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## EXAMINING TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: CONTEXT, IMPLEMENTATION AND VIABILITY

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### ABSTRACT

TBLT has become the most dominant approach in language teaching and SLA research. In language teaching, it considers 'task', which promotes negotiation of meaning in the communicative context, as a unit of teaching and learning and in SLA research, it is used as a tool to elicit naturalistic language for research. Presently, there is a growing trend of adopting TBLT in English language teaching with the purposes of enhancing the communicative ability by focusing on meaning in a real-life context. TBLT seems theoretically sound as it has been supported by many psycholinguistic studies. However, there is an increasing concern about the suitability of using a task and adopting TBLT in various world contexts. There is a contention on the practical application of 'task' in real teaching. This article analyses how suitable is the use of 'task' is in teaching English at the primary level of Nepal.

### INTRODUCTION

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) has dominated the discourse of language pedagogy since the 1980s. Being an offshoot of the communicative approach, TBLT assumes that language is learned when learners communicate to perform a 'task'. It demands learners' role not merely as a learner but rather as a user of language and provides an opportunity to 'negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication' (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 224). However, there are many practical concerns for the implementation of tasks in the classroom. For example, Littlewood (2007), by referring to the other studies (e.g. Carless, 2004; Ho, 2004; Li, 2003; Samimy and Kobayashi, 2004), argues that the assumption of learners' engagement

in communication contradict the local realities of East Asia. The 'classroom management of large classes with unmotivated students, avoidance of English, minimal demand on language competence to perform tasks, knowledge-based grammar test, assessment and accumulation of knowledge as educational value' are the grassroots realities in the East Asian context, which contradict TBLT (p. 244). Similarly, elsewhere Carless (2002, 2003, 2007, 2008) reports that the use of L1, issues of classroom management, preference of learning grammar, low proficient students and the power relationship between students and teachers have made implementation of 'task' less effective in Hong Kong. This indicates that in the socio-cultural context, such as in Japan, where students are introverted, shy and respectful of teachers as the ultimate source of knowledge, the implementation of TBLT is reported to be inappropriate (Burrow, 2008).

The studies cited above reveal that there is an increasing concern about the suitability of TBLT in real contexts. In this article, I discuss whether or not the use of 'task' is suitable at the primary level in the present context of Nepal. To do so, the three parameters of the post method pedagogy, particularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) will be adapted. The three dimensions of post-method pedagogy analyze the suitability of any pedagogy in relation to grassroots realities and socio-cultural practices of the context in which it is being implemented.

### **Conceptualizing Task in TBLT**

Before I proceed, it is worthwhile to define what a 'task' is, though it is difficult to define. Task from the pedagogic perspective can be defined as a planned activity that provides a plentiful opportunity to negotiate meanings by using language (Nunan, 2004). In the same way, Skehan (1996) defines tasks as:

[...] activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in a task is evaluated in terms of the achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear resemblance to real-life use. (p. 20)

The three fundamental features mentioned above are: a task focuses on *meaning* (not on *form*), it has a fixed *outcome*, and it reflects *authentic use* of language (real-life language). By consolidating these features, Ellis (2003, pp. 9-10) defines that a task is a 'work-plan' which focuses on 'meaning' and involves 'real-world use of language'. He further points out that a task involves 'any of four language skills' and engages learners in 'cognitive processes (e.g. selecting, classifying, reasoning) to achieve a fixed outcome'.

Task, as defined by Ellis, includes both the process and product of language teaching. The process includes cognitive strategies, and the product is the expected outcome of a task. At the same time, it also indicates that the work-plan of teachers is a major factor which determines the successful completion of a task. However, such a definition needs a critical scrutiny because it is hard to envisage how the teachers' work-plan guarantees language learning.

There are some problems with the idea of a *predetermined outcome* and work plan. First, the predetermined outcome of a task undervalues the role of the factors that yield during the task performance, and it does not guarantee learners' contribution in performing a task (Pica et al., 1993). In this regard, Seedhouse (1999) contends that learners can complete the task even by producing a limited linguistic output that does not necessarily help learners to learn language. Likewise, the notion of a predetermined outcome of a task seems to undervalue the factors like relationships among participants in the classroom, which play a vital role to influence the meaning of language (Seedhouse, 2005).

Similarly, the work plan actually may not address the learners' reinterpretation of the task when it is performed in the classroom. But learners' (re) interpretation of the task is a significant factor in the task performance because this may lead a task into an 'unforeseen direction' which jeopardizes the expected outcome (Murphy, 2003, p. 353). Thus, the outcome of the task basically relies on how the teachers reinterpret it according to the learners' needs rather than on their work plan.

The other problem is the notion of authentic language, which is one of the major tenets of TBLT. It is argued that task enhances the real use of language. But at the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the use of authentic language in the classroom is scarce in the context where English is not used outside the classroom. Moreover, all the authentic languages that occur outside the classroom cannot be taught in the classroom (Seedhouse, 1999).

This discussion reflects that it is difficult to define what a 'task' is for language learning and teaching purpose. However, there are some points which can be drawn from the discussion. First, the effective implementation of 'task' depends on the capability of teachers to prepare a work-plan and address the interpretation of task by learners in the classroom. Second, the assumption that the process of language learning is evaluated on the basis of the outcome of a task may not necessarily engage learners in using language in the classroom. Thirdly, the notion of authentic language restricts the task in a context

where English is widely used outside the classroom situation, i.e. the definition of 'task' is not generalizable to different contexts. Therefore,

I argue that a pedagogic task should be redefined as a tool that incorporates the practices of language learning in a particular socio-cultural context, and the suitability of TBLT should be judged from a socio-cultural perspective.

### **Theoretical Justification for Task-Based Approaches**

The proponents of TBLT claim that a task provides students with opportunities to perceive, comprehend, and ultimately learn a language (Willis, 1998; Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). The major arguments supporting 'task' as pointed out by Swan (2005) are:

[...] that acquisition occurs online during communicative use of language, that the conscious 'noticing' of formal features is necessary for their acquisition, and that built-in developmental sequences render progressive structural syllabuses unworkable. (p. 378)

TBLT assumes that language is learned when it is used in communication, during which learners notice the gap between the target language and their existing interlanguage consciously (Schmidt, 1990). In this regard, Samuda and Bygate (2008) claim:

By involving learners in making purposeful, on-line choices of meaning and form, a task engages holistic language use: through engaging with the task, learners are led to work with and integrate the different aspects of language for a larger purpose. (p. 8)

The arguments mentioned above show that TBLT is a useful approach to teach language in an integrative way, opposing the idea of teaching language in a fragmented way. In sum, the rationale behind using 'task' can be summarized as follows:

Task provides learners with the opportunity to negotiate and notice the gap between their interlanguage and target input. Task integrates all aspects and skills of language, providing learners with an opportunity with holistic language use.

Task stimulates learners to use real-life language.

Moreover, the rationale behind 'task' is grounded in various SLA studies. Therefore, it is relevant to mention the theoretical foundation of 'task' as follows:

### **Cognitive and Psycholinguistic Underpinnings**

TBLT largely relies on the findings from various psycholinguistic studies. Firstly, the notion of *comprehensible input* is derived from the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), which assumes that language is acquired when learners comprehend input.

However, it is contended that receiving input is not sufficient to learn language because it does not assure the conditions for goal-oriented or negotiated interaction in which learners take part. Long's (1996) *Interaction Hypothesis*, another theory behind TBLT, claims that speakers deploy various strategies to confirm whether addressees understood the message. The strategies include comprehension check, clarification request, confirmation check and recasts, which are used for the negotiation of meaning (NoM). NoM is the process of checking and clarifying problematic utterances to understand the meaning of the target language input.

The other theory underpinning TBLT is the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995), which claims that learners learn if they are provided with an opportunity to produce language. The (pushed) output provides learners with opportunities for 'contextualized, meaningful language use' (Courtney, 2001, p. 26). Furthermore, output provides feedback, helps learners to test a hypothesis and raises their consciousness about language. However, this hypothesis does not specify what aspect of language should be learned. In this regard, Skehan (1998) and Skehan and Foster (1997) suggest three aspects to be considered while designing the task, i.e. *accuracy* (error-free language use), *complexity* (elaborated language use in contexts) and *fluency* (using knowledge in communication without difficulty).

### **Socio-cultural Theoretical Framework**

The psycholinguistic studies mentioned above consider learners as an information-processing machine. On the contrary, socio-cultural theorists (e.g. Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf and Appel, 1994) argue that language is not learned in an intricate information-processing mechanism, but rather through a cooperative interaction among participants. In this regard, Julkunen (1989) argues that the rate of students' success in performing a task in a cooperative situation is higher than in a competitive and individual situation.

The socio-cultural theorists further argue that learners always co-construct the activity in which they participate on the basis of their socio-cultural background and locally determined goals. In this sense, language learning is considered a *mediated process* which occurs through *scaffolding*, i.e. supportive dialogue (Lantolf, 2000). This interpretation redefines a task, i.e. it is not an activity having a fixed outcome. It is an activity that can be (re) interpreted by learners differently according to the setting and interlocutors which determine the goals of the task. In this regard, (Seedhouse, 2005) argues:

Language learning is not seen as solely involving the acquisition of discrete syntactical and lexical items; the levels of discourse and socio-cultural participation are also involved. (p. 564)

Similarly, the success of a task depends upon 'how learners approach and perform the task rather than the intended properties of the individual task' (Willis, 2005, p. 25). Such arguments reveal the fact that negotiation of meaning in the task performance is influenced by the participants' social relationship, the context in which the task is performed and the goals of learners.

Therefore, the negotiation of meaning as interpreted by the cognitive information-processing assumption does not seem to carry significant importance in TBLT. Because learners interpret the task differently, set individual goals and perform the task according to the context (Swain and Lapkin, 1998).

In sum, the proponents of TBLT are unable to provide a reliable theoretical foundation of language learning which is applicable in diverse world contexts. Most of the studies represent the contexts where English is used as the first language, thus they lack the generalizability power. Moreover, the precedence given to the linguistic and mentalistic variables based on processing of knowledge as input leads to a 'partial acquisition' (Breen, 2001, p. 125) of the language learning process. Bruton (2002) further contends that tasks are useful only for fluency, but they are less useful for accuracy and complexity. Likewise, Foster (1998) argues that only those learners who like to take part in interaction learn language by performing a task.

Such contentions reflect that there is plenty of room to raise questions about the applicability of using 'task' in relation to the 'cultural experience' claims made by the proponents of TBLT. Therefore, there is a need of close scrutiny of effectiveness of using tasks in relation to the 'cultural experience' of language learning in socio-cultural contexts (Breen, 2001, p. 138), which includes classroom size, teacher-student relationship, assumption behind language teaching and so on.

### **The Status of the English Language in Nepal**

Nepal is a multilingual country where English is the most dominant foreign language. Although Nepali is the official language, which occupies a number of significant domains and registers, English occupies the second largest number of significant domains throughout the country, including the tourist industry, international trade and business, international affairs, aid projects, the media, education, and science and technology

(Eagle, 2000, p. 53). The majority of children in schools learn English as their third language. This paper overviews the status of English only in Primary Education as follows;

### **English Language Teaching at Primary Educational Level**

Primary education in Nepal covers the Grades One to Five (Year 1-5). There are two types of schools, i.e. government-aided schools (GAS) and private schools (PS). The English language is more prominent in PSs than in GASs. But the number of GASs is far more than that of PSs, and the problem of ELT is more serious in GASs. Thus, my focus is only on the issues related to GAS context.

The Government of Nepal (GoN) has introduced the policy of teaching English from Grade One since 2003 by changing the previous policy to teach English from Grade Four. The curriculum suggests that three languages (Nepali, English and a local language) can be used as medium of instruction at the primary level (CDC, 2006). It is further suggested that since English is a compulsory subject, it should be taught in English. However, this policy is not in consonance with grassroots reality as reported elsewhere (e.g. Awasthi, 2003; Davies et al., 1984; Bhattarai, 2007) that English teachers are untrained and they have weak English language proficiency to teach English. Davies et al. (1984 PP. 7-8 cited in Awasthi, 2003) state "...the very obvious lack of English proficiency among teachers leads to the total failure to provide comprehensible input." Although there are some changes, the situation of ELT has not been ameliorated as it is expected. The situation of ELT in GASs is still deplorable.

Supporting the findings of Davies et al. (1984), Awasthi, (2003) reports that "...the standard of written and spoken English amongst government school teachers ranges from grade two to grade four native speakers." A recent report reveals that;

*We have found that the levels of the English language of many Primary School teachers of Nepal is so low that they feel unable, and lacking in confidence, to teach the language.* (British Council Nepal, 2008)

The introduction of English in Grade One has increased the problem even more. However, a recent decision made by the government to make training and teaching licenses mandatory to obtain an appointment in schools is a positive sign for recruiting quality teachers. But a study has to be done to assess whether the policy has been successful in selecting the best teachers.

### **Task-Based Activities in Primary Textbooks**

Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), the authority to prepare curriculum and textbooks, states that the medium of teaching English at the primary level will be communicative. The textbooks, which have been prepared with an aim to develop communicative competence, include various 'tasks'. However, they have been included only to provide free practice on a particular grammar item. Thus, the present curriculum is based on the assumption of *task-supported language teaching* in which task is utilized to provide practice to learn grammatical features rather than to negotiate meaning to learn language (Ellis, 2003).

Similarly, since the four language skills are incorporated in the curriculum, students from Grade One are expected to listen, read, write and speak English. However, teachers' qualification and their experience contradict this expectation. As mentioned above, primary level teachers are not qualified and proficient enough to teach English. Furthermore, they have to handle very large classes without essential physical facilities in many cases.

### **Critical Challenges in English Language Teaching**

Among the various dilemmas and confusions, there are some notable issues of teaching English at the primary level in Nepal. In addition to the weak English language proficiency of teachers, the large classroom size and inadequate teaching materials are other issues. Because of these, teachers only have to use the chalk-and-talk method (Awasthi, 2003; Bhattarai, 2007) while teaching English. Another serious issue is the problem of teacher development. Despite long institutional efforts of the government, the scarcity of trained English language teachers is always felt. The data show that only about 45% of the teachers are trained (Bhattarai, 2007).

To sum up, there is a lack of trained and proficient teachers to teach English. The classroom sizes are unmanageably large, where communicative activities cannot be conducted effectively. Furthermore, the diverse sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds of learners have also affected the teaching and learning of English. Children from diverse linguistic backgrounds who have to learn English as a third language perceive English as the hardest subject. In the same way, lack of resources, traditional methods of teaching, and preference to use L1 are other major factors affecting teaching English.

### **Assessing TBLT Implementation: Theory versus Ground Reality**

Since TBLT has not been introduced in Nepal, I must say that it is too early to argue whether or not it is suitable. However, its suitability can be assessed on the basis of the suitability of the tasks which are incorporated in the present curriculum and textbooks. The following section analyses the rhetoric and reality of implementing these 'tasks' in the context of Nepal.

### **Context-Specific Considerations**

Language pedagogy...must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context, embedded in a particular socio-cultural milieu. (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, pp. 538)

As mentioned above, the suitability of language pedagogy here, TBLT, should be assessed in relation to local realities which include broader socio-cultural context, role and relationship between teacher and students, students, school environment, availability of resources and so on. The following section details the suitability of 'task' in terms of these factors.

#### **1. Competencies and Capacities of English Language Teachers**

Implementing 'tasks' has been critiqued as it demands highly competent teachers who are able to plan for using tasks and facilitate students to perform them (Knight, 2001). In this regard, the two teacher informants (among three), who were asked to comment on the present status of English teachers in Nepal, opined that there is a need to train on how to use (communicative) tasks. Most teachers are still untrained. If a teacher cannot hold a simple conversation, they will have difficulty using tasks in the classroom.

But another teacher commented that 'training doesn't necessarily ensure good teaching in the classroom. There might be several factors which affect teaching.' This reflects that, in addition to insufficient training, there are other factors affecting the implementation of tasks (These factors will be discussed in the following sections). Furthermore, as mentioned above, English teachers in Nepal are not proficient in English to facilitate students to perform tasks. In this regard, (Tsui, 2003) argues that untrained teachers cannot provide proper facilitation to perform tasks. This implies that there is the need of huge amount of teacher preparation in Nepal for effective use of tasks in teaching English.

## **2. Availability and Accessibility of Educational Resources**

[...] in Hariom Primary school of Dodhara-8, there are no classrooms, furniture, chalk, a staff room and so on. "Teaching- learning can happen only on sunny days, but it is not possible in cloudy/ rainy days because the hut built by villagers some years ago may collapse anytime," Shanti Rana, the Head Teacher, contends. (BK, 2009)

This news from a national newspaper reflects the condition of the majority of GASs in Nepal. This situation raises the questions: How can we expect to implement 'task' in such a context? Where will students sit and interact if there is no furniture? This implies that the practice of using 'task' which is developed in the resourceful contexts may not be applicable in the schools where even pieces of chalk and blackboard are not available. Similarly, without resources, teachers cannot develop their own tasks to use in the classroom. Thus, they have to solely depend on the textbook prescribed to teach English.

## **3. Student Agency and Participation in Task Performance**

TBLT presumes that a task activates learners to use their existing knowledge. It implies that learners should have the ability to use their interlanguage for the successful accomplishment of the task. But the studies have reported that those students with low proficiency in English, like in Korea (Li, 1998) and Greece (Karavas-Doukas, 1995) do not participate in interaction actively.

Regarding this concern, one teacher informant commented about that "learners' ability to use English in the classroom is directly proportionate to the amount of exposure outside the classroom. In areas where English is rarely heard, it is understandably unnatural to speak in a foreign language." In the same way, the two other teachers opined that "the majority of Primary students [in Nepal] do not speak in English because they never use it for real-life purposes." This suggests that the real-life use of English in the context where it is not used outside the classroom, like in Nepal may be irrelevant in teaching English.

## **4. Cultural and Social Dynamics in Educational Settings**

[...] the social status of teachers needs to be upgraded. Teachers should be well-trained, supported assessed in classroom activities, supported regularly, and made accountable for profession. A good teacher deserves a good salary and a good social status.

The profession of language teaching should be understood in relation to complex socio-

cultural activity (Tudor, 1996). The opinion of one teacher informant, as mentioned above, shows that the low social status of teachers in the broader socio- cultural milieu hinders teachers' professionalism in Nepal. The teacher claims that without providing support and raising the teachers' social status, we cannot force teachers to spend more time for material development and preparation to teach English as demanded by TBLT.

Another issue is the power relationship between teachers and students (Willis, 1996). In Nepal, teachers are considered the source of knowledge and authority to maintain discipline in the classroom. A teacher's strictness to maintain discipline and quietness in class is considered a quality of a good teacher. This can be considered as a 'cultural mismatch' between the rhetoric of TBLT and the culture of learning (Samimy and Kobayashi, 2004, p. 261) in Nepal. In this regard, one teacher informant comments;

*There exists a power relation between teachers and students. Students do not feel confident to speak to the teachers, because they are also afraid of making error which the teachers do not enjoy.*

This suggests that the perceived socio-cultural relationship between teachers and students, which consider teachers as an authority and students as a passive recipient does not seem to allow the effective implementation of tasks in teaching English at the primary level in Nepal.

## **5. Managing Large-Scale Class Environments**

"We have to teach 68-115 students in a class", the head teacher, Rabindra Ghimire says, "We lack a sufficient number of teachers and funds to divide the classes into sections." "We only hear when teachers come closer to us," Parbati Ghatani, a second Grader, says, "We have to queue to get our homework checked." "It takes at least one week to make students understand a topic. Thus, it is not possible to make all students understand and finish the course", Laxmi Adhikari, a teacher, comments. (Poudel, 2008)

This news from a national daily paper suggests that classes in Nepal are overcrowded, which accentuates the problem of classroom management. Thus, in the context where noise is regarded as indiscipline, like in Hong Kong (Carless, 2002) and Nepal, the use of tasks may be problematic. Because while performing tasks, students have to interact with each other, which creates a bit of a noisy environment in a large class. In this case, one teacher informant commented that "the class sizes are usually large, having 80/90 students in most public schools." We cannot conduct group and pair work." This opinion shows that the large classroom size affects in implementation of tasks. Furthermore,

teachers cannot conduct pair and group work activities in an unmanageably large class.

## 6. Assessment Mechanisms and Testing Practices

The curriculum of the primary level has mentioned that students' communicative ability will be assessed by keeping a record of their classroom performance in a profile regularly. The provision for evaluation of all the language skills has been clearly articulated in the curriculum (CDC, 2006). However, in practice, only grammar items, reading and writing are given prominence, and they are tested through written examination twice a year (sometimes more). In this connection, one teacher informant opined *-The exam system in its current form is not encouraging communication. There must be a rethink of it, which means the aims and objectives of learning English must be clearly established in the examination.*

This opinion suggests that the present evaluation practice does not assess the communicativeability of students. Likewise, it is also problematic to test communicative competence with tasks because they require much time and preparation in construction and interpretation. With a large number of the students it is challenging for untrained teachers to assess the communicative competence of students with low proficiency. Furthermore, the exams in Nepal have ther *washback effect*

(Hughes, 1988) towards memorizing the fixed answers and rote learning. In an extreme end, another teacher informant comments, "It is impossible to prepare questions to test the communicative ability of such a large number of students."

### Bridging Theory and Classroom Practice

[...] practicality does not pertain merely to the everyday practice of classroom teaching. It pertains to a much larger issue that has a direct impact on the practice of classroom teaching, namely, the relationship between theory and practice. (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, pp. 40)

Practicality, which is closely related to particularity, is concerned with theory-practice relationship. As Nunan (2004) claims that there is a gap between what is anticipated and actual implementation, I argue that the theory behind TBLT may be difficult to translate into practice in the context of Nepal. Although the curriculum aims to develop communicative competence in English (CDC, 2006), teaching and learning activities are still in the grip of traditional grammar translation (GT) method. In place of using tasks, the majority of teachers teach English by translating it into Nepali. In this regard, one teacher informant commented "Largely we are using GT, and that allows translation and

memorization of grammar rules. To move from this stage to group/pair work is a big leap." There are two possible reasons for this. First, teachers are not able to speak exclusively in English. Second, students who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds may not understand English without translating it into Nepali.

Furthermore, in contrast to the rhetoric of 'task', learning English in Nepal is considered learning grammar through explicit instructions on the particular form followed by drilling, memorisation and rigorous practice. In addition, since English is taught as a subject (not a medium of instruction), students expect and are expected to obtain high marks in their examination. They do not need to perform any kind of communicative task in the examination. Because of this expectation and practice, the use of tasks in the classroom may become insignificant.

### **Empowerment and Educational Transformation**

The pedagogy of possibility is concerned with "participants' experience which draws ideas not only from the classroom episodes but also from the border social, political and economic environment in which they grew up" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 542). The underlying assumption behind this parameter is that any theory should empower learners and work with the experiences of people in a pedagogic setting. Furthermore, by analyzing the role of pedagogy in relation to power and social inequality, it also provides critical input to redefine the policy, curriculum and textbooks. This assumption raises various issues about the implementation of TBLT at the primary level of Nepal.

By acknowledging the particularity and practicality of 'task' in Nepal as mentioned above, it is crucial to assess how possible it is to implement it in the context of Nepal. One of the issues related to the possibility of implementing TBLT is the purpose of learning English. Although a negligible number of students, especially in tourist areas and cities can access TV channels and computers and listen to English songs and watch movies, the majority of them hardly have a chance to use English outside the classroom. In this regard, one teacher informant argues that "Because English is a foreign language in Nepal. Students can speak English only to us tourists, if any. But there are a few opportunities now, e.g. to read newspapers in English, to listen to English songs, to watch English movies, etc." This view suggests that although globalization has brought some opportunities to use English, only a small number of students have benefited from it. Thus, students expect to learn grammar rather than use English in communication.

The whole discussion shows that the concept of 'task' is an innovation which is face-

threatening (Ellis, 2001; Eckerth, 2008) for both teachers and students of Nepal. Both teachers and students have to change their roles, i.e. teachers should transform from an authority to a facilitator, and students should transform from a passive learner to an active user of language. Such role transformation is also a threat to the existing identity of teachers. In this regard, Canagarajah (2002, p.135) argues that "methods embody the social relations, forms of thinking and strategies of learning that are preferred by the circles that construct them." This applies in the case of TBLT, too. TBLT, which seems an appropriate approach in the centre where the number of students is small, social relationship between teachers and students is open, and students prefer to work in the group taking an active role during the interaction, does not seem to exist in the *guru-chela* relationship in Nepal (i.e. teacher- student relationship in which a teacher is always a superior/provider). Therefore, the implementation of TBLT without considering this fact may destroy the local way of thinking and learning English. This suggests that there is less possibility of implementing TBLT in Nepal.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed the suitability of TBLT at the primary level in the present context of Nepal in terms of particularity, practicality and possibility. The whole discussion is based on a pivot question: Is TBLT rhetoric or reality at the primary level in Nepal? The discussion suggests that the implementation of TBLT contradicts the socio-cultural context, practices and expectations of teaching/learning English in Nepal. Thus, the implementation of TBLT without considering the local reality may further trivialize the local strategies of learning English (Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 2002). The inappropriateness of TBLT has already been reflected in the resistance shown by both teachers and students toward the use of 'task' in the classroom. By considering the expectation and preferred learning styles of students, instead of using 'task' as a means of engaging students, teachers are using it as a means of teaching grammar. Therefore, I claim that there is a big gap between the rhetoric and reality of Nepal.

The mismatch between expectation and implementation of tasks in a real context shows that there is a need of redefining TBLT to make it more context sensitive. Task should be redefined in line with particularity, practicality and possibility of its implementation in diverse world contexts. But to date, TBLT neither represents the issues of contexts where classes are overcrowded, teachers are untrained, resources are not available nor does it

provide any framework that addresses the power relationship that exists between teacher and students. Thus, I suggest that there is a dire need of evaluating TBLT with the bottom-up approach rather than implementing it without considering the local realities. Although I confess that I am not in a strong position to deny the suitability of TBLT in Nepal without a large-scale study, based on the issues raised in this paper, I argue that the assumptions of TBLT exist only in rhetoric but not in reality in the context of Nepal. Despite this fact, I suppose TBLT might work if it is done by competent teachers with adequate resources and a clear policy of English language teaching.

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