

# EXPLORING KURDISH EFL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING RELATIVE CLAUSES THROUGH TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## ABSTRACT:

Few studies have investigated teachers' views on the use of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach in teaching grammar structures. However, no study has specifically examined the use of this approach in the University of Duhok context. Thus, this study addresses the gap by exploring English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of instruction and evaluating its effective use in teaching relative clauses. Therefore, 30 EFL teachers who teach English grammar from various colleges of the University of Duhok participated in the study by completing a closed-and open-ended questionnaire to provide their opinions on the use of TBLT in teaching relative clauses. A mixed-method approach was used with quantitative and qualitative data collected via questionnaires. The findings indicate that English EFL grammar teachers at the University of Duhok generally hold positive attitudes towards the use of TBLT in teaching English relative clauses and demonstrate familiarity with its principles. However, they also identify key challenges in task design and offer insightful recommendations for its development.

**KEY WORD:** UoD, Kurdish EFL teachers, the TBLT approach, and English relative clauses.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, language teaching approaches have significantly shifted from traditional methods like grammar-translation and direct methods to more communicative approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and TBLT. Consequently, EFL teachers have been encouraged to adopt TBLT to enhance learners' motivation and improve language competence. The primary purpose of TBLT is to provide a real-world context for learners to use the language. Working together on tasks, learners create contexts for interactions with various opportunities for communication. Researchers advocate that these negotiations contribute to language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

Kurdistan, like other EFL contexts, has experienced a range of methods and approaches of English teaching and learning, from the conventional methods to CLT and TBLT, particularly at university level, EFL teachers have used a variety of approaches in their teaching.

To date, nevertheless, few studies have examined whether or not Kurdish EFL teachers have employed TBLT in their teaching practice, and whether or not this approach is effective in teaching grammar (e.g. relative clauses).

### 1.1. Aims of the Study

The study aims to investigate EFL teachers' perception of using TBLT to teach grammar in the Kurdistan region, especially at the University of Duhok, challenges they face when designing TBLT tasks for teaching grammar, and the way they assess the effectiveness of TBLT in teaching grammar.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1- What are Kurdish EFL teachers' perspectives on the use of TBLT in teaching relative clauses?
- 2- To what extent do Kurdish EFL teachers implement TBLT when teaching relative clauses in their classrooms?
- 3- What challenges do Kurdish EFL teachers face in using TBLT to teach relative clauses?
- 4- How do linguistic and cultural factors specific to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq influence the effectiveness of TBLT for teaching English relative clauses to undergraduate TESOL learners?

### 1.3. Significance of the Study

The results of this research can have significant implications on raising Kurdish EFL teachers' awareness about the effectiveness of TBLT instruction in teaching complex grammatical structures such as relative clauses.

## 2. Literature Review

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The following sections present a theoretical background which explains the TBLT approach, English

### 2.1. Task-Based Language Teaching Approach

Teaching a second or foreign language through a sequence of tasks that aim to encourage students using the language in an interactional and authentic way is known as task-based language teaching (TBLT). Van den Branden (2006) stated that TBLT is “an approach to language education in which students are given functional tasks that invite them to focus primarily on meaning exchange and use language for real-world, non-linguistic purposes” (p. 1). It is a pedagogical approach which emphasizes meaningful communication and tasks that focus on authentic communication to facilitate language learning. According to Le (2014, p. 108), the introduction of the CLT approach during the last three decades has given rise to a new teaching methodology known as TBLT, which enhances the motivation and communication skills of educators and students in real-world language use. The TBLT approach combines theoretical and empirical foundations to create effective pedagogy, emphasizing notable learning outcomes achieved through tasks. Therefore, tasks are regarded as the main unit of planning and instruction in language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Norris, 2009; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Similarly, Cook (2008) and Willis and Willis (2001) asserted that TBLT organizes teaching and learning around a series of communicative tasks, which are carried out in the target language.

The term ‘task’ in educational and pedagogical contexts has been defined in various ways, yet all tasks require students to use the target language to achieve a specific outcome. Bachman and Palmer (1996) defined a task as “an activity that involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular situation” (p. 44). Also, Richards and Rodgers (2001) referred to a task as “an activity or goal that is carried out using language. A task is considered as a central unit of planning and teaching” (p. 224).

Regarding classroom instruction, TBLT aligns with a learner-centered educational philosophy, as it promotes meaningful, content-oriented activities above linguistic and has specific components like objective, technique, and specific outcome (Nunan, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Teachers, as a main part in the successful implementing of TBLT, need to have a positive conceptual understanding of this approach. Jeon and Hahn (2006) stated that having sufficient knowledge about instructional framework’s plan, process, and evaluation is crucial for teachers who wish to successfully apply TBLT. This is in line with Calvert and Sheen (2014) who stated that “essential for the success of task-based instruction is the

### 2.3 English Relative Clauses

A relative clause (RC) is a subordinate or dependent clause that modifies a noun (antecedent) and provides additional information to the head noun of the main clause which precedes it. In other words, it acts as an adjective, describing the noun phrase (NP) of the main clause (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Relative clauses are

relative clauses, and a review of previous studies that tackle the same issues.

ability of teachers to design and implement language learning tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty so that students can engage with and learn effectively from the materials provided” (p. 2). Moreover, the way a teacher views and comprehends TBLT may have a big impact on how they teach in the classroom because there is a connection between their thoughts and their methods (Borg, 2015). According to Plews and Zhao (2010), teachers frequently struggle with TBLT and implement what they believe to be TBLT in ways that may not align with the actual TBLT principles. Based on some research outcomes on curriculum innovation and implementation, the already difficult process of introducing something new may become even more difficult if teachers’ opinions are not adequately considered (Carless, 2003).

### 2.2 TBLT and Grammar Teaching

TBLT highlights the use of meaningful tasks as the main planning and instructional unit, wherein grammar is learned as a result of communicative contact (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). Unlike traditional approaches that emphasize isolated grammar drills, TBLT places grammar in tasks that reflect real-world activities, such as giving directions, writing emails, or planning events. In TBLT, grammar instruction often combines implicit learning in which learners acquire grammatical structures incidentally while working on a task, with explicit instruction, which is presented when learners’ attention is on linguistic form (Long, 2015).

TBLT is frequently used in grammar instruction, with pre-, during-, and post-task phases. For instance, learners might be introduced to target grammatical structures in context at that stage. In the task phase, students participate in communicative exercises that require the use of certain structures, including narrating a past event to practice past tense forms. To improve students’ accuracy, teachers can point out specific grammatical problems or provide corrective feedback during the post-task phase (Skehan, 1998).

The conflict between focusing on meaning and form is one of the critical issues of TBLT’s application to grammar teaching. Long (1991) proposed the idea of “focus on form” as a comprise between solely meaning-focused communication and decontextualized grammar instruction. Focus on form entails briefly drawing learners’ attention to linguistic elements as they emerge naturally during tasks in order to maintain the communicative core of TBLT. However, Ellis (2003) highlighted the use of reactive focus on form, where teachers provide feedback on learners’ errors committed during task performance. Proactive attention to form, such as pre-teaching specific grammatical topics, can also be effective if incorporated smoothly into the task cycle.

introduced by relative pronouns (who, which, that, whose, and whom) which modify animate or inanimate antecedents or by relative adverbs (where, when, and why) which modify temporal, locational, or causal antecedents. These relative pronouns and adverbs create a syntactic and semantic link between the clause and its noun phrase.

English relative clauses are of two types: defining relative clauses (restrictive) and non- defining relative clauses (non- restrictive). Defining relative clauses specify essential information about the antecedent and often employ the relative pronoun that, and are not enclosed by two commas on either side of them. For example, ‘Sarah’s sister who (that) lives in Italy is a fashion designer’, this implies that *Sarah* may have more than one sister, but is specifically speaking about the one who lives in Italy. However, non-defining relative clauses provide additional information about the antecedent without changing its main identity and are enclosed by two commas on either al., 1985).

## 2.4 Previous Studies

The increasing focus on TBLT in recent decades has resulted in a wide range of studies on how teachers understand and use it in their classrooms. Teachers’ beliefs, experiences, and classroom practices significantly shape the way TBLT is interpreted and applied in real teaching contexts. Among the studies on this topic, Jeon and Hahn (2006) investigated Korean secondary school EFL teachers’ perspectives of TBLT to highlight its potential benefits and implementation challenges. The researchers conducted this study in South Korea and employed surveys and semi-structured interviews to collect data. The analysis combined quantitative statistical methods and thematic qualitative techniques. Findings revealed that teachers acknowledged TBLT’s advantages, such as promoting meaningful communication and learner engagement, however, they faced significant difficulties, including limited instructional time, large class sizes, insufficient training, and strict standardized curricula. Moreover, because of structural limitations, many teachers turned back to conventional approaches even after realizing the pedagogical benefits of TBLT.

Similarly, Tabatabaei and Hadi (2011) conducted a study to investigate Iranian EFL teachers’ perceptions of TBLT and the factors influencing their decisions to use or avoid this approach. The study included 80 participants from diverse educational institutions, and employed a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers’ opinions. Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews yielded qualitative insights. The results of the analysis revealed that although many teachers acknowledged the importance of TBLT to enhance communicative competence and student engagement, they faced challenges such as time constraints, limited training, insufficient resources, and large class sizes. Teachers who implemented TBLT highlighted its alignment with communicative teaching principles and its ability to promote real-life language use, whereas others pointed to challenges with task design, evaluation, and institutional resistance.

In alignment with these results, Pohan, et al. (2016) conducted a study in Indonesia with 50 EFL teachers from various schools and employed a mixed-methods approach, ultimately yielding consistent benefits and challenges.

side. For instance, ‘Sarah’s sister, who lives in Italy, is a fashion designer’, this indicates that Sarah has only one sister and the fact that she *lives in Italy* adds extra information but is not essential to identifying Sarah’s sister. Nevertheless, both defining and non-defining relative clauses in English include a relative pronoun. The only position in which the relative pronoun is optional is when the relative pronoun acts as the object of the verb in the relative clause, as in ‘the man (whom/that) I saw yesterday was very upset’ the relative pronoun (whom/that) is the object of the verb ‘saw’. This relative clause is referred to as reduced relative clauses (Quirk et al., 1985). Similarly, Liu, et al. (2018) investigated Chinese EFL teachers’ perceptions and implementation of TBLT in higher education, the study conducted across six provinces and involved 66 teachers. The findings of questionnaires and interviews revealed that 80% of participants used TBLT and valued its ability to promote teamwork and interactive skills, however, only 20% were very familiar with the methodology, and 80% expressed limited understanding.

More recently, Pham and Nguyen (2018) explored EFL teachers’ perceptions TBLT in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The research conducted at five universities with 68 participants of varying teaching experience and demographics. The findings of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews revealed that the majority of teachers held positive attitudes towards TBLT and showed a strong understanding of its principles, including its communicative, integration of real-world tasks, and student-centered focus. Teachers mentioned that TBLT promotes academic progress, interactive learning, and intrinsic motivation. However, difficulties such as time constraints, large class sizes, limited teacher proficiency, and inadequate materials, prevented its wider implementation. Quantitative analysis showed a moderate positive correlation between understanding and implementation, whereas qualitative data emphasized the need for professional development and specialized resources to assist TBLT adoption.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, no study has ever been conducted in Kurdistan region of Iraq, especially in the university of Duhok to explore Kurdish EFL teachers’ perspectives on teaching relative clauses through TBLT instruction based on three personal variables of teacher’s gender, academic qualifications, and years of teaching experience. The current study is, therefore, an attempt to address this gap in the university of Duhok.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

The current research was carried out using a mixed-method approach to explore Kurdish EFL teachers’ perspectives on the use of TBLT for teaching grammar topics such as relative clauses. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions and enhances the validity of the findings. The quantitative approach was

used to analyze data collected from close-ended items, which were designed using a five-point Likert scale. The qualitative approach was also used to analyze teachers' responses to open-ended questions, which allowed teachers to share their thoughts and experiences in more detail.

### 3.2. Participants

The current research involved 30 (12 males and 18 females) Kurdish EFL teachers from Duhok University who teach English grammar. Twenty-five teachers hold a master's degree and only five teachers hold a PhD degree. In terms of years of teaching experience, there are seven novice teachers and 23 experienced teachers. Kim and Roth (2011) stated that novice teachers are teachers who have one to five years of experience while experienced teachers are those teachers who have more than five years of experience.

### 3.3. Instruments

A structured questionnaire, adapted from Jeon and Hahn (2006) framework, was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data through a combination of close-ended and open-ended questionnaires (see Appendix A). It comprised three sections: gathered demographic data, including gender (male/female), academic qualifications (MA /PhD in English), and teaching experience (novice/experienced). The second section involved 12 close-ended items to evaluate teachers' attitudes toward TBLT in teaching grammar. The third one includes four open-ended questions which allowed

## 4. Results and Discussion

Based on the SPSS analysis of close-ended questionnaire, the results in general reveal that EFL teachers at the Duhok University generally hold positive attitudes toward the use of TBLT in teaching relative

teachers to elaborate on their experiences, challenges, and recommendations for implementing TBLT in grammar instruction.

### 3.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure research validity the questionnaire was sent to a panel of jury (see Appendix B) of 10 experienced teachers, and was piloted with five EFL teachers before sending it to the main study sample. Feedback from the jury member and pilot study led to modifications, including rewording ambiguous items and adjusting the length of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the Likert-scale items, yielding a coefficient of .786, which indicated a high level of internal consistency (Field, 2018).

### 3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data from close-ended items were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 28). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations were calculated to summarize teachers' attitudes toward TBLT. Inferential statistics, such as t-tests were conducted to explore differences based on demographic variables (e.g. gender, academic qualification, and years of experience). Qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Responses were coded to identify recurring themes related to the benefits and challenges of using TBLT to teach relative clauses.

#### 4.1. Results of close-ended questionnaire

clauses. The following tables show the statistical analysis of 12 items according to demographic variables (gender, academic qualifications, and years of teaching experience).

Table 1: Statistical analysis of EFL teachers' perceptions based on gender differences

Items	Gender	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	± S.D.	t-Test (Sig.)
1. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is practical to implement in my classroom for teaching grammar.	M.	58.3%	25.0%	16.7%			4.41	0.79	0.24
	F.	22.2%	61.1%	11.1%	5.6%		4.00	0.76	
2. TBLT can be effectively used to teach grammar topics, such as relative clauses, to EFL learners.	M.	66.7%	25.0%	8.3%			4.58	0.66	0.27
	F.	22.2%	66.7%	11.1%			4.11	0.58	
3. TBLT helps students apply grammar structures (e.g. relative clauses) in real-life communication.	M.	41.7%	50.0%	8.3%			4.33	0.65	0.31
	F.	38.9%	33.3%	22.2%	5.6%		4.05	0.93	
4. Students are more engaged in learning grammar through TBLT than traditional grammar-focused methods.	M.	50.0%	16.7%	33.3%			4.16	0.93	0.01
	F.	55.6%	38.9%	5.6%			4.50	0.61	

5. TBLT encourages collaborative learning among students, which positively impacts their understanding of grammar topics.	<b>M.</b>	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%			4.33	0.77	0.04
	<b>F.</b>	44.4%	55.6%				4.44	0.51	
6. Using TBLT enhances my students' ability to retain and recall grammar structures.	<b>M.</b>	58.3%	33.3%	8.3%			4.50	0.67	0.30
	<b>F.</b>	11.1%	72.2%	11.1%	5.6%		3.88	0.67	
7. TBLT tasks provide sufficient opportunities for students to receive feedback on their use of grammar structures.	<b>M.</b>	41.7%	41.7%	16.7%			4.25	0.75	0.69
	<b>F.</b>	27.8%	44.4%	27.8%			4.00	0.76	
8. TBLT tasks allow students to identify their own grammar errors during activities.	<b>M.</b>	41.7%	25.0%	33.3%			4.08	0.90	0.31
	<b>F.</b>	27.8%	50.0%	16.7%	5.6%		4.00	0.84	
9. I have sufficient expertise to implement TBLT effectively in my classroom.	<b>M.</b>	25.0%	33.3%	41.7%			3.83	0.83	0.74
	<b>F.</b>	33.3%	44.4%	16.7%	5.6%		4.05	0.87	
10. I feel confident designing TBLT tasks that focus on teaching grammar, such as relative clauses.	<b>M.</b>	41.7%	33.3%	16.7%	8.3%		4.08	0.99	0.17
	<b>F.</b>	22.2%	61.1%	11.1%	5.6%		4.00	0.76	
11. Linguistic differences between English and my learners' native language affect their ability to learn grammar through TBLT.	<b>M.</b>	16.7%	33.3%	33.3%	8.3%	8.3%	3.41	1.16	0.68
	<b>F.</b>	27.8%	33.3%	27.8%	11.1%		3.77	1.00	
12. Learners' cultural backgrounds influence their participation and engagement in TBLT activities.	<b>M.</b>	33.3%	41.7%	16.7%		8.3%	3.91	1.16	0.17
	<b>F.</b>	33.3%	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%		3.83	1.09	

In terms of gender differences, the teachers' responses to the first items revealed that although male teachers ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) demonstrated slightly higher agreement than females ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), there were no statistically significant differences between teachers' gender. This suggests that EFL teachers generally believe that TBLT is a practical approach to implement in their classrooms for teaching grammar. As for item 2, the results showed high levels of agreement among both genders for using TBLT effectively to teach grammar topics, such as relative clauses. Similarly, item 3 highlighted the role of TBLT in helping students apply grammar structures in real-life communication with males ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) and females ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ). Despite 5.6% of female teachers opted for "disagree", there was no significant difference between gender group. In contrast, items 4 and 5 revealed that males ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 0.93$  and  $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.77$  respectively) were more significantly different than females ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.61$  and  $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.51$  respectively) to view that

students are more engaged in learning grammar through TBLT and it encourages collaborative learning among students, which positively impacts their understanding of grammar topics. Regarding item 6, which states that using TBLT enhances students' ability to retain and recall grammar structures, male teachers ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) showed a slightly higher agreement compared to female teachers ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), though the difference was not statistically significant. In terms of corrective feedback, item 7 and 8 revealed no significant gender-based preference as both males and females demonstrated strong preference for the opportunity TBLT provides for students to receive feedback on their use of grammar structures. However, 5.6% of female teachers showed disagreement with item 8 as they don't believe that TBLT tasks allow students to identify their own grammar errors during activities. Concerning teachers' beliefs on having sufficient expertise to implement TBLT effectively in their classroom, female teachers ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) demonstrated higher agreement than male teachers ( $M =$

3.83, SD = 0.83). Meanwhile, 8.3% of males and 5.6% of females do not feel confident designing TBLT tasks that focus on teaching grammar, such as relative clauses, however, the majority of teachers showed agreement with this item. Finally, the effect of linguistic differences and

cultural background on students' ability to learn grammar and their participation in TBLT activities showed no significant difference. Both groups expressed similar perceptions regarding the last two items across gender differences.

Table 2: Statistical analysis of EFL teachers' perceptions based on academic qualifications

Items	Academic Qualifications	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	± S.D.	t-Test (Sig.)
1. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is practical to implement in my classroom for teaching grammar.	MA	36.0%	48.0%	16.0%			4.20	0.70	0.35
	PhD	40.0%	40.0%		20.0%		4.00	1.22	
2. TBLT can be effectively used to teach grammar topics, such as relative clauses, to EFL learners.	MA	40.0%	48.0%	12.0%			4.28	0.67	0.54
	PhD	40.0%	60.0%				4.40	0.54	
3. TBLT helps students apply grammar structures (e.g. relative clauses) in real-life communication.	MA	44.0%	36.0%	16.0%	4.0%		4.20	0.86	0.21
	PhD	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%			4.00	0.70	
4. Students are more engaged in learning grammar through TBLT than traditional grammar-focused methods.	MA	52.0%	28.0%	20.0%			4.32	0.80	0.16
	PhD	60.0%	40.0%				4.60	0.54	
5. TBLT encourages collaborative learning among students, which positively impacts their understanding of grammar topics.	MA	44.0%	48.0%	8.0%			4.36	0.63	0.51
	PhD	60.0%	40.0%				4.60	0.54	
6. Using TBLT enhances my students' ability to retain and recall grammar structures.	MA	36.0%	52.0%	12.2%			4.24	0.66	0.63
	PhD		80.0%		20.0%		3.60	0.89	
7. TBLT tasks provide sufficient opportunities for students to receive feedback on their use of grammar structures.	MA	32.0%	44.0%	24.0%			4.08	0.75	0.82
	PhD	40.0%	40.0%	20.0%			4.20	0.83	
	MA	36.0%	63.0%	24.0%	4.0%		4.04	0.88	0.28

<b>8.</b> TBLT tasks allow students to identify their own grammar errors during activities.	<b>PhD</b>	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%			4.00	0.70	
<b>9.</b> I have sufficient expertise to implement TBLT effectively in my classroom.	<b>MA</b>	28.0%	44.0%	28.0%			4.00	0.76	0.07
	<b>PhD</b>	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%		3.80	1.30	
<b>10.</b> I feel confident designing TBLT tasks that focus on teaching grammar, such as relative clauses.	<b>MA</b>	32.0%	52.0%	12.0%	4.0%		4.12	0.78	0.23
	<b>PhD</b>	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%		3.60	1.14	
<b>11.</b> Linguistic differences between English and my learners' native language affect their ability to learn grammar through TBLT.	<b>MA</b>	20.0%	32.0%	36.0%	8.0%	4.0%	3.56	1.04	0.85
	<b>PhD</b>	40.0%	40.0%		20.0%		4.00	1.22	
<b>12.</b> Learners' cultural backgrounds influence their participation and engagement in TBLT activities.	<b>MA</b>	40.0%	32.0%	16.0%	8.0%	4.0%	3.96	1.13	0.68
	<b>PhD</b>		60.0%	20.0%	20.0%		3.40	0.89	

According to the academic qualifications, the results indicated that there are no statistically differences across the 12 items. Both MA and PhD holders showed almost similar patterns of agreement with the role of TBLT in enhancing students' relative clauses. This consistency emphasizes that academic qualifications do not strongly affect teachers' overall perceptions of the effective use of TBLT in teaching grammar. In general, teachers from both groups expressed agreement with items 2, 4, 5, and 7 as the mean scores for these items were high. This reflects teachers' perspectives on the positive impact of TBLT on teaching relative clauses. Furthermore, PhD holders demonstrated broad agreement with item 4 (students are more engaged in learning grammar through TBLT than traditional grammar-focused methods) and item 5 (TBLT encourages collaborative learning among students, which positively impacts their understanding of grammar topics) as their responses were with "strongly agree" and "agree." In contrast, a small number of teachers selected "disagree"

for certain items, for instance, 20.0% of PhD holders disagreed with item 1 (task-based language teaching (TBLT) is practical to implement in my classroom for teaching grammar) and 4.0% disagreed with item 3 (TBLT helps students apply grammar structures (e.g. relative clauses) in real-life communication). As for the last three items, 20.0% of PhD holders and 8.0% of MA holders selected "disagree." Notably, 4.0% of PhD holders opted for "strongly disagree" on item 11 (linguistic differences between English and my learners' native language affect their ability to learn grammar through TBLT) and item 12 (learners' cultural backgrounds influence their participation and engagement in TBLT activities). These teachers might have distinctive perspectives especially when it is related to students linguistic and cultural factors. Although these outliers are statistically insignificant, they provide valuable insights into the nuanced attitudes that may exist within the teaching context.

Table 3: Statistical analysis of EFL teachers' perceptions based on years of experience

Items	Years of Experience	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	± S.D.	t-Test (Sig.)
<b>1.</b> Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is practical	<b>Novice</b>		71.4%	14.3%	14.3%		3.57	0.78	0.93
	<b>Experienced</b>	47.8%	39.1%	13.0%			4.34	0.71	

to implement in my classroom for teaching grammar.									
2. TBLT can be effectively used to teach grammar topics, such as relative clauses, to EFL learners.	<b>Novice</b>	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%			4.00	0.57	0.49
	<b>Experienced</b>	47.8%	43.5%	8.7%			4.39	0.65	
3. TBLT helps students apply grammar structures (e.g. relative clauses) in real-life communication.	<b>Novice</b>	42.9%	28.6%	28.6%			4.14	0.89	0.68
	<b>Experienced</b>	39.1%	43.5%	13.0%	4.3%		4.17	0.83	
4. Students are more engaged in learning grammar through TBLT than traditional grammar-focused methods.	<b>Novice</b>	42.9%	28.6%	28.6%			4.14	0.89	0.52
	<b>Experienced</b>	56.5%	30.4%	13.0%			4.43	0.72	
5. TBLT encourages collaborative learning among students, which positively impacts their understanding of grammar topics.	<b>Novice</b>	57.1%	28.6%	14.3%			4.42	0.78	0.26
	<b>Experienced</b>	43.5%	52.2%	4.3%			4.39	0.58	
6. Using TBLT enhances my students' ability to retain and recall grammar structures.	<b>Novice</b>	28.6%	42.9%	14.3%	14.3%		3.85	1.06	0.12
	<b>Experienced</b>	30.4%	60.9%	8.7%			4.21	0.59	
7. TBLT tasks provide sufficient opportunities for students to receive feedback on their use of grammar structures.	<b>Novice</b>	14.3%	28.6%	57.1%			3.57	0.78	0.62
	<b>Experienced</b>	39.1%	47.8%	13.0%			4.26	0.68	
8. TBLT tasks allow students to identify their own grammar errors during activities.	<b>Novice</b>	28.6%	28.6%	42.9%			3.85	0.89	0.66
	<b>Experienced</b>	34.8%	43.5%	17.4%	4.3%		4.08	0.84	
9. I have sufficient expertise to implement TBLT effectively in my classroom.	<b>Novice</b>	14.3%	42.9%	28.6%	14.3%		3.57	0.97	0.49
	<b>Experienced</b>	34.8%	39.1%	26.1%			4.08	0.79	
10. I feel confident designing TBLT tasks that focus on teaching grammar, such as relative clauses.	<b>Novice</b>	28.6%	42.9%	14.3%	14.3%		3.85	1.06	0.38
	<b>Experienced</b>	30.4%	52.2%	13.0%	4.3%		4.08	0.79	
11. Linguistic differences between	<b>Novice</b>		28.6%	71.4%			3.28	0.48	0.04

English and my learners' native language affect their ability to learn grammar through TBLT.	<b>Experienced</b>	30.4%	34.8%	17.4%	13.0%	4.3%	3.73	1.17	
12. Learners' cultural backgrounds influence their participation and engagement in TBLT activities.	<b>Novice</b>	14.3%	42.9%	42.9%			3.71	0.75	0.32
	<b>Experienced</b>	39.1%	34.8%	8.7%	13.0%	4.3%	3.91	1.20	

Based on teachers' years of experience, both novice and experienced teachers showed agreement with most of the items, reflecting a shared understanding of the benefit of TBLT in teaching grammar. The overall means for both groups across the 12 items indicate a general agreement on the importance of TBLT in enhancing students' relative clauses. This broad agreement suggests that years of experience do not significantly affect teachers' perceptions of TBLT. However, item 11 (linguistic differences between English and my learners' native language affect their ability to learn grammar through TBLT) showed a statistically difference the two groups. Experienced teachers reported a higher agreement (M = 3.73, SD = 1.17) compared to novice teachers (M = 3.28, SD = 0.48), with the t-test (0.04) revealing a significant difference. This finding might indicate that some of experienced teachers are not more inclined to find linguistic difference as a crucial factor in affecting students' ability to learn

**4.2. Results of open-ended questionnaire**

According to the thematic analysis of 30 Kurdish EFL teachers' responses to open-ended questions following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, the answers to the first question "How familiar were you with TBLT before using it in your teaching context?" reveal a predominantly positive attitude among the teachers. Out of 30 participants, 24 (80%) indicated that they were familiar with TBLT before using it in their teaching context. This suggests a high level of pre-existing awareness and understanding of its principles and applications in language teaching through pedagogical training and experience, post postgraduate studies (e.g., MA or PhD programs), or engagement with second language acquisition research. Conversely, five participants (16.6%) expressed partial familiarity with TBLT, while only one participant (3.3%) reported no familiarity. This disparity highlights a small gap in teachers' knowledge with contemporary teaching approaches. They may have had limited opportunities to engage with TBLT in their training or practice.

Concerning the second-open-ended question "What challenges do you face when designing TBLT tasks for teaching grammar, and how do you address these challenges?", the responses reveal key themes related to pedagogical, learner-related, and institutional constraints. A dominant theme emerging from the data is the challenge of balancing meaningful communication with a focus on grammatical accuracy. Many teachers reported that they face difficulties in designing tasks that are meaningful and

grammar through TBLT, while novice teachers have a balanced perspective which reflects their nuanced understanding of students' linguistic differences. Beyond this significant difference, the data reveal notable patterns in the responses to other items. A small number of novice teachers opted for "disagree" on items 1, 6, 9, and 10. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, provided "disagree" responses to items 3, 8, 10, 11, and 12. Their disagreement may suggest a nuanced perspective gained through years of practice. Furthermore, items 11 (linguistic differences between English and my learners' native language affect their ability to learn grammar through TBLT) and item 12 (learners' cultural backgrounds influence their participation and engagement in TBLT activities) received "strongly disagree" responses from a small number of experienced teachers. These outlier responses highlight the diversity of perspectives within the experienced group.

focus on forms, as an overemphasis on either aspect may undermine the task's effectiveness. To address this challenge, teachers provided several suggestions such as: giving students models of naturalistic communication involving the structure of relative clauses in the pre-task phase, designing tasks where using a relative clause form is necessary to complete the task, and providing implicit feedback through recasts or clarification requests instead of explicit correction. Another persistent challenge which influences task selection and design is matching tasks with learners' proficiency levels. Some teachers mentioned that tasks may be difficult for lower-level learners, which would cause dissatisfaction, or can be too easy for advanced learners, which would cause disengagement. To lessen this, teachers reported modifying task complexity, providing scaffolding, and sequencing activities gradually. The presence of students' native language can further cause confusion when learning grammar through tasks and group work. In order to avoid linguistic interference, teachers can move around the classroom to monitor group discussions and praise efforts to use the target language. Finally, it was determined that institutional limitations, including large class sizes, time allocation, strict curricula and pressures from standardized testing, prevented TBLT from being fully implemented. By incorporating task-based principles into conventional grammar education, some teachers address these limitations by integrating task based principles and ensure institutional standards are met while encouraging communicative learning.

As for the third open-ended question "How do you assess the effectiveness of TBLT in teaching grammar, and

*what criteria do you use to evaluate learners' performance?"*, the thematic analysis of teachers' responses highlights a difference between those who see TBLT assessment through performance-based measures such as task completion, grammatical accuracy, and communicative fluency which were mentioned by 12 teachers, and those who emphasize involvement as a sign of success that were suggested by five teachers. Ten of Kurdish EFL teachers prefer summative methods like tests and rubrics, whereas five of them rely on formative measures like peer assessment and observation. The variety of teachers' answers demonstrates the flexibility of TBLT also emphasize the importance of combining qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques in order to fully assess students' grammatical development.

Regarding the last open-ended question, *"What are your suggestions for improving the use of TBLT in teaching grammar more effectively?"*, EFL teachers mentioned critical themes. First of all, many teachers underscored the role of authentic, real-life tasks in encouraging meaningful learning and motivation. They suggested integrating AI and technology-based tasks to align with students' digital literacy. Second, the role of collaborative learning environments was frequently highlighted. Teachers proposed conducting tasks in small groups to foster peer interaction and discussion. Third, several teachers highlighted the importance of evaluating students' proficiency levels before using TBLT. They suggested conducting pre-test assessment that help them understand their students' initial abilities and this can modify TBLT tasks to meet students' needs more effectively. Fourth, explicit focus on form in communicative tasks was recurrently emphasized. Teachers suggested using incidental focus-on-form strategies, structured grammar-specific tasks, and quick grammar explanations to grab students' attention to grammar structures. Fifth, teachers stressed the necessity of scaffolding and providing timely feedback, which are crucial strategies for correcting students' errors and reinforcing learning outcomes. Finally, a few numbers of teachers emphasized the need for professional development. They recommended that workshops and training sessions could improve teachers' knowledge of TBLT approach.

### 4.3. Discussion

Overall, the findings of the descriptive and thematic analysis of EFL teachers' perceptions about the use of TBLT to enhance learners' relative clauses indicate that Kurdish EFL teachers, in general, have favorable attitudes towards TBLT and its practice for teaching relative clauses to students of Duhok university as the mean value of all close-ended items exceed 2.00. Teachers believe that TBLT is a practical and effective approach to implementing relative clauses in their classroom. Additionally, teachers think that TBLT help students apply grammar in real-life communication, encourage collaborative among them, and allow them to identify their own grammar errors during activities. Their attitudes are similar to those reported in the studies by Jeon and Hahn (2006), Tabatabaei and Hadi (2011), and Pohan, et al. (2016), who found out that teachers held positive attitudes towards the use of TBLT in enhancing communicative

competence and student engagement. It can be argued that although few teachers were in disagreement that students' linguistic differences and cultural background may affect their ability to learn grammar and their participation and engagement in TBLT activities, many teachers acknowledge that these factors can often act as a barrier particularly during group work activities, where students might switch to their native language, are hesitant to challenge their peers or take initiative, and are fear of making mistakes.

Interestingly, it is worth mentioning that teachers' responses to the open-ended question indicate that their familiarity with TBLT is consistent with the positive attitudes they expressed in the closed-ended questions. Moreover, the majority of teachers effectively use specific criteria to assess learners' performance, emphasizing the value of contextualized grammar instruction, in which students showed mastery by group work completion; nonetheless, few teachers were unsure about certain criteria because of their limited experience with the use of TBLT approach. This is in contrast with the findings of Liu, et al. (2018), where only 20% of teachers were very familiar with this methodology, and 80% expressed limited understanding.

The results of this study indicate that the efficacy of TBLT is evaluated not only by language use accuracy and fluency but also through the naturalness of communication and the capacity to apply taught structures in a variety of contexts. These results imply that although TBLT offers a meaningful and communicative approach to teaching grammar, its evaluation still requires clearer guidelines and more teacher support. However, in order to overcome challenges that teachers face when designing TBLT and maintain the efficacy of grammar structure within a task-based framework, careful task selection, scaffolding, and classroom management techniques are required. This is in line with Jeon and Hahn (2006) and Pham and Nguyen's (2018) findings, where they found that time constraints, large class sizes, limited teacher proficiency, and inadequate materials can be challenges when designing TBLT tasks. Furthermore, teachers' suggestions for improving TBLT highlight a shift in TBLT toward a more student-centered approach, where the emphasis is on contextualized learning experiences and meaningful communication rather than just grammatical accuracy. This diverse viewpoint on TBLT successfully tackles the difficulties of teaching grammar in a manner that is consistent with modern language education pedagogy.

### 5. Conclusions

The study demonstrates that Kurdish EFL teachers at the University of Duhok view Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a valuable method for teaching English relative clauses. In essence, the findings can be summarized as follows:

- Kurdish EFL teachers hold positive attitudes toward TBLT, recognizing its role in enhancing both real-life communication and collaborative learning.
- Most teachers are familiar with TBLT's principles, though some practical challenges persist in its practical implementation.
- Key challenges include balancing meaningful communication with a focus on grammatical accuracy,

designing tasks that cater to different proficiency levels, and managing institutional constraints like large class sizes and strict curricula.

Based on these findings, we recommend that future research and practice should:

- Expanding the sample size and including multiple institutions to increase the generalizability of the findings.
- Incorporating additional data sources—such as classroom observations or follow-up interviews—to complement self-report questionnaires and provide a richer picture of TBLT implementation.
- Offering more targeted professional development opportunities to help teachers overcome design challenges and adapt TBLT strategies to diverse classroom settings.

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**Appendix A: Teachers' Questionnaire**

**Part I: Personal information**

Please tick (✓) only one appropriate option for you.

**Gender**

- Male
- Female

**Academic qualification**

- Master in English

- PhD in English

**Years of teaching experience**

- 1-5 years
- More than 5 years

**Part II: Questionnaire**

**1. Close-Ended Questionnaire**

Please read the items below and then tick (✓) only one option that you find align with your point of view.

No	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is practical to implement in my classroom for teaching grammar.					
2	TBLT can be effectively used to teach grammar topics, such as relative clauses, to EFL learners.					
3	TBLT helps students apply grammar structures (e.g. relative clauses) in real-life communication.					
4	Students are more engaged in learning grammar through TBLT than traditional grammar-focused methods.					
5	TBLT encourages collaborative learning among students, which positively impacts their understanding of grammar topics.					
6	Using TBLT enhances my students' ability to retain and recall grammar structures.					
7	TBLT activities provide sufficient opportunities for students to receive feedback on their use of grammar structures.					
8	TBLT tasks allow students to identify their own grammar errors during activities.					
9	I have sufficient expertise to implement TBLT effectively in my classroom.					
10	I feel confident designing TBLT tasks that focus on teaching grammar, such as relative clauses.					
11	Linguistic differences between English and my learners' native language affect their ability to learn grammar through TBLT.					
12	Learners' cultural backgrounds influence their participation and engagement in TBLT activities.					

**2. Open-Ended Questionnaire**

Please provide your responses to the following questions based on your personal opinions and experiences.

1. How familiar were you with TBLT before using it in your teaching context?
2. What challenges do you face when designing TBLT tasks for teaching grammar, and how do you address these challenges?

3. How do you assess the effectiveness of TBLT in teaching grammar, and what criteria do you use to evaluate learners' performance? What are your suggestions for improving the use of TBLT in teaching grammar more effectively?

**Appendix B: Jury Members**

No	Name	Academic Status	University / College
1	Dr. Hussein A. Ahmed	Professor	Nawroz University / College of Languages
2	Dr. Alya M.H. Ahmed	Professor	University of Duhok / College of Languages
3	Dr. Saeed A. Saeed	Asst. Professor	University of Duhok / College of Basic Education
4	Mr. Lazgin Kh. Sulaiman	Asst. Professor	Nawroz University / College of Languages
5	Dr. Haveen M. Abdulmajeed	Lecturer	University of Duhok / College of Languages

**استكشاف آراء معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الأكراد حول تدريس الجمل الموصولة من خلال تعليم اللغة القائم على المهام**

**المستخلص:**

قامت دراسات قليلة بالتحقيق في آراء المعلمين وتصوراتهم تجاه استخدام منهج تدريس اللغة القائم على المهام (TBLT) في تدريس الهياكل النحوية. ومع ذلك، لم تقم أي دراسة بفحص استخدام هذا النهج على وجه التحديد في سياق جامعة دهوك. وبالتالي، تساهم هذه الدراسة في سد هذه الفجوة من خلال استكشاف تصورات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول TBLT وتقييم استخدامه الفعال في تدريس الجمل الموصولة. شارك في الدراسة ثلاثون معلماً من مختلف كليات جامعة دهوك، وقاموا بالإجابة على استبيان مغلق وآخر مفتوح لجمع بيانات كمية ونوعية. تم استخدام منهج البحث المختلط مع البيانات الكمية والنوعية التي تم جمعها عن طريق الاستبيانات. كشفت النتائج أن معلمي قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة دهوك لديهم مواقف وآراء إيجابية بشكل عام نحو استخدام TBLT في تدريس الجمل الموصولة في اللغة الإنجليزية ويظهرون الإلمام بمبادئها. كما أشاروا إلى التحديات الأساسية في تصميم المهام ويقدمون توصيات ثاقبة لتطويرها.

**الكلمات الدالة:** جامعة دهوك، معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، منهج TBLT، والجمل النسبية باللغة الإنجليزية.

**ليكولينا بوجوونين ماموستاين زمانى نينگليزى وهك زمانهكى بيانى لدور فيركرنا رستهين ريژهيى ب ريكا فيركرنا زمانى لسهر بنه ماين نهركى**

**پوخته:**

كيم فهكولين بين هاتينه نهجام دان لسهر ليكولينا بوجوونين ماموستاين لدور پيرموئ فيركرنا زمانى لسهر بنه ماين نهركى (TBLT) ژبو فيركرنا بونياتين رسته سازيى. سهرهراى هندئ، چ فهكولين نهجووينه كو بكار ئينانا نهقى پيرموى ب تايبهتى نهجام بدن د چوارچوڤى زانكوبا دهوك دا. نهفجا، نهف فهكولينه رولهكى گرنگ گنرېت و بهشاريى دكهت د پركرنا نهقى بوشاييى دا بريكا فهديتنا بوجوون و تيبينين ماموستاين زمانى نينگليزى وهك زمانهكى بيانى لدور TBLT و ههلسهنگاندا بكار ئينانا وئ يا كاريگهر د بوارئ فيركرنا رستهين ريژهيى دا. سهه (30) ماموستا ژ چهدين كوليزين جياوازين زانكوبا دهوك بهشاريى د قئ فهكولينى دا بين كرين، و رابوون ب بهرسفدانا رپرسهكى گرتى و نيكى دى يئ فهكرى ژبو كومكرنا زانبارين چهندايتي و جورايتي. پيرموهكى تيكههل ژناليى شيوازي يئ هاتيه بكار نينان دگهل ههجوونا زانبارين چهندايتي و جورهتتيى كو هاتينه كومكرن بريكا رپرسيان. دهر نهجام ديار دكهن كو ماموستاين ريزمانا زمانى نينگليزى وهك زمانهكى بيانى ل زانكوبا دهوك نارهزوويين نهرينى بين ههين بشيوهكى گشتى بهرهف بكار ئينانا TBLT د فيركرنا رستهين ريژهيى بين زمانى نينگليزى دا و زانباريهكا باشا ههى لدور بكار ئينانا وئ. لئ دگهل هندئ، ئهه ههروسا ناستهنگين سهرهكى ددهنه ديار كرن د ديزاينكرنا نهركان دا و راسپاردهين باش پيشكيش دكهن ژبو پيشنخستنا وئ.

**په يقين كليلى:** زانكوبا دهوك، ماموستاين زمانى نينگليزى وهك زمانهكى بيانى، پيرموئ TBLT، رستهين ريژهيى د زمانى نينگليزى دا.