

A Book Review

**School-Based EFL Teacher Professional Development for Task-Based Language Teaching:
An Ethnographically Informed Case Study of Rural China**

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Abstract

This book review analyzes School-Based EFL Teacher Professional Development for Task-Based Language Teaching: An Ethnographically Informed Case Study of Rural China by Jing Yixuan. This book presents the author's immersive engagement with English language teachers to collaboratively enhance their pedagogical skills in successfully implementing task-based instruction in rural Chinese contexts. The book contributes to the field of English language teaching under TBLT frameworks.

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Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has drawn the attention of English language teachers and researchers since Prabhu proposed his Bangalore Project (1979-1984). However, the implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in many under-resourced contexts remains limited and under-researched. In this regard, Jing Yixuan's work addresses this gap in her recent volume, *School-Based EFL Teacher Professional Development for Task-Based*

Language Teaching An Ethnographically Informed Case Study of Rural China (Yixuan, 2024). This volume addresses the gap through her 12-week immersive ethnographic case study in rural Northwestern China. The book demonstrates how collaboration between a teacher educator and rural EFL teachers enhances the teachers' skills in designing and implementing language tasks, as well as implementing TBLT in challenging rural contexts.

The book consists of three major parts, relating to the author's understanding of TBLT in general and in the Chinese context, her ethnographic engagement with rural Chinese EFL teachers, and finally reporting, evaluating, and reflecting upon her study in educational contexts (Pole & Morrison, 2003). The first part of the book consists of five closely connected chapters. This section sets the scene for the research on TBLT in rural China. In Chapter 1, the author provides a general review of the literature, defining TBLT and its principles, and draws on her personal experience as an English language teacher in China. In Chapters 2 and 3, by embedding the author's own stories of understanding and experiencing TBLT, the book presents a review of the related literature on teacher development programs and TBLT training. With her real-world experiences with teachers in Chapter 4, she discusses teacher development programs in China and the curriculum guidelines for English education prescribed by the Chinese Ministry of Education. Chapter 5 discusses how modernization in urban China has created a division between urban and rural descriptions for all Chinese citizens. Based on this description, the chapter explains the significance of this division of pedagogical practices in the context of English education in modern China.

The second part of the book, comprising four chapters, explores the main storyline: the author's personal experiences with site selection for the study. While selecting a suitable research site and participants, the author details the education system in rural China, the nature of secondary schools, and stakeholders' perceptions of outsiders in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents EFL teachers' honest admission of their inability to keep up with shifts in the ELT paradigm, while Chapters 8 and 9 describe the author's collaboration with teachers and students through seminars and workshops aimed at enhancing their pedagogical practices. This section discusses the teachers' realization of the significance of task-based lessons and students' satisfaction with their learning through TBLT instruction.

The third part of the book comprises five chapters that provide a theoretical perspective on collaborative teaching and teacher development within TBLT frameworks, thereby contributing to the ELT community. Chapter 10 presents how the school leadership plays an inseparable role in enhancing English language teaching and learning practices in rural Chinese contexts. Chapters 10 and 11, respectively, examine the role of school leadership in enhancing EFL teaching and learning, and provide a comprehensive evaluation of the degree of human agency in the context of teacher development. Chapter 12 critically examines the role of a teacher educator in teacher professional development, addressing the gap between the participant teachers' classroom practices and the Ministry of Education's directives for language teaching in China. Similarly, Chapter 13 reconnoitres the effectiveness of teacher educators in reforming the national curriculum, and Chapter 14 recommends strategies to address teacher development under TBLT frameworks in South-Western China.

Thus, the book contributes to the field of ESL/EFL teacher development in general and TBLT practices in particular. The author spent time in the field, building strong relationships with the stakeholders by engaging in their everyday teaching and learning activities at the school (Jing et al., 2022). The author's exploration of TBLT in rural and under-resourced Chinese

contexts has captured the attention of ESL/EFL practitioners and experts worldwide. The author establishes her research rigour through her prolonged ethnographic engagement with rural ESL/EFL teachers and triangulates multiple data sources through interviews, observations, and text analysis. This has established rich contextual descriptions and credibility for the research findings. Considering that TBLT has essentially been transformed from the traditional cognitive-interactionist and psycholinguistic viewpoints (Qin & Lei, 2022), this ethnographic field study contributes to enhancing English language teachers' pedagogical skills to boost student motivation and engagement in language learning under TBLT frameworks. One of the contributions of this book is that it presents a more socio-cultural perspective on TBLT.

Finally, the author concludes that while TBLT in modern China offers potential to enhance student-centred English language teaching, its implementation is constrained by insufficient teacher professional development, a top-down curriculum structure and national examination system, and limited resources. Hence, the author emphasizes the importance of sustainable teacher development within the TBLT framework and the need for localized adaptations to support effective ESL/EFL practices. The major takeaway for readers is that TBLT must be a context-sensitive rather than top-down, expert-laden approach to language teaching and learning. The book's strength lies in its in-depth exploration of teacher transformation through TBLT practices in rural China and in its offering of future directions for global EFL/ESL prospects.

In addition to shedding light on the realities of EFL/ESL practices in rural China, this book seeks answers that resonate across its borders. Today, when TBLT is often accepted as a well-established approach, this book emphasizes that socio-cultural and institutional contexts determine its effectiveness. By highlighting the gaps between EFL/ESL policies, classroom practices, and teachers' lived experiences, the book offers insights for policymakers, curriculum and syllabus designers, textbook writers, and teacher educators worldwide who face similar challenges of applying TBLT in local settings. The author's immersive ethnographic fieldwork makes this book especially pertinent to researchers and teacher educators seeking to explore how language-teaching frameworks expand across contexts for pedagogical transformation.

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