

# A Comparative Review of Task-Based Language Teaching and the Production-Oriented Approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL): Language and Thinking Skills Development

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study presents a critical comparison between Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, aiming to explore their differences and complementary strengths in fostering both language proficiency and thinking skills.

**Methods:** This paper systematically reviews recent key literature in both Chinese and English, and conducts a comparative analysis of the theoretical foundations and teaching practices of TBLT and POA across five dimensions: task design, instructional goals, critical thinking development, teacher-student roles, and pedagogical adaptability.

**Results:** The results show that TBLT helps improve language fluency and communication skills among beginner learners, while POA places greater emphasis on logical expression and the development of critical thinking, making it more suitable for intermediate to advanced learners. The two approaches demonstrate complementary strengths across multiple dimensions, suggesting that integrating them into instructional design is both theoretically sound and practically feasible.

**Conclusion:** This study proposes an integrated instructional approach centered on 'task-driven learning and output optimization,' highlighting the need to flexibly combine TBLT and POA based on learners' proficiency levels and specific teaching contexts. Future research may further explore the development and empirical validation of such hybrid models across intercultural and diverse educational settings.

**Keywords:** Production-oriented approach (POA); Task-based language teaching (TBLT); Language skills; Thinking skills; Instructional integration; English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction

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## INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of globalization and higher education transformation, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction is expected not only to enhance learners' language proficiency but also to foster higher-order thinking skills to meet the dual challenges of complex social contexts and individual development (1). However, a persistent issue in current teaching practices is the disconnection between language skills and thinking abilities. Traditional classrooms often focus on linguistic forms and fluency, with limited attention to cognitive training such as logical reasoning and critical judgment (2). This tendency restricts learners' deeper engagement with the language and reveals the limitations of EFL instruction in cultivating comprehensive competencies.

To address this challenge, Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) have emerged as key approaches in recent foreign language education research. TBLT emphasizes the use of authentic tasks to promote language use and build students' communicative confidence (3). In contrast, POA focuses on a three-stage structure—motivating, enabling, and assessing—and adopts an output-driven approach that guides input, stressing the integration of logical expression and idea construction (4). While the two approaches differ in their teaching philosophies, task structures, and instructional goals, they also demonstrate potential complementarity at different instructional stages and cognitive levels (5,6).

Meanwhile, integrative teaching approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) have also gained increasing attention, reflecting a shift in language education from 'isolated skill training' to the integration of 'authentic tasks and higher-order thinking.' However, compared with the interdisciplinary nature of CLIL and PBL, TBLT and POA—both task-based language-oriented approaches—continue to hold a central position in international foreign language teaching theory and practice, especially in the context of vocational and higher education in China and East Asia (7,8).

Although some researchers have explored the instructional logic and outcomes of these two approaches through case studies, a systematic comparison of their key dimensions—such as task

design, instructional goals, critical thinking development, teacher-student roles, and adaptability—remains lacking. The construction of a unified model for their integration is still at an exploratory stage.

In response, this paper adopts a critical literature review approach to systematically compare the similarities, differences, and potential complementarity between TBLT and POA across the five aforementioned dimensions. It also proposes an integrated framework combining 'progressive stages' with 'pedagogical fusion.' The research assumes that TBLT is more suitable for the early stages of language learning, primarily to stimulate learners' motivation for communication and expression, while POA is better suited for intermediate and advanced levels, focusing on structured output and logical construction. The two approaches may complement each other in terms of task design, teacher roles, and cognitive goals. This study aims to provide a structural foundation and theoretical support for future integrative pathways in language teaching, addressing the growing need for a shift in EFL instruction from 'language skills' to 'comprehensive competencies.'

## METHODS

This study adopts a combined approach of systematic literature review and critical comparative analysis to explore the multidimensional applications of TBLT and POA in EFL instruction. It focuses on the similarities, differences, and complementary strengths of the two approaches in developing both language proficiency and thinking skills. The aim is to construct a well-structured and theoretically grounded comparative framework that can serve as a foundational reference for instructional integration.

The literature data were mainly obtained through searches in both Chinese and international databases, including CNKI, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and ERIC. The search strategy focused on keywords such as 'Task-Based Language Teaching,' 'Production-Oriented Approach,' 'English language teaching,' and 'critical thinking.' The time frame was limited to studies published between 2010 and 2024, with a focus on research related to the pedagogical principles, implementation pathways, and instructional effectiveness of TBLT and POA.

### Literature Screening Criteria and Process

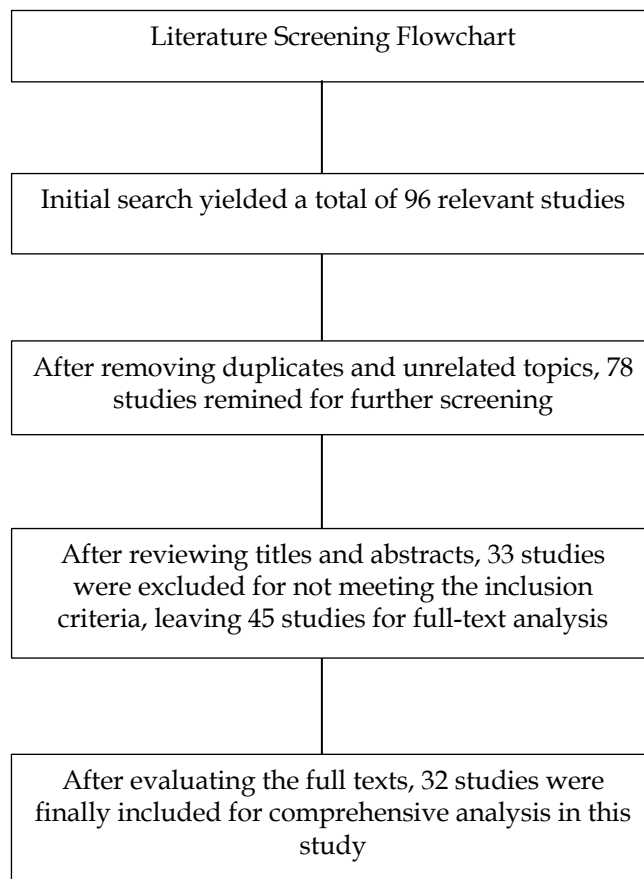
The inclusion criteria for the literature were as follows: (1) the study focused on learners of EFL; (2) the research examined the impact of teaching methods on language expression or cognitive abilities; and (3) the study was supported by a theoretical framework or empirical evidence. Exclusion criteria included studies that did not focus on EFL instruction, lacked analysis of instructional effectiveness, or were not directly related to the research topic.

To ensure systematicity and transparency, the literature screening process followed the PRISMA

(Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The process was as follows:

1. A total of 96 relevant studies were initially retrieved.
2. After removing duplicates and irrelevant records, 78 studies remained for title and abstract screening.
3. Of these, 33 studies were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria, leaving 45 articles for full-text analysis.
4. Following a detailed full-text review, 32 studies were finally included for comprehensive analysis (**Figure 1**).

**Figure 1:** Literature Screening Flow (PRISMA-based)



Based on the 32 core studies identified, the research further extracted the key features of TBLT and POA in terms of language output, critical thinking, instructional structure, and

assessment mechanisms. These findings are summarized in **Table 1** to ensure transparency in the composition of the reviewed literature.

**Table 1:** Overview of Representative Studies

Author	Year	Approach	Research Focus	Task Design	Instructional Goals	Thinking Skills	Teacher-Student Roles	Instructional Suitability
Bygate	2020	TBLT	Language fluency and communicative competence	✓	✓	✗	✓	Beginner
Wen Q.	2021	POA	Viewpoint expression and logical organization	✓	✓	✓	✓	Intermediate-Advanced
Song & Shen	2021	POA	Improving writing ability	✓	✓	✓	✓	Intermediate-Advanced
Ellis R.	2009	TBLT	Task-based teaching concepts	✓	✓	✗	✓	Beginner
Zhang Y.	2023	POA	Discourse structure and language organization	✓	✓	✓	✓	Intermediate
Wang & Lyu	2024	POA	Integrated language ability and feedback mechanisms	✓	✓	✓	✓	Intermediate-Advanced
Barokah	2018	TBLT	Task-based writing training	✓	✓	✓	✓	Intermediate
Liu X	2021	POA	Critical writing and reflective guidance	✓	✓	✓	✓	Intermediate-Advanced

### Analytical Framework and Operational Definitions

To systematically compare the application features of the two teaching approaches in EFL instruction and to provide a structural basis for proposing integration pathways, this study develops an analytical framework encompassing the following five dimensions: (a) task design, (b) instructional goals, (c) critical thinking cultivation, (d) teacher-student roles, and (e) instructional adaptability.

The definitions of these dimensions are based on representative studies such as Ellis and Wen (5,9–12), and are further refined through an analysis of classroom task types, learning objectives, cognitive demands, interaction patterns, and instructional contexts found in the selected literature. To enhance the analytical operability, the following criteria were established:

- **Task Design:** Judged based on whether the study describes task procedures (e.g., three-stage process), task types (speaking/writing), and orientation (practical vs. expressive).
- **Instructional Goals:** Determined by analyzing learning objectives, with a focus on whether they emphasize language fluency, logical expression, or a combination of both.

- **Critical Thinking Cultivation:** Identified by the presence of higher-order cognitive elements such as argument development, elaboration of viewpoints, and reflective expression.
- **Teacher-Student Roles:** Examined based on the degree of teacher dominance, student autonomy, and the presence of feedback mechanisms.
- **Instructional Adaptability:** Assessed by considering learner level (beginner/intermediate/advanced), class type, and teaching context (EFL/ESL/ESP).

All selected studies were systematically coded and horizontally compared according to the five dimensions above. The results are summarized in **Table 1**, serving as the theoretical foundation for the subsequent comparative analysis and integration proposal.

### Theoretical Foundations and Contextual Suitability of the Two Approaches

From a theoretical perspective, TBLT and POA are grounded in different assumptions about language acquisition and instructional prerequisites. TBLT, rooted in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emphasizes natural language acquisition through task completion. It

is well-suited for small-class settings where learners have basic language skills and teachers can effectively organize tasks, but may be less effective in contexts with limited resources or inexperienced instructors (13).

In comparison, the POA highlights a 'production-driven, input-enabled' instructional path. It initiates learning with challenging output tasks that stimulate learners' desire to express, followed by teacher-supported input and feedback scaffolding to enhance language organization and idea development. The successful implementation of POA requires that learners possess a foundational level of language proficiency and that teachers are able to guide the expression process and clarify output standards. It is particularly well-suited for academically oriented courses that emphasize expressive quality and depth of thinking.

These theoretical distinctions determine the contextual suitability and limitations of each approach in different educational settings, and they serve as the basis for designing an integrated instructional pathway in the following sections.

### **Analytical Procedure and Core Literature Overview**

Building on the above-mentioned methodology, this study selects 32 core studies identified in the methods section as the analytical sample. These studies are categorized, coded, and compared based on the features of TBLT and POA in terms of instructional design, implementation mechanisms, and competence orientation. In addition, integration attempts and strategic suggestions found in the literature are examined to identify the complementary features and potential pathways for synthesis between the two approaches. The analysis draws heavily on representative works such as Ellis (13), Wen (14), Bygate (6), Song & Shen(15), using the five analytical dimensions as the structural framework for the comparative discussion in the following sections.

### **Research Hypotheses and Theoretical Assumptions**

Based on the existing literature and theoretical analysis, this study proposes the following instructional hypotheses as a logical guide for the comparative analysis, while systematically constructing the analytical framework:

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): TBLT is more suitable for the early stages of EFL learning, effectively

enhancing learners' engagement and fluency in expression.

- Hypothesis 2 (H2): POA is better suited for intermediate and advanced stages, promoting the simultaneous development of logical language expression and critical thinking.
- Hypothesis 3 (H3): TBLT and POA possess complementary features in terms of teaching philosophy and task structure, suggesting a theoretical basis and practical potential for integration.
- Hypothesis 4 (H4): A progressive, task-restructured instructional pathway can be developed, following a 'task-driven - idea-guided - output-optimized' model of integration.

These hypotheses will be addressed and verified through the five-dimensional comparative analysis and the integrative pedagogical model proposed in the later sections, providing a theoretical foundation for the instructional integration recommendations that follow.

## **RESULTS**

Based on 32 core studies identified in the previous section, this study conducts a systematic and critical comparison of TBLT and POA in EFL instruction, aiming to reveal their structural differences and complementary features in teaching philosophy, classroom implementation, and skill development pathways, while preliminarily validating the hypothesis that TBLT suits beginner levels and POA suits intermediate to advanced stages.

To ensure analytical consistency and comparability, this study adopts the five-dimensional framework introduced earlier, drawing on Ellis (13) and Wen (14), and the coding results in Table 1 to define the analytical indicators and criteria (see the Methods section).

The following sections present a dimension-by-dimension comparison of TBLT and POA—focusing on task design, instructional goals, critical thinking, teacher-student roles, and pedagogical adaptability—to summarize their similarities, differences, and contextual suitability, laying the empirical groundwork for the integrated pathway proposed in the discussion section.

### **Task Design**

Instructional goals shape classroom direction, learning organization, and assessment criteria. In

this study, TBLT and POA differ fundamentally in their orientation—functional vs. logical.

TBLT typically follows a three-phase process: pre-task, task performance, and post-task, with real-world contexts serving as the driving force for language use (16). Typical tasks focus on everyday situations such as ordering food, asking for directions, or discussing hobbies, emphasizing fluency and pragmatic appropriateness. Task objectives tend to be broad, prioritizing meaning-making over control of linguistic forms. Teachers act primarily as facilitators, intervening as needed during task execution. This type of task design is particularly suitable for beginner-level learners, as it helps build confidence and motivation for communication. However, it offers relatively limited guidance in terms of discourse organization and logical argumentation.

In contrast, POA adopts a three-stage task structure—Motivating, Enabling, and Assessing—with a greater emphasis on cognitive challenge and clearly defined stage objectives (17). For example, Zhang found that integrating POA tasks into writing instruction in vocational colleges significantly improved students' coherence in expression and depth of argumentation (18). POA tasks often focus on argumentative essays, academic writing, or workplace presentations, emphasizing the construction of viewpoints and logical language use. In this framework, teachers play a central role in guiding output and regulating feedback, ensuring alignment between instructional input and learners' production.

In summary, the analysis of this dimension confirms the stage-based applicability proposed in Hypotheses H1 and H2, while also supporting the view in Hypothesis H3 regarding the complementarity of task design principles. It further provides a theoretical foundation for the integrated task reconstruction outlined in Hypothesis H4.

### **Instructional Goals**

The formulation of instructional goals directly determines the orientation of classroom activities, the organization of the learning process, and the construction of assessment criteria. Within the analytical framework of this study, TBLT and POA demonstrate a fundamental difference in instructional goals—functionality-oriented in TBLT and logic-oriented in POA.

TBLT focuses on the practicality of language use and communicative effectiveness, emphasizing the achievement of communicative goals through the completion of real-world tasks. Its instructional goals tend to prioritize naturalness of expression and responsiveness in language use (13). Barokah (19) noted that TBLT can effectively improve learners' ability to complete tasks using language in authentic contexts, making it particularly suitable for teaching scenarios aimed at developing basic communicative competence at the beginner or intermediate levels. The emphasis is often on 'whether the task is completed' rather than 'whether the language is accurate and well-structured.'

In contrast, POA places the quality of language output at the core of its instructional goals, emphasizing coherence in logical expression, integrity of discourse structure, and the ability to express critical ideas (14). As demonstrated in the empirical study by Song and Shen (15), POA enhances students' skills in argument development, paragraph construction, and language organization, showing particular advantages in academic English and formal expression contexts.

In summary, TBLT is better suited for speaking practice or interactive tasks that are oriented toward communicative functionality, where goals are open-ended and flexible. POA, on the other hand, is more appropriate for written or oral tasks that require clear objectives and high structural precision. The two approaches differ in their goal-setting focus—TBLT follows an 'open-ended communication' path, while POA adopts a 'precision-guided expression' approach. This complementarity in instructional goals provides a logical foundation for constructing a stage-based integrated teaching model.

This analysis echoes Hypotheses H1 and H2 regarding stage-based instructional suitability, and reinforces Hypothesis H3 by highlighting the complementary nature of instructional goal orientation between TBLT and POA, thereby supporting the integration framework in Hypothesis H4.

### **Critical Thinking Development**

With the advancement of higher-level language teaching concepts, the cultivation of thinking skills has become an important goal in foreign language education. TBLT and POA show significant differences in whether they emphasize critical thinking, the cognitive levels of task

design, and the construction of feedback mechanisms.

TBLT emphasizes language use and communicative fluency, with typical tasks focusing on practical communication scenarios such as shopping, asking for directions, or describing personal experiences (19). While this approach helps enhance students' pragmatic responsiveness and linguistic flexibility, its task goals are largely oriented toward information exchange, with relatively low cognitive demand and limited engagement with critical expression activities such as reasoning, argumentation, or deep reflection.

In contrast, POA systematically integrates elements of thinking training into task construction and assessment design—particularly in writing tasks—by emphasizing viewpoint development, argument organization, and the refinement of logical expression (14). The study by Song and Shen (15) indicates that POA supports learners in information filtering, argument integration, and logical presentation, with students demonstrating stronger discourse organization and greater awareness of critical thinking in the process.

In summary, TBLT is more appropriate for the early stages of language learning, serving as an entry point to build pragmatic confidence and communicative motivation. POA, on the other hand, offers an effective pathway for deepening linguistic logic and enhancing cognitive skills at the intermediate and advanced stages. The gradient difference in thinking development—shifting from pragmatic-driven to critical-thinking-driven instruction—provides a clear cognitive progression for constructing an integrated teaching model.

The findings in this dimension further validate Hypotheses H1 and H2 by illustrating the cognitive progression between the two approaches, while also aligning with Hypothesis H4 in establishing a thinking-driven trajectory within an integrated teaching model.

### Teacher-Student Roles

The definition of teacher and student roles is a key variable influencing instructional efficiency, the quality of classroom interaction, and the depth of cognitive engagement. TBLT and POA exhibit significant differences in their interaction structures, degree of teacher control, and approaches to fostering learner autonomy,

reflecting their fundamentally different pedagogical orientations.

TBLT advocates for a student-centered instructional model, emphasizing learners' active participation and language use during tasks (20). In this approach, teachers act primarily as task designers, resource providers, and facilitators. They offer contextual preparation and language support before the task, encourage collaborative communication during the task, and provide brief feedback afterward. This decentralized structure enhances the natural flow of language and freedom of expression, which helps beginner-level learners build pragmatic flexibility and a sense of engagement. However, Ellis notes that in classrooms lacking structured guidance, student output tends to be fragmented, with weak discourse coherence and poor information organization (16,21).

In contrast, POA explicitly emphasizes the dominant role of the teacher throughout the instructional process—especially during the Enabling and Assessing stages. Teachers are responsible not only for task progression but also for providing model expressions, logical structuring templates, and clear assessment criteria (10). During instruction, teachers offer multiple rounds of feedback and metacognitive guidance to help students refine their language use and improve the logic of their arguments, thereby promoting more in-depth and structured output. Wang and Lyu (22) point out that POA's teacher-led support system is particularly effective in large-class settings, as it reduces learners' cognitive load and ensures consistency in the quality of output.

In summary, TBLT tends to reduce teacher control to stimulate learners' spontaneous expression, making it well-suited for early-stage language instruction that aims to build confidence and motivation. POA, on the other hand, reinforces the teacher's guiding role, making it more appropriate for intermediate and advanced stages where logical reasoning and refined expression are emphasized. The contrast in teacher role orientation—activation of expression in TBLT versus regulation of expression in POA—highlights their functional complementarity across different stages of instruction.

This dimension of analysis further supports the integrated instructional pathway proposed in this study (see Hypothesis 4), which suggests that teacher roles should be adjusted flexibly according to learners' developmental stages. A

gradual shift from guidance to collaboration to feedback can help students transition from expressive freedom to expressive precision.

### **Pedagogical Adaptability**

The adaptability of a teaching approach determines its practical feasibility and effectiveness across different instructional settings, learner profiles, and classroom conditions. From the perspective of this study, TBLT and POA each demonstrate distinct advantages and limitations in terms of stage alignment, class size compatibility, and teacher dependence, further reflecting the fundamental differences in their theoretical structures and implementation pathways.

TBLT centers on ‘authentic tasks,’ emphasizing the practical use of language in real communicative contexts (16). This method is characterized by its openness and flexibility, making it particularly suitable for the early stages of language learning, where it helps to stimulate learners’ motivation and willingness to communicate. Bygate noted that TBLT shows strong adaptability in helping learners build basic language intuition and pragmatic confidence (6). However, due to its relatively loose task structure and low teacher control, TBLT can lead to issues such as unequal participation, fragmented output, and challenges in providing effective feedback in large classes or mixed-ability settings, which may affect overall classroom efficiency.

In contrast, POA adopts a clear three-stage instructional structure—Motivating, Enabling, and Assessing—with explicit guidance and a coherent task flow. It is better suited for intermediate and advanced learners who already have a basic command of the language and aim to develop logical expression and improve output quality (4). Zhang (18), in an empirical study on writing courses in vocational colleges, found that POA’s staged task design supports viewpoint development and structural integration, making it particularly effective for cognitively demanding tasks such as written reports and project presentations. Furthermore, POA advocates for a ‘layered task + staged output’ strategy, which helps maintain consistency in pacing and reduces cognitive load in large-class teaching. However, POA also places higher demands on teachers’ instructional design skills, material development, and assessment systems, thus requiring greater preparation and execution efforts.

In summary, TBLT is more suitable for beginners, as it helps spark interest in expression and communication, particularly in small-class settings or environments that allow for high task flexibility. POA is better suited for intermediate to advanced learners, supporting greater instructional control and enhanced output quality in larger classrooms. The complementary features of the two approaches—regarding target learners, course types, and resource dependence—suggest that instructional strategies should be flexibly integrated based on students’ language proficiency, course objectives, and teaching conditions, rather than relying solely on a single pedagogical paradigm.

To visually present the structural differences and pedagogical orientations of the two approaches across the five key dimensions—Task Design, Instructional Goals, Critical Thinking Development, Teacher-Student Roles, and Pedagogical Adaptability—this study provides a systematic comparison table (Table 2).

### **DISCUSSION**

Through the comparative analysis across five dimensions, this study finds that TBLT and POA differ fundamentally in their pedagogical philosophies, cognitive support mechanisms, and classroom organizational models. However, they also demonstrate significant complementarity in areas such as stage alignment, skill development focus, and task structure design. These findings not only validate the hypothesis regarding stage-based suitability of the two approaches but also provide theoretical and practical insights for the design of an integrated instructional pathway.

TBLT is function-oriented, emphasizing the practical use of language and fluency in expression, making it especially suitable for the early stages of language learning. Its typical tasks center on simulated communication and situational dialogues, which help stimulate students’ motivation to express and their willingness to participate (6,16). However, this approach tends to be weaker in guiding argument organization, discourse logic, and critical thinking, thereby limiting the development of higher-level expressive skills.

In contrast, POA adopts a structured sequence of *Motivating – Enabling – Assessing*, focusing on viewpoint development, logical reasoning, and language refinement. Song and Shen highlight that POA supports the development of argumentative awareness and depth of

expression during task completion (15). Wen further emphasizes that the multi-round feedback mechanism in the assessing stage is a key channel for cultivating reflective language competence (14). POA demonstrates strong adaptability particularly in intermediate and advanced courses focused on writing and academic expression (18).

From an integrated perspective across the five dimensions:

- In task design, TBLT tends to be context-driven with an open structure, while POA

emphasizes logical progression and output-oriented expression.

- In instructional goals, TBLT aims for communicative achievement and language fluency, whereas POA values clarity of ideas and discourse coherence.
- In thinking skills development, TBLT focuses on functional output, while POA incorporates systematic training in critical thinking.
- In teacher-student roles, TBLT highlights learner autonomy, whereas POA emphasizes teacher guidance.

**Table 2:** Multidimensional Comparative Analysis of TBLT and POA

Comparison Dimension	TBLT	POA
Task Design	Follows a three-phase process: <i>Pre-task – During-task – Post-task</i> . Tasks emphasize contextual authenticity and language fluency, with a relatively open structure.	Follows a three-phase process: <i>Motivating – Enabling – Assessing</i> . Tasks have clear output goals and logical structure, emphasizing quality of expression and depth of thinking.
Instructional Goals	Focuses on communication and task completion, emphasizing practicality and building confidence in expression. Suitable for helping beginners quickly develop communicative ability.	Emphasizes logical expression, argument organization, and discourse structure. Suitable for intermediate and advanced learners to develop integrated language and thinking skills.
Critical Thinking Development	Prioritizes language fluency and information exchange, with limited systematic guidance for critical thinking and lower cognitive challenge.	Embeds critical thinking requirements into output tasks, supported by feedback mechanisms to promote logical construction and viewpoint refinement, facilitating higher-order thinking development.
Teacher-Student Roles	Teachers act as facilitators and assistants; students lead task completion. Emphasizes learner autonomy and interaction.	Teachers act as guides and feedback providers, students complete expression tasks with teacher support. Emphasizes structural guidance and cognitive regulation.
Pedagogical Adaptability	Suitable for beginners and small-class teaching. Highly flexible, but more difficult to manage in large classes or mixed-proficiency settings.	Suitable for intermediate/advanced learners and large-class teaching. Clear structure and strong control but requires higher teacher competence in design and assessment.

In terms of pedagogical adaptability, TBLT is more suitable for communicative tasks in small classes with beginner-level learners, while POA is better aligned with the needs of intermediate and advanced learners engaged in structured expression.

In sum, the analysis not only supports the study’s hypothesis on stage-based suitability (TBLT for beginner stages, POA for intermediate to advanced stages) but also reveals the complementary potential of the two approaches in terms of pedagogical philosophy. This provides a

foundational basis for designing an integrated instructional model in future practice.

Although previous studies have explored the pedagogical value of TBLT and POA individually (e.g., Li, 2020; Barokah, 2018), there remains a lack of systematic comparison between the two approaches in terms of task structure, cognitive mechanisms, and integration models (11). Li (2022) proposed an integrated language teaching approach based on the fusion of multiple methodologies, emphasizing the construction of hybrid strategies tailored to learners' diverse needs (23). However, existing literature still lacks well-established integration models and practical implementation pathways. Through a five-dimensional comparison and hypothesis-based analysis, this study establishes a preliminary structural framework, providing a theoretical foundation for instructional integration and laying the groundwork for the development of a 'hybrid model' in the discussion section.

### Proposed Integrative Pedagogical Pathway

Based on the systematic analysis and comparison of TBLT and POA across five key instructional dimensions, this study proposes an integrative pedagogical pathway that combines stage-based progression with methodological integration. The aim is to leverage the strengths of both approaches in a coherent manner to better meet the developmental needs of language learners and enhance their expressive abilities.

From the perspective of stage-based suitability, TBLT is more appropriate for the early stages of language learning, where task-driven instruction helps enhance learner motivation, build communicative confidence, and develop basic pragmatic competence. At this stage, teachers can introduce context-based tasks (such as everyday conversations and daily interactions) to stimulate learners' willingness to participate in language use and to strengthen their sense of self-efficacy. As learners' language proficiency improves, instruction can gradually incorporate the structured tasks of POA, shifting the focus of expression from 'achieving communication' to 'clear expression + critical construction,' thereby promoting simultaneous growth in depth of expression and linguistic logic.

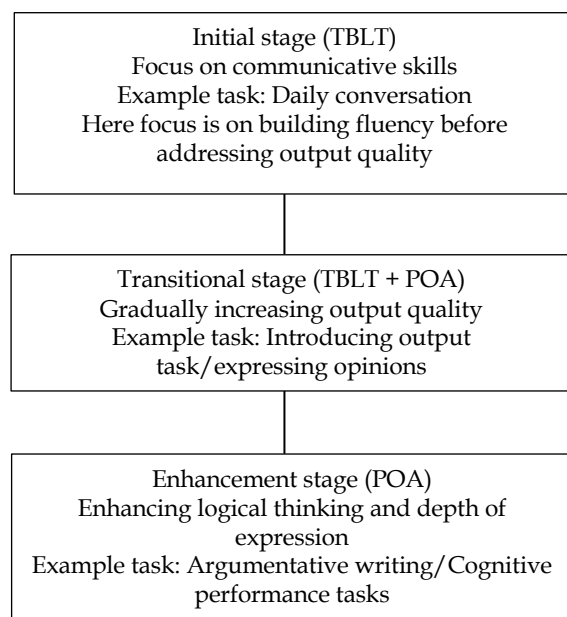
At the task design level, it is recommended that teachers adopt a strategy of task progression and structural layering: beginning with TBLT tasks as an entry point to guide students through low-structure, communication-oriented activities, and

then transitioning to the POA's three-stage structure—Motivating, Enabling, Assessing—to support learners in completing cognitively demanding and logically organized higher-level tasks (e.g., argumentative writing, viewpoint articulation, academic debates). Through this staged integration, task design evolves vertically from 'free generation' to 'logical construction.'

In terms of teacher role positioning, the integrative pathway requires teachers to shift their support roles flexibly. In the early stage, teachers should act as facilitators and language resource providers; in the intermediate and advanced stages, they should transition into roles as cognitive guides and feedback constructors. This involves providing multiple rounds of language refinement, differentiated assessment, and model examples to help learners gradually achieve autonomous control over expressive structures.

Overall, the proposed integrative pathway reflects a learner-centered instructional philosophy, emphasizing the precise alignment between developmental stages and pedagogical models. It responds to Hypotheses H3 and H4 of this study, which concern 'pedagogical complementarity' and the 'feasibility of integration.' **Figure 2** illustrates the integrative pathway model constructed in this study. It is recommended that teachers flexibly adjust task types, expression goals, and support strategies based on their teaching context to achieve both instructional effectiveness and coordinated skill development.

**Figure 2:** Integrative Pathway for EFL Writing Instruction (TBLT and POA)



**Theoretical Justifications for the Integrative Model**

The ‘stage-based progression and task integration’ model proposed in this study not only responds to the complementary teaching strategy gap identified in the preceding analysis of pedagogical gaps, but also demonstrates a coherent integration of multiple theoretical frameworks. This integrative model is not a simple combination of TBLT and POA. Instead, it forms a highly coordinated instructional structure rooted in their pedagogical mechanisms and cognitive logic. It aligns closely with the core principles of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and the Production-Oriented Approach (POA).

First, from the perspective of SCT, the TBLT component emphasizes real-world, task-driven language use, which supports students in building self-efficacy during communication. This idea is consistent with Bandura’s view that learning confidence can be enhanced through social interaction (24). In the initial stage of the model, TBLT creates a low-pressure and highly engaging environment. Through completing daily communication tasks, students receive positive feedback, which activates their motivation and builds confidence in language output.

Second, the later stages of the model are built upon POA’s three-phase structure, which reflects the ‘scaffolding + challenge’ approach advocated by ZPD. Vygotsky argued that learning occurs most effectively within the ZPD, where appropriate teacher support promotes cognitive growth (25). In the Enabling and Assessing stages of POA,

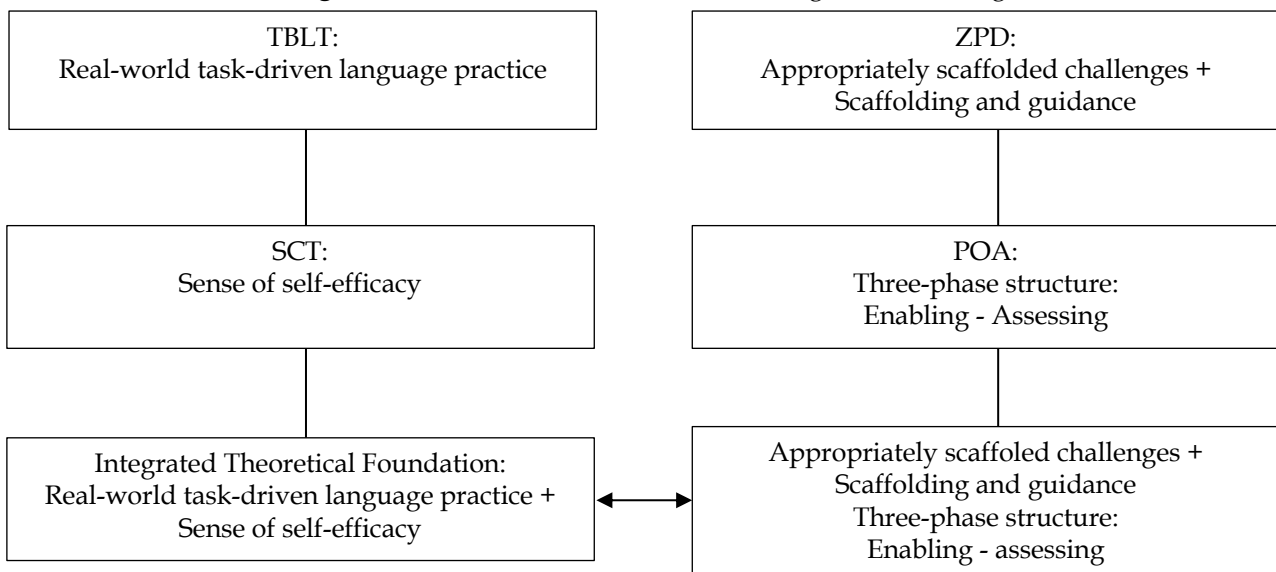
teachers provide guided input, strategy training, and dynamic feedback, helping students move beyond their current level toward higher cognitive development—thus putting the ZPD principle into practice.

In addition, this integrative model also deepens the theoretical logic within POA itself. According to Wen, POA aims to promote the coordinated development of language skills, thinking skills, and intercultural competence through well-designed tasks (4). These tasks should be aligned with learners’ current abilities and supported with appropriate scaffolding. The staged progression of this model—from activating expression, to building logical reasoning, to expanding thinking—practically reflects this concept.

In summary, the integration of TBLT and POA not only meets learners’ needs at different learning stages but is also strongly supported by SCT, ZPD, and POA theory. Starting from pedagogical complementarity and reinforced by progressive task design and shifting teacher roles, this model forms a cognitive loop of ‘input – scaffolding – output – reflection.’ It supports Hypothesis 4 (H4) and offers a multi-framework perspective for advancing teaching theory.

To further illustrate the logical relationship between the integrative model and its theoretical foundations, this study presents a ‘Theoretical Support Framework’ (Figure 3). The figure highlights the core mechanisms and theoretical anchors of TBLT and POA at each stage, visually demonstrating the closed-loop logic of theory, practice, and model integration.

**Figure 3:** Theoretical Framework of the Integrative Teaching Model



## Chapter Summary

Building on the preceding five-dimension analysis, this section further integrates the core features of TBLT and POA in terms of pedagogical philosophy, instructional structure, and competence orientation. It systematically explores the complementary relationship between the two approaches and the feasibility of their integration. By proposing a “stage-based progression and task integration” pathway, and incorporating typical task designs and shifting teacher roles, the current discussion preliminarily constructs a new integrative model for EFL writing instruction.

The three-stage pathway not only addresses learners’ developmental needs at different phases of instruction but is also theoretically supported by SCT, the ZPD, and the internal mechanisms of POA. Together, these frameworks form a cognitive loop of ‘input - scaffolding - output - reflection.’ The construction of this pathway further validates Hypotheses H3 and H4 proposed in this study, namely the structural complementarity of the two teaching approaches and the theoretical feasibility of their integration.

The conclusion will summarize the key research findings, outline the theoretical and practical contributions, and discuss directions for future research and broader application.

## CONCLUSION

This study focused on TBLT and POA, using a systematic literature review and five-dimensional comparative analysis to examine their respective orientations, instructional effects, and potential integration in EFL instruction. The findings indicate that TBLT emphasizes communicative tasks and expressive activation, making it suitable for beginner stages, while POA focuses on logical construction and output quality, aligning with intermediate to advanced learners—thus supporting Hypotheses H1 and H2.

Drawing on the dimensions of task design, instructional goals, critical thinking development, teacher-student roles, and pedagogical adaptability, the study proposes an integrated instructional pathway based on “task-driven input and output optimization.” This model combines the communicative authenticity of TBLT with the structured guidance of POA, forming a progressive teaching chain of ‘input-driven engagement - idea construction - quality enhancement.’ The framework is theoretically supported by SCT, ZPD, and the POA model itself

(Figure 3), in line with Hypotheses H3 and H4.

The study also addresses a current research gap in the systematic integration of language teaching methods. Unlike fragmented case comparisons, it offers a practical and theoretically grounded strategy adaptable to learners of various proficiency levels and instructional contexts, with potential for application in intelligent teaching tools and multimodal task environments.

In summary, EFL instruction should move beyond static reliance on a single method and adopt dynamic integration strategies based on learners’ developmental stages, cognitive needs, and teaching environments. In practice, TBLT can be employed to activate learners’ motivation and fluency in the initial phase, while POA can be introduced later to refine expression and deepen reasoning. By aligning stage-specific goals, feedback mechanisms, and cognitive scaffolding, a progressive trajectory from pragmatic activation to critical construction can be established—fostering systematic, structured, and multidimensional development in foreign language writing instruction.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study offers a systematic comparison of TBLT and POA in EFL instruction and proposes a theoretically grounded integration framework, several limitations remain. First, the reviewed literature primarily focuses on individual methods, lacking empirical studies that compare or validate integrated approaches. The findings are derived from literature-based reasoning without support from classroom data.

Second, the literature is mainly drawn from Chinese and East Asian higher education contexts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to diverse cultural and institutional settings. Third, despite including both Chinese and English sources, the sample is dominated by Chinese-language databases, resulting in linguistic and regional bias, particularly underrepresenting research from Latin America, South Asia, and Western Europe.

To address these limitations, future research is recommended to conduct empirical studies on integrated teaching models to evaluate the effects of combining TBLT and POA across contexts, promote cross-cultural comparisons to explore the adaptability and responsiveness of both approaches in diverse educational systems, expand comparative frameworks by

incorporating models such as CLIL and PBL, integrate AI-powered feedback and adaptive task design to enhance personalization and real-time output quality, implement longitudinal studies to assess the sustained impact of integrated instruction on language and thinking development.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**WQ:** Conceptualization, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, writing – original draft.

**WAD:** Supervision, methodological guidance, writing – review & editing, critical revisions.

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