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Teacher’s Perception on the Design and Implementation of Task for an Online English Course for Young Learners in China

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Master’s Degree Program in Early Language Education for Intercultural Communications
Master’s thesis in Education
June 2020
ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a fast growing in the online English teaching using the video-based synchronous technology for young learners in China. However, the research has been lagging on the phenomenon and little research has been done on the language teaching pedagogy used for these courses.

This study aims to investigate the phenomenon through the teacher perception about the application of task based language teaching (TBLT) approach for the video-based synchronous setting using the Classin software, specifically the design and implementation of tasks. Supported with second language acquisition theory, TBLT has become the dominant second language teaching pedagogy for the last decades with huge impact on the traditional classroom teaching. TBLT is believed to be supportive to the second language acquisition by creating more chances for negotiation of meaning with directed attention to form using pedagogical tasks in teaching. It has also been proved to be applicable with technology mediated context, like the video-based synchronous setting.

The study aims to explore how the teachers design and implement tasks for the video-based synchronous setting using the Classin software as well as the challenges that they are facing. The research reveals that the teachers followed a present-practice-produce (PPP) methodology rather than TBLT approach. The learning activities that they designed and implemented were situational grammar exercises rather than real tasks. The teachers had a poor or limited understanding of the task and TBLT, which lead them to believe that TBLT was not applicable in the video-based synchronous setting. Besides this, the video-based synchronous context posed more challenges to the teachers for the design and implementation of learning activities.

The research findings indicate that the teachers need more education to gain a proper understanding of TBLT so that they can design and implement task in the video-based synchronous setting. It would be valuable to both the development of TBLT as a pedagogy and to the teachers if more model examples of TBLT lessons for video-based synchronous setting can be developed and promoted by researchers of TBLT.

Avainsanat – Keywords
Task, Task based language teaching, teacher’s perception, video-based synchronous communication, PPP
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List of Abbreviations

PPP: Present–practice–produce

PPT: Power Point

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

SCMC: Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication

TBLT: Task-based language teaching
1 Introduction

1.1 Background: The Boom of Online English Course for Young Learners in China

Given the sheer number of populations in China, anything that is trendy can become a big thing. One of the recent trends in educational context in China is the upsurge of paid and private online K-12 education with the English course as the leader of the trend. According to a news report (Xiao, 2019), the total amount of young learners enrolled in online English course in 2019 climbed to 10 million from 6.25 million in 2018 in China. The estimated business revenue for the online English training for young learners in China would reach 35 billion RMB for the year of 2019. More and more students choose the online training against the traditional offline training. In 2018, 26.59% percent of young learners chose online English training. The number rises to 33% in 2019 and is estimated to increase faster with the advent of 5G technology.

There are various forms of online teaching and learning. The dominant form of private online English training in China uses the synchronous virtual classroom supported by the video conferencing technology like Zoom and Classin. About 80% of the users choose the video-based synchronous teaching and learning over the asynchronous study of pre-recorded videos and other forms of online learning (Pintu Media, 2018). The synchronous torturing mode offers three different choices: one-to-one, small group and dual teacher for large class. Again, one-to-one and small group is more popular with young learners.

Most of the parents prefer to choose native speakers other than Chinese teachers as the teacher of the online English course for their kids. Report (Li, 2019) says that 46% of the parents interviewed like the combination of native speakers as leading teacher and Chinese teachers as assistant while 40% of the parents choose courses taught only of the native speakers. The native speakers who teach those online courses come from English speaking countries from North America as well as Europe, Philippine and some other countries.

Online English training becomes popular in China for the benefits it offers. First it offers learners the chance of communicating with native speakers in a non-English environment, which is demonstrated by the parents’ preference over native speakers. Native speakers are highly pursued by the parents because they are expected to have pure accent and speaks better English and therefore be better teachers. Second it offers the convenience of attending the course without
travelling to and back the training center. Students can access the course anywhere simply by turning on the computer and log into the learning platform as long as there is internet connection. Thirdly it is also because of the multimodal and interactional mode of synchronous video conferencing which supports the use of multimedia authentic input.

Besides the added values of the online course, there are also social and economic reasons behind the phenomenon. The status of English as the global lingua franca and globalization has long been pushing the parents in Asian countries to invest in their kids’ English education. It is hoped that the bilingual competence will open doors for their professional development and stand out in the global workforce competition when they grow up (Nunan, 2003). The pressure of competition also comes from within China’s national educational system with an assessment scheme that is almost entirely dependent on the score of standardized exams since the K-12 stage. The parents feel pressed to send their kids into various afterschool tutoring programs to improve their kid’s academic performance on almost all subjects within the public schools (Qi, 2016). China’s foreign language education policy also places the English in a high position. English is one of the three core subjects, the other two being mathematics and Chinese as mother tongue, through the primary, secondary and high school. It is also the only and mandatory foreign language to be taught since grade 3 in most of the public schools (MOE, 2001, 2011).

However, advancement of technology is the deciding force that put the wide spread of video-based synchronous course into reality. The coverage of high-speed internet connection and affordance of electronic devices, like the computers and smartphones, make it possible for the kids across the country to access the online course. In 2017, the internet user reached 772 million in China and 55.8% of Chinese people had access of internet (Pintu Media, 2018). The maturing video conferencing technology that support both written, oral and visual communication creates more possibilities that meets the pedagogical demands of teaching and learning in the virtual classroom.

1.2 Problem statement: Question into the Pedagogy

Fostered by the favorable influence from social, economic and technological conditions, the video-based synchronous English course is sure to stay and grow even bigger. While technology might be able to change certain context and dimension of education, bringing with both opportunity and challenges, it cannot change the fundamentals of how people acquire second language or learn any new knowledge. A new pencil does not make a child better at writing essays; a computer does not
make a teacher better or a learner smarter (Thomas, Reinders, & Warschauer, 2013). Technology must be integrated with the pedagogy to achieve effective results for language teaching and learning (Farr & Murray, 2016). Technology alone cannot make language acquisition happen. Rather it is up to the teacher and learner to manipulate the technology to its full potential for assisting learning under the proper guidance of educational pedagogy.

It then brings up the question of what kind of pedagogy those video-based synchronous English courses for young learners in China are following. From the point of class size, one-to-one course taught by native speakers and small group class, which the current study is focused on, are the most popular ones. The small group mode is relatively newer than the one-to-one mode. Although it has the added benefit of interaction among the learners compared to one-to-one mode, it is still in the exploring stage in both terms of teaching practice and business development.

Some features of the small group synchronous course can be identified by the analysis of the websites of six leading brands (Proud Kids, Qkids, Air US, KK Talkee, Whale English Elite Education and Hawo) that offering such courses for young learners. A table of the course features is drafted based on the public information online (see Table 1). One common feature they all share is the emphasis on the qualification of English teachers who are presumably native speakers. All the courses are refenced to the Chinese National Curriculum (CNC). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is used as framework by five brands while Common Core State Standards of US (CCSS) is used by two brands. The group size is small with only two to six students. The time for one class lasts from 25 mins to 50 mins while the shorter time period is more favored. Two of the brands use the Classin to support their teaching and the other four have their own supporting software. Only two brands have clearly stated the material they used on their website. The other four brands label their material as self-developed.

Table 1. Features of the synchronous small group English course from 6 leading brands in China
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Type of Teacher</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>CEFR/CNC</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Platform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qkids</td>
<td>Native speakers</td>
<td>Self-developed</td>
<td>CEFR CNC</td>
<td>2 or 4, 30 mins</td>
<td>4-12</td>
<td>Own software</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air US</td>
<td>Native speakers</td>
<td>Kid’s Box</td>
<td>CEFR CNC</td>
<td>4, 25</td>
<td>3-12</td>
<td>Classin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KK Talkee</td>
<td>Native speakers</td>
<td>Self-developed</td>
<td>CCSS, ACTFL CNC CEFR</td>
<td>2, 25</td>
<td>4-12</td>
<td>Own software</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whale English Elite Education</td>
<td>Native speakers</td>
<td>Reach</td>
<td>CCSS, CEFR CNC</td>
<td>2, 50</td>
<td>3-18</td>
<td>Own software</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawo</td>
<td>Native Speakers, Chinese teachers</td>
<td>Self-developed</td>
<td>CEFR CNC</td>
<td>4 or 6, 45</td>
<td>5-12</td>
<td>Own software</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the teaching pedagogy, all the brands states that their classes are following the second language acquisition principles, fun and commutative. Some pedagogical terms like PPP (Presentation, Practice and Production), PBL (Project based learning), comprehensible input, flipped classroom and TBLT (Task-based language teaching) are used to label their teaching. However, it is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of actual teaching and learning simply from the commercial branding text on the website. A deeper examination of the actual lessons is needed for this purpose. Although trial lessons are offered for the learner and parents to assess the lessons before enrollment, the parents still lack a criterion to make the proper decision without expert knowledge. It calls for critical external evaluation of the course for both the benign development of the education and the benefits of the learners.
1.3 Aim of the Study

The current study has two aims. One aim is to examine the practice and pedagogies followed by the teachers for the video-based synchronous English course for young learners in China. In more details, it aims to explore how the teachers design and implement tasks for their online English course. The other aim is to explore the teachers’ perception on the application of language teaching pedagogy, especially the TBLT approach, for teaching English as a second language in the video-based synchronous setting. To achieve these goals, the study will be carried out through the analysis of the recordings of sample video-based synchronous English lessons together with the interview of English teachers for one representative English course in China, namely EEO English course. The study wants to see if and how TBLT is being adopted and how it could possibly be better applied from the teachers’ perspective.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study will firstly benefit the teachers by providing them with suggestions to make better pedagogically grounded decision for their design of learning activities and teaching in the video-based synchronous setting. The teachers and course developer will be offered with a critical perspective to reflect on their own teaching practice, a pedagogical guideline for designing and teaching their lessons online and an understanding of the challenges posed by the video-based synchronous setting. While effective teaching is the core for the growth and success of any English training business, the study will inform the business owner or decision maker of the online English training business of the necessary improvements for their current online courses and development of future courses. The study can also help them to recognize the need for teacher training programs to develop teacher competency that is needed for the online teaching using TBLT approach. At last, the study will also benefit the huge number of learners of the online English course if they are offered with courses that are supported with research findings in the SLA and CALL.

The study will also fill the gap of research that calls for the study on the teacher’s perception of applying TBLT approach in video-based synchronous setting. So far there have been some studies focused on the teacher’s perception of TBLT (Andon & Eckert 2009; Barnard & Nguyen, 2010; Erlam 2016; Jeon & Hahn 2006; McAllister, Narcy-Combes, & Starkey-Perret, 2012; Zheng & Borg, 2014), showing that the teachers don’t have a clear understanding of TBLT and they need support for implementing task based teaching. However, these studies are all on face-to-face
classroom setting. The study on teacher’s perception of applying TBLT in SCMC context is scarce. The current study on teacher’s perception of applying TBLT for video-based synchronous setting in the English course for young learners in China will fill the gap.

1.5 Key Concepts

Interaction Approach: The interaction approach incorporated some aspects of the Input Hypothesis together with the Output Hypothesis and developed into its current status (Gass & Mackey, 2012). The approach explains how the learner’s exposure to language input, production of language and feedback to the production worked together to promote the language acquisition. According to Long (2015), the negotiation for meaning links the language input with language output when the learners notice there is a gap between his language and target language.

Interaction Hypothesis: The Interaction Hypothesis holds that there are brief opportunities for the learners’ attention to be drawn to the linguistic form and explicit teaching that help to improve the implicit input processing when the learners negotiate for meaning. During that activity, the positive and negative feedback to the learner’s output are facilitative to the language acquisition. (Long, 2015)

Present–practice–produce (PPP): Present-Practice-Production includes both the controlled production activities of audiolingualism and communicative language activities. PPP involves three phases: (1) the presentation of the language forms through explicit instruction, (2) the provision of ‘practice’ in the form of controlled production activities, and (3) the inclusion of free-production activities in the form of situational grammar activities. PPP is the dominant teaching methodology favored by most of the second language teachers. (Ellis & Shintani, 2014)

Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication (SCMC): Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication refers to situations where participants involved in the communication are online at the same time and communication takes place virtually in real-time. SCMC includes chat, MOOs, audio conferencing and videoconferencing. (Stockwell, 2010)

Task-based language teaching (TBLT): Task-based language teaching is a language teaching approach that focus on the meaning of language but does not neglect the form language. It is contrasted to the structural language teaching approach that considers language as an object to be taught and learned with a synthetic syllabus. In TBLT, language is considered as a tool for making
meaning and learners are engaged in activities that would motivate their natural ability for accidental language acquisition. (Ellis et al, 2019)

1.6 Structure of the study

This study is consisted of six chapters. Chapter 1 explains/provides an overall introduction to the study, including the background information, the problem statement, the aim of the study, the significance of the study and the definition of key concepts. Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework for the study and place the study into the context of research on the teacher’s perspective and practice of TBLT approach in a video-based synchronous setting. It begins with the review of the Interactional Approach and its significance for second language acquisition and language pedagogy, especially TBLT. It follows with a review on the studies on TBLT approach, covering from the confusion in the definition of task, to the design of a TBLT syllabus, the implementation methodology of a TBLT lesson and application of TBLT in the video-based synchronous setting. A point to be made here is that TBLT is usually contrasted with the methodology of PPP while TBLT challenges the PPP methodology, the latter is still the dominant method favored by language teachers. Chapter 3 presents the research questions. Chapter 4 explains the reasoning for the choice of research methodology and research method, which is online group interview and observation of stream-recorded sample lessons. The data collection process and analysis method, research validity and reliability as well as ethical issues were also explained in this chapter. Chapter 5 outlines the study results with discussion evolved around the themes emerged under every research question. Chapter 6 includes the conclusion drawn from the research results based on the theoretical foundation and implications for the stakeholders of similar English course. The study’s strengths and limitations are presented and suggestions for future research in teacher’s perception and practice of TBLT approach in video-based synchronous context are proposed
2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Interaction Approach

The interaction approach explains the second language acquisition through the link of input, interaction, output of language and feedback on the output. The approach is constituted of two hypotheses: Long’s (1983b, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis and Swain’s (1985, 1995) Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Cognitive concepts like noticing, working memory and attention were used to explain the how the working mechanism of the four above-mentioned factors during communication. According to the approach, ‘negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways’ (Long, 1996, pp. 451–2). It is now commonly accepted within the SLA literature that there is a robust connection between interaction and learning (Gass & Mackey, 2012).

2.1.1 The Interaction Hypothesis

The Interaction Hypothesis explains how incidental language acquisition works (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). The Interaction Hypothesis holds that opportunities for attention to implicit negative feedback and for explicit learning to improve implicit input processing occurs during the negotiation of meaning when interlocutors seek to prevent or address a communication problem (Long, 2015).

*Environmental contributions to acquisition are mediated by selective attention and the learner’s developing L2 processing capacity, and... there resources are brought together most usefully, although not exclusively, during negotiation for meaning. Negative feedback obtained during negotiation work or elsewhere may be facilitative of L2 development, at least for vocabulary, morphology, and language-specific syntax, and essential for learning certain specifiable L1- L2 contrasts. (Long 1996, p. 414)*

The negotiation for meaning promotes the language acquisition because it leads to selective learner attention and thus noticing of linguistic forms in the input. When the forms happen to be in the learner developmental stage and order of acquisition, then language acquisition would happen. Negotiation provides the learner with an opportunity to compare their own construct or guess of
linguistic form, which maybe erroneous, with the correct form of target language. (Ellis & Shintani, 2014)

2.1.2 The Output Hypothesis
Swain’s output hypothesis (2005) proposes that language production play a crucial role in the acquisition of a second language. Swain built the hypothesis from her research work on the French Immersion Program in Canada. She observed that students' proficiency level fell significantly behind their native correspondences after several years of study. One reason for the issue was because the students had little chance for language production, either in speaking or writing. Therefore, Swain argued that input alone is not enough for L2 learning and output is also important for promoting language learning.

According to Swain (2005), output has three functions:

1. The noticing function, or what might be referred to as its consciousness-raising function. Output gives rise to noticing. During the production of language, especially when the learners have difficulty to articulate their ideas, they would recognize their problems and notice what is lacking in their linguistic knowledge.

2. The hypothesis-testing function. Output is way for the learners to test about their best guess or hypothesis of certain language structure or form. Learners try to find out if certain hypothesis works or not during conversation through the feedback for their output.

3. The metalinguistic function, or what might be referred to as its reflective role. It means that learners use language to reflect on language use. It helps the learners to map out the relationship between meaning, forms and function.

2.2 Task Based Language Teaching Approach
This section will provide a review on the literature of TBLT as one of the most influential and contested language teaching approach. It will cover the originating source for TBLT development, the construct of task as the central unit to TBLT, the design of a TBLT syllabus and the methodology for implementing a TBLT lesson. It will also examine the criticisms launched at TBLT and how they are addressed. At last, the research on TBLT and synchronous computer mediated communication (SCMC) will be reviewed.
2.2.1 TBLT as a Contested Approach

During the past thirty years, research in task-based language teaching (TBLT) has burgeoned. Besides the organization of biannual international conference on TBLT, the growing number of publications has testified the influential status of TBLT in language teaching and research. TBLT has been researched as a theoretical construction with support of SLA theories (Bygate 2015; Ellis 2003, 2009; Long 2015; Van den Branden et al. 2009; Van den Branden 2006) and as a pedagogical construction (Bygate et al. 2001; García-Mayo 2007; González-Lloret & Nielson 2015; Samuda & Bygate 2008; Samuda et al. 2018; Robinson 2011; Skehan 2014). The teachers’ perspective on doing TBLT has also been explored although the empirical classroom research on TBLT is still relatively lacking (Andon & Eckert 2009; East 2012; Van den Branden 2016; Van den Branden 2006; Willis & Willis 2007). In recent years, the research on technology and TBLT is also growing (González-Lloret & Ortega 2014; Thomas & Reinders 2010; Ziegler 2016b; Ziegler & Phung 2019). As task is considered both as a construct for SLA research and language pedagogy, studies have investigated how tasks can promote L2 acquisition and how task can be implemented in the classroom.

2.2.2 Driving Forces for the Establishment of TBLT

The communicative language teaching movement in the 1970s and 1980s together with the early research in the SLA is the driving forces behind the emergence of task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2018; Ellis et al., 2019; Hummel, 2014; Bygate, 2016). Communicative language teaching views the language as a means for communication and aims to develop the learner’s communicative competence rather than to merely enable learners to produce grammatically correct utterance. It was distinguished as a weak and strong version (Howatt & Smith, 2014). Each version has its inherent problem and task-based language is considered as a remedy to the problems.

Littlewood (2014) and East (2015) analyzed the development and problems for the weak and strong version of CLT. Two sources were identified as the roots for the weak and strong version of CLT: the communicative perspective of language and learning respectively. The communicative perspective of language thinks that language should be learned as functions instead of grammar structures. Under its influence, the notional-functional syllabus was developed, using the discourse functions like description, narration and instruction as organizing units. The teaching methodology for the weak version remained the same as traditional structural, sometimes using the PPP model.
of Presentation/Practice/Production. The strong version of CLT believes that communication is enough for language learning and traditional teaching is not necessary. This perspective of learning was influenced by Krashen’s Natural Approach, which proposes that comprehensible input is all that is needed for language acquisition and grammar should be learned incidentally. The strong version of CLT focuses on fluency (Ellis, 2018) but misses the accuracy of the language.

TBLT attends to both the need of communication with the focus on meaning and grammar with the focus on form during interaction. Unlike weak CLT, grammar is not placed at the forefront in a teacher-led way. Unlike strong CLT, grammar is not ignored, and it is not left entirely up to the learners to work out the rules (East, 2015). Therefore, TBLT is considered as a remedy to the weakness of both versions of CLT.

2.2.3 Definition of Task
Since it was first adopted to specify the communicative activities in the language class in the 1980s, a variety of definition for the term task has been suggested by researchers yet no universally accepted definition has been established in the research literature so far. The meaning of task has grown out of the simple denotation of communicative activity to a more subtle set of meanings as the project keeps on development.

Below are some definitions proposed by researchers on TBLT.

Tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. (Willis, 1996, p23)

A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes. (Ellis, 2003, p 16)

In other words, ‘task’ in TBLT has its normal, non-technical meaning. Tasks are the real-world activities people think of when planning, conducting, or recalling their day. That can
mean things like brushing their teeth, preparing breakfast, reading a newspaper, taking a child to school, responding to e-mail messages, making a sales call, attending a lecture or a business meeting, having lunch with a colleague from work, helping a child with homework, coaching a soccer team, and watching a TV program. Some tasks are mundane, some complex. Some require language use, some do not; for others, it is optional. (Long, 2015, p6)

The above only listed part of the definitions that make appearance in the research literature of TBLT. There are more versions of task definitions. Bygate (2001b) attributed the disagreement on the definition of task to the ignorance of context while Ellis attributed it to the failure to distinguish task as workplan and process. As we can see from the list above, task is usually referred to as activity. It can either mean the actual materials that constitute a task (i.e. the workplan) or to the language use resulting from the performance of the task (i.e. the process) (Ellis et al., 2019). While the actual performance of a task varies with different learners under different contexts, it is arguable to restrict the meaning of task as a workplan. Therefore, Ellis proposed a definition of task based on a set of criterions to define the task as a workplan. The current study will choose to follow the Ellis’s definition and criteria of task as it is more concrete and thus easier to apply in the research and teaching practice.

The four criterions of task as workplan proposed by Ellis (Ellis et al., 2019, p. 20) is as follows:

1. The primary focus is on meaning.
2. There is some kind of gap.
3. Learners rely mainly on their own linguistic and nonlinguistic resources.
4. There is a clearly defined communicative outcome.

It means that the workplan for the task should make sure that the learners will work primary on the understanding and conveying of meaning during the task performance. In order to achieve this, the workplan needs to create either some information or reasoning gap to push and engage students into the communication to make up for the information gap. During the communication process, the students will need to use both their linguistic and nonlinguistic resources to come up to a solution. The students’ performance will be evaluated by whether they have completed the task or not instead of their conformity to the language codes.
2.2.4 Classifying Tasks

As there is no single agreed definition of task, there is no one-cut way for classifying tasks. The tasks can be categorized according to the pedagogic principles, psycholinguistic perspectives or even narrative mode (Ellis, 2003). The classifying of tasks is important since it offers a range for possible activities for the course designers and teachers when they are deciding which type to include for specific lesson. Due to the variety of tasks available and the benefits of task classifying, the section below will examine in detail the ways of task classification.

The first and foremost distinction to be made between tasks is real-world task and pedagogical task. Real-world task means the activities that you do with language in real life while pedagogical task means the activities that you do in the classroom with language, which may or may not happen in real life (Ellis, 2018). The real-life task aims at situational authenticity and the pedagogical task aims at interactional authenticity. It is an issue of debate as whether only real-world task should figure in a TBLT syllabus. Long (2015) advocates for only real-world task that resulted in the needs analysis of the learners should be used for any TBLT course. Ellis (2017, 2018) pointed that real-world task is not feasible for general purpose language programs and for young learners. He argued that both real-world task and pedagogical task has its role to play in the task-based language teaching depending on the teaching context.

The way to classify tasks develop with the research and pedagogic practice of TBLT. Prabhu as one of the early explorers of TBLT, classified the tasks into information gap, reasoning gap and opinion gap tasks. Willis (1996) listed six types of tasks: listing, ordering and sequencing, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences and creative. Ellis argued for a principled way to category tasks and he proposed a list of task categories as in the Table 5.

Table 2. Ellis’s suggestion for task category (Ellis et al., 2019, p.21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of tasks</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input-based tasks</strong></td>
<td><strong>Out-put based tasks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening or reading tasks</td>
<td>Speaking or writing task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One-way task</strong></td>
<td><strong>Two-way task</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one participant is given all the information of the task and would use this information to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
lead the performance of the task while other participants respond to the information. Both participants are provided with matching information to solve the task in cooperation by using their separate information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused task</th>
<th>Unfocused task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A task that draw and focus the students’ attention to certain language feature.</td>
<td>A task with no specific focus on language feature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Here-and-now task</th>
<th>There-and-then task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasks related to the immediate environment of the learner.</td>
<td>Tasks unrelated to the immediate environment of the learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closed task</th>
<th>Open task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A task with only one or two answers.</td>
<td>A task with multiple possible solutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convergent task</th>
<th>Divergent task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasks that need the students to reach a consensus on the answer.</td>
<td>Tasks that allows students to have different answers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monologic task</th>
<th>Dialogic task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task requires only one student to do the talking.</td>
<td>Task requires two or more students to carry out a dialogue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2.5 Designing a task-based syllabus

As the design of any syllabus, a TBLT syllabus needs to be designed with some informed principle. Since task is the basic unit for the organizing of the syllabus and implementation element for teaching, the selection and sequencing of tasks are critical to the TBLT syllabus design. What tasks could and should be included? How to evaluate the complexity of the tasks? How to cater to the needs, interest and capacity of different learners at different age from different background? How can the teaching of grammar be incorporated into the syllabus? How can the tasks be grouped and organized into a logical and progressive way so that the learners can move ahead smoothly by following the syllabus? Questions like these needs to be answered for the successful creation of a TBLT program.

Long (2015) and Ellis (2003, 2018) discussed the problems and offered their solutions for syllabus design with task. For task selection, Long used the needs analysis to elicit and collect contents of
tasks. While recognizing the value of needs analysis, Ellis (2018) also argued that for young learners and general-purpose learners, tasks can be selected on thematic contents and the guiding principal for the selection should be topic familiarity, intrinsic interest and topic relevance. For task sequencing, Long analyzed a variety of criteria for the grading of tasks, including the valency and criticality, frequency, learnability and complexity. However, he admitted that the grading of tasks remained one of the real problems of TBLT. Ellis suggested a general criterion of four aspects of the task, the input factor, the interaction factor, the reasoning factor and the outcome factor, leaving space for the teacher to manage.

**Long’s approach to TBLT syllabus**

Long (2015) identified five steps to create a task syllabus:

1. Conduct need analysis to find out the specific needs with language usage in real world for the learners, for example what tasks a restaurant waitress or an accountant working in the office would need to accomplish.
2. Based on the need analysis, a group of target task would be elicited and then set up a language corpus for the target tasks using samples of the oral and written materials that were used by native speakers for the tasks.
3. Create a group of pedagogic tasks by modifying or elaborating the target tasks.
4. Classify and group the target tasks into target task types
5. Form the task syllabus with the series of target tasks under different types

Selecting the tasks based on needs analysis as suggested by Long can solve the problem of content selection of a TBLT program for learners with specific needs since it can ensure the relevance of the content to the needs of learners. However, it does not work as well for young foreign language learners (Cameron, 2001).

Long (2015) stated that the grading of the tasks, or the rational sequencing of pedagogic tasks, remained one of the most problematic dimensions of the task syllabus design. Long analyzed a variety of criteria for the grading of tasks, including the valency and criticality, frequency, learnability and complexity. Of all these criteria, none had been either theoretically or empirically proven to be effective and pragmatic for the grading of tasks.
Ellis’ approach to TBLT syllabus design

Task complexity and sequencing was also recognized as one of the real issues for TBLT by Ellis et al. (2019). Prahbu’s horizontal and vertical dimension of task syllabus was cited as the most practical method existing so far for syllabus design. Some task examples of the Prabhu’s syllabus was cited to demonstrate the horizontal and vertical dimensions. For example, at the vertical dimension, the syllabus involved three types of task, including the clock faces, the monthly calendars and the school timetables. All the three tasks were related to the time concept and increased in complexity gradually. At the horizontal level, three task operations were arranged for the task type of clock face. They included learning days of the week, calculating the time needed for the cloak hand to move from one place to another and reading the time on a clock.

The different types of task are arranged according to the vertical grading and the difficulty of the specific tasks under the same task type is graded horizontally. Familiarity was used as the criteria for vertical grading. A general progression of complexity for tasks from information gap, to reasoning gap and finally to opinion gap was applied to the horizontal grading. It addresses the principles that inform the selection and sequencing of tasks in a task-based course.

Ellis et al. (2019) suggested to provide the teachers with content and a general sequencing dimension for referencing to develop task as workplan, leaving it for the teachers to judge and adjust according to the learner difference and their own experience. The task sequencing suggested by Ellis (2003) is based on the input factor, the interactive conditions of the task, the reasoning factors and the outcome factors of task.

Table 3. Ellis’ Criteria for task sequencing (Ellis et al., 2019, p. 152-153)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ellis’ Criteria for task sequencing</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-verbal input</td>
<td>Written input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High-frequency lexis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shorter, simple sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Static information</td>
<td>Dynamic information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Few elements/relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structured</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Here and now</td>
<td>There and then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Familiar</td>
<td>Unfamiliar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interactive factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Two-way</th>
<th>One-way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Single task</td>
<td>Dual task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Monologue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reasoning factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Information gap</th>
<th>Reasoning gap</th>
<th>Opinion gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Few steps</td>
<td>Many steps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcome factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pictures</th>
<th>Written</th>
<th>Oral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Descriptions</td>
<td>Instructions/ narratives</td>
<td>Arguments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above provides the teachers with a frame of complexity grading when designing and selecting proper task types.

**2.2.6 The Implementation of TBLT Lesson**

A TBLT lesson usually consists of three phases: the pre-task phase, the main task phase and the post task phase (Willis, 1996):

(1) The pre-task phase, i.e. the various activities that the teacher and students can undertake before they perform the task;

(2) The main-task phase, i.e. the actual performance of the task;

(3) The post-task phase, i.e. the various activities that the students and the teacher can undertake to follow-up on the performance of the task.

Ellis (2018) argues that not all phases are essential for a TBLT lesson. Only the main task phase is essential. Therefore, a TBLT lesson may have just the main-task phase, or the pre-task phase
and the main-task phase, or the main-task phase and the post-task phase or all three phases. Furthermore, Ellis pointed out that there are different options to choose depending on the factors including the learner preparations required for the task, the difficulty of the task, the priority on the language aspects (complexity, accuracy and fluency) and linguistic issues related to the task. Detailed options are presented in the table below.

Table 4. Implementation options in the different phases of a task-based lesson (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p.142)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-task phase</td>
<td>1. Teachers perform or show the students how to perform the task.</td>
<td>Students listen or watch the task being performed by the teacher on site or in video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Teacher pre-teaches the target language.</td>
<td>The teacher teaches language that is needed for the performance of the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Teacher help students to build up understanding of the task.</td>
<td>The teacher helps the students to relate the task to their own knowledge and/or gap of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Teachers ask the students to plan for the task.</td>
<td>The students are allowed to plan for the task in a given time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main task phase</td>
<td>1. Time pressure</td>
<td>The time allowed for the preparation of task is pre-set and limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Contextual support</td>
<td>Students are provided with textual input when they are performing the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Explicit instruction</td>
<td>Explicit instruction on key linguistic features that appeared during the performance of the task is arranged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Surprise element</td>
<td>A surprise element that would make the task more interesting or challenging is added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-task phase</td>
<td>1. Repeat performance</td>
<td>Students are asked to repeat the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Report</td>
<td>Students are asked to report the outcome of the task.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.7 Criticism and defense for TBLT

As a relatively new approach that challenges the mainstream approach of language teaching, TBLT has received considerable questioning, criticism and resistance from both researchers (e.g. Seedhouse, 1999, 2005) and teacher educators and course book writers (e.g. Bruton, 2002; Sheen, 2003; Swan, 2005) who support the traditional approach of language teaching. Ellis (2009) pointed that the critiques on TBLT were built on misunderstandings of TBLT and Long (2016) addressed the critiques, some of which were reputed as non-issues, and some recognized as real issues. Ellis (2017) and Ellis et al. (2019) further discussed the problems and issues of TBLT, dividing them as non-issues from outsiders and real issues of debate among the insider or advocates of TBLT.

Some common criticism on TBLT (Ellis et al. ,2019) from outsiders of the TBLT include:

1. Tasks alone cannot make up a whole syllabus.
2. TBLT does not teach ‘new language’.
3. TBLT does not teach grammar.
4. Task performance causes indexical and minimal use of the second language.
5. TBLT is not fit for beginning learners.
6. Teacher’s role is limited in TBLT.

The insider critiques or the real issues of TBLT (Ellis et al. ,2019) include:

1. The limitation of task-based research.
2. The selection of task types for a TBLT course.
3. The issue of task complexity and sequencing.
4. The role of explicit instruction in TBLT.
5. Teachers’ and students’ negative perceptions about TBLT.

While the non-issues can be answered with the research evidence for the past decades, the real issues remain and pose challenges to teachers when implementing the TBLT in various contexts and needs to be solved by further research.
2.3 TBLT and SCMC

2.3.1 Research on technology mediated TBLT

As technology continues to create more innovative opportunities for language learners to get access to authentic input and multicultural experience while break down barriers for meaningful interaction using the target language, the research on technology and TBLT also grows. The relationship between technology and TBLT was explored in books that deal with the general development of technology and SLA (Chapelle and Sauro 2017; Farr and Murray 2016; Levy and Stockwell 2013; Thomas, Reinders and Warschauer 2013) as well as volumes that are dedicated to the technology mediated TBLT.(González-Lloret and Ortega 2014; González-Lloret 2015; Thomas and Reinders 2010).

In a review of the study on technology and task-based language teaching, Lai and Li (2011) examined the mutual contribution of technology and TBLT to each other and discussed the reciprocal relationship between them. Technology has increased the quantity of language output and enhanced the quality of language production during task performance. It also improved the language learning by noticing and self-monitoring and promoted the long-term language development through task performance. On the other hand, TBLT provides a pedagogical framework for the selection and design of technology enhanced language learning. They also pointed out the challenges for integrating technology into the TBLT. Technology posed demands to both the learners and teachers. Technology mediated TBLT requires the learners to have digital literacy, communicative competency and intercultural competency. It requires the teachers to play multiple roles both before and after task as to raise the learner’s awareness, design proper tasks, monitor student cooperation and follow up student performance after class. Teacher’s understanding of the pedagogical principle and technological tools is also challenged.

2.3.2 Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication and TBLT

According to González-Lloret (2017), studies of technology and tasks are mainly focused on second language interaction with computer-mediated communication (CMC) as the major intervention. CMC is dominant in the research of technology mediated TBLT. There are two modes of CMC, namely synchronous computer mediated communication (SCMC) and asynchronous computer mediated communication (ACMC). SCMC means virtual communication that happens online at the same time among the participants (Stockwell, 2010).
The research on SCMC has more than 25 years (Martin, 2018) as part of the broader study of computer assisted language learning (CALL). Research on SCMC has established the effectiveness on second language acquisition. Two meta-analysis on the study of CMC (Lin, 2014, 2015) and three meta-analysis specifically on SCMC (Lin, Huang, & Liou, 2013; Sauro, 2011; Ziegler, 2016b) indicated that interaction in the SCMC is effective for the second language acquisition.

SCMC gradually develops from text chat to audio conferencing and video conferencing (Anderson & Elloumi 2004; Johnson & Sheehan 2006). In recent years, there has been a growing presence video conferencing in the language instruction (Ziegler, 2016), using programs like Skype, Google Hangouts, Adobe Connect, Blackboard, Zoom and Classin. These software support multimodal communication online. Participants can talk, share multimedia documents and write online while see each other virtually through the interface of the software. SCMC has become video-centric with the growth of internet capacity and improvement in the quality and reliability of video conferencing software (Petersen & Sachs, 2016).

Lin (2014, 2015) analyzed 59 studies during the period of 2000-2012 for the effectiveness of CMC in second language acquisition (SLA) and concluded that there was a positive and medium overall effect for CMC used for instructional/learning purposes in SLA. Sauro (2011) examined the general trend in the SCMC research by categorizing the 97 studies under the four language competences. The study shown that SCMC context is productive as the face-to-face context for the research of L2 process and outcome and pointed out more research on young learners are needed as one of the future research directions. Lin (2013) narrowed the analysis to ten studies that were focused on the text-based SCMC and found that the interaction in the text-SCMC can enhance the second language development with a small advantage over the ACMC, face-to-face interactions, or voice-chats mode. Ziegler’s meta-analysis (2016b) is the only one to date that compared the relative effectiveness of interaction in SCMC with that of the face-to-face (FTF) context. It resulted that the interaction in SCMC performed slightly better than in FTF in terms of the L2 learning outcomes on the productive and written aspects.

However, the research in SCMC is predominantly focused on text-based mode while the research on video-based SCMC is lagging behind the present development (Petersen & Sachs, 2016).
2.4 Chapter Summary

The TBLT grows out of the communicative language teaching method and traditional structural method of teaching, which usually uses the PPP methodology. It is supported by the SLA research findings that learners acquire and develop language following their own internal developmental syllabus rather than the external syllabus imposed by the teachers or textbooks. The Interactional Approach is one of the TBLT’s main theoretical support from the SLA research. The interaction Approach proposes that second language acquisition can be promoted through the negotiation of meaning by elaborated language input, noticing of gap and pushed language production when the opportunity arises during the breakdown of interaction.

TBLT as a language teaching approach believes that teachers can create such opportunities for negotiation of meaning for the students by creating a learning context where language acquisition is more likely to happen. Real-world task or pedagogical task that has interactional authenticity is the instrument through which the TBLT is built and realized. However, it is challenging to do TBLT in real classroom. Some misunderstanding and real issues in the implementation of TBLT in different contexts has been identified by the researcher and reported by the teachers, especially those who are more accustomed to the traditional teaching using the PPP methodology.

A relatively new domain in the TBLT research is its application in the video-based synchronous context. Research has established the mutual beneficial value between the TBLT and SCMC in general and video-based synchronous context in particular. However, the research is still lagging on the application of TBLT in the video-based synchronous context. Even fewer is done about the teacher’s perception and practice of applying TBLT in such context.
3 Research Questions

With an aim to examine the teacher’s perception and practice on design and implementing tasks in the video-based synchronous context for young learners in China, the teachers of EEO Experimental School and EEO online English course were chosen as the subject of the study. At the time when the study was conducted, EEO online English course had been running for over one year. Although one year was not long, they were one of the first practitioners to try and explore the small group English teaching in video-based synchronous setting using the software Classin. Classin is a web-conferencing software dedicated for educational purpose, like the software Zoom.

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

1. How are the tasks designed by teachers for video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
2. What are the challenges for teachers to task design in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
3. How are the tasks implemented by teachers in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
4. What are the challenges for teachers to implement tasks in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
4 Research Methodology

The research methodology part explains the research paradigm and method for the thesis. The study follows the qualitative approach, using lesson observation and online group interview with teachers to collect data. As East (2012) said, the class observation and interview are common ways in the research in education. The study aims to explore the teacher’s understanding of task design and implementation for video-based synchronous context. Therefore, interview is a great way to explore their ideas and reflections. The lesson observation offers further verification of the teacher’s explanation as it serves as the expressed evidence and justification of their opinions. The lesson observation together with the interview provides a holistic and thorough inquiry into the teacher’s practice and understanding of task design and implementation for synchronous context.

4.1 Qualitative approach

The study follows the qualitative research approach. Qualitative approach can be used to dig deeper into the to human behavior and to people’s experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of a phenomena by interpreting the meaning generated by the subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is aligned with the constructivist belief that knowledge is acquired through social interaction (Blair, 2016). The current study aims to explore the teacher’s understanding of their experience for design tasks and teaching. Teachers build up their pedagogical beliefs through their own experiences of learning, teaching and communication with the larger community of education practitioners, which in turn affects their day to day teaching practice.

The researcher is the part of the research instrument and affects the research from data collection to analysis (Blair, 2016). According the Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers’ own worldview also affects the result of the research when they try to understand the phenomena through the lenses of the participants view. The current study is also affected by the researcher’s understanding of the topic. The result of the study is thus the combination of knowledge and interpretation of the researcher and the participants.

4.2 Research design

This section explains the research design for the study, including the research context and the participants of the study.
4.2.1 Research Context

The study focused on EEO Online English course, an online English course for young learners in China using the video conferencing software Classin. It offers a representative image of the mass online English course in China, the study of which provides a gateway into the understanding of the practice in larger scale.

The EEO Online English course and the teachers were selected for the study based on three reasons. The first reason is because EEO was willing to share and spread their understanding and practices as one of the first explorers and non-profit institution focused on the researching of online language teaching with Classin in China. There are dozens of big brand and hundreds of small brand commercial English online programs for beginning learners in China which have much more bigger student enrollment in the highly competitive market. However, these programs tend to be more restrictive about the disclosure of detailed information of their syllabus structure, lesson design and content due to legal and financial concerns. Second, EEO online English program served as an exemplary model for some of the market players at the time. The institution maintains close observation of online English teaching development in China and has established cooperation with leading commercial online English brands who are also their customers. Third, the teachers designed and taught the lessons at the same time, which means they can reflect and revise their design with their experience of teaching. The reasons above rendered EEO as the best fit for the study although they have a rather smaller student enrollment and lower number of teaching staff.

At the time when the study was conducted, the online English course had been taught for over one year and the students were from grade K to grade three. The course for one grade lasted for 42 weeks with three classes for every week. The time for one lesson was one hour with 5 minutes break time in between. The class size for grade 3 was 6 students while for grade K to 2 was 4 students. There was a total of 26 students and 5 teachers involved in with the course. All the learners of the course were Chinese kids living in China. Teachers were both responsible for the design and teaching of online course.

4.2.2 The participants of the research

The participants of the study were three teachers of the EEO online English course. It was intended to invite all five teachers of EEO online English course to participate in the study. But one teacher
was on vacation and unable to join; the other four teachers agreed to join the interview. On the day of the interview, one teacher was sick and could not attend the event. As a result, there were three teachers participated in the group interview online.

All the participants had been teaching with EEO for around one year by the time of the interview. One teacher was of Chinese nationality, who was also a new teacher. The other two were from America had previous experience of teaching English in the traditional classroom setting. The Chinese teachers was taking charge of grade K and phonics workshop. The foreign teachers taught the grade 1 to 3 classes since they had a higher level of language proficiency than Chinese teacher. None of them had online teaching experience before joining the EEO. Their previous and current teaching experience allowed them to reflect and compare the advantage and challenges of the teaching practice in the virtual online classroom with that of the brick and mortal classroom.

Table 5. Group interview participants information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Time Joined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Grade k</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2016.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>2016.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>2016.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Data Collection

The data of the study were made up of two parts. One part was collected through the observation of the recording of sample online classes and lesson plans. The other part was collected through online group interview using the video conferencing software Classin, which was also the software used for the teachers for their online course. The online group interview was recorded for transcribing and can be reviewed online anytime when needed.

Online group interview was chosen for the study to collect data because of its convenience to overcome the geographical boundaries that were faced by the researcher and the participants and also for its benefits of being able to record the interview online for review of data in later times. Due to its resemblance with the traditional face-to-face interview and the rich data collected through the instrument, synchronous online interview is becoming increasingly valued and
considered as a legitimate research method over the past decade (O’Connor & Madge 2017; Salmons, 2015). Skype is been often taken as the choice for conducting the synchronous interview due to its international recognition (Deakin & Wakefield 2014; Quartiroli, Knight, Etzel & Monaghan 2017). For the current study, Classin was chosen because both the researcher and participants were familiar with the use of the software, making it an ideal tool for the online interview.

A pilot online interview was conducted with two of language teachers with online teaching experience one week before the interview to verify the question list prepared. During the online group interview session, three participants joined the interview from their office in Beijing while the researcher conducted the interview from Finland, using the software Classin. The group interview lasted for around one hour. The online group interview was organized around the research questions of task design and implementation in the video-based synchronous setting. The teachers were asked to reflect on their experience and offer their opinions on the topic.

Therefore, two sets of data were collected. One set of data is the recording of eight online English lessons taught by the participants of the study sometime before the study kicked in and corresponding teaching materials prepared for four lessons. These materials were provided by manager at EEO experimental school. The lessons were recorded by the teachers themselves for purposes other than the research but nevertheless can be viewed by anyone with the link of the webpage and with the permission for viewing. The other set of data is collected through the online group interview.

4.4 Data Analysis

The two sets of data were first analyzed separately and then evaluated holistically for conclusion. The recordings of the eight lessons were viewed for several times for both a general impression of the lessons and detailed examination on the lesson structure, the learning activities of the lesson and the interaction between the teacher and learners as well as among the learners. Detailed activity analysis log of two lessons were created based on the observation of the lesson recordings together with the teaching materials prepared by the teachers. The log included all the activities of the lessons from the warming up to the ending. The activities were analyzed and categorized as grammar exercise or task according to Ellis’s criterial for task.
The recording of the online group interview was first transcribed word by word and the transcription was then analyzed using the method of content analysis. Content analysis is a strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the contents of written data (Mayring, 2004: 266). It takes texts and then analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary using both pre-existing categories and emergent themes in order to generate or test a theory (Cohen et al., 2013). In more detailed steps, it involves coding, categorizing of the units of analysis, comparing the categories to find the relationship between them, and drawing theoretical conclusions from the text. The transcription of the study was first read for several times to get the general idea of the teachers’ answer. Then following the content analysis method, the transcription was first coded. During this process, no pre-existing category or code was applied. The codes were generated based on the text itself. The codes were then categorized into five bigger themes: pedagogical concern for design, technical concern for design, pedagogical concern for teaching, technical concern for teaching and challenges for teaching.

4.5 **Reliability and validity**

Reliability and validity are the two most important and fundamental features used to assess the quality of research measurement instruments and results. In qualitative research, reliability means the dependability, consistency and trustworthy (Golafshani, 2003). It means that consistent result would be achieved using the same approach by different researchers for different projects (Twycross & Shields, 2004). Validity in qualitative research means credibility of the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the study, and the ways in which the researcher used the study's design, methods, and data to generate and test these interpretations and conclusions (Maxwell, 2017). Triangulation of data has been suggested to strengthen the reliability and validity of the research (Golafshani, 2003). In this study, the data collected from lesson observation, syllabus analysis and group interview of the teachers form the triangulation to enhance the reliability and validity.

4.6 **Ethical considerations**

The research follows the code of ethics through the whole process. The interview was based on voluntary participation through the coordination of the manager at the EEO experimental school. A letter of explanation about the study was sent to all the participants several days before the interview. Further explanation and approval of the use of information collected through the
interview for the study was obtained from the participants before the start of the interview. Approval of the use of information regarding the lesson recordings were also obtained from the EEO experimental school.

4.7 Chapter Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore the teacher’s practice and perception of task design and implementation for an online English course for young beginners using the video-based synchronous conferencing software Classin. Lesson observation and group interview were used to collect the data for the qualitative research. The group interview transcription data was coded, and emergent themes analyzed under the research questions. The Ethical Principles of Research with Human Participants and Ethical Review in the Human Sciences in Finland (2019) followed for the study. The letter of invitation for interview was attached in the appendix.
5 Results and Discussion

The data obtained from the group interview reveals the teacher’s thinking and perception behind their practice of designing and implementing task in the video-based synchronous setting, the pedagogical beliefs that guide their actions. The classroom instruction displayed in the sample online lesson recordings and the materials prepared for the lessons are demonstration and results of their thinking and perceptions. In this section, the data from lesson observation and group interview will be discussed in a holistic way to explore the teacher’s perception and practice of task design and implementing. The syllabus of EEO online course, the learning activities and instructions in the sample lessons are discussed with themed categories of data from the group interview. The discussion is organized under the four research questions:

- How are the tasks designed by teachers for video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
- What are the challenges for teachers to task design in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
- How are the tasks implemented by teachers in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
- What are the challenges for teachers to implement tasks in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?

5.1 How to Design Tasks for the Video-based Synchronous Setting in Classin?

In order to answer the question of ‘how’ to design tasks for the video-based synchronous setting in Classin, we will first look at the question of ‘what’ kind of task is being used for the lessons through the analysis of syllabus and learning activities. Then we will proceed to the detailed procedures of how to design tasks from the teacher’s account.

5.1.1 Syllabus Analysis: TBLT or Not

This section will examine the syllabus of EEO online English course to see if it is a TBLT syllabus. The course book used by the EEO online course is Wonders, a literacy program used for native language learners in the public schools of California, USA. It is not like the common EFL or ESL program typically found in China or other countries where English is learned as a foreign language.
Wonders has been gaining popularity among some Chinese parents who are seeking for top-notch English education for their kids and language training organizations to meet the customer needs. It is believed that the authentic text material of Wonders provides better language input for the learners than most of the other EFL courses that has been dominating the English education in public schools and private training organizations for years.

According to the introduction to the Wonders, the program develops the students’ reading fluency based on a broad selection of content areas and rich genres of authentic literature and stories. Students would build up their literacy skill, critical thinking skill and knowledge of science and social studies at the same time. The program supports student-centered learning and small-group teaching.

The textbook of Wonders is organized around different themes. It has six units for every grade with each unit consisting of one theme, or one big idea. Every unit takes six weeks to complete including one final week for review and assessment. Take the grade 1 coursebook for example, the themes covered are

- What makes you special?
- What makes a community?
- What can happen over time?
- What animals do you know about? What are they like?
- How can we make sense of the world around us?
- How does teamwork help us?

All the themes are closely related to the life of the learners and corresponding to the cognitive and knowledge level of the students. Every theme is then break down into smaller topics or weekly concepts. For example, the five subtopics in the Unit 1 What makes you special are: school, home, pet, friends and move. For each topic, there is a key question that leads the kids to explore and answer, like what do you do at school, what is it like where you live. These questions function as a task or project for the kids to complete, leading the study of every week. The book also covers the study of phonics, vocabulary and reading strategies like visualization and making predictions.

Table 6. The Syllabus for Unit 1 of Wonders
By comparing the Table 10 and Table 6 Horizontal and vertical dimensions of Prabhu’s syllabus, it can be concluded that Wonders is obviously not a truly task-based syllabus for second language learners since it is designed for native speakers. It offers the possibility of turning into a TBLT course by using it as raw material. It meets the criteria of content selection for a general purpose TBLT course suggested by Ellis et al. (2019), namely the familiarity, intrinsic interest and relevancy of the tasks. It also displays the horizontal and vertical sequence of themes and topics within a theme. However, the problem with Wonders syllabus is that it does not have a clear set of task operations as shown in the Table 6. At this step, it is still not sure if Wonders is used in a TBLT method or not. If the syllabus is intended to be used for a TBLT purpose, then the course developer or the teacher who is using the syllabus needs to design their own tasks, which would require the teachers to have at least a basic understanding of the TBLT approach.
5.1.2 Learning Activities Analysis: Grammar Exercise or Task

The syllabus analysis shows that the Wonders syllabus for EEO online English course needs further development of task operations if it is intended to be used as a TBLT syllabus. This section will analyze the learning activities of one recorded sample lessons to further verify if the EEO online English course uses tasks as in a TBLT syllabus or grammar exercise as in a traditional synthetic syllabus. The learning activities in Table 11 are then examined according to Ellis’s definition of task (shown in Table 3) and criteria for differentiating task and grammar exercise (see Table 12).

A total of eight lesson recordings were provided for the study. They were stream recorded and can be reviewed any time after the lesson was completed, which is a benefit of synchronous online teaching. The sample lesson under analysis is for grade 1. The lesson lasts for 60 minutes with a five-minute break in between. It is chosen on a random base after reviewing all the eight lesson recordings. Since the teacher’s belief and understanding of language pedagogy stays the same, the sample lesson can represent the whole course. The detailed description was made after observing the lesson recordings.

Table 7. Learning activities of EEO online English course sample lesson 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Learning Activities</th>
<th>Activities Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Warm up</td>
<td>Warm up&lt;br&gt;Pick a vocabulary and make a sentence&lt;br&gt;Students take turn to choose a vocabulary and <strong>make a sentence.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Phonics Long A: a_e, ay, ea, ei, ey&lt;br&gt;Students <strong>practice the pronunciation</strong> of words with a_e, ay, ea, ei,ey structure.</td>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Game: French Fry Phonics&lt;br&gt;Students take turns to <strong>match</strong> the vocabulary with phonemes and <strong>read</strong> the word at the same time.</td>
<td><strong>practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Video Clip: Similes and Metaphors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5 | Grammar | Similes: as….as, like, as  
One student reads the explanation of similes and the teacher explains what a simile is.  
The teacher presents two comparable sentences with picture prompts.  
The students take turn to **read out** the simile sentence:  
This man is strong.  
The ox is strong.  
This man is as strong as an ox.  
More examples following the same method: This man is hungry like a wolf.  
This girl is as fast as lighting.  
These friends are like two peas in a pod.  
He is as busy as a bee.  
Fill in the blank  
My friend is as slow as____.  
My mum is beautiful like _____.  
My dog is as smelly as _____.  
This song sounds like _____.  
My teacher is as scary as ______.  
Writing:  
Students are asked to **write two sentences using as and like in their small blackboard.**  
The teacher checks and corrects their sentences.  |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | Vocabulary | Action verbs:  
The teacher explains what an action verb is with a picture showing the common action verbs and some sample sentences.  |
The students take turns to **read out** sentences containing action verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Action verb games: run, swim, ride, play, watch, wash The students take turns to <strong>choose the correct picture</strong> for the action verb and then <strong>make a sentence</strong> with it.</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Writing: ordering ideas <strong>Number</strong> the sentences and <strong>put them into the right order</strong> to make a coherent paragraph. More writing exercises that need students to sequence the sentences.</td>
<td>Presentation and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Writing: Students are asked to <strong>write a paragraph to explain how to make something simple</strong> use the conjunctions of first, next, then and last. The students then take turn to read out their writing and the teacher corrects some grammar mistakes.</td>
<td>Free Production task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the key construct for TBLT, task is the essential component for the design and implementation of a TBLT lesson. To determine if the activities of sample lesson 1 are real tasks, we can first revisit the task definition of Ellis (2003) (e.g., the primary focus is on meaning; there is some kind of gap; learners rely mainly on their own linguistic and nonlinguistic resources; there is a clearly defined communicative outcome) for a proper understanding of task. It differentiates with the traditional grammar exercise and communicative activities in a number of ways. For teachers who are new to the TBLT approach, they are usually familiar with the grammar exercise and communicative activities embedded in popular ESL or EFL textbooks but uncertain to judge the task correctly. Seeing the difficulty in distinguishing ‘exercise’ and ‘task’, Ellis (2018) proposed the criteria as following.

Table 8. Criteria to distinguish ‘exercise’ and ‘task’ (Ellis, 2018, p. 42)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

35
Orientation

Learners need to master linguistic skills before they can learn to communicate with the target language.

Learners develop their linguistic skills during the process of communicating with target language.

Focus

The focus is primary on the linguistic forms and semantic meaning.

The primary focus is on the pragmatic meaning.

Goal

Knowledge of the language.

Realization of communication goals.

Outcome evaluation

The learner’s language capacity is evaluated by standard test on linguistic codes.

The learner’s language capacity is evaluated by success rate of completing the communicative goal.

Real-world relationship

The mastery of linguistic skills is expected to be facilitative for language use in real world in future.

The task is derived from real world life.

Using the criteria in Table 12, eight out of the nine activities (No. 1 to 8) of the sample lesson are determined as grammar exercise used for the PPP method while activity nine is a free production task. As Ellis said, most of the grammar exercises meets only one, two or three criteria of task, but not all. So are the number one to eight learning activities in the Table 12. Most of the activities in the sample lesson are vocabulary drilling, requiring the students to use a vocabulary to make a sentence after the teacher explained the vocabulary meaning. There is no gap of information or communicative outcome for the activities. The students rely only on their linguistic resources to complete the activities. All these eight activities are directed for the teaching and practice of vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar rather than to achieve certain communicative goal. Their assessment is based on the correctness use of vocabulary or grammar. The free production task of writing activity at the end of the lesson does have a real-world outcome to explain something easy to do and has a primary focus on the meaning rather than form.

From the analysis of the learning activities, it can be concluded that sample lesson 1 is task-supported lesson using grammar exercises rather than tasks. Most of the activities designed by the teachers are grammar exercise. Task is only used at the production part of the lesson. The
observation of the other seven sample lessons also confirmed with the same conclusion that grammar exercise plays a dominant role in the course. Task only plays a minor role. The whole course is still basically a structural syllabus with PPP methodology with occasional usage of tasks.

5.1.3 Tools and Procedure for Designing Tasks

Pedagogically the design of a grammar exercises and task is different. But technically they are the same in terms of the use of software and visual display. This part discusses procedure of task designing for the video-based synchronous setting as well as the tools and software used for it.

There are two steps for the design process. First, the teachers find inspirations from the teaching content. The teachers follow the Wonders curriculum, which is broken into topics on a weekly base. The teachers check the learning objective of the week and know what to work on. From the content, the teachers decide the activities for the lessons. The previous part has already discussed the syllabus and detailed the learning activities that the teachers designed for the lessons.

The next step is the visual design part, which was called as the “ascetic aspect of it” by the teachers. Teacher C explained, “I usually found one image. I use that as an inspiration.” “If we are learning about what can you see in the sky, I will just make everything about airplanes.” More explanation from Teacher B, “When I envision that I want to do an activity like this, then I went to the Microsoft Power Point to see if Power Point let us do the activity in that way." These are the general steps that they take. It seems similar to what the teachers do for traditional teaching.

For online teaching, the teacher relies highly on computer and software to realize their ideas for the lessons. The tools that the interviewees mentioned for task design include Google, Photoshop, Power Point, as well as Classin. Google is used for the search of songs, videos, pictures and other resources for the activities. Photoshop is used to edit the pictures. Power Point is used for the presentation of information and for making games. Classin has a function to make some images that is movable by the students with their mouse. These are the most frequently used tools for lesson design for Classin.

While all these tools are useful and necessary for the design, Power Point is the most critical one since it offers a variety of functions that enable the teachers to make the lesson more attractive and engaging. The teachers said they rely a lot on PPT and EDB file, much more than the traditional classroom. They made “a lot of Power Point stuff especially for games.” When asked how they
turned an idea into the visualization, Teacher C said it is only a matter of what we can do on Power Point.

The Classin supports various types of documents, including PPT, WORD…… But the types of documents that were mostly used by the teachers were Microsoft Power Point, EDB and Mp4. The Mp4 files were usually video clips that teachers downloaded from online. The PPT and EDB files were created by the teachers themselves. Except for this, the Classin blackboard allowed the teachers to write, type and draw as the blackboard in the classroom, which was another non-dispensable part of teaching.

Table 9. Type and number of files prepared by teachers for the sample lessons of EEO online course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Lesson</th>
<th>PPT files</th>
<th>EDB files</th>
<th>MP4 files</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A grade K lesson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A grade 1 lesson</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A grade 2 lesson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A grade 3 lesson</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the preparation of learning activities and material is always important to the successful and meaningful teaching and learning, the design of the activities and preparation of files is even more important in online teaching. Online teaching relies highly on the material prepared beforehand and offers less possibilities of improvisation during the teaching. “In Classin you are almost entirely dependent on the materials for that lesson plan. You have to use what is there.” Therefore, design is a critical step that the teachers need to pay extra attention and effort.

5.2 Technical Challenge for Designing Task for Video-based Synchronous Setting

The teachers identified two challenges for designing tasks for video-based synchronous setting. One challenge is to make the presentation of the task visually attractive. The other challenge is to make sure the design of the tasks matching the boundaries of the software Classin.

5.2.1 Visual Presentation of the Task

As mentioned before, one step in the design of the tasks is the visual presentation of the learning activities. The visual presentation of a task has two purposes. The pictures or images chosen by
the teachers are not only vividly attracting, but also facilitative for the learning and teaching. Teacher A commented that the beauty of PPT is just assistant to the content. The pictures usually help to explain the meaning of a vocabulary, or providing the context of a story for reading, or serving as a prompt for speaking or writing tasks. Therefore, the visuals of the activities are equally as important as the written texts and oral instructions given by the teachers.

To be able to make beautiful PPT is one important capacity for the teachers. Affected by their personal taste for visual presentation, the teachers display different styles for the visual design. “I don’t have an artistic eye as those two do. I’ll put things very straight. Everything is lined up in square. This is because that is how I look at things in my mind whereas Bret doesn’t like that. Sherry likes the very cute cartoons.”

The teachers also said the limitation comes with what you can do or cannot do with PPT. Teacher B explained the process of visual designs as to first get an image from google and use the PPT to adjust it. Reflecting on their past work, teacher C said, “I’ve learned a lot of nuances of that program…..I think the basic idea of teaching is kinds of the same. We got better at making more attractive presentations visually and we kind of got the routine that works better.”

The visual presentation is identified as one of the main concerns and key element for task design by the teachers. The first thing that Teacher B popped out at the question ‘what is your main concern for task design’ is: is it beautiful enough? It is also a difference with the material preparation for the traditional classroom teaching.

5.2.2 Catering to the Online Teaching Software

When the teachers were designing the tasks, they need to keep in mind how it will work on the Classin software. Do depending on what kind of platform or software you are using for the teaching online, get familiar with the software and make clear what it is supporting or not. Always remember the choices and limitations of the software at the preparation stage.

To illustrate how they design the activities with the function of the Classin teaching tools in mind, Teacher B and Teacher C each shared an example. Teacher B said, “We designed a lot of things with the dice in mind. The dice is very important.” Dice can be used to select words or numbered items in a random way. Teacher C explained some techniques to make the EDB file. He said when they made an EDB they knew exactly what tools they needed to make it, or to make the
activity work. “I think we just have all these tools in mind. I want the kids to draw something here. I would leave a space where I can put the private blackboard, or I need to leave this blank space in an EDB file for a dice. So, you just have to keep that in mind when you make files.”

Teacher C concluded: “You have to work the activities around those tools. Everything is designed with the tools in mind. Because you know what you have available it is not that we use the tools well. It is because we design around the tools.” The main functions of different web-conferencing software are similar with each other. But still each software would have its own unique interface and tool kit. Teachers need to get familiar with the software they are using so that they can enjoy the proficiency and relative freedom in designing tasks for the specific setting.

5.3 How to Implement Tasks in the Video-based Synchronous Setting in Classin?

In this section, we are going to discuss how tasks are implemented in the video-based synchronous setting in Classin and the teacher’s perception about task implementation. It is consisted of two parts: teacher’s understanding of task implementation and one example of task implementation. The previous section on task design has pointed out that teachers mainly use PPP methodology and uses tasks only occasionally at the last stage of PPP, not in the sense of task for TBLT. Therefore, the teacher’s understanding of task in comparison is contrasted with their understanding of PPP, which emerges out as a major theme in the interview.

5.3.1 Teachers’ Perception of Task Implementation in the Video-based Synchronous Setting

During the interview, the word task, game and activity were used interchangeably by the teachers. Teachers used the term game much more often than the term task or activity. The word game (games) appeared for a total of 42 times while the word task appeared for 20 times in the discourse of the teachers. The word activity (activities) were also used for 23 times by them. It happened often that the teachers would use game to answer the questions for tasks.
Although the participants used ‘game’ and ‘activity’ to replace ‘task’, but the games and activities used by the teachers are not real task as defined for TBLT. By looking at the following four examples of games used for the EEO online English lesson, we can see that the games are grammar exercise and practice in disguise although they are more interesting to play. What the students need to do for the games is to follow the model sentence and fill in words prescribed by the teachers. There were no chance for them to use their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources.

Figure 2. A guessing game

A guessing game to practice the word ‘predict’ and sentence pattern: I predict that the startled person is behind door number_____.

Figure 1. Word count of ‘task’, ‘game’ and ‘activity’.
Figure 3. A snake and ladder game
A snake and ladder game to practice the pronunciation of vocabulary.

Figure 4. A French-Fry game
A French Fry game to practice the phonics of ay/ey/eigh/a-e.
The banana-and-monkey game is a fill-in-blank exercise for the students to practice the use of nouns and verbs.

5.3.2 Lesson structure: PPP or Task Cycle

For the implementation of a TBLT lesson, there are usually three stages of task phase: pre-task, main task and post task. Ellis (2019) suggested an option-based methodology for implementing tasks (see Table 8). However, the interview transcription analysis revealed that teachers believe PPP methodology of present, practice and production works with the online teaching on Classin rather than TBLT. This is in accordance with the conclusion from the learning activities analysis in previous section that the lessons are task supported with PPP methodology.

The teachers have established ‘macro cycle’ for the weekly planning of lessons and ‘micro cycle’ for the single lesson based on their trial and reflections of the online teaching. As explained by one teacher: “We have different parts that we’re going to teach in every day. On the first day we teach vocabulary and some lead in. On the 2nd day we do the phonics and the reading. On the last day we do the grammar and the writing.” The teaching of language was organized around the language features and skills instead of using task to orchestrate all the activities as promoted by the TBLT.

Figure 6. Macro structure for one week’s teaching in three lessons

The micro cycle for a single lesson is constituted of several short activities in methodology of PPP. The teachers have reached an agreement that PPP works well with their setting. Teacher C commented:

“Also, whatever you are teaching we can use their classic PPP, present practice and the production. We can’t get you all the processes in the class, so I just focus on is the practice.”

Usually the teachers follow the cycle of “new information, play a game, some quick activities maybe sing a song” so the kids are not so bored. Teacher B agreed:
“We start with the leading. Let’s say we do vocabulary, we teach the vocabulary, we play a game, we teach more vocabulary, we play a game and we do a production. we have a very solid pattern to go by. so now I just have to fill in those patterns with different games.”

This pattern that they found work best with the online teaching model is exactly PPP method in essence.

![PPP Methodology Diagram](image)

**Figure 7. PPP methodology in use of the lessons**

Teacher C further explained the technique of scaffolding during the practice by providing students with the target word and sentence model so that the students would be able to do a free production after practice: “

“For a lot of practice activities, it is just like filling the blank. This is the new word I want you to use. You give them a small sentence, like my responsibility is to wash the dishes...... and when you have your production activity, maybe you take away that sentence and to see if they can remember it without your prompting or they have to write down which their responsibility is. You help them to produce language by first giving them the scaffolding. Give them the word and then a sentence they might be able to use it and then set them free and see if they can do it by themselves. So hopefully you have already built what they need for them to produce. If not, then you know that you need to go back and the practice more.”

He also said due to the time limit, they had to cut the production part of the PPP and leave the time for more practice although they try to incorporate the production part whenever they can. However, even the free production of language here is still controlled. Students are required to produce the
language strictly following the sentence pattern using specific words rather than free interaction with their own linguistic resources.

Task plays a minor role in the course only the form of free production activity for the PPP. When asked if the lessons follow more of the PPP methodology or TBLT teaching, one teacher replied that it is less task-based usually. He said:

“It is hard to give task because task works well in groups. It is almost impossible to set up groups in Classin. So, we’re kind of forced to do whole class learning all the time. If you give the kids the privates Blackboard, they might be able to do the tasks on themselves. I usually only do that for writing and occasionally something like this realization you can do.”

It shows that the teacher believes that TBLT does not work with whole group teaching in the video-based synchronous context and it has to be done with groups.

5.3.3 Turning a Grammar Exercise into a Task

This part will discuss how to turn a grammar exercise into task in the video-based synchronous context using one of the learning activities in a sample lesson as example.

![Figure 8. Sorting of zoo animals and farm animals](image)

In this lesson, there were four learning activities designed for the theme of sorting and classifying objects. Figure 8 shows the first activity, sorting of zoo animals and farm animals. The teacher first explained and modeled to the students that they need to pick one shadow from the left and
move it under the light so that they can see the animal more clearly. Then they need to decide whether the animal is zoo animal or farm animal, using the sentence structure xx belongs in the zoo/on the farm. Then the teacher asked different students to finish the activity. During the activity, the teacher explained the use of prepositions in the zoo/on the farm/at home/in my house and corrects the students when they make mistakes.

Figure 9. Distinguishing and Classifying of rubbish

Figure 9 shows the last activity of distinguishing and classifying or rubbish. There were three more similar activities in between, classifying girl or boy, classifying fruits/vegetables, classifying healthy or unhealthy food. All these activities followed the same teaching and learning method. The students were given a sentence structure with written text input. The students then are required to make a sentence. The activities are grammar exercise for practicing certain structure. The students are only allowed to respond to the teacher’s question. They are not given the chance to use their own linguistic or non-linguistic resources. There was no gap of information or communicative outcome.

If these activities are going to be designed and implemented as a task, some changes need to be done to create a gap of information, a communicative outcome and the students should be encouraged to use their own linguistic or non-linguistic resources. For the activity of soring zoo animals and farm animals, the teacher can ask one student A to pick one animal shadow and see what it is while all other students need to close their eyes so that they won’t know what animal is
picked. A gap of information could be created in this day. And then the students open their eyes and the student A describes the animal in his/her own words and ask other students to guess which animal it is. At last they can decide whether the animal belongs to zoo animal or farm animal. The same method could be used to change the activity of classifying rubbish into a task.

With the learning activities designed properly as tasks, the lesson then can be arranged according to the phases of a TBLT lesson into the pre-task stage, main-task stage and post-task stage. The animal sorting task can be used for the pre-task stage where the teachers models for the students. The classifying activities of the vegetables/fruits/foods can be used for the main-task phase and the rubbish sorting task for the post-task phase where the students can repeat the task.

The example is to show that it is possible to design task using the Wonders textbook and implement task in the synchronous setting in Classin. There is not much difference to the design and implement of learning activities using the PPP method in regards of the technical and pragmatically aspects. The fundamental difference lies on the pedagogical understanding and practice. What is needed for the teachers is more knowledge and skills to manipulate tasks in their teaching.

5.4 Challenges for Implementing Task in the Video-based Synchronous Setting

To answer the second research question: What are the challenges of implementing tasks in the video-based synchronous context of Classin, there are also two broad themes emerged from the interview, just as the topic of design. The challenges are two-fold. One is related to the pedagogical issues same as in the traditional classroom teaching and one related to the technical problems specific to the mode of video-based synchronous meditation and more specifically to the functions of Classin. Some challenges of teaching language online are the same as the teaching in any context, like how to keep the learners motivated and engaged. It also poses some challenges that are unique to the online setting, like the lack of physical interaction, no movement is allowed, some technical issues and constraints of the software.

5.4.1 Pedagogical Challenges

Lack of Motivation

The teacher reported that learner motivation is one of the big issues for synchronous teaching and learning. Students get distracted easily when they are studying at home in front of the computer. Their attention may be called away by what’s happening to their parents at the moment or they
may be surfing online or using mobile phones at the same time when they are appearing for the class. They also get bored if the content is not relevant or interesting enough for them. One teacher said, “Sometimes I expect too much from kids and I make activities that I think they should able to do. But if it is too dry, they won’t even try it. If it is too much reading in one day, they just don’t like.” “Because everyone has the cellphone now even though they're like 6-year-old kids. So, what they really doing is on the phone. They are trying not to pay attention, or they are reading a comic book or something.” Things like these are common during the class.

Although the teacher complained that there’s nothing to keep the students from turning their heads away to some other things, they found ways to cope with the issue. They offered several strategies to engage the students’ attention. One strategy is to notice the students when they are absent minded by looking at their face through the webcam and calling their attention back to the class. The teacher explained the technique, “I learned something if you can look at people's face……if somebody is not focused on class, he might have a little bit different of face. So, I take a picture of them of their darker face to get their attention back. Oh, James, answer the question and he will look like normal again. And I will take a picture of that. I will show him the two pictures and say compare the two pictures, one of them you are not in class in, where are you?” “Or I shake the camera of students. If I know someone who’s not paying attention, I will make them very big. Or maybe I will move them around. The student would react like oh and come back to reality when their mind is wondering.”

In the traditional classroom teaching, it is easier for the teacher to see if the students are concentrated. However, as the teacher gets familiar with the student’s behavior online, it is also possible for them to notice the student’s performance. The other strategy that the teachers suggested is to use the teaching tools of Classin like the responder. One teacher used the responder to get the student’s attention. “The responder. I seriously if I see a student's getting bored, even if I am in the middle of a sentence, I would say who’s fast. If there wasn’t a question, then I just give the student a trophy or something. I demand 100% attention at all time.”

Another strategy offered by the teacher is to run a race between the students. “I like to do races. So, I give them one minute and two teams. Each team write down as many names as they can or something like that. See which teach become the winner.” The use of competitive game is adopted by all teachers as an effective way to engage the students with learning.
No physical movement allowed
Teaching and learning online poses a restriction on the physical movement for both the teacher and learners. For the teachers, the gestures that are commonly used to help express meaning, manage classroom and meditate communication is not applicable in the online setting. One teacher said, “When I was a teacher in the classroom, I did a lot of running and the jumping like active activities. So, it was very difficult for me I have a lot of ideas or activities to do this do that.” Another teacher echoed, “I have personally a hard time in class to teach verbs that I did in a classroom setting because there's less TPR. When you are in the classroom you can say stand up and everyone can really stand up. In Classin, if you say stand up or jump then the camera only shows part of your body.” It is also impossible to move things around or stand closer to someone who is in trouble or invite someone to be teacher’s assistant. These are all impossible in Classin.

The learners can’t move either. They are also forced to sit down for the whole class. “Your kids cannot stand up and the move. They are forced to sit down. You have to sit still for an hour even if you are five years old. That is the big issue.” For young learners who are taking online class, the lack of physical interaction with teacher and classmates creates a kind of isolation. The experience is very different with the traditional classroom interaction.

Whole class vs Grouping of students
At the time when the interview was done, Classin did not have a function to support group discussion. All the interaction was visible and hearable to everyone in the virtual classroom. The teachers could not separate students into groups and assign group tasks to them. “I think I mentioned earlier that group task does not work well in Classin. It is not a good way to separate people. So, you are kind of forced to do everything together as a class. You can do individual work just with the private Blackboard.” One teacher took this as reason for not using tasks in their teaching.

However, they still manage to create communicative dialogues between two partners in the setting. The teachers usually would drag down the image of two students into the center of the blackboard to create a virtual match for dialogue. The other students could be muted at the time when the dialogue was carrying on. “I will say you guys need to have a conversation for one minute. I bring up the timer and set the timer for one minute. You're going to have a really good conversation if it is really good then I will give you two trophies it was not good I will give you one trophy.” One
teacher used timer to guide the dialogue and trophy to motivate the students. Another teacher created some funny elements to the dialogue by drawing or adding pictures to the images of the learners. “You can drag down the camera or you can just take a little picture of someone, and there will be like a little body down here, then put a silly head over the picture, it could be animals, dinosaur or anything. These two people are supposed to speak something, having a conversation. This is just a kind of way to do a dialogue. It won't be our stick figure. It would be something more interesting, like maybe is a guy with a very nice suit or is the dinosaur. Essentially, we can just have a dialogue like we are having now, but it is just a little bit sillier so that the kids would be more interested in doing it.”

The grouping that the teachers commonly used was the competition game that mentioned before. “We put students into group where they can cooperate to do one task. These two students in one group and the other two in another, have them do a competition task or something else. Who can read this word faster, which team can do it faster? Can the team cooperate to find all the vowels together in one minute?” The games are grammar exercises.

5.4.2 Technical Challenges
Technical issues are unavoidable for online teaching and learning. The teachers identified four common technical problems that they run into: the internet speed, the sound issue, young learner’s difficulty with the use of computer and lack of prior training of the software.

First, low internet speed causes lag of information transmission during the class. It happens that the student can’t see or hear at the same time as the class progression. " Or the internet is bad. You see the students talking through their mouth movement, but you hear nothing." “It is always the same students. I think it is their internet problem.” The quality of the lesson would be highly infected in case of poor internet connection.

The sound issue is prominent in the video-based synchronous environment. If the students’ computer is not muted, then their environmental sound would be brought into the virtual classroom. Everyone can hear what happens in the classmate or teacher’s room. Students would be disturbed and distracted by unexpected sound. One teacher “Mum and grandma are having an argument behind and you can hear all the family business. I told my student once, Martina can you tell your mum to be quiet. My student said, Mum, teacher asked you to be quiet! I was just laughing. Sometimes there is a lot of background noise or the microphone just doesn’t work well.”
Sometimes the students have difficulty using the webcam or microphone, which can also cause interruption. “When we try to explain to somebody that their microphone is too quiet, you have to turn up your microphone. Then they do turn it up, it is super loud.” Cases like these affect the overall experience of online teaching and learning.

The technical training of the learners was not integrated as part of the course preparation. The young learners did not receive enough training from either the parents or the teachers on the use of hardware and the software. To solve this problem, it would be suggested to incorporate the use of the all necessary equipment and software at the beginning of the course. Indeed, the teacher responded that they just added it to the beginning week to teach them how to use the different tools although it is not the major parts of the curriculum.

5.5 Chapter summary

The first conclusion that can be reached through the discussion is that they do not design or implement tasks for their online English course using the video-based synchronous software Classin. The learning activities or the games that were designed and used by the teachers were situational grammar exercise rather than tasks for the TBLT. The teachers use PPP methodology rather than TBLT. All the answers to the four research questions are based on this realization.

1. How are the tasks designed by teachers for video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
   Pedagogically, what the teacher designed are not tasks but grammar exercises, which they called games. Technically, the teachers use a lot of PPT for the visual arrangement of the games and they recommend getting really familiar with the functions of PPT. This would be applicable to the design of any learning activities for video-based synchronous setting, no matter it be grammar exercise or task.

2. What are the challenges for teachers to task design in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
   The challenges identified by the teachers for the design of games (but would be also applicable to tasks) is to make the content visually attractive and arrange the activities with the functions and limitations of the video-based synchronous conferencing software in mind.
3. How are the tasks implemented by teachers in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
Pedagogically the teachers do not use tasks. They use PPP methodology to arrange all the teachings. The teachers did not answer the question of how to implement tasks for the video-based synchronous setting, which they believe does not work. However, as shown in the discussion, the grammar exercises that the teachers use can be converted into task and implemented using the three-phase task cycle for a TBLT lesson.

4. What are the challenges for teachers to implement tasks in the video-based synchronous online English course using Classin?
Although the teachers do not use task, the challenges that they identified is generic for all the teachings in the video-based synchronous setting. These challenges are caused by the lack of physical interaction among the teachers and students. The technical issues caused by internet connection speed and sound issues will also inevitably be present.
6 Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data collected, this section draws conclusions on the teacher’s perceptions of task design and implementation, draws lessons from the participants experience, offer advices to online language teachers and make a tentative proposal for the future research and development of second language teaching using a TBLT approach in video-based synchronous context.

6.1 Contribution to the Understanding: Task Plays only a Minor Role

From the observation of the lessons and the teacher’s answers, it can be concluded that the online English course follows a synthetic approach with the PPP as guideline for their design of activities and teaching in the video-based synchronous context. The participants have also tried to adjust their design of the activities and teaching arrangements. They made the presentations more vivid and attractive so that the students would be more interested; they cut the teacher talk time and shorten the duration of one activity to ensure the student’s attention. However, they stick to the PPP cycle and they think this is the best solution they have found so far. Although it is contrary to their course introduction that TBLT approach is followed, the result is in accordance with what the research says about the teaching practice in reality. PPP is still widely implemented and preferred by the teachers over the TBLT in both tradition classroom setting (Carless 2009; Richards & Rogers 2014) and in computer assisted context (Jarvis 2015).

Teachers prefer the PPP method over the TBLT approach for various reasons. First teacher’s belief and perception are shaped and established by their previous language learning experience, their preservice education and their own practice of teaching in case of in-practice teachers (Borg, 2009). As Van den Branden (2009) argues, “[t]eachers teach in the way they themselves were taught and show strong resistance toward radically modifying the teaching behavior that they are so familiar with” (p. 666). Although the teaching has been moved from traditional classroom to the virtual classroom, the teachers fundamental understanding of the pedagogy does not change, and they continue to use PPP like what they did in their previous teaching.

Second the participants have misconception about TBLT. In their understanding, TBLT is all about group work, which they can’t do due to the limitation of the software. It is reported that teachers have difficulty in understanding what task really means and what the TBLT approach is (East 2012, 2017; Ellis & Shintani 2014; Zheng & Borg 2014; Erlam 2016). One of the common
misconceptions about TBLT is that it must involve small group work (East 2017; Ellis 2018). However, Ellis (2009, 2018) pointed out tasks can be performed under different participating structure, which also includes individual and whole-class, and whole class input-based tasks are appropriate for beginning learners. Therefore, it is possible to create tasks in the SCMC context.

Long (2015, 2016) dismissed the traditional syllabus and PPP method for its inconsistency with the research results on SLA, the developmental sequence and the learner-centeredness for language development. Ellis (2018) argued that both PPP and TBLT may have a place in a language course as they cater to different aspects of language learning. However, Ellis also asserted that most of the teaching should be based on tasks for students to develop language capacity for real life communication, which a course based solely on exercise could not possibly achieve.

Given the inconsistency of the PPP method with the SLA theories and comparatively advantage of TBLT to SLA (Ellis & Shintani 2013; Long 2015; Ellis et al. 2019), it is argued that TBLT should be considered as the framework for the future development of the EEO online English course. As Jarvis (2015) advocated that TBLT should be at the forefront of the teaching practice in the computer assisted language learning context. It is also argued that all stakeholders and practitioners of the video-based synchronous teaching, including the course developers and the teachers, should take a serious examination of their current practice and explore the possibility and practicability of adopting the TBLT approach or at least incorporating the use of task into their course.

6.2 Implications for Stakeholders of Video-based Synchronous Online English Course

This section will discuss how to use the TBLT as a framework for a video-based synchronous English course for young beginners using the curricula of Wonders.

As has been discussed before at the syllabus section, Wonders does not make a typical TBLT curriculum. However, it can be served as the appropriate authentic material for a TBLT curricula. The problem is how to develop specific tasks for the course. In order to develop tasks for the course, the first and foremost thing is to adopt the TBLT approach at the very beginning and using it to guide everything follows, which in the case of EEO is to change the teacher’s preference of PPP method over the TBLT approach. The teachers have known enough of the technical nuance of
designing activities and teaching flexibly with the software of Classin. What is lacking here is more knowledge of the SLA theory, limitations of PPP and benefits of TBLT. The teachers need to be convinced that TBLT can work with the video-based synchronous setting (Baralt & Gomez 2015; Guo & Möllering 2016, 2017).

Then how to use the TBLT as a framework for the video-based synchronous language teaching? Hampel (2006) proposed a three-level design and implementation process for online tasks. The framework shown in Table 15 provides a general direction for the big things to be taken into consideration when design and implement tasks in for online settings. Hampel (2010) offered a more detailed task framework for virtual environment by expanding Ellis’ (2003) original task framework. In Hampel’s (2010) framework, ten design features were taken into consideration, including goal, task type, importance of the task, input, conditions, linguistic complexity, procedures, predicted outcomes of product and process, teacher factors and learner factors. While the detailed components for these features varies with the level of the learners and content of the course, the principle is fit for the development of all synchronous courses that follow the TBLT approach.

Table 10. Three-level design and implementation process for online tasks (Hampel, 2006, p 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>SLA theories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sociocultural principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affordances of online environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Function of tasks within course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type of tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learner/tutor roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Implementation in the classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One more reference for the TBLT course developers and teachers for video-based synchronous setting is the hexagon model (Armellini, McLoughlin & Motteram, 2007) shown in Figure 1 below. It was used as a course tool for the LANguage learning with CErified Live Online Trainers (LANCELOT) project. The level of difficulty increases as the choices moves from the center to the outer edge of the model. Different elements of a task can be mapped with the model.
Figure 10. The hexagon model of synchronous teaching methodology (Swertz et al., 2007, p189)

TBLT is still a relatively recent innovation—one whose adoption requires expertise on the part of course designers and classroom teachers, and a considerable investment of time and effort if it is to be successful (Long, 2016). Personally, I found it rather hard to learn and understand what task and TBLT really is. Many times, I found myself confused by the literature. Besides, there is not
much task-based syllabus or materials for reference although there are reports on the implementation of task-based teaching around the world. As Tomlinson (2015) commented that there is hardly any literature focusing on materials and curriculum design for TBLT. It would be even harder to put it into practice and to design and implement task-based teaching. Researchers (Ellis 2018; Long 2015; East 2012, 2017) call for more teacher education on the TBLT and prepare ready-made materials for teachers. It would be of great value to teachers if the English language course and material developers can turn their attention to the video-based synchronous setting and design task-based model lessons for teachers.

6.3 Limitations and Strengths of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the teacher’s practice and understanding of task design and implementation in the video-based synchronous setting using the Classin software for an online English course for beginning learners in China. There are several strengths of the study. Firstly, I am privileged to be able to analyses the lessons from a more theory grounded point while at the same time be aware of the difficulty of understanding and applying TBLT from my own experience of learning about the approach. I know how it is easier for the teachers to just follow the normal track of using the PPP rather than TBLT. Besides, I have both the experience of teaching English to beginning learners online using the same software as the participants do and teaching in the traditional classroom setting. Therefore, it is easy for me to understand the possible challenges posed by the video-based synchronous setting. Secondly as the research on this field is rather scarce, the study can draw some attention to the phenomenon, increase social awareness about the challenges and difficulties faced by the teachers and lead to possible support and solution for the issue from both the researchers and teachers themselves as well.

The study also has its limitations. The number of the participants is rather small and all of them come from the same organization. They share some mutual understanding and practice of teaching. Their understanding is limited in their own way and certainly cannot represent the whole image of online English teaching practice using the video-based synchronous setting. More research of teachers from other organizations and even from other countries are needed. Besides, the research only studies the teacher’s perception, studies on the learner’s experience and understanding will also be needed to get a whole view of the teaching and learning.
6.4 Future Research

Based on the findings of the study, the application of TBLT approach in video-based synchronous setting can be explored in more aspects through research. Firstly, the research on the development and implementation of a real and longitude TBLT syllabus for the video-based synchronous setting can be done. There are reports and research on TBLT programs in traditional classroom setting and research on single tasks in video-based synchronous setting. However, there is no research on the application of TBLT for a long-term course, possibility for several years covering the whole primary school years of language learning. It is already happening in real life, calling for attention from the researchers. Secondly, the need for more research on the teacher education of TBLT in video-based synchronous setting is urgent. Both effective teaching training and research on the training is in great need to catch up the growth in the need of quality language teachers for video-based synchronous setting. Thirdly, more research into the young learner’s experience of language learning in the video-based synchronous setting is called for. The multimodal communication in the video-based synchronous setting poses challenges for both teacher and learners.
References


Xiao, Yanzai. (2019). *2019 Online English tutoring market estimated to be over 35 billion RMB with young learners aged from 6-12 as the major consumers*. Retrieved from https://www.jiemodui.com/N/109796.html


Appendices

Appendix I. Email to the participants and questions for the interview

Dear XXX,

Thank you very much for participating in the research work for my master thesis! I appreciate your time and kindness for sharing your insights on lesson designs and teaching for the English course of Edu Experimental School.

The interview questions are drafted with an aim to find out what and how to make the teaching of English to young learners with Classin as effective and engaging as possible by drawing upon your experience and reflections. The questions will focus on the task design, teaching in the Classin setting and challenges for both task design and teaching with Classin.

All the interview questions are based on the following context:

- Lesson design and teaching of English course to young learners in China
- Using the software of Classin
- Based on your personal experiences and reflections

Please let me know if any of the questions is unclear or does not make sense to you so that I can modify or clarify it to you. Thank you!

Best Regards,

Yundan Chen

Introduction

Could you please share with us your educational background and teaching-related experiences please?

Research Question 1. How to design tasks for English lessons in the Classin setting?

- Usually how do you design the tasks for lessons for the Classin setting?
- What are your main concerns when you are designing the tasks for the lessons in Classin?
• What are the resources and tools you use for task design?
• How do you sequence the tasks for lessons and why?
• How do you integrate games into your task design?
• Based on your experience, what kinds of tasks work well with the Classin setting and what kinds of tasks does not work? Can you explain why?
• In your opinion, what are the key elements for a great task design?
• How has your perception of task design been changed during the past year of working with Classin (or maybe not changed)? How does this change affect your task design now?

Research Question 2. How to implement the tasks for English lessons in the Classin setting?

• How to make the best use of the different teaching tools of Classin? Can you give some examples?
• How do you maintain the student attentions and keep them engaged in learning?
• How do you create interaction in the class during the teaching?
• How do you make the input of language easier for the learners understand during the teaching?
• What do you usually do to help the students produce language output during the class?
• How do you provide feedback to students based on their language output during the class?
• In your opinion, how is the teaching on Classin different with that of the traditional classroom? How do you adapt to the difference?

Research Question 3 What are the challenges of task design and implementation for the English lessons in Classin?

• Based on your experience, what are the challenges or difficulties to implement the tasks in the Classin setting? Why?
• How is the teaching and learning affected by group size? What is the difference between groups of 4 and 6? How do you adjust your lesson design and teaching to different group size?
• How is the teaching and learning affected by the student’s English proficiency level?
• What features do you want to change/add/improve to the Classin software if it is possible?
• What suggestions would you like to give teachers who are new to the teaching of English in the Classin setting?
• Would you like to add any other ideas related to task design and teaching of English in the Classin setting?

Appendix II. Link for the recording of sample lessons

https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=24cc5110632e39eb&from=groupmessage
https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=cb03a9cde542823e&from=groupmessage
https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=ec57b26efce29f8d&from=groupmessage
https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=2ef9742e9ed6105d&from=groupmessage
https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=15afba250810d467&from=groupmessage
https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=719973b05d932497&from=groupmessage
https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=928f4a06abfc735d&from=groupmessage
https://www.eeo.cn/live_m.php?lessonKey=a899da31946ce73c&from=groupmessage

Appendix III. Link for the recording of online group interview

https://www.eeo.cn/webcast_m.php?courseKey=3de27de98480d7cc&lessonid=8314571&from=groupmessage
Appendix x. Implications for Online Language Teachers Using the Video-Based Synchronous Setting

1. Learn more about TBLT and consider using real tasks for teaching
2. Use Hampel’s three-level design and implementation process as guideline for the whole process from design to implement
3. Use the Hexagon Model for more detailed reference of task design and implementation