceptable, and they may not have been giving the learner a totally objective reaction [28]. To enhance trustworthiness, strategies such as member checking and peer debriefing were employed. In future research, it may also be advisable to adopt triangulation by involving various sources of data including students' views and classroom observations to provide a more comprehensive picture of how TBLT is being implemented.

**Lack of classroom observations and student responses:** In this study, no classroom observations and student responses were performed, which may have been used to supply further information about the effectiveness of task-based teaching of speaking. The interactions and the opinion of the students could be observed and thus provide a more balanced view on the effects of TBLT on student engagement and language acquisition that the perspectives of the instructors could complement.

Theoretically, the results support the importance of the conceptualization of TBLT as a versatile pedagogical framework but not a strict approach [29]. Although TBLT is highly justified by the interactionist and sociocultural theories of language learning, its application should be adapted to the conditions of a particular situation, including class size, assessment procedures, and other affective aspects of learners. Theoretical frameworks of TBLT in EFL classrooms in the future should explicitly consider the effects of institutional and cultural factors which determine classroom practice, especially in exam-based education systems such as China.

Moreover, more theoretical attention should be paid to the incorporation of assessment in task-based speaking lessons. The existing theory of TBLT tends to focus on the design of tasks and interaction but gives little information on the practical assessment of large EFL classrooms. The theoretical frameworks should be extended to incorporate task-based formative assessment and reflective feedback systems so that the pedagogical consistency of TBLT could be increased and instructors could assess the speaking performance more competently [30].

Lastly, further studies on teacher agency in the implementation of TBLT are necessary in the future. According to the findings, instructors are crucial in mediating adaptation of the task-based principles in the local context. Theoretical debates on TBLT could be better grounded in the realization that instructors do not simply perform tasks; as practitioners, they make decisions about tasks, forms of interaction patterns, and feedback practices.

## 7. Enhancement of Trustworthiness

In order to enhance the credibility of the study, a number of measures were taken:

**Member Checking:** Here, the instructors got a chance to go through their interview transcripts and verify their accuracy so that their views were reflected correctly.

**Peer Debriefing:** The thematic interpretations and decisions made during the coding process were discussed with a colleague who was experienced with qualitative research. This step reduced biasing of the researcher and

also made sure that the themes were backed up by the data.

Triangulation: Various sources were used in data collection such as different instructors with different experiences in teaching and these were useful to offer more detailed and diverse view on the usage of TBLT.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the reliability of future studies can be improved with the help of some extra sources of data, e.g., interviews with students, classroom observations, and, perhaps, longitudinal studies to trace the trends in both teaching and student engagement.

## 8. Recommendations

On the basis of the results and the discussion of this paper, a number of theoretical and practical recommendations are suggested to facilitate the more successful application of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to improve the speaking skills development in the Chinese EFL settings. These suggestions are grounded in the lived experiences of instructors and aim to bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom realities.

On a practical level, EFL instructors in Chinese settings may consider the following recommendations. To begin with, instructors are encouraged to use task adaptation and scaffolding techniques, especially in speaking tasks. Language input before the task, clear task instructions, and model answers can help reduce anxiety and promote active participation, particularly among weaker students.

Second, grouping strategies that are flexible should be effectively integrated into instructions on speaking in tasks. Pairs, small group discussions, and role-play activities can be used to address the challenge of large classes and provide a more equal distribution of speaking time. Defining roles in groups can also be used to improve student accountability and student engagement [31].

Third, instructors are advised to focus on the provision of formative and delayed feedback rather than the continuous error correction when performing tasks. The common language problems can be discussed, peer-reviewed, and reflected on after completing the task without disrupting the communication process, thus contributing to both fluency and accuracy. Simple and task-specific talking rubrics can also assist instructors in delivering clearer and more consistent feedback.

The policy makers and curriculum designers are urged to align the assessment systems with the communicative goals at the institutional level. Adding the elements of speaking to formal assessment and decreasing the commitment to written tests alone could make students more motivated to engage in task-based speaking activities. Moreover, offering special professional training for instructors on TBLT and speaking assessment will enhance their pedagogical confidence and competence.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, writing the original draft: Y.W.; reviewing the manuscript, critical feedback: N.N. and A.B.R.; supervision of the study: N.N.; final approval: A.B.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical research standards and the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. The study involved non-invasive qualitative interviews with adult participants and posed minimal risk. Institutional permission was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. Participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks, and consented to participate voluntarily.

## Data Availability Statement

The qualitative data presented in this study are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and confidentiality agreements with participants. Anonymized excerpts may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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