UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

Using Task-based Language Teaching to Tackle the New Spanish Curriculum: Possibilities, Challenges, and the Role of Technology

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Abstract

The theoretical tenets of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) make it a potentially effective approach to consider to tackle the principles of the new Spanish curriculum. Thus, the following research opens with a theoretical background and literature review of the positive and negative pedagogical implications of TBLT. The study also examines the affordances and issues of technology in its synergy with tasks in what is known as Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching (TMTBLT). These explorations are complemented with discussions on the use of TBLT and TMTBLT in light of the new Spanish curriculum in general and the Catalan context in particular. To shed light on the possibilities and challenges of the approach(es), this research adopted a quantitative approach using a questionnaire to collect data on students' perceptions on a technology-mediated task. Findings were complemented by the teacher/researcher's observations. The sample population in the study included 48 students with different proficiency levels. The results found that TBLT may help in student motivation, in providing a competential and meaningful learning, and in fostering communicative skills. On the other hand, results identified several challenges, namely time constraints, overuse of L1, and teaching contexts that may resist new approaches. Finally, results pointed out at the affordances and issues of blending technology and tasks, namely promoting digital skills and engaging students in tasks. Nevertheless, students' digital literacies must not be assumed given that adding the technology component may strongly affect task complexity.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching, Spanish Teaching Context, Possibilities, Challenges, Students' Perceptions

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. The goals of this thesis

The original motivation for this research thesis is to explore the possibilities and challenges of implementing a task-based language teaching approach in the Catalan foreign language classroom. Additionally, the study seeks to shed light on the affordances and issues of technology-mediated task-based language teaching. The exploration is framed within the updated Spanish educational plan consisting of a syllabi aimed at providing meaningful learning through day-to-day problems and everyday inquiries. The goal is to move away from memorization-based learning towards an education that prepares students to become active agents in society to make it more just, democratic, and inclusive. As this thesis will explore, the principles of task-based education harmonize with the foundations of the new curriculum *a priori*. Moreover, technology has a significant role to play in the equation and the thesis acknowledges it from the outset. To understand how the combination of technology and tasks come into play in the Catalan foreign language classroom, the present work complements the literature on the pedagogical implications of tasks and technology by providing learners' perceptions on a technology-mediated task.

The paper is organized in six sections. Chapter 1 offers an introduction of the new curriculum and examines its origins and main tenets, namely a competential and meaningful way of learning made possible by the design of learning scenarios that promote an authentic and real-world experience through the exploration of topics that cater to students' interests. It also goes into detail and highlights the interpretation of the law by the Catalan Government. Next, the introduction provides a glimpse of task-based language teaching and its tenets, and it compares it to project-based learning which is a recognized teaching approach in public Catalan schools. Then, the introduction briefly

looks into the convergence between tasks and technology through technology-mediated task-based language teaching in the framework of computer-mediated language learning. Finally, the introduction provides potential reasons for considering the synergy of technology-mediated tasks in the Catalan context bearing in mind the new curriculum guidelines. Chapter 2 provides, first, an account of the possibilities of task-based instruction in second language acquisition considering the extensive body of research. Moreover, it explores the different versions of task-based language teaching focusing attention on Ellis's model which seems appropriate for the Catalan context. The second section of the chapter goes into detail about the ways tasks may tackle the new curriculum. A description of the linguistic competence is followed by an examination of specific competences and skills for a second language. At this point it is necessary to focus on the definition of task and its typology classification to illustrate how tasks may promote the developing of the key and specific linguistic competence as well as the skills. The chapter continues its exploration of how the theoretical perspectives of task-based language teaching attain the rest of the key competences outlined by the new curriculum. The chapter subsequently concludes with a review of the challenges found in the literature on tasks for language teaching, for instance, learners not attending to their use of the second language, resorting to their first language, the implausibility of needs analysis in the public system, class discipline, lack of understanding of the nature of tasks, or the lack of financial support and training on behalf of institutions. Chapter 3 investigates the promises of technology-mediated task-based language teaching in Catalan schools. Firstly, the chapter highlights the affordances of using technology in its synergy with tasks for language pedagogy, namely developing language skills, facilitating student-centered learning, cultivating positive attitudes towards language learning, and facilitating interaction, communication, and collaboration. The first

section also explores a set of proposed criteria a task needs to satisfy to be considered technology-mediated. Secondly, the chapter underlines how the combination of language tasks and technology tasks may promote, on the one hand, the key digital competence of the new curriculum, and, on the other, several other components such as universality of the curriculum or assessment. Lastly, challenges of complementing tasks with technology are identified, to be specific, access to technology, teacher training, determining the digital needs of students, and task complexity and sequencing. Chapter 4 begins the case study by proposing three research questions based on the literature review and analyses from the theoretical parts of the thesis: possibilities and challenges of task-based language teaching in the Catalan context in general, and the affordances and issues of technology-mediated tasks in particular. Chapter 5 provides the methods employed for the study (instrument, participants, design, and procedure). Chapter 6 analyzes the results and complements them with figures. Chapter 7 discusses the results for each research question and Chapter 8 concludes the research on a final note on the steps to follow if the field of technology-mediated task-based language pedagogy is to advance.

1.2. The new curriculum

On September 27, 2022, the government of Catalonia (*Generalitat de Catalunya*) published a new curricular structure for pre-primary, primary and secondary, and upper-secondary education. The design of the new curriculum is the answer to the passing of the Ley Orgánica 3/2020 on September 29 which modifies the Ley Orgánica 2/2006, also known as Ley Celaá. The new Education law is now the LOMLOE (*Ley Orgánica por la que se Modifica la Ley Orgánica de Educación*). Catalonia and the rest of the autonomous regions, then, develop their educational roadmap from there. The transition to the new curriculum will be well-established in the

2024-25 academic year. The Department of Education of Catalonia promises comprehensive information for schools to use in designing their curriculum in light of their needs. In any case, the Department clarifies that the application of the curriculum needs not be immediate, but gradual. The Department assures a generalized training, guidance, and counseling for those agents involved in the education system; that is, from in-service teachers and school leadership to school inspectors.

The curriculum for primary and lower-secondary education (referred as 'basic') includes key competences such as learning to learn, developing a democratic attitude, or recognizing linguistic plurality. Six vectors serve as the bedrock for a way of teaching that promotes deep rather than rote learning. The curriculum includes the gender perspective, offers universal materials, guarantees quality language teaching, fosters a democratic attitude, and emphasizes personal well-being. Planning considering the six vectors ensures acquiring knowledge from angles that challenge traditional ideas of learning. Certainly, the curriculum envisions learning in an interdisciplinary way to tackle discipline-specific learning needs in addition to more integral and holistic problems. The curriculum continues defining learning as a continuum, encompassing all branches of knowledge with coeducation at its core. To clarify, the present work focuses on lower-secondary education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*) which is of a compulsory nature and comprises ages 12 to 16.

The model for the new curriculum stems from Competency-Based Education (CBE) which emerged in the United States in the 1970s and Schenck (1978) characterizes as "based on a set of outcomes that are derived from an analysis of tasks typically required of students in life role situations" (p. vi). CBE enables students to master identified skills to perform particular real-life tasks. Competencies are usually developed through group projects. In doing so, competency-based instruction promotes

critical thinking and problem solving, involves creativity and imagination and places a special focus on collaboration and communication through the incorporation of cooperative learning. Proponents of CBE, including American policy makers and agents in higher education, see it as quality teaching given its learner-centered approach including recognizing learner's pace and offering individualized learning. Advocates, however, manifest the need to define pertinent competencies in the curricula (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p. 152). This is perhaps the main challenge of CBE, namely defining general and standard needs for all students while at the same time tailoring them to meet learner-specific necessities. Clearly, the possibility of such approach given class sizes and the lack of infrastructures or training represents a major challenge.

In the language domain, Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) is the answer to CBE. CBLT focuses on the acquisition of language to perform life tasks. CBLT centers on transmitting messages thus prioritizing fluency rather than accuracy. The approach envisions language as chunks of information to be used in the communicative task. Assessment is continuous and achievement of the outcome translates into mastery of the skill or competence (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p. 153). Practicality is at the kernel of CBLT and that is, indeed, what detractors of the approach critique. For them, CBE illustrates the undervaluation of contents thus teachers' expertise. Furthermore, they point at workload or class time/size—as has been mentioned—as restricting factors that contribute to the lack of acquisition. Critics even challenge this view by arguing that knowledge such as critical thinking or problem-solving cannot be developed effectively if they are not built on particular well-organized contents. Finally, opponents argue against CBE seen as a manifestation of an ideological agenda that places the focus on teaching behaviors and performance rather than thinking skills and contents (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p. 168-9).

Nevertheless, CBLT is based on theories of language and learning. On the one hand, CBLT is based on a functional and interactional perspective on the nature of language; that is, that language is used to attain personal and social needs, that the interaction to achieve a goal will bring about a set structures and vocabulary that can be provided to perform the task in advance or that language can be taught gradually as communicative chunks to finally master the communicative competence; on the other, CBLT assumes different learning theories. For example, it presumes that language is based on skills—understood as set of behaviors—that can be learned from practice, and that such practice is imperative for successful language production (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p. 154-155).

CBLT is a response to students' demands thus needs analysis (NA) is the first step in CBLT course design:

> [CBLT] by comparison is designed not around the notion of subject knowledge but around the notion of competency. The focus moves from what students know about language to what they can do with it. The focus on competencies or learning outcomes underpins the curriculum framework and syllabus specification, teaching strategies, assessment, and reporting. Instead of norm-referenced assessment, criterion-based assessment procedures are used in which learners are assessed according to how well they can perform on specific learning tasks. (Docking, 1994, p. 16)

Essentially, the needs of secondary learners are not the same as those taking a vocational course to join the workforce in a particular field. Instructors are benefited from the 'needs' or 'competencies' outlined by the Department of Education of their respective countries. This is part of an effort to determine standards as points of reference to assess language teaching curricula in, for instance, the United States. Of

course, this approach has raised criticism given that standards may vary depending on the context thus they are not universally applicable (Richards and Rogers, 2014, p. 164). Members of the European Union use the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to language teaching and assessment. Since 2001, the CEFR specifies competencies/outcomes at different levels of proficiency (Basic user, independent, and proficient). As its updated version of 2020 states, the document's "'can do' definition of aspects of proficiency provides a clear, shared roadmap for learning, and a far more nuanced instrument to gauge progress than an exclusive focus on scores in tests and examinations" (p. 21).

The Department of Education of Catalonia has updated what they consider to be the key competencies for second language acquisition, which are included in the first key competence: Linguistic Communication Competency (*Competència en comunicació lingüística*) which will be analyzed in depth in chapter 2.2. The new text also includes the *sabers*—from now on skills—which are area-specific skills, knowledge, values, and/or attitudes necessary to achieve subject- or area-specific competencies. These sets of skills learners develop are applicable to a variety of situations which is the added value these abilities present. The reason is to be found in the emphasis of the Department on school subject merge—*treball globalitzat*; that is, teaching in an interdisciplinary way through, for example, projects that encompass contents form different classes. Precisely, the skills are attained through *situacions d'aprenentatge*—learning scenarios from now on—which are materialized in the class through the creation of a lesson or task contextualized within a real-world problem students need to engage with (Decret, 2022, p. 10). The vision of the Department is that the design of situations promotes competence-based learning thus skills which are applicable to a wide range of contexts. The official document goes into depth when it

comes to these skills which slightly vary from the first and last two years of lower-secondary education.

1.3. What is task-based language teaching?

Learning scenarios take us to tasks. There should be a clarification of what task-based pedagogy is and what it is not. TBLT stands for task-based language teaching, also known as task-based language instruction. Educators such as Willis (1996) and Willis and Willis (2007) and SLA researchers like Long (1985) and Ellis (2003) regard it as a subfield of communicative language teaching since it draws on multiple ideas such as the focus on meaningful language used to perform real-world tasks through actual communication.

TBLT is not a single method but an approach which allows for teaching methods to be incorporated into the task-based practice. The approach first drew the attention of educators Candlin and Murphy (1987). Second language acquisition (SLA), a subfield of applied linguistics, has informed TBLT extensively. The findings have determined the attitude towards tasks. For example, many scholars including Skehan or Robinson have shown interest in the nature of tasks in the framework of SLA. Educators such as Nunan (1989) have also advocated for TBLT and the early case studies by Prabhu (1987) and the more recent ones by Van den Branden show its application in the language classroom. TBLT is based on Dewey's principles of effort, relevance, and experience in successful language learning, yet the approach is heavily informed by theories of learning.

The principles that underlie current approaches of TBLT are: (1) A primary focus on (pragmatic and semantic) meaning, (2) A gap to be filled (3) A reliance on learners' linguistic and non-linguistic resources, (3) A defined outcome other than language itself (Ellis, 2009a, p. 223). Nunan (1989) classifies tasks in two categories: real-world and pedagogical. Whereas the former constitutes tasks that would be useful for a certain group

of learners since they are dependent on learners' needs, pedagogical tasks represent opportunities to develop thinking skills such as decision-making or problem-solving abilities while permitting authentic language usage. More recently other task typology classifications have been proposed. This will be further explored in chapter 2.2.

Willis (1996) proposes a different classification among which are creative tasks. Creation has a significant role in (language) learning and TBLT may include the creative component. In any case, TBLT does not equal project-based learning (PBL). Although both approaches are learner-centered and share many characteristics—namely collaboration, and student autonomy—PBL makes a task the central focus of a term or even a longer period and it often concludes with a final product. Through a TBLT approach, students not only develop decision-making or research abilities, but also get to express themselves through creative tasks. Moreover, since TBLT views tasks as central to lessons, it allows for diversification and the implementation of a variety of tasks which are performed during shorter periods of time. In practical terms, TBLT and PBL have many things in common indeed. Lastly, since they are both approaches, they recognize a wide variety of methods which can be used in synergy with them, oftentimes traditional ones.

As one has seen, the functionality and purpose of language use that defines TBLT clearly aligns with the nature of CBLT. In any case, current versions of TBLT are dependent on tasks as the primary source of instruction, and whereas CBLT permits the instruction of standardized grammatical structures and it is often based on a syllabus, TBLT constitutes an approach that builds itself as instructors implement it which varies from context to context and from student to student. In addition, teachers take up the role of course designers and lesson planners which adds an extra challenge. (Richards and

Rodgers, 2014, p. 194) This and other challenges will be developed further in chapter 2.3 of this thesis.

1.4. What is technology-mediated TBLT?

The convergence between teaching and technology is found in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In SLA this is known as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), an area of research that investigates the application of digital tools in second language teaching and learning. Although in its primary stages CALL focused on drill-like practices, the subfield's modern manifestations look into virtual learning environments or mobile-assisted language learning in language teaching.

An area of interest of CALL research is, indeed, the application of digital tools in TBLT. Both Al-Balushi (2010) and Thomas and Reinders (2010) investigate the connection between technology and tasks. Moreover, and more recently, in *Technology-Mediated TBLT: Researching Technology and Tasks* (2014), González-Lloret and Ortega explore the possibilities of using modern technologies in TBLT design and instruction and coin the term technology-mediated task-based language teaching (TMTBLT) to differentiate it from the mere use of digital technologies in language learning for entertainment without a solid language teaching foundation. They argue that

> [t]he approach to curriculum known as task-based language teaching (TBLT; see Norris 2009; Samuda & Bygate 2008; Van den Branden 2006) seems particularly relevant for informing and maximizing the potential of technological innovations for language learning. Web 2.0 technologies create unprecedented environments in which students can engage in "doing things" through technology-mediated transformation and creation processes, rather than just

> reading about language and culture in textbooks or hearing about them from teachers. (p. 3)

The use of technology in our everyday lives becomes more widespread with every passing year. People use technology to look up information, connect with one another, and carry out real-world tasks like booking a hotel room on a website. The use of the Internet and Web 2.0 tools have defined the way a generation interacts with the world—Generation Z. Gen Zs have been familiar with gadgets and technology since they were born. More recently, Generation Alpha—early 2010s as starting birth—are also familiar with Web 3.0 tools such as virtual assistants or AI-powered chatbots. Therefore, it would be thoughtless not to consider the implementation of such technologies in the language classroom. Indeed, the experiential learning and the learning by doing components that underpin TBLT attest to the potential suitability of the use of technology for language teaching and learning.

1.5. Why consider TMTBLT in the Catalan context?

As one has seen, the new curriculum outlines the communicative linguistic competence and the digital competence as key skills to be developed by the end of the obligatory education. It is more important than ever then to attend to the development of these two abilities. Indeed, the world we live in looks very dissimilar from forty years ago and education cannot stay aside.

The constant flux of people given globalization generates the necessity of individuals who are able to communicate in a variety of contexts. From traveling to other countries to giving directions to tourists in their own city. As seen, TBLT presents an excellent learning opportunity for this endeavor given its emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy. Moreover, TBLT offering of two main tasks, namely real-world or pedagogical, means that it prepares learners for actual situations they may encounter in

their future—and present—day-to-day lives. If that is not the case, TBLT still affords learning opportunities through its pedagogical tasks through which learners can develop critical skills when solving problems or debating and pondering on different situations.

The practicality of CBLT was mentioned as the main source of objection for detractors of the model given that, in their view, contents might be neglected. What are these contents exactly though? If detractors argue against a traditional focus on form in the second language classroom TBLT is the answer to that. Models such as Ellis's treat TBLT as an actual approach, not a method, so rather than monolithic, TBLT is considered by some as an approach that can—and should if needed—accommodate different methods and teaching techniques, even a language focus as Ellis proposes. Furthermore, Spanish, and Catalan educators have an obligation to address the digital competence as well, as stated in the curriculum. In-service teachers and researchers cannot be oblivious to the progress of technology. In fact, teaching should benefit from the enormous quantity of ICT tools that educators are provided with to complement their teaching practice and the synergy of TBLT and technology is an excellent course of action.

Chapter 2: Possibilities and challenges of TBLT

This chapter examines the different TBLT models and their characteristics and presents an overview of the existing literature on the positive pedagogical implications of the approach. The discussion of the new Spanish curriculum on the following section is crucial to understand the theoretical framework on which TBLT can be implemented to tackle the guidelines of the new curriculum. The chapter concludes with a general description of issues that have been identified when implementing TBLT in the classroom. The section relates some of these issues with the Catalan context and it also provides some solutions.

The possibilities for second language pedagogy are presented in 2.1. The potentiality of implementing TBLT in the Catalan/Spanish context in light of the new curriculum is discussed in 2.2. The general challenges of TBLT are described in 2.3.

2.1. Possibilities of TBLT

Extensive publications on TBLT attest to the interest in the approach. The introduction mentioned the criteria a 'task' should satisfy to be regarded as such. Essentially, meeting those standards differentiates a task from a situational grammar exercise where the outcome is the use of 'correct' language when shifting the focus from meaning to form. A distinction ought to be made between 'task-based' and 'task-supported.' Whereas task-based syllabi consist of unfocused tasks; that is, tasks whose main objective is to provide learners with opportunities to communicate in general terms, task-supported courses comprise focused tasks to practice specific grammatical features. It could be argued that focused tasks resemble situational grammar exercises at the end of the presentation, production, and practice cycle (PPP). Nevertheless, focused tasks in task-supported lessons still differ from grammar exercises inasmuch as learners are not told what linguistic feature they need to use. As Lyster (2007, p. 44) mentions,

they represent a "proactive form-focused instruction . . . designed to enable students to notice and to use target language features that might otherwise not be used or even noticed in classroom discourse." In tasks-supported courses, then, tasks are used to support other teaching methods rather than being the primary focus of the lesson. Ellis (2017) argues that "[s]uccessful L2 acquisition clearly does call for learning incidentally through task-based teaching but it can also benefit from the skill development that task-supported teaching can provide" thus proposing a hybrid syllabus which he argues offers clear advantages (p. 522). Indeed, task-supported teaching is advocated by some including Müller-Hartmann & Schocker van Ditfurth (2011) and Long (2015) who acknowledge its appropriateness when transitioning from traditional practices to new ones like TBLT, and Ellis (2017) who advocates for task-supported lessons to deal with recurrent grammatical problems. Although upper-secondary school is progressively becoming more skill-based, it is currently transitioning and educators implementing TBLT should be aware of this. Basic education teachers in Catalan high schools should also be informed about learners' backgrounds and previous academic experience and whether a purely TBLT approach is well-suited to them.

The four main versions of TBLT (Willis, 1996; Long, 1985; Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003) are unified by the promotion of natural language use which caters to incidental language learning through a primary focus on meaning rather than intentional through a focus on pre-determined linguistic units. Following Nunan's classification of tasks; that is, pedagogical tasks—aiming at interactional authenticity thus natural language use—and real-world tasks—aiming at both interactional and situational authenticity, Ellis's version of TBLT embraces both pedagogic and real-world tasks. Although pedagogical tasks lack the authenticity of, for instance, a target task where a learner takes the role of salesperson and customer, they represent a stimulating interaction which fosters natural

uses of language. Ellis (2018) illustrates it when arguing how engaging in a comparing task "can result in patterns of turn taking and repair of misunderstandings that are typical of everyday talk and thus achieve interactional authenticity" (p. 13).

Ellis not only sees production tasks as central in TBLT but believes that input-processing tasks need to be included in the TBLT lesson. In the Catalan context, input-processing tasks, for instance, could represent a valuable opportunity for students who decide to continue their education into upper-secondary school and take the admission tests which assess not only written production but students' input-processing skills (reading and listening). Options offered after the basic education in the Catalan context range from upper secondary school—*batxillerat*—or vocational training—*cicles*. The main objective of upper secondary school is to prepare learners to take the *selectividad* tests for admission to university. *Cicles*, on the other hand, present a more practical nature insofar that this vocational training prepares learners for their introduction to the workforce.

Input-based tasks may also represent an interesting option for beginner learners so it might be appropriate to implement during the first cycle of secondary education (ages 12-14) or even low-proficiency learners in the second cycle of secondary education (ages 14-16). Tasks that deal primary with input seem to afford learners with the linguistic resources to be able to carry out production tasks over time (Shintani, 2012). Certainly, it is claimed (Littlewood, 2007) that beginner-level learners need to be pre-taught some language in order to perform certain tasks. Given the diversity of student profiles and proficiency levels in public Spanish high schools, an interpretation of TBLT that places emphasis on both tasks that require production and others that do not—yet do not prohibit it either, should be considered. It is also argued that input-based tasks may be appropriate to first introduce TBLT to teachers familiar with more

traditional approaches and that it may also be well-suited to large groups (Ellis, 2017, p. 510). This characteristic is especially of interest to the Spanish context which, on the one hand, is currently transitioning to a skill-based learning teaching and learning and, on the other, the ratio of students in classes may hamper some output-based tasks. Within this context it is argued that output-based tasks, then, should be carried out with high-proficiency students whose acquisition may benefit from the negotiation of meaning and form (Swain, 1985; Long, 1996; Lyster, 2001). In any case, as Shintani informs us, input-providing tasks seem like the way to go with low-proficiency students. This represents a challenge in classroom setting where students show a wide range of proficiency levels; that is, the public context. As Ellis (2014) puts it,

> The use of input-based tasks provides a way of introducing learners to the L2 in much the same way as they learned their L1. In L1 acquisition, children do not begin the process of acquiring their L1 by speaking it. They spend a considerable amount of time listening to input and matching what they hear to objects and actions around them. TBLT provides an opportunity for beginner learners to learn in the same, natural way. Asking beginner learners to try to speak from the start is unnatural and can be anxiety-provoking – even if their production is carefully scaffolded as in presentation-practice-production (PPP). It should be noted, however, that input-tasks do no prohibit learners from speaking so those beginner learners who are natural risk-takers and are keen to speak as well as listen are free to do so (p. 108).

It is imperative then that instructors are aware of these findings and pick and combine those types of tasks, so all profiles of students benefit from performing them.

Another distinction between the approaches concerns linguistic focus (i.e., focused, and unfocused tasks). Ellis together with Long embrace both types of focus

while Willis and Skehan favor mainly unfocused tasks. Ellis aligns with Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993) when arguing that TBLT should allow for the possibility to address grammatical problems that learners have through focused tasks in a natural and useful way to accomplish the outcome. Regarding linguistic support, Ellis sees it as optional while attention to form might be implemented in any phase of the lesson. Other advocates such as Samuda and Bygate (2008) acknowledge that a focus on grammar might be beneficial. Indeed, this might help teachers when designing a lesson, especially, to deal with grammar points. It has been suggested however (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993) that its design and implementation should adhere to three criteria: (1) grammar units are presented in a 'natural' way through the task, (2) tasks make those units 'useful' for performing the task, and (3) they become 'essential' for task completion—although the authors point out that this last precept is difficult to achieve since each learner might use different linguistic resources to complete a task.

In Ellis's interpretation of TBLT, lessons are not necessarily learner-centered but follow a teacher-class participatory structure when focusing on input-providing tasks, and, especially when introducing TBLT in contexts where the approach might be unknown (Ellis, 2014, p. 105). Finally, Ellis (2003) has also pointed out the benefits of the symbiosis between TBLT and traditional approaches. He believes tasks can be complemented by more traditional practices. Again, this might be the answer to implementing TBLT in contexts where other approaches are already well-received.

This takes us to the role of grammar in TBLT lessons, some (Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005) have criticized the approach to teaching grammatical forms, or, as they argue, the lack thereof on the grounds that task-based instruction prohibits it. Given that both Sheen and Swan advocate for PPP practices, they advise against the incidental attention to form—or focus on form—proposed by Long (1988), namely that form-

focused instruction is adequate only when a communication problem has originated during a task. Certainly, research shows that other strategies such as corrective feedback may facilitate acquisition when making learners focus on particular language units (Ellis & Shintani, 2013). In any case, some versions of TBLT allow for the teaching of grammar in the traditional way through focused tasks, for example, in the post-phase so as to practice the language units or even explain discrete grammar rules; that is, a focus on formS. Willis and Willis (2007) propose two ways of working on language in the classroom. The first one is the 'language focus' which takes place before the communicative activity (planning stage)—either at home or in class, which others (Ellis, 2009b) also view as valuable for L2 acquisition. In brief, learners have to think about language for the communicative activity, working alongside their peers and using external help such as dictionaries or grammar books. The second is the 'form focus' which involves learners understanding and working on the language and concludes the task cycle. Form-focused activities may range from raising the awareness of particular grammatical words and phrases in terms of form and meaning, recalling linguistic units in texts, completing gap-filling exercises after grammar rules have been explained, providing correction, or even practicing form-focused exam questions.

As one can see, the approach Ellis proposes is an interesting one for the Spanish context. It allows for natural language use, group work and individual work, a focus on form in all phases of a TBLT lesson, a combination of focused and unfocused tasks, and the view that group work is not indispensable thus allowing for input-based tasks carried out with the whole group. Indeed, it offers an opportunity to make language learning more accessible to students given that it is able to adapt to the different contexts and learners' profiles.

2.2. TBLT and the new curriculum

Pioneers in the Catalan context such as Elias Puig and Francisco Ferrer y Guardia advocated for modern schools "seek[ing] to build free, egalitarian societies in which coercion and oppression of all kinds are banished, and in which every individual, not just a fortunate elite, can realize his or her potential" (Long, 2015, p. 65). As we mentioned in the introduction, the LOMLOE suggests tackling the key and area-specific competences, and skills through the design of learning scenarios. The Decret from the Department of Education of Catalonia, in turn, highlights general vectors to guide the design of any classroom activity. TBLT and its philosophical underpinnings make the approach ideal for tackling the several criteria the Spanish government outlines by creating what the Montessori approach called *exercises de la vie practique* or practical exercises for the person's day-to-day life.

On the one hand, key competencies of the new curriculum have been defined according to the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of May 22, 2018, on key competencies for lifelong learning. Achieving the key competences outlined by the Decret is considered essential for the personal development of learners to address situations and problems in the different areas of the student's life and creates new opportunities for personal growing. Additionally, key competences target at fostering learners' socialization, ensuring the continuity of learners' educational path, promoting their active engagement in society and, finally, raising awareness on the natural environment, the planet, and their role in it (Decret, 2022, p. 33). The key competencies proposed by the Spanish government are: (1) competence in linguistic communication; (2) plurilingual competence; (3) mathematical competence and competence in science, technology, and engineering; (4) citizenship competence; (5) entrepreneurial competence; and (6) competence in expression and cultural awareness.

The focus on this section will be on most key competences. Nonetheless, the digital competence is addressed in chapter 3.2. It is also important to point out that these competences are in no way hierarchical and attainment of one key competence contributes to other competence attainment.

First, the competence in linguistic communication encompasses all areas where the linguistic competence is utilized, for example, orally or written. Students develop their competence when using their linguistic resources in an appropriate and coherent manner in various areas and contexts and for different communicative purposes. Learners need to use a set of skills, attitudes, and knowledge so as to understand, interpret and critically evaluate different linguistic messages. It entails engaging with multimodal texts in such a critical way that it enables them to avoid manipulation and misinformation. Moreover, mastering this competence enables learners to communicate with others in a cooperative, creative, ethical, and respectful ways. Finally, the Decret highlights the importance of developing a complex linguistic competence inasmuch as it constitutes the foundation for independent and reflective thinking and the construction of knowledge in all areas. The Decret also notes that developing this key competence enables learners to appreciate the aesthetic dimension of language and to enjoy literary culture (p. 35). We could include the plurilingual competence in this block inasmuch as it shares most criteria mentioned above. The Decret calls attention to recognizing and respecting individual language profiles, developing strategies to make transfers between languages, and integrating the historical and intercultural dimensions so as to understand, appreciate, value, and respect the linguistic and cultural plurality of society with the goal of promoting democratic coexistence (p. 37).

Additionally, the document offers a description of the specific competencies for a second language. The competencies are summarized as follows: (1) Describing and

valuing linguistic and cultural diversity through recognizing local and foreign languages and interculturality so as to allow linguistic transfer. Identifying and refusing stereotypes and linguistic prejudices while embracing diversity as a source of cultural richness; (2) Comprehending and interpreting oral and multimodal texts in the standard dialect. Understanding the general message and most relevant information, its intention, and contents to construct knowledge, an opinion, and allow for opportunities to enjoy oneself; (3) Producing coherent and clear oral and multimodal texts with the adequate register considering different discursive genres. Participating in varied communicative interactions in an autonomous way to express ideas, feelings and concepts, and construct knowledge through personal connections; (4) Comprehending, interpreting, and analyzing through a critical lens while acknowledging the purposes of reading and written and multimodal texts recognizing the global meaning and the main and secondary ideas. Identifying the speaker's intention, pondering on the contents and the type of text, and assessing its quality and reliability to construct knowledge and the ability to answer diverse communicative needs and interests; (5) Producing adequate, coherent, and cohesive written and multimodal texts applying strategies such as planning, composition, revision, correction, and edition. Developing peer and self-assessment skills considering the individual conventions of chosen discursive genre to construct knowledge and answer particular communicative demands in an informed, effective, and creative manner; (6) Researching, selecting, and contrasting information coming from different sources in a gradual and autonomous manner. Evaluating the reliability and adequacy so as to prevent information manipulation and disinformation. Integrating and transforming information into knowledge to communicate it through a personal, and critical position while being respectful of intellectual property; (7) Selecting and reading texts for pleasure in an autonomous fashion. Developing reading

habits that progressively incorporate more diverse, complex, and quality texts. Sharing reading experiences to construct a personal reading profile encompassing the social dimension of reading; (8) Mediating through different languages, using simple strategies and knowledge to explain concepts or simplify messages and to transmit information in an efficient, clear, and responsible manner; (9) Extending and using the personal linguistic repertoires across different languages. Critically reflecting on its inner-workings and becoming aware of the individual strategies and knowledge to improve the response to specific communicative needs; (10) Utilizing linguistic resources in the democratic cohabitation, conflict resolution, and in participation towards attaining human rights. Using non-discriminatory language and avoiding power abuse through language to foster the effective, ethical, and democratic use of language.

In chapter 1 the *sabers* or skills were also mentioned; that is, cycle-specific abilities students should possess by the end their basic education which change slightly in complexity for each cycle. Some of the skills it mentions for the first two years are, for example, applying basic strategies to understand and appreciate linguistic, cultural, and artistic variety in face-to-face, hybrid, and online contexts (languages and its speakers), searching for information using basic strategies and learning resources, e.g. dictionaries, textbooks, libraries, digital tools, etc. in the personal and academic contexts (communication), selecting different types of texts by male and female authors through the exploration of the school/municipal library catalogue (literary education) or developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes which allow for detection and collaboration in mediating simple everyday situations (language reflection).

The task typology TBLT offers make the approach ideal to ensure the mastering of the linguistic competences and skills. The distinction between real-world and pedagogic tasks, input- and output-driven, or focused and unfocused has already been

explored. Indeed, there is no accepted way of classifying tasks, but perhaps two task typology classifications have informed TBLT the most. The first is Prabhu's (1987, p. 46-47) who classified them thus:

1. Information-gap activity: "involves a transfer of given information from one person to another – or from one form to another, or from one place to another – generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language."
2. Reasoning-gap activity: "involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns."
3. Opinion-gap activity: "involves identifying and articulating personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation."

These task types are based on the communicative and cognitive processes of learners when performing the task. The other classification is found in Willis (1996), where six types of tasks are proposed:

1. Listing: brainstorming, fact-finding

2. Ordering and sorting: sequencing, ranking, categorizing, and classifying

3. Comparing: matching, finding similarities, and finding differences

4. Problem-solving: analyzing real or hypothetical situations, reasoning, and decision making

5. Sharing personal experience: narrating, describing, exploring, and explaining attitudes, opinions, reactions.

6. Creative tasks: brainstorming, fact-finding, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, and many others.

The types of tasks range from simple—including one single type—to complex—incorporating two or more types. Listing tasks offer learners opportunities for brainstorming and fact-finding, for instance. A third classification has emerged considering the cognitive and communicative processes involved in the performance of the task. The parameters are summarized as follows (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 11):

- One way versus two: “In a one-way information-gap task, one participant holds all the information that needs to be communicated and thus functions as the information-provider while the other functions primarily as the receiver of the information but may interact if communication becomes problematic. In a two-way task, the information is split between the participants so both need to function as the providers and receivers of the information.”
- Monologic versus dialogic: “A monologic task places the burden of performing the task entirely on a single speaker and therefore involves a long, uninterrupted turn. A dialogic task is interactive and thus necessitates interaction between the participants and typically results in shorter turns.”
- Closed versus open: “In a closed task there is single (or very limited set of) possible outcomes (i.e., solutions). In an open task there are a number of possible outcomes. A closed task is typically an information-gap task whereas an open task is typically an opinion-gap task.”
- Convergent versus divergent: “Opinion-gap tasks can require learners to converge on an agreed solution to the task or can allow learners to arrive at their own individual solutions.”
- Rhetorical mode: “The task can involve describing, narrating, instructing, reporting or arguing.”

It is clear that the variety of task typology of a task-based instruction may afford opportunities to master key and specific competences as well as the skills in the linguistic domain.

A second key competence of the new curriculum is the personal, social, and learning-to-learn competence which involves reflecting on oneself for self-awareness, collaborating, or managing life-long learning. In addition, the competence includes learning to learn or expressing empathy and managing conflicts in an inclusive and supportive context. (Decret, p. 40). A third one is the citizenship competence which is aimed at developing responsible citizens who actively participate in society. The competence provides learners with knowledge of social, economic, legal al political concepts while fostering the active commitment of students with sustainability. Moreover, it intends to create individuals who respect human rights, gender equality, equal treatment, and non-discrimination when pondering on major ethical issues (Decret, p. 41). Fourth, the entrepreneurial competence aims at developing a life approach to act on opportunities and ideas using specific knowledge essential to obtain valuable outcomes for others. It enables students to identify needs and opportunities, make decisions through creative and innovative processes. In addition, it fosters learners' empathy and communication and negotiation skills (Decret, p. 42). Finally, the competence in expression and cultural awareness involves acknowledging and appreciating the expression of ideas in different cultures through the arts and other artistic manifestations. It enables learners to express ideas and feelings through, for instance, plastic and visual creations (Decret, p. 43). This competence, albeit not considered transversal for the Department, can have a significant role in TBLT when considering creative tasks as part of the TBLT lesson. Precisely, creation is a high-order thinking skill and constitutes a type of task proposed in TBLT teaching frameworks

such as in Willis (1996). The personal, social and learning-to-learn, citizenship, entrepreneurial and digital competences are considered transversal for the Department insofar as they are central in all areas and should be considered when designing lessons or projects (Decret, p. 453). They are directly linked to the transversal competencies outlined by the UNESCO's International Bureau of Education.

Long (2015) offers a comprehensive exploration of how TBLT attains the aforementioned competences. Long highlights nine core principles that shed light on the effectiveness of the approach to achieve the key and specific competences the LOMLOE suggests and the general vectors the Department establishes.

The first core principle is *l'éducation intégrale* which is closely related to 'learning by doing' (Dewey, 1938; 1997) and aims at bridging the gap between brain work and manual work. *L'éducation intégrale* seeks to educate the whole individual regardless of gender, class, or race. This sort of education was designed in opposition to the segregation of minorities being taught in a system that perpetuated an immoral *status quo*. Advocates of this progressive education argued in favor of working on contents coming alive through real-world tasks which involved hands-on practice. It is believed that this type of educations results in meaningful learning when learning becomes a joyful experience rather than mere rote learning based on repetition. TBLT prepares learners for present and future real-world communicative tasks based on their needs. If NA—that is, determining the learning needs of students, is not feasible due to the instructional context, pedagogic tasks still afford learners the opportunity to put language into practice in an implicit and incidental way. As Long (2015) illustrates it,

> Almost all pedagogic tasks have a hands-on, problem-solving quality designed to arouse learners' interest and hold their attention. Following live or recorded street directions from a native speaker by tracing out a route on a road map,

> navigating a video simulation, or walking the streets of a real town, for example, are more likely to prepare learners to follow street directions to find their way in an unfamiliar location (the target task for some of them) than studying a reading passage describing the route that someone else took from A to B, or reading/hearing a dialogue showing someone asking for and receiving directions. Actually, doing a task, or, initially, a simple version thereof, is more relevant, comprehensible, and memorable than reading about someone else doing it (p. 68).

Certainly, two of TBLT's 10 methodological principles Long proposes are attained, namely the use of tasks and not text as the unit of analysis and the promotion of 'learning by doing.'

The second core principle Long (2015) examines is individual freedom. Although individuals are regarded as agents of their own learning, education cannot be relegated to a sole spectator of learners' noticing or stumbling across knowledge. TBLT plays a role midpoint. The course of action of TBLT starts with a NA to determine the needs of students. The teacher becomes the facilitator and provider of feedback of the content students show interest for and their output thus "recogniz[ing] individual freedom and freedom to learn, but also the need to provide guidance when the timing is right" (p. 71).

Indeed, rational thinking serves as the bedrock for TBLT. Indeed, when people are rational individuals, they make society change. The classification of task typology also offers us a glimpse of the approach of task-based instruction to develop reasoning skills. Insofar as students guide their own learning, tasks are designed to allow inquiry and facilitate a natural progression of learning. Not only that, TBLT's basis is true to rationality on the grounds that processes are motivated by research findings and up-to-

date theories that inform all decisions based on a task-based course. Decisions are negotiated with students who become active participants.

Additionally, task-based instruction shares the emancipatory nature of secular public Catalan schools brought about by Ferrer's Escuela Moderna and its principles. TBLT is viewed as an approach to ready students to become agents of societal change. The approach "assumes that there are some values that can, and should, be defended as universals because they reflect the essence of what it means to be human" (Long, 2015, p. 73). Since it escapes from dogma, learners are encouraged to question affairs such as racism or inequality independently and reach their own conclusions. Learner-centeredness has a central role in TBLT. Chomskian views on individual's readiness for language acquisition is considered through the design of simple and complex tasks based on the needs of students. Task-based instruction also provides a framework for students' intrinsic motivation for learning when enabling them to guide their own learning path. The 'elaborated' input Long mentions caters to all learners' profiles and offers unlimited opportunities for each individual student. Given the heterogenous of students in the Catalan classroom and the attention to individual difference (ID), a task-based instruction can be a solution to the challenge IDs posit. Aptitude, motivation, and the learning styles and strategies learners bring to the class can be effectively tackled through a task-based approach. Universal Design is one of the vectors of the new curriculum and the learner-centeredness nature of TBLT is, indeed, suitable to make learning accessible to all students.

Besides, TBLT embraces an egalitarian teacher-student relationship. Long (2015) argues that, in contrast to a teacher-fronted approach,

> an egalitarian approach to teacher–student relationships will not only improve classroom climate but also create advantageous psycholinguistic conditions for

> language learning. Students treated as equals are likely to talk more and to have their own communicative and psycholinguistic needs met, since the syllabus will be one designed to meet their needs, as identified by the needs analysis, with teacher interventions to deal with problematic code issues triggered by students' problems (focus on form), not by whatever is on the page the class is (supposedly) "up to" in a grammar-based textbook never written with them in mind (p. 77).

Again, the teacher becomes a facilitator, helping students when *they* necessitate their teacher's assistance. This principle is closely-related to the democratic principle. Indeed, Long notes that TBLT's participatory democracy allows learners to dictate what they want to learn since contents are negotiated with them. Furthermore, the terms of the assessment might also be discussed. Essentially, students' democratic attitude is developed through their participation in all processes concerned with the course, including feedback from student to teacher.

Finally, two core principles which, again, present a clear relationship with the tenets of the new curriculum are mutual aid and cooperation. They constitute an essential component to address democracy in the classroom. Additionally, it adds to the universality of the curriculum given that it embraces mixed proficiency students working together towards an outcome. Research has found that in the process of working along with their peers, both high- and low-proficiency students benefit from each other (Yule and MacDonald, 1990; Kim and McDonough, 2008; and Watanabe and Swain, 2007). TBLT's strong emphasis on collaborative and cooperative learning backed up by science and pedagogy theories such as the Interaction Hypothesis confirm the effectiveness of a task-based approach. For Long (2015) what he calls

> ‘sheltered’ communication has affective value, especially for shy students, and is one reason why in TBLT, individual, pair, and small group work often precede work in whole class formats, as distinct from their more traditional use as ways of organizing classroom participation to maximize listening and speaking opportunities after public lockstep work (p. 325).

TBLT, then, escapes from the traditional view of learning as a race and promotes mutual aid, cooperation, and the success of the whole group.

It is important to remember that all the class activities conducive to the attainment of key and specific competences, and skills designed through the lens of the general vectors need to be framed within learning opportunities, namely the real-world scenarios in the present or future. In TBLT, NA—when possible—ensure that topics stay relevant to students. In a similar fashion, learning based on scenarios should be designed according to students’ interests, a debate surrounding a certain event, a research based on an aspect of reality, or the creation of an artistic creation. (Decret, p. 456). Both real-world tasks and pedagogic tasks, then, should be selected accordingly. As we have noted, the learner-centeredness component at the kernel of TBLT allows for the attainment of the above criteria and culminates in the meaningful learning the curriculum strives for.

It is clear that TBLT’s theoretical perspectives are in agreement with the key competences, skills, area-specific competences outlined by the LOMLOE. Additionally, it ensures the attainment of the Catalan vectors for the design of any classroom activity within the framework of learning scenarios.

2.3. Challenges of TBLT

In the previous section we highlighted the positive implications of TBLT and continued with the possibilities of using TBLT in tackling the new curriculum.

Nonetheless, detractors of TBLT have defined key issues in task-based language instruction on the ground of many diverse aspects. The Catalan public system is certainly subject to these issues.

Insofar as it is a communicative approach, TBLT requires learners to actively speak. Albeit some interpretations of TBLT see a role of input-processing tasks rather than production, most tasks in a TBLT lesson comprise production ones and some are, indeed, oral. Both Seedhouse (1999) and Widdowson (2003) have been critical of the minimal use of the second language (L2). Their studies seem to show that, although learners may achieve the outcome of the task, they may not be attending to their use of L2 thus producing indexicalized and pidginized language. As stated, Ellis (2009b) makes a case for the potential positive effect planning may have on fluency, accuracy, and complexity in L2 oral production which could represent a solution to the issue.

Another concern is the wide resort to the first language (L1). Carless (2004) concluded that recourse to students' mother tongue represented a major issue in his implementation of TBLT. Similarly, during the implementation many tasks resulted in other activities rather than L2 production. It is important to note that his study was conducted in the context of Hong Kong's 'target-oriented curriculum' in elementary schools, differing from the Spanish/Catalan system in many aspects. In any case, it could be that the overuse of L1 is due to task complexity, so it is imperative that teachers are aware of the limitations of their students. Indeed, selecting tasks is one of the problems in the implementation of TBLT in the language classroom, especially in the public context where proficiency levels can be very dissimilar. Not only that, criteria for evaluating tasks are still under-researched, so teachers have to take on the extra responsibility of determining which tasks are appropriate for a particular group of students based on experience and intuition. This informs us about the problematics of

novice teachers implementing TBLT since they may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to regard a task fit for their students. Even though some argue (Skehan, 2016) that task implementation is as, if not more, important as task conditions, it is impossible to not see it as a recipe for failure.

When it comes to task selection, there is no consensus among advocates of TBLT either. While some (Cameron, 2001) argue against needs-based syllabus for young foreign language students, others (Long, 2015) advocate for an investigation of learner needs in a particular context. Some (Gilabert and Malicka, 2021a) have highlighted the potential of NA in informing task selection, design, and sequencing. It might certainly be challenging to establish the needs of learners in the Catalan public system considering all the dimensions for task design proposed by Gilabert and Malicka; that is, general aspects of task, participants and interaction, physical space where task takes place, tasks' cognitive demands, tasks' linguistic demands, communication and technology, and other dimensions like available support during task performance (p. 98-102). The LOMLOE's proposal of the skills students need to acquire by the end of their basic education can be a starting point to determine general needs. Ideally, in-service teachers would design pedagogic tasks based on real-world ones negotiated with their learners and sequence them according to complexity. Of course, the lack of financial resources and time in a public educational context prevents it. As Gilabert and Malicka (2021b) admit,

> NA may sometimes not be easy to conduct, even to the point of impossible, since it requires a considerable amount of time, effort, and institutional support for it to work, but we also believe that the enormous pay-off in boosting design and saving time is worth every minute of NA (p. 116)

In a similar vein, Long (2015) warns of the harms the lack of institutional support may cause when implementing an innovative approach such as TBLT, for example, teacher burnout. He outlines some factors that may favor TBLT including available financial resources and institutional support, existing language teaching knowledge or possible training (p. 371).

Turning back to Carless's study, a second challenge had to do with discipline. Task-based instruction requires students to talk while keeping class order. Maintaining class discipline in the classroom context through a speaking task seems, indeed, challenging, especially when monitoring and providing feedback all during a one-hour lesson with a large group. The first solution to this issue could be splitting the class into smaller groups with other teachers so it facilitates organization and monitoring. In this way, output-based tasks could be the focus. When the lesson is with the whole group, the solution would be to emphasize input-based tasks since they "are easily conducted with the whole class making them well-suited to large classes and to teacher more used to teaching in lockstep" (Ellis, 2018, p. 180).

Interestingly, Carless's study also pointed out at the poor understanding of the nature of tasks. This takes us to the teacher's role in TBLT. As Long also notes, teacher training is key for a successful implementation of a task-based program which necessitates teachers' familiarity with the approach. Although teachers may be familiar with the criteria a task should satisfy, Erlam (2016), for example, found that of 43 tasks designed by teachers and analyzed in the study, only 47% fulfilled the four criteria proposed by Ellis (2003). Contrarily, Taourite and Ruiz Cecilia (2020) study showed that primary school EFL teachers in Spain were familiar with the different criteria. In any case, it is unknown whether they implemented tasks following widely accepted criteria. When it comes to difficulty in implementing TBLT, the results in Erlam

showed that the most difficult criterion to satisfy was designing tasks that involved learners relying on their own resources. In Taourite and Ruiz Cecilia results showed that teachers favored TBLT on the grounds that it encourages teachers to be creative in their lessons and promotes students' learning communicative skills. Nonetheless, the main reasons to avoid its implementation included not being used to teach English using TBLT and having little knowledge of task-based instruction. Taourite and Ruiz Cecilia's study also shed light on teachers' opinions on TBLT training for Spanish language teachers which included a demand for training in TBLT in general to be able to relate TBLT to curriculum objectives and textbooks, a call for greater education and institutional support, and requests for the inclusion of teachers in TBLT decisions taken at school including material adaptation and/or development. Lack of suitable materials is a great issue in TBLT which has certainly been identified: "TBLT is unlikely to flourish unless teachers have access to suitable materials, and these are not currently available. Hard-pressed teachers are unlikely to have the time (and perhaps the skills) to develop their own materials" (Ellis, 2018, p. 273).

Clearly, TBLT posits many challenges. Many of these challenges may be eluded given the possibilities different versions of TBLT offer (e.g., resorting to input-based tasks with large groups) while others such as NA require financial support from institutions that may lack the resources to do so.

Chapter 3: Affordances and issues of TMTBLT

The main goal of this chapter is to sketch the affordances and issues of implementing TMTBLT in the EFL classroom in Catalonia. As a background to the discussion of how TMTBLT may achieve the specifications of the new syllabus, the chapter briefly offers a literature review on computer-mediated instruction and learning. It then examines the convergence between tasks and technology to subsequently make a case for the consideration of TMTBLT for attaining the new curriculum directions. The discussion ends recognizing some issues for debate. The affordances of TMTBLT are described in 3.1. The feasibility of the approach to attain the curriculum's recommendations is discussed in 3.2. Issues are pointed out in 3.3.

3.1. Affordances of TMTBLT

CALL has come a long way since its earliest manifestations. Studies in the role of technology in SLA has turn to exploring the potential of synthesizing technology and tasks in classroom which is attested by the numerous studies published since the turn of the century. Recent research by Chong & Reinders (2020), for instance, synthesized qualitative findings from 16 technology-mediated TBLT studies published between 2002 and 2017 in second and foreign language contexts. The results confirmed the affordances of technology-mediated tasks, namely facilitating collaborations, interactions, and communications, cultivating positive attitudes towards language learning, facilitating student-centered learning, developing language skills—particularly speaking and vocabulary, and developing non-language skills.

In chapter 2, a distinction between task-supported and task-based language teaching was offered. In a similar fashion, the synergy between technology and tasks can result in two different approaches; that is, technology-enhanced or technology-mediated TBLT. Whereas the former includes technology in some but not all activities

of the curriculum, the latter views technology as integral in all steps of the implementation of tasks (González-Lloret & Rock, 2022, p. 36).

Chapelle (2001) pioneered the evaluation of tasks in computer-assisted language learning when proposing several criteria. The criteria included the language learning potential, learner fit, meaning focus, authenticity, positive impact, and practicality. She led the way for a task framework for computer-assisted language learning. Later, it was González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) who coined the term technology-mediated TBLT to distinguish two types of technology use in the classroom. In contrast to the use of technology to carry out traditional classroom activities and tasks in digital environments, the technology-mediated language learning they propose envisions technology used with a purpose and needed to perform a task.

In turn, González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) take the modern definition of task proposed by Van den Branden (2006, p. 4) as "an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language" and identify five key criteria of task in its synergy with technology (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014, p. 5-6): (1) primary focus on meaning (i.e. incidental learning and mostly implicit); (2) goal oriented (i.e. a task that entails the use of language for a communicative purpose and results in communicative and/or non-communicative outcomes); (3) learner-centeredness (i.e. learners' needs and wants are central to the task which is flexible in nature to adapt to each learner's linguistic, non-linguistic and digital skills); (4) holism (i.e. tasks that offer authentic and real-world processes of language use); and (5) reflective learning (i.e. tasks must offer opportunities for reflective higher-order learning). TMTBLT can be done in any of the different varieties of TBLT as long as it complies with the aforementioned criteria proposed for technology-mediated tasks, considers digital skills when implementing technologies,

and fully integrates with the TBLT curriculum through a coherent assessment and program evaluation (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014).

The positive implications of technology-mediated tasks are clear. Technology-mediated tasks may inform task theory and practice beyond face-to-face and oral language in the traditional classroom. Precisely, technology-mediated tasks may help SLA research when used as a methodological tool. This is illustrated in Ziegler (2018) when examining pre-task planning in L2 text-chat or Ziegler et al. (2017) when exploring the methodological implications from an input enhancement project. Additionally, technology can open the door for the development of materials thanks to the unlimited resources the web offers. Projects such as the automatized task design generator (taskGen) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and the National Research Agency, for example, aim at assisting teachers, task, and syllabus designers. Lastly, digital tools may aid in offering students better assessment as the next section explores.

3.2. TMTBLT and the new curriculum

The new curriculum presented by the Spanish government is aware of the need to digitalize Spanish education. When we explored the ways traditional TBLT may tackle the curriculum in chapter 2, one was left unaddressed, namely the digital competence. As González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) argue,

> it would be advantageous to make technology a simultaneous target of instruction in TBLT curricula. Given how precious digital technological competencies have become in many of our societies, then supporting both language learning and digital literacy learning simultaneously can give technology-mediated TBLT curricula unique added educational value (p. 3).

The digital competence is one of the eight key competences as well as a transversal one. On the one hand, developing the digital competence by the end of the basic education entails learning to use digital technologies for personal and academic development, work, leisure, and participation in society. It involves mastering digital literacy through managing digital devices and apps, communicating, and collaborating online, creating digital content, or knowing how to be safe on the web. By the end of secondary education, students should be able to make advanced searches on the Internet, and critically select information while respecting intellectual property. Additionally, for instance, students should learn to participate, collaborate, and interact on virtual environments (Decret, p. 39) In the curriculum, the digital competence is also included within the linguistic one. On the one hand, it calls attention to developing reading skills in the digital environment which encompasses navigating and searching the web, selecting reliable information, processing it, and integrating it; on the other, it recognizes the potential in bringing students closer to other cultures, especially foreign (Decret, p. 196-197). This last point is precisely an aspect Chong and Reinders (2020) identified in their research, namely that communication using technology with learners from other cultures fueled students' motivation to communicate (p. 78). Certainly, studies indicate that TMTBLT may develop non-linguistic skills, for instance, digital and intercultural literacy (Chong & Reinders, 2020, p. 79). This is possible thanks to the design of learning scenarios in which learners need to use language in conjunction with technology.

Online creative spaces like blogs represent a golden opportunity to stimulate high order thinking skills like analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Creation receives great attention in the new curriculum. Students are expected to create final products as a culmination of their learning process. The curriculum highlights the different processes

these creations entail; that is, collaborating, making decisions, or developing critical thinking (Decret p. 457). Creation is at the top of Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). It represents the highest taxonomic skill and together with the rest of HOTS and LOTS, it has been revised for the digital era. The skill includes animating, filming, podcasting, or video calling (Churches, 2008). Collaboration may permeate all cognitive processes when, for instance, texting, commenting, or video calling.

As the new curriculum states, the development the digital literacy of students is to be done in a transversal way. In addition, in at least one of the three first years of secondary education, students enrolled in public schools need to take a technology and digitalization course. This course aims at developing the digital literacies: computer, informational, critical, multimedia, and computer-mediated (Shetzer & Warschauer 2000) while offering training in prototyping, programming, or robotics. Given that this course is broad in scope, only compulsory during one academic year, and that the stand-alone digitalization course is elective during the last year of secondary education, it is paramount that teachers include the digital element onto their lessons, and, when needed, guide and aid students in the task performance. A word of caution, however, is that computer-mediated environments may influence task complexity thus task performance if students are not familiar with the technology that is mediating their language learning process (González-Lloret, 2016, p. 43). Hence, teachers need to consider the added complexity they might be bringing to the task when incorporating the technological element.

The universality of the curriculum is one of the general vectors of the new curriculum, and as with any teaching approach, catering to mixed ability groups and IDs while providing feedback is challenging. TBLT, however, offers a main advantage over

other teaching approaches apart from mutual aid and cooperation which have already been outlined as core principles of TBLT. As Ellis (2018) puts it:

> Tasks by their nature do not dictate the language that students need to use but rather allow them to use whatever resources they have available. Thus, the same task can be performed in very different ways by different learners in accordance with their L2 proficiency (p. 265-6).

Some solutions put forward (Ellis, 2018, p. 266) include scaffolding learners' performance of a task to the extent each learner needs in output-based tasks or encouraging students to ask for clarification during input-providing ones.

Another idea is that the teacher could also modify the input by adding, for example, subtitles to a video or glosses to a piece of text. When including the technology component to the equation, the possibilities of TBLT in addressing mixed-ability groups are even greater and may facilitate catering all learning profiles. Chong and Reinders (2020) singled out the potential of technology in facilitating teacher-student communication or providing feedback and clarification (p. 78). They also pointed at the affordances of individualized learning: "learners can get acquainted with the language skills at their own pace; learners regard this kind of personalized learning as beneficial to their language development" (p. 79). Studies on gaming and virtual worlds within the framework of TBLT (Franciosi, 2011) have also demonstrated the suitability of gaming on targeting IDs insomuch that games might provide learners with feedback while performing a task thus adjusting to individual performance level. Indeed, simulations, virtual worlds, multi-user games align with Deweyan experiential learning and represent an extraordinary opportunity for SLA research and pedagogy.

Finally, the curriculum calls attention to formative assessment and TBLT approach to assessment, namely performance-based is appropriate. Technology

facilitates the formative assessment of learners inasmuch as their performance might be documented and recorded and shared with students and peers to evaluate their own performance and that of their classmates. Some technological supports and tools to assess performance have been proposed (González-Lloret, 2016, p. 58-63), namely text-based computer-mediated communication technologies (e.g. using chat apps like WhatsApp or internet forums), audio and video computer-mediated communication (e.g. using videocall apps like Google Meet), virtual environments (i.e. spaces where students interact and engage with other speakers and carry out different tasks), interactive maps (e.g. using Google Maps to navigate and find directions), and Internet searches and WebQuests (i.e. closed guided internet searches previously chosen by the teacher). These tasks represent a modern take on traditional ones. They may foster language skills—both linguistic and pragmatic, digital and multimodal literacy—when engaging with the technologies, cultural competence, information literacy—when finding information and giving it sense and value, or collaborative work which has a central role in most tasks mentioned above. In any case, it is argued (González-Lloret & Rock, 2022, p. 44) that defining models for evaluation in technology-mediated TBLT should be at the forefront of future research. In the meantime, a combination of the criteria to assess the different competences proposed by the new curriculum together with Churches's revision of Bloom's taxonomy and grading criteria models such as González-Lloret's (2016) can serve as a starting point.

3.3. Issues of TMTBLT

Given that many areas of TMTBLT are still under-researched, it is difficult to make a case in favor of all areas related to TMTBLT. González-Lloret and Rock (2022) point out at four key issues research on technology-mediated TBLT still needs to address, namely a widely-accepted definition of 'task,' task selection and sequencing,

and how to assess technology-mediated tasks (p. 38). This section takes a closer look at access to technology, teacher training, determining the needs of students, and task complexity and sequencing.

The main issue of a TMTBLT curriculum is the access to technology. This might not be a particular problem to the Catalan context. The 2022-23 Digital Education Plan of Catalonia (*Pla d'educació digital de Catalunya 2022-23*) presented by the Department of Education and partly funded by the Next Generation EU package aimed to create digitally competent students, teachers, and centers. Hence, teachers who decide to implement a TMTBLT program will be able to do it. High schools are equipped with high-speed Internet connection, students use laptops and/or tablets daily, and classroom content can be shown on interactive whiteboard displays powered by smart operating systems and services such as the Google Workspace suite. However, not all high schools in Catalonia may be fully digitalized which would impede the implementation of a TMTBLT lesson. Results of the Plan have not been made public yet. However, this is a big first step towards digital access and literacy for both students and teachers if all steps of the Plan are carried out.

Second, teacher training thus comprehending the ways technology and tasks can work together to facilitate language acquisition is imperative. The Plan addresses the importance of developing teacher digital literacy through training and assessment or promoting the creation of digital content. A concern raised by most teachers in the studies analyzed by Chong and Reinders (2020) was the learning curve to learn the technology used for the different tasks and also the time spent in its implementation. In the same vein, the analysis conducted by Chong and Reinders evidenced the importance of making students familiar with the technology used to perform the task. As they note, "[l]earners may become passive and confused when interacting with peers using

technological tools when they have no experience doing so in a similar context" (p. 80). A solution might be to introduce technology progressively so both teachers and students have enough time to digest it and get familiar with it. Technology-enhanced instruction could be the first step towards technology-mediated tasks (González-Lloret & Rock, 2022, p. 43). Albeit guides for integrating technology and tasks exist (González-Lloret, 2016), institutions have the obligation to train their staff, so it is implemented effectively. Interestingly, the Plan mentions efforts to ensure the digital competence of novice teachers through the collaboration with universities offering courses on teacher training. From my experience, a few lessons on ICTs are not enough to master and integrate technologies into teaching, so further efforts are required.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the main issues of TBLT is determining the needs of students. When designing technology-mediated tasks digital needs ought to be considered as well (González-Lloret, 2014). This represents a challenge in traditional TBLT *and* TMTBLT. A NA informs course and syllabi designers about language needs, and, for some (Long, 2005), it should be the first step in any TBLT curriculum. Few published studies shed light on this area of TBLT. For the purposes of the present study, let us look at a NA carried out in a high school context in Japan. In her study, Watanabe (2006) conducted surveys with students, full-time teachers, and the head of the English department of the school. She then triangulated the results with national curriculum guidelines and proposed a task-based learning and teaching model that accommodates all the preferences expressed by all participants of the study. González-Lloret (2014) admits that "conceptualizing and carrying out a mixed-method needs analysis is not easy; it is costly and requires time a certain degree of expertise for data analysis and interpretation" (p. 26). This is indeed something that Watanabe mentions in her study, namely that it was difficult to collect

information from all intended participants (e.g., recent graduates from the high school). Additionally, she also expresses that reporting results to full-time teachers needs to be complemented by an action plan to change the curriculum on behalf of the institution. NA in TMTBLT adds another layer; that is, finding what the language and technology needs of institutions and students are. The first example of a NA in the context of TMTBLT can be found in González-Lloret (2007) who conducted a NA to develop several web-based tasks for a graduate-level Spanish literature course. The NA determined the language and digital skills by looking at several sources (e.g., present graduate students enrolled in the class and course-related documents) and using a mixed-methods approach (e.g., observation, interviews, and questionnaire). The results were determinant for identifying tasks, selecting type tasks, and designing pedagogical tasks. Although it is evident that NA's results are valuable, it is apparent that, in addition to pinpointing language needs, determining digital needs adds to the complexity of the endeavor. After analyzing the results of her NA, González-Lloret (2007) had to develop tutorials and add 'help' buttons to ensure the adequate performance of the task. Designing and tailoring tasks to not only language needs but to digital needs would scare any in-service teacher who is already burdened by other daily responsibilities. Although ideal, it is unrealistic without the resources and support of institutions. In any case, a simple NA like on-line questionnaires can inform teachers about students' wishes, interests, and digital skills and would represent an effective method while being less time consuming than, for instance, observation (González-Lloret, 2014, p. 41).

Be that as it may, a NA is determinant for selecting type tasks, design them and sequence them according to principles of cognitive complexity. Thus, Robinson (2001) proposes a model that distinguishes task complexity or cognitive factors, task conditions

or interactional factors, and task difficulty or learner factors. As his study evidenced, cognitive factors have significant effects on task conditions and difficulty: “cognitive complexity is a robust, and manipulable influence on learner production, and is therefore a feasible basis for design and sequencing decisions which operationalize a task-based syllabus” (Robinson, 2007, p. 52) Hence, tasks are cognitively more complex if there is no planning time before starting the task, it requires several subtasks, or if it is based on an unshared context. Participation variables like closed tasks that only have one solution or participant variables like familiarity with the task are some of the task conditions that may also affect performance. Additionally, learner factors have an impact on task difficulty (e.g., affective variables like confidence and ability variables like proficiency) (Robinson, 2001, p. 30). Robinson’s theories have been applied to technology-mediated tasks adding additional variables like familiarity with the technology which makes difficult to predict how task complexity is altered in technology-mediated tasks (González-Lloret, 2016, p. 42). In designing technology-mediated tasks, syllabi designers should be aware of, on the one hand, all the variables that play a role in task performance including complexity, condition, and difficulty in traditional TBLT and, on the other, the importance of being acquainted with the digital literacies of students so as to design technology tasks that anticipate any barriers for successful acquisition. As one can tell, this represents a heavy workload for teachers who may not have institutional support.

A final remark on digitalization is the case of Sweden where a digital de-escalation was announced on May 15, 2023. The decision was fueled by poor results in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Evidence in the fields of psychology or neuroscience have called attention to reducing screen time while studies

in education or pedagogy have pointed at the possibilities of technology in facilitating meaningful learning. As Selwyn argues,

> [a]ny outcomes that arise from digital technology use in schools depend on an array of other confounding factors – teachers' levels of preparation, students' backgrounds, classroom conditions, and hundreds of other variables that lie behind the complexities of any educational situation. What works in a well-resourced classroom in Östermalm is not going to translate to a small rural classroom in Östersund. Crucially, then, there is no sure-fire 'one-size-fits-all' dictate about digital education (paragraph 10).

Indeed, an effective use of digitalization is strategic and mandated by the different variables of the particular context and the needs of students learning in it. It is important, however, not to abandon the digitalization as Selwyn advises but to coordinate professionals and find strategies to make it effective—when to use it to mediate learning and tasks, when to use it to enhance the experience, and when to turn to traditional practices. The case of Sweden should certainly serve as cautionary, but in any case, should institutions use it to demonize digital tools.

Skehan (2003) pointed out a main danger of using Internet-based materials in the language classroom, essentially by-passing most processes leading to acquisition and "simply get[ting] the job done" (p. 408-409). The possibilities of combining tasks and technology are evident. Nonetheless, in being in its infancy, many areas of TMTBLT need to be researched, and teachers need to be trained, so its implementation is effective. Last but not least, teachers should use technology strategically to add value to their lessons rather than letting it become counterproductive. Although much work needs to be done, the current possibilities of TMTBLT are exciting and new lines of

inquiry are opening with the transition to Web 3.0 tools that make it even more appealing to educators and researchers alike.

Chapter 4: Research questions

This thesis poses three questions based on the literature review and the analyses of the potential possibilities and challenges of implementing TBLT in the Spanish/Catalan context in general, and the affordances and issues of technology-mediated TBLT in particular.

RQ1. What are the possibilities of using TBLT in the Catalan context?

RQ2. What are some of the challenges of using TBLT in the Catalan context?

RQ3. What are the affordances and issues of using TMTBLT in the Catalan Context?

Chapter 5: Methods

5.1. Instrument

In order to collect reliable data that would add to existing literature and inform future research, a student questionnaire was utilized to collect quantitative data aimed at exploring students' perceptions and experience of a Technology-Mediated TBLT lesson. Additionally, observation of task realization on behalf of the teacher/researcher also served as an instrument to gather data that would complement the results.

5.2. Participants

The researcher selected two groups of approximately 60 Catalan secondary students from a secondary school in Barcelona (age 14-15) although only 48 students completed the questionnaire. The group of students for this study encompassed male and female. Proficiency levels ranged from A1 to B2. The main approach in the school

is PBL, so students were familiar with tasks and collaborative learning. Additionally, the school is fully digitalized; that is, there is a touchscreen in every class, each student has a Chromebook, and class materials and communications are done via the Google Workspace Suite.

5.3. Design

The pre-, main, and post-task cycle with a language focus in the post-task advocated by some TBLT proponents such as Willis was chosen. In the pre-task, the teacher elicits the topic of the project; that is, discovering and surviving the United States of America, through pictures and introduces the topic through a video. Students' particular interests in the project topic and previous knowledge is gathered through a Know-Want-(Learn) thinking routine. Then, students are told they have just arrived in the US. They are paired up with another student and they are given a US state. Students with a higher level are paired up with those who have a lower one. Some students make groups of three. Some students choose their preferred US state. In small groups, students carry out a speaking exercise where they have to answer the question "How often do you stay in a hotel? When?" Visual aid with adverbs of frequency is shown on a screen, so students can use them as guiding language. After the short debate, students are shown a message that informs them about a booking cancellation, and they are told that they have to look for a hotel to stay the night. The technology-mediated task is designed so students use several literacies, namely computer literacy, informational literacy, and multimedia literacy (Shetzer & Warschauer 2000). Next, students navigate the website booking.com and look for a hotel. Students implicitly encounter words such as 'king bed,' 'kitchenette,' and 'check out.' Students use their linguistic resources to decide on several aspects. For instance, where, when, and what type of room, etc. To do so, students need to utilize the literacies above, for example, to manipulate a calendar

for selection of dates. Then, students have to write down a short text reporting their plans including the reasons for choosing the hotel and something the pair likes about it. An example of a short text is displayed on the board, so students can use it as reference throughout the task. At this stage the teacher has not raised awareness to the grammatical forms used. In the post-task, once students have produced a short text, they share them with the other pair in their small group. After that, the teacher asks for volunteers to share their texts with the class. The teacher writes down 'future going to' and 'present continuous' examples from what the students are reporting on the whiteboard. For example, "We're going to stay…" or "We're checking in…" The teacher then invites students to pay attention to the language and to think about form and meaning; that is, future plans. The lesson concludes with a practical language focus via an interactive and engaging online worksheet.

5.4. Procedure

Learners from the first group carried out the different tasks in a timely manner and were monitored by the teacher/researcher while gathering data from the observation. The lesson is carried out a second time with the second group. A different day, participants filled out the online questionnaire.

Chapter 6: Results

6.1. Possibilities of TBLT in the Catalan context

Motivation is a key aspect in (language) pedagogy, and it is closely related to learning outcomes. As Ellis and Shintani (2013) put it, "[w]hile it is probably true that teachers can do little to influence students' extrinsic motivation, there is a lot they can do to enhance their intrinsic motivation" (p. 26). TBLT is a goal-oriented approach, so students are motivated when working towards achieving the task outcome, for instance

solving a problem. In addition, TBLT is a learner-centered approach which means that lessons are focused on students' needs considering their language resources to solve communicative situations. Lastly, time- and resource-permitting, tasks should be designed around learners' interests, so it caters to what appeals to them. Although a NA for this particular task was not carried out due to time constraints, the task is viewed positively when it comes to motivation. As Figure 1 shows, students were mostly very motivated or motivated. Only a small number reported being a little motivated or not motivated at all. The high satisfaction, nonetheless, might also be explained by its technology-mediated implementation as one can see in Figure 9.

Figure 1

Learners' perception on task motivation

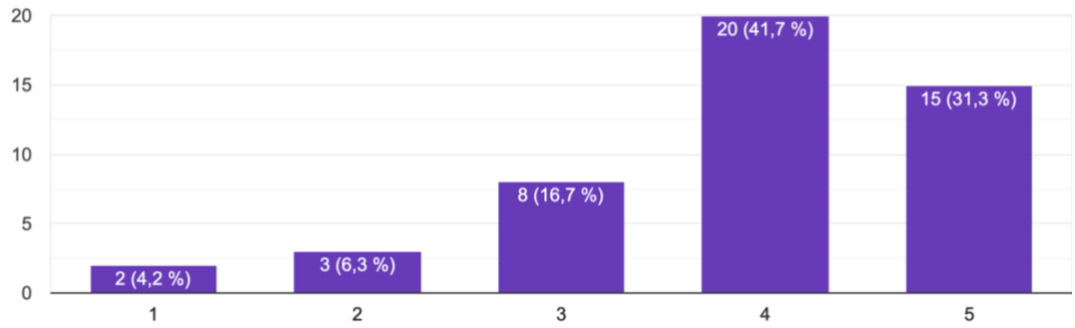
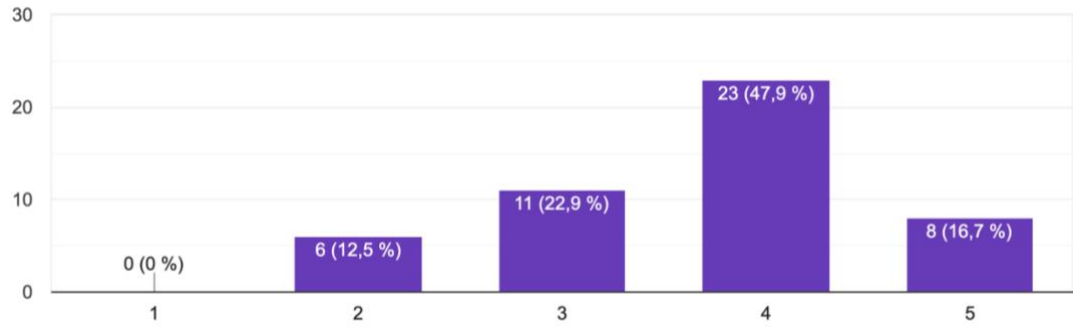


Figure 2 relates learners' perception on the practicality of the task for the student's day-to-day life where 0 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree.' According to their answers, it appears that participants valued this type of task in terms of its usefulness. The findings for the question reveal that most students strongly agree (16.7%) or agree (47.95%) while the remainder are neutral (22.9%) or disagree (12.5%).

Figure 2

Learners' perception on practicality of main task



As explored in chapter 1, one of the objectives of the new curriculum is to facilitate skill development through learning scenarios such as the one participants encountered in the lesson. The lesson's approach represents a competence-driven way of learning inasmuch as students are able to make decisions to make a hotel booking, navigate a hotel booking website, use specific hotel-related vocabulary, and make plans. All of this in a communicative and hands-on manner. By fostering decision-making through group collaboration, students are developing skills easily transferable to other areas of knowledge. As the Decret poses learning situations such as the one learners participated in are vital in order to develop deeper knowledge (p. 457).

Indeed, when being asked about the aspect they enjoyed the most when performing the task, Figure 3 shows how exploring different hotels and hotel rooms, and their services is what learners liked the most. Almost half of the participants chose this option. It suggests that the real-world nature of the task motivated students and engaged them in the task realization. This perception lines up with the new curriculum and the learning scenarios it encourages teachers to design; that is, situations students may encounter in their future lives and present lives. The results are also in line with the data for RQ3, namely that the amount of information technology confers—hotel and

hotel room options—is highly valued. This option was followed by engaging in cooperative work with peers and negotiating towards an outcome. The results (20.8%) indicate that participants also valued peer work. Albeit not essential to some advocates of TBLT—Ellis (2003), cooperative collaborative learning often has a primal role in a TBLT lesson. It represents an opportunity for learners to engage in interactions with their peers or small group without the judgement of the whole class as Long (2015) argues when he mentions the 'sheltered' communication TBLT affords. This is even maximized when the task is performed online which encourages learners to participate actively in the performance without feeling worried, they may make a mistake (Chong & Reinders, 2010, p. 78).

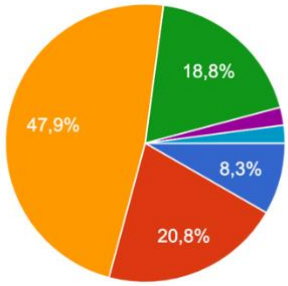
The third option in Figure 3 shows the interest in attention to form. As explored in chapter 2, TBLT may attend to grammar in the context of the communicative activity that presents a problem in communication, as Long argues. However, Ellis (2009a) notes that attention to form can occur in several ways and during all phases of a TBLT lesson. In this particular lesson, the focus on form was carried out throughout the lesson—through recasts similar to Ellis et al. (2001)—and during the post-task through a language focus involving students completing some traditional grammar exercises. As has been argued, in being an approach, TBLT can include traditional grammar exercises when a language focus is needed. Some models of TBLT (Ellis, 2003) do not reject traditional approaches, but rather view traditional structural teaching as complementary to TBLT.

There are studies comparing more traditional methods (e.g., PPP) to newer ones like TBLT, but results are inconclusive. See Sheen (2006), a comparative study involving PPP that reported positive results in contrast to TBLT complemented by corrective feedback, or the comparative studies by de la Fuente (2006) and Shintani

(2011). While the former found TBLT to offer more durable learning, the latter found a clear superiority in the TBLT group when it came to the acquisition of some items. In both studies learners in the TBLT groups negotiated for meaning when comprehension failed. Shintani also found that high exposure to grammar items resulted in incidental acquisition due to the functional need of the context. In any case, it is imperative that TBLT advocates conduct studies comparing the effects of different approaches in L2 teaching and, until evidence give us a final verdict, combine different aspects of different approaches to attend to the needs of learners.

Figure 3

Aspect learners enjoyed the most



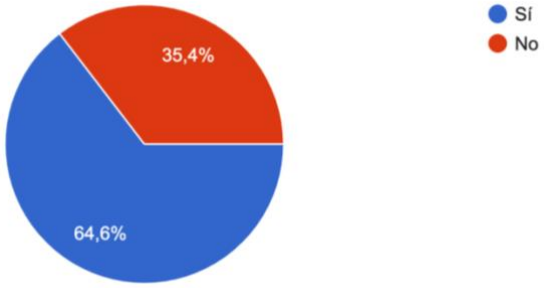
Note. Orange: exploring different hotel options and hotel rooms and the services each offers; red: collaborating and making decisions with my peers; green: practicing vocabulary and grammatical structures while learning how to book a hotel room; blue: learning how to book a hotel room; purple: other; cyan: not valid data.

Regarding communication, Figure 4 shows that 64.6% of students felt they had helped their peers communicate in English. In any case, observation attested to the use of L1 to assist in communication. This is congruent with Ellis and Shintani's argument. As they point out, "[w]hen talking in groups [as in the case of the study] they [students]

make effective use of the L1 to solve linguistic problems" (p. 246). This is certainly a concern as the study has observed and it is addressed in the following section.

Figure 4

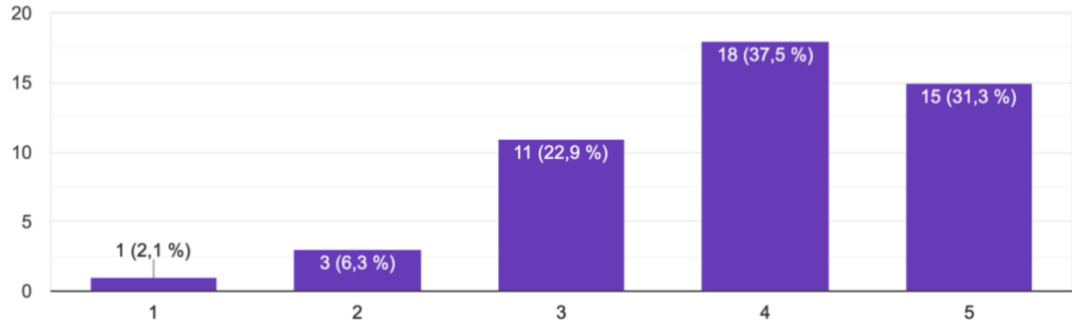
Learners' perception on helping their peers communicate



As has been mentioned, the Government of Spain emphasizes the use of language teaching approaches that develop the communicative competence. Additionally, one of the vectors of the new curriculum is the quality of language teaching with a focus on communication, so as to develop higher skills of communication to clarify, explain, rephrase, compare, contrast, summarize, collaborate, debate, etc. As Figure 5 shows, when asked about the usefulness of this type of task to improve the students' speaking skills, participants mostly strongly agree (31.3%), agree (37.5%), or are neutral (22.9%).

Figure 5

Learners' perception on usefulness of task to improve speaking competence



Some of the reasons for the participants' answers include:

- being practical, so it is more entertaining,
- being enjoyable, so it motivates students to communicate,
- encouraging students to speak in English in all steps of the lesson, so it improves fluency,
- forcing students to use English when negotiating with their peers, so it requires communication,
- including interactive tasks done in pairs and groups, so it facilitates learning,
- reporting the students' production to peers and the whole group, so it reinforces learning.

These observations support Chong & Reinder's (2020) who identified in their synthesis of TBLT studies that learners expressed an improvement in their English proficiency after engaging in communicative tasks that afforded opportunities to interact with their peers in authentic situations (p. 78).

The reasons for the participants who did not find the task useful are concerned with task complexity, either because it was too simple or too demanding. The reasons are in

harmony with Carless's findings (2004) and entails, as one student reports, "my partner ignored everything, so he didn't learn anything." An explanation might be found in an unfamiliarity with the type of task which may result in lack of engagement, as in Carless's study. In any case, mixed proficiency groups represent a challenge for teachers and although TBLT allows for students to work with their existing linguistic resources, oftentimes teachers should ensure task adaptation to different levels of difficulty so as to make them accessible to all learners when English is being taught to the whole group. Nevertheless—as has been put forward in chapter 2, this represents an increased workload for teachers that may result in burnout and further mental problems. Precisely, although ideal, it is difficult in the Catalan high school.

6.2. Challenges of TBLT in the Catalan context

For the second research question both observation while performing the task and some questions of the survey were used to explore some potential drawbacks of TBLT in the Catalan classroom. For instance, a yes/no question of the survey asked whether students had needed additional time to finish the task. To clarify, this relates to the post-task. Once students had produced a short text, they reported it to the other pair in their small group. After that, the teacher asked for volunteers to share their texts with the whole class. Results from the yes/no question are shown in Figure 6. Results describe how most students (72.9%) did not need extra time to finish the task while the rest (27.1%) report that they did. Furthermore, in an additional question which asked students if they had shared their short text with the small group, most students (68.8%), once again, report that they had while the remainder participants had not (31.3%). The results are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 6

Learners' perception on having enough time for post-task realization

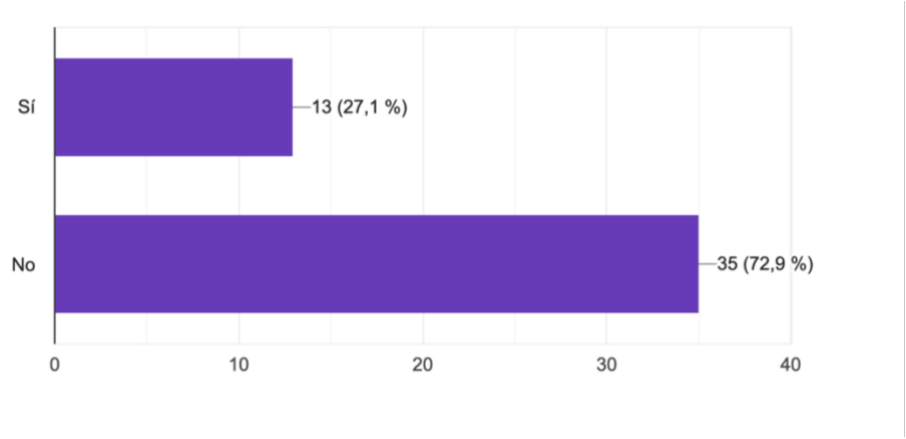
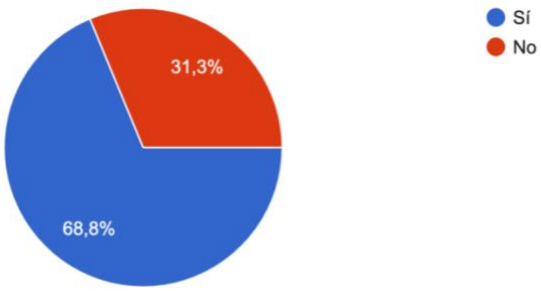


Figure 7

Learners' answers on reporting to their small group



Observation of the main task realization and reporting, however, shows different results. Many students did not have enough time to finish producing their short text during class time. They handed in the text the following class. It could be that the question on the form participants completed was not sufficiently clear and required clarification. Although participants were not asked about having enough time to perform the language focus, observation attested that most students did not have enough time for the language practice, so it was shared with students for them to complete as a post-task at home. Observation also exposed the difference in proficiency level which hindered task

realization. Two important factors seem to influence the results of the lesson. One is instructional time and order and the other is proficiency level.

When it comes to teaching time, it is important to bear in mind that the average class time in Catalan high schools is one hour albeit any in-service teacher could confirm that in practical terms it is less than that. This raises the question of whether TBLT could successfully be implemented in the language classroom in the Catalan context. Many variables play a role in instructional time: from classroom management issues to magic moments that may slow down teaching. Regarding class management, a communicative approach such as TBLT entails communication which may generate a challenge in maintaining classroom order and encouraging student participation, especially with younger learners. As Carless (2004) notes in his study, traditional educational contexts may resist this type of methodology due to the perception of a task. As Carless puts it, "[s]tudents, I suggest, may view activities as a lull from serious instruction and an opportunity to take a break" (p. 667). This is something that my observation could confirm.

Another variable that may influence task performance is proficiency level. One of the main benefits of TBLT is that it offers the possibility for students to use their linguistic resources to communicate and complete a task, even at low proficiency levels, especially when performing mixed proficiency tasks; that is, tasks performed by, for example, student pairs, one of higher and one of lower proficiency. In Carless (2004) examination of the implementation of TBTL in the classroom, he notes that students' L1 was extensively used and even led to non-linguistic tasks. Recourse to students' mother tongue was due to limited English proficiency to support the task, to facilitate it due to task difficulty, to express feelings, or simply because of laziness or lack of initiative (p. 653). It has been mentioned that resourcing to L1 is not negative *per se*, yet

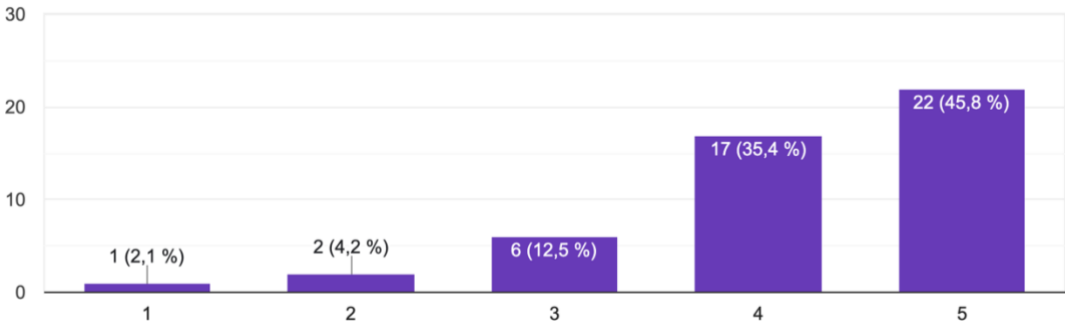
teachers should strive for maximal use of L2 and decide which tasks could benefit from using the L1 to support them and in which tasks the mother tongue could represent a barrier in developing the target language. Certainly, use of L1 is one of the main challenges of language pedagogy thus TBLT. Given the limited linguistic resources it is comprehensible that students employ their L1 when communicating with their peers in working towards the realization of a task. As some have argued, "[t]his situation is likely to arise to an even greater extent in foreign language classrooms, where the learners' limited L2 proficiency makes social interaction with other students in the L2 even more problematic" (Ellis and Shintani, 2013, p. 231). Certainly, there seems to be a consensus on the maximal use of L2 since some negative outcomes in L1 usage in the language classroom have been identified (Turnbull and Arnett, 2002; Cook, 2010). Nonetheless, L1 can and should be used strategically to facilitate learning.

6.3. Affordances and issues of TMTBLT in the Catalan context

Regarding the research question on the affordances of using TMTBLT in the language classroom**,** Figure 8 shows learners' perceptions on easiness of navigation of the website booking.com. The task represents a real-world problem involving individuals booking a room on the internet. The question asked learners to answer whether they had found the website easy to navigate so as to find the information to complete the task (e.g., hotel, room type, check-in/check-out dates, etc.). As the results show, most students either strongly agree or agree. The data shows how students are familiar with platforms such as Booking. As explored in Chapter 3, students' digital literacy is already high being proficient in the use of most digital platforms and services. However, it should never be assumed.

Figure 8

Learners' perception on easiness of navigation of website



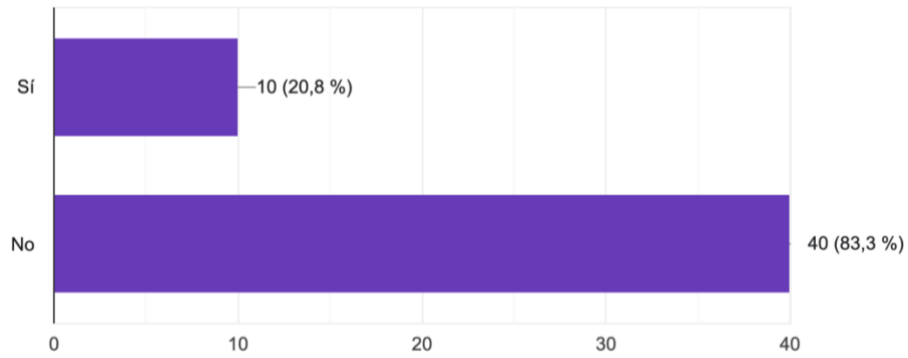
During the realization of the task, some students struggled to navigate the website since not all of them were familiar with that type of platform. It seems that the lack of familiarity with this type of platforms could hinder the completion of tasks such as the one performed which aligns with the additional variables González-Lloret (2016) identifies when combining technology with tasks. Teachers should be aware of these variables so as to demonstrate how to utilize the technologies that are going to mediate the tasks, so they become accessible to all students. Another variable in this study was the lack of predisposition or interest from learners to navigate the website in English. During the task many students switched the website's default language to Spanish which obstructed the incidental encounter of vocabulary related to hotels and hotel bookings. Indeed, this is a concern raised by Skehan (2003), namely by-passing the target language. However, a reason for this could be found in the lack of familiarity with this type of task or due to an inadequate comprehension of task instructions. Clear instructions, then, are of great importance. As evidenced in Chong and Reinders (2020), clear instruction and scaffolding is paramount when it comes to effectiveness of technology-mediated tasks.

When asked about whether students had preferred to perform the task on a print handout, Figure 9 shows learners' preference for the technology-mediated medium. The answers include diverse reasons. Many participants mention the convenience of using their laptops. These observations support the digital literacy of students and how used to technology they are on their everyday lives. Participants also alluded to the information the medium offers; that is, richer and more amount of information. If a handout had been used, students would have been offered a limited amount of hotel options to choose from, conversely, using a website provided students unlimited options. One student reports that using the web platform allows them to "jump from link to link to know more about the hotel and hotel room" while another says that "there are more hotel options on Booking than on a handout." This is indeed a reported affordance of technology (Chong & Reinders, 2020, p 79), in other words, not being limited by the information the teacher provides. Participants also report being more motivated given that they could navigate the website freely and choose the option they preferred: "I wouldn't have liked it [using a handout] since it is more entertaining to use the Chromebook given that you can look up the hotel reviews." These results are in line with most studies (Chong & Reinders, 2020, p. 78), namely that students are more motivated to engage in technology-mediated tasks.

Indeed, an online tool such as a hotel booking platform provides the extra linguistic value the amount of information affords so the exposure to language is maximal. Not only that, but technology also affords the possibility for mixed proficiency tasks when offering glosses or translations of words and phrases as learners perform a task, bridging the gap between high- and low-proficiency students while reducing teacher workload. All in all, when technology is available, teachers should resort to it to add the extra value their instruction could benefit from.

Figure 9

Learners' preference of medium for task realization



Chapter 7: Discussion

Regarding the findings for RQ1, based on the quantitative analyses, it appears that TBLT has the potential to offer many possibilities in the Catalan foreign language classroom in general terms. It seems that TBLT may help in keeping students motivated insofar as TBLT is goal oriented and students want to achieve the task outcome. It is possible that since TBLT allows students to perform tasks independently of their linguistic resources, it has the potentiality to avoid frustration and foster engagement. Additionally, task-based language learning may cater to students' interests thus adding to their motivation. Time-permitting a NA to determine the target group's interests, however, should be conducted to ensure the engagement of students and success of the lesson. Moreover, students reported positive perceptions on the practicality of the main task and almost half of the participants expressed that exploring different hotel options and hotel rooms and the services each offered was the aspect they enjoyed the most. This informs us about the suitability of the approach to tackle key components of the new curriculum, namely through the design of authentic learning scenarios that foster competential and meaningful learning. Finally, the results confirm findings on the

potential of a communicative approach such as TBLT for promoting speaking skills, particularly during peer work.

In regard to the results for RQ2, observation contradicts some of the results and sheds light on some of the challenges of TBLT in the Catalan context. While students reported on the questionnaire that they had had enough time to produce and report the short text, observation attested that the task was time-constrained and that most students did not have enough time to share it with other pairs. Additionally, most students did not have sufficient time to perform the language focus exercises. These findings raise the question of whether one-hour lessons are enough to develop a full TBLT cycle and whether teachers should consider dividing TBLT lessons into several classes. Another observed challenge that aligns with the literature is the role of language proficiency and how it might play in task performance. Indeed, the data confirms that students might recourse to their L1 because of a low-proficiency level. However, it also might be because they are simply not familiar with this type of communicative approach. In any case, overuse of students' L1 is difficult to control and may hinder language acquisition. It is paramount, then, that teachers design tasks that allow for complexity readjustments thus take into consideration the various proficiency levels of the target group. Finally, teachers should consider the context where they are trying to implement a task-based curriculum. Contexts where teacher-fronted instruction has always been the norm and where students might not be familiar with a learning system based on communicative practices might resist its application or, at least, hinder its execution if there is not an appropriate guidance and gradual introduction.

Regarding RQ3, the data points at several affordances of technology-mediated tasks. Firstly, it shows that Catalan teenage learners are digitally competent and that technology-mediated tasks are appropriate for working on language skills while tackling

the digital component of the new curriculum. Nevertheless, observation affirms that digital literacies should never be assumed and that teachers need to consider that some learners might need the teacher's assistance when performing a technology-mediated task since technology may alter the complexity of such tasks. Secondly, results demonstrate to how technology-mediated tasks may be more appealing to students, so they may have the potential of further engaging students in tasks. This could be explained by the familiarity of students with the medium. Results show how students perceive the medium as more convenient, information-rich, and motivating than its traditional counterpart.

This study has provided with new data to complement existing literature. On the one hand, it has confirmed many possibilities for the implementation of TBLT in the Catalan context in light of the new curriculum guidelines; on the other, results have confirmed some of the existing concerns of its implementation. Lastly, the incorporation of the technology component has shed some light on the affordances of technology-mediated tasks as well as potential negative implications of its careless incorporation into syllabi.

This study presents several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, the present study has gathered data from a small number of participants in a specific micro-setting context. Hence, the data alone is not sufficient to draw general conclusions on the possibilities and challenges of the application of TBLT in the Catalan foreign language classroom or on the affordances and issues of TMTBLT. A larger number of participants would provide more reliable data, especially, if the data would come from other educational contexts were, for example, traditional instruction is the norm. or where full digitalization has not yet taken place. In addition, a single technology-mediated lesson is not sufficient to gauge general perceptions of the

approach. Another limitation is the methods to gather data. Insights come solely from the answers of students. Teachers' perceptions could surely provide additional insights. Perhaps, they could be interviewed to know their opinion on the feasibility of such approach in the particular context where they teach. Therefore, to have richer insights on the perceptions of the implementation of a task-based approach and technology-mediated tasks, a whole TMTBLT program should be designed and put into action. The program could then be followed by an evaluation through a mixed-methods approach.

Despite its limitations, the findings of this study provide interesting and necessary insights on the possibilities and challenges of the implementation of (TM)TBLT in the Catalan context in light of the new curriculum, most of which align with existing literature on the pedagogical implication of TBLT.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In brief, this study has shown that both TBLT and TMTBLT represent potential approaches Spanish and Catalan teachers should take into consideration. TBLT clearly adjusts to the tenets of the new curriculum. In addition, in being a flexible approach rather than monolithic, teachers may choose the model that suits their instructional needs. Moreover, when complementing traditional TBLT with technology-mediated tasks, teachers will be addressing the digital component of the curriculum, fostering their students' digital literacies and their own.

Nonetheless, as with any approach, there are always challenges and (TM)TBLT is not an exception. Further avenues for research are ample and have been highlighted throughout the present thesis, especially regarding TMTBLT in being a relatively new subfield. It is imperative, for instance, that researchers carry out comparative studies that shed light on the effectiveness of TBLT in different areas. Moreover, considering the challenges identified in the results of this study, a research agenda exploring how technology-mediated tasks can aid with time management, mixed-ability groups, and control of resort to L1 should be examined. In addition, accounts of NAs of both language and digital needs can help us have a better understanding of how language and technology intersect in the language acquisition process. This is only possible if educators implement technology-mediated tasks in their instruction and if researchers continue investigating the questions that arise when considering TBLT in its synergy with technology.

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