

# A study on the application of input hypothesis and output hypothesis in task-based language teaching in mixed-level classes

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**Abstract:** While task-based language teaching (TBLT) is recognized for enhancing second language acquisition (SLA), challenges such as diverse learner proficiency, exam-oriented pressures, and limited resources hinder its application, particularly in a context like China. This thesis investigates the implementation of task-based language teaching in mixed-level classes, grounded in the input and output hypotheses that emphasize meaningful communication through structured tasks. In the end, some critical areas such as differentiated task design, teacher training, classroom management strategies, cultural adaptation, and technological integration are discussed to optimize TBLT for varied educational contexts, particularly in mixed-level classes.

**Key words:** TBLT; input hypothesis; output hypothesis

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## 1 Introduction

TBLT has gained recognition as an effective approach in SLA, emphasizing the completion of meaningful tasks that reflect real-world communication. This approach offers learners valuable opportunities to process language input and produce output in real context. However, implementing TBLT in mixed-level classes, where students have diverse proficiency levels, presents some unique challenges for both teachers and students. Teachers must design suitable tasks that accommodate the varied needs of learners, ensuring each student receives appropriate input while being capable to produce meaningful language output. This study aims to examine how TBLT influences both input processing and language output in mixed-level classes, with a specific focus on task design strategies that can enhance learning outcomes for learners at different proficiency levels. By exploring these strategies, the study seeks to provide insights into how TBLT can facilitate effective language acquisition while adapting to the needs of different students.

## 2 An overview of basic theories

### 2.1 Task-based language teaching

TBLT is an approach in SLA that uses real-world tasks for language learning, focusing on active language use in authentic contexts rather than grammar instruction or memorization. Grounded in constructivist theories, TBLT promotes dynamic, interactive learning through structured tasks that guide context-specific language use (Ellis, 2017). The core unit of instruction, the "task", encourages communicative use and can be adapted to different proficiency levels by varying task complexity. TBLT fosters linguistic proficiency and practical communication skills through learner-centered instruction.

## 2.2 The input hypothesis

Proposed by Krashen in the 1980s, the input hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input slightly beyond a learner's current proficiency. It suggests language learning occurs naturally, similar to how children acquire their first language through exposure to meaningful communication. Grounded in cognitive theories, including Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), it argues that input should challenge learners without overwhelming them [1]. This theory contrasts with grammar-focused methods, promoting language acquisition through context-rich input.

## 2.3 The output hypothesis

Swain's output hypothesis emphasizes the role of language production in learning. While input is vital, language output accelerates cognitive processing and helps learners identify gaps and refine understanding.

Challenging the view that input alone drives acquisition, Swain argued that output promotes deeper engagement. Influenced by Vygotsky, the theory suggests interactive output supports cognitive development and meaning construction (Vygotsky, 1978). Hypothesis testing through feedback is key to refining language use.

## 2.4 Mixed-level classes

Mixed-level classes are educational settings where students with varying linguistic skills, background knowledge, learning styles, and cognitive abilities are taught together. This variation can arise from differences in language exposure, learning efficiency, and personal experiences. In SLA, mixed-level classrooms are common, with learners at different proficiency levels participating in the same activities. These classrooms pose challenges and opportunities for teachers, who must meet the diverse needs of students while maintaining an inclusive and effective learning environment.

# 3 Relevant studies at home and abroad

TBLT has gained attention in SLA as an approach focused on meaningful, communicative tasks. It is particularly beneficial for mixed-level language classes, where students of varying proficiency levels work together.

## 3.1 Research on the application of TBLT in English teaching

TBLT, based on communicative language teaching, prioritizes meaningful tasks over rote learning. Introduced by Prabhu (1987) as an alternative to traditional grammar methods [2], TBLT has evolved through works by Ellis (2017) on task design and learner interaction [3]. Research on TBLT in China began in the early 2000s, aligning with the communicative goals under the New English Curriculum Standards, while emphasizing adaptation to the exam-oriented context.

International studies have explored TBLT's application, with research by Skehan examining task complexity and authentic task design. TBLT has been proven to improve learner engagement, fluency, and communicative competence (Ellis, 2017), despite challenges like teacher resistance and resource limitations. In China, TBLT's development has focused on curriculum reforms and communicative competence, with studies by Wang Xiaolin (2015) highlighting issues such as inadequate teacher training, lack of authentic materials, and time constraints [4]. Both domestic and foreign studies emphasize the need for enhanced teacher training, localized materials, and integration of TBLT with traditional methods to overcome these challenges.

## 3.2 The studies on the application of input and output hypotheses in TBLT

Krashen's input hypothesis (1992) emphasizes "comprehensible input" in SLA, influencing TBLT to incorporate input-rich tasks [5]. Swain's output hypothesis highlights the importance of active output to refine language, with recent studies showing that combining both input and output improves proficiency. The interaction hypothesis also plays a key role in TBLT.

In China, integrating input and output in TBLT addresses issues like "mute English" and limited communicative

competence. Studies demonstrate that combining both improves fluency and reading comprehension. Researchers emphasize adapting tasks to learners' needs and blending traditional methods with TBLT for better outcomes.

#### **4 Summary and comment based on the previous research and gap-finding**

The integration of input and output hypotheses into TBLT has been widely explored, demonstrating their effectiveness in enhancing communicative competence. International research offers theoretical insights and diverse contexts, while domestic studies in China focus on adapting TBLT to the exam-driven education system. In China, situational teaching aligns with the principles of input and output by creating immersive contexts, but approaches differ: internationally, interaction and meaning negotiation are emphasized, while in China, structured outputs are linked to exam outcomes.

Critical gaps remain, including limited empirical evidence on how differentiated tasks meet the diverse needs of mixed-level classrooms. Few studies examine how task complexity impacts engagement and outcomes, particularly in resource-limited settings. Additionally, the challenges of balancing communicative competence with grammar-focused testing in exam-driven contexts are often overlooked. Addressing these gaps requires both theoretical refinement and practical adaptation, especially in culturally specific and resource-variable environments.

#### **5 Suggestions for possible research and application in schools**

##### **5.1 Task design and classroom management**

Research should examine the impact of differentiated TBLT tasks on engagement and outcomes across proficiency levels. Longitudinal studies could explore how tiered tasks affect communication skills. Schools should design tasks that challenge students at varying levels and foster collaboration. Additionally, strategies like group work, peer feedback, and clear instructions can help manage mixed-level classrooms effectively.

##### **5.2 Teacher training and support**

Studies should explore how teacher training improves proficiency in task-based methods and its impact on task design, classroom management, and outcomes. Schools should implement dynamic training programs that include theory, workshops, and role-playing to address mixed-level classroom complexities and promote meaningful language acquisition.

##### **5.3 Cultural, contextual, and technological integration**

Research should explore hybrid models combining TBLT with traditional methods, especially in exam-driven environments like China, to balance communicative competence and exam performance. Additionally, technology offers opportunities to enhance TBLT. Tools like apps, online platforms, and simulations can support differentiated instruction, improving engagement and task complexity for mixed-level learners.

#### **6 Conclusion**

TBLT, grounded in input and output hypotheses, offers a dynamic framework that balances meaningful communication with structured language acquisition. Research findings and theoretical discussions highlight the effectiveness of TBLT in promoting language proficiency and communicative competence. However, challenges remain, particularly in exam-oriented and mixed-level classes like China. By adopting strategies such as tiered tasks, teachers' professional development, and culturally relevant adaptations, educators will overcome these barriers and optimize learning outcomes. Meanwhile, the role of technology in creating interactive and differentiated learning experiences signals promising directions for future exploration. I believe continued research and innovation in TBLT implementation will enhance its applicability, empowering educators to foster inclusive, effective, and engaging language learning environments.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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