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# **An Exploratory Study of Teaching Tasks in English as a Foreign Language Education**

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## RESEARCH REPORT

# An Exploratory Study of Teaching Tasks in English as a Foreign Language Education

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Due to rising demand for qualified teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), interest in issues pertaining to the language proficiency of these teachers has increased. However, research focusing on the teaching tasks that EFL teachers engage in for the purposes of EFL instruction is scant. The present study aims to address this gap in the literature by identifying the teaching tasks and exploring the teaching practices reported in logs kept by 5 EFL teachers over the course of a 2-week period. Findings suggest that the majority of language teaching tasks observed in the teachers' logs were related to the instructional stages of (a) presenting subject material and communicating lesson content and (b) planning, developing, and organizing instruction.

**Keywords** Teachers of EFL; teaching task; teacher logs; organizing instruction; presenting subject material and communicating lesson content; managing classroom activity; assessing student learning; providing feedback

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In most countries, English as a foreign language (EFL) is an increasingly mandatory, key school subject, oftentimes delivered by teachers whose first language is not English (Sešek, 2007). English is increasingly taught not only at the secondary or tertiary levels but also in elementary school curricula in a variety of countries (e.g., Butler, 2004, 2005). Although mandatory EFL instruction has increased across countries and curricula, teachers often feel underprepared to carry out their teaching tasks in English (Butler, 2004), which may diminish the quality of their teaching and, ultimately, their students' learning.

To maintain minimum standards for foreign and second language (L2) instructors, several countries have introduced so-called *language benchmark qualifications* (Andrews, 2003; Nakata, 2010) to test (future) EFL teachers' professional qualifications. As a form of language for specific purposes (LSP) testing, these benchmark examinations primarily assess the language proficiency of L2 teachers in the domain of L2 instruction (Elder, 2001); that is, the assessments tend to be contextualized and embedded in tasks relevant to L2 instruction. Two aspects of LSP tests distinguish them from general language proficiency tests: (a) authenticity of tasks and (b) interaction between language knowledge and specific purpose knowledge (Douglas, 2000). Given these two parameters, the test content and methods of an LSP test should derive from an analysis of the relevant characteristics of the target language use (TLU) domain so that "test tasks and content are authentically representative of tasks in the target situation, allowing for an interaction between the test taker's language ability and specific purpose content knowledge, on the one hand, and the test tasks on the other" (Douglas, 2000, p. 19).

Although interest in the language proficiency of EFL teachers has increased considerably to inform education and assessment practices (e.g., Nakata, 2010; Sešek, 2007), investigation of the teaching tasks that L2 educators engage in for the purposes of L2 instruction has received limited attention in the research literature (Elder, 2001; Sešek, 2007). There is a dire need for an inductive study examining the most common tasks EFL teachers carry out in classrooms as part of an effort to further define the TLU domain of English for EFL teaching (Borg, 2003). Systematically documenting the daily activities engaged in by EFL instructors in different contexts may provide fundamental insights into the teaching tasks these instructors perform.

By collecting logs of the daily EFL teaching practices of five experienced EFL teachers in different countries, this project aims to investigate which teaching activities EFL teachers perform when preparing and implementing their lessons by highlighting similarities and individual differences across the five instructors. The insights gained are intended to inform task selection for both LSP assessments of EFL teaching ability and teacher training programs.

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## Literature Review

The term *teaching task* has been defined in reference to two distinct uses (Ellis, 2000; K. E. Johnson, 2000; K. Johnson, 2003). In the domain of task-based language teaching, it has been defined as a “means of clinically eliciting samples of learner language for purposes of research” (Ellis, 2000, p. 194). By contrast, in the general education literature, *teaching task* appears to be synonymous with *activity*, or, as K. Johnson (2003) puts it, “what we give students to do in classrooms” (p. 4). In this study, we expand the latter conception and adopt a dual definition of teaching task as (a) a meaningful classroom-based L2 learning assignment and (b) a device for structuring and organizing the content and methodology of L2 teaching (Ellis, 2000; Prabhu, 1987). Hence we understand language teaching tasks (LTTs) broadly, from a teacher’s perspective, as any type of target language-related activity performed by L2 teachers, both inside or outside the EFL classroom, in which they engage with the target language for the purpose of L2 instruction. This definition encompasses two essential dimensions of language teaching identified by van Lier (1991): planning and implementation.

Several stages of everyday instruction can be identified in textbooks, teaching guides, and handbooks for EFL instructors (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Bailey, 2005; Donmall, 1991; Helgesen & Brown, 2007; K. E. Johnson, 1999). First, many have emphasized the planning, developing, and organizing of instruction as a crucial theme (Anderson, 2008). Often subsumed under *lesson planning* (K. E. Johnson, 1999), this initial stage includes the selection and sequencing of materials in designing a particular syllabus (Anderson, 2008; Helgesen & Brown, 2007). For example, for teaching EFL listening comprehension, Helgesen and Brown (2007) maintained that L2 teachers need to understand the construct of listening ability when planning a lesson, including the components of the cognitive processes involved as well as the cultural implications that accompany particular listening experiences. Thus teachers have to be able to engage with and analyze (new) texts on a number of levels, such as authenticity, pronunciation, vocabulary, required listening/speaking strategies, or expected student output, to design teaching activities that promote particular listening skills (K. E. Johnson, 2000).

The second and third themes in L2 instruction that are frequently highlighted in the literature refer to the presentation of subject material (or communication of lesson content) and management of classroom-based activity (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Bailey, 2005). The themes are closely intertwined, given that the presentation of content in the L2 classroom shapes the teaching experience and flow of classroom-based activities. The presentation stage includes phenomena such as defining, explaining, unpacking, and elaborating content or giving instructions and guiding students’ comprehension/language production. *Lesson content* refers to anything that the teacher uses, manipulates, lists, explains, instructs, and produces (orally and in writing) during classroom instruction. By conducting these activities, the teacher manages learning experiences and maintains and structures the flow of events (e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986). In reference to research conducted by Calderhead (1981), K. E. Johnson (1999), for example, maintained that experienced teachers “possess a well-organized knowledge base regarding the students and the classroom environment that enables them to simplify, differentiate, and transform information during instruction and also make alternative choices without disrupting the flow of instruction” (p. 57). Thus teachers must make impromptu decisions and immediately implement them during the interactive teaching process. This decision making has been found to increase (a) teachers’ cognitive information-processing load and (b) the “probability of classroom management problems” (Shavelson, 1983, p. 408). K. E. Johnson (1999) argued that to cope with and prevent content presentation and classroom management issues from arising, experienced teachers rely on a “repertoire of instructional routines” (p. 57) to implement instructional decisions (for a list of instructional considerations, see K. E. Johnson, 1999).

The fourth and fifth themes emphasized in the teaching literature refer to the assessment of student learning and providing feedback to learners (Anderson, 2008; Helgesen & Brown, 2007). A teacher’s task of assessing students includes continuous monitoring of the learning process and provision of relevant feedback (Gipps, 2012). Feedback has been incorporated into models of classroom learning. For example, in a comprehensive study of the quality of student learning experiences, Bennett, Desforge, Cockburn, and Wilkinson (1984) proposed a model including teacher feedback as a crucial teaching task in classroom-based instruction. Moreover, Tunstall and Gipps (1996) developed a detailed typology of teacher-induced feedback, including verbal and nonverbal moves to communicate rewards, punishments, approvals, attainments, and improvements.

The major teaching stages and activities in L2 instruction outlined earlier, identified in the teacher education literature and more practice-oriented teacher guidelines, can be summarized into the following five themes of teaching practice in which instructors are continuously engaged:

1. planning, developing, and organizing instruction,

2. presenting subject material and communicating lesson content,
3. managing classroom activity,
4. assessing student learning, and
5. providing feedback.

While these task categories can be inferred from textbooks, they have—to our knowledge—not been investigated empirically from the perspective of L2 instructors as experts. Investigating LTTs performed by EFL instructors in the classroom is a crucial step toward (a) defining the TLU domain of English for teaching EFL and (b) developing appropriate measures to assess language proficiency for EFL instruction. Therefore the aim of this exploratory study is to document the types of LTTs EFL instructors are performing in diverse contexts. The following research questions were proposed to guide this exploratory study:

1. Which LTTs are reportedly performed by the EFL teachers for the purpose of instructing students?
2. Do LTTs differ across EFL instructors?

## Methodology

### Participants

Five EFL teachers—one man and four women—from four different countries (Vietnam, China, Brazil, and Mexico) participated in this study. The geographical representation in this sample was due to convenience recruitment. We identified a total of 20 eligible teachers from Asian and Latin American countries based on several criteria: They should (a) be teaching EFL students; (b) be able to show proof of proficiency on a standardized language test that aids in making high-stakes decisions, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or the *TOEFL*<sup>®</sup> test; and (c) be able to keep a log for at least 10 hours of instruction a week. Of the initial sample, only 10 teachers agreed to complete electronic logs of their instruction. Of these 10 teachers, 5 were actually able to consistently keep logs over a 2-week period. Although the number of participants was small, we were able to collect at least 20 hours of instructional log data from each teacher, which provided rich data. As shown in Table 1, three teachers were from Asian countries, whereas two taught in Latin America. All teachers had university-level degrees in EFL teaching or a related field.

The teachers were from three private schools and two public schools. One of the three private schools focused on both English language teaching and exam preparation. This focus could account for differences in teaching practices, particularly in comparison to regular public schools where English is only one of many subjects taught. The participants' weekly teaching hours ranged between 8 and 25 (see Table 1). Their students' ages ranged from lower secondary school to adult learners.

### Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

We designed an electronic log using SurveyMonkey. Logs have been advocated as an appropriate method to investigate the “enacted curriculum” (Rowan & Correnti, 2009, p. 120), which includes not only the academic content taught in the classroom but also the content-specific teaching practices. For the purpose of this study, use of the logs also offered a practical alternative to classroom observation given the varied locations of the study participants. Moreover, logs were deemed an appropriate method to use over a 2-week data collection window to increase the opportunity to capture teaching practices that might not be repeated in every teaching session (Rowan & Correnti, 2009). A major limitation of using logs after the completion of a teaching session is the faded memory effect. To mitigate this effect, participants were asked to complete the logs immediately after the end of their classes each day. Participants were sent instructions explaining potentially unfamiliar terminology within the log as well as directions for how to complete each entry. Moreover, we encouraged teachers to ask any questions about the log and/or log entries via e-mail. In total, 92 log entries were obtained from the five teachers, covering a total of 83 hours of weekly classroom instruction across teachers.

The log was divided into two main sections. The first section asked for (a) the name of the teacher, (b) the unique ID assigned to each teacher, (c) the date on which the log was completed, and (d) a 300-word summary of the English class taught. For the summary, teachers were specifically asked to write about (a) language skills taught and (b) specific activities used to teach the lesson.

The second section of the log was further divided into five parts: writing, listening, reading, speaking, and grammar and vocabulary. Following Rowan and Correnti (2009), the first question in each part asked whether the given language

**Table 1** Summary of Information About Teacher Participants

Name	Country	Degree	Language of degree	Students	School type	Number weekly teaching hours	Number of logs
Chris	Brazil	Teaching EFL (BA), Linguistics (MA)	English	Adults	Private	8	21
Chiara	Mexico	Teaching EFL (BA)	English	Adults	Public	25	20
Lin	China	TESOL (MA)	Mandarin (BA), English (MA)	Lower and upper secondary	Private	20	20
Yuan	China	Teaching EFL (BA), TESOL (MA)	English (BA), English (MA)	Upper secondary and adults	Private	10	19
Quang	Vietnam	Teaching EFL (BA)	English	Lower and upper secondary	Public	20	19

skill or content area was the focus of the lesson for that day. If a particular skill or content area was selected as a *major focus of instruction*, then follow-up questions prompted participants to elaborate on their teaching practices. If the selected option was a *minor focus*, *touched briefly*, or *not taught today*, the online log automatically directed the participant to the next content area. Dichotomous (yes/no) follow-up questions asked whether specific EFL teaching tasks took place in the classroom. The log included 38 such questions, corresponding to 38 different EFL teaching tasks that were identified a priori by an expert panel (see Table A1 for the full list of a tasks). If a participant chose *yes*, then the online log prompted the participant to elaborate, in an open-ended format, on the specific steps he or she took to complete the teaching task in question. The following are two examples for LTT 30:

1. Describe how you directed or guided a drama/role-play activity. Please provide specific examples.
2. Please describe the communicative context (e.g., school, home, library, shopping, museum, park, zoo, travel, among others) of the drama/role-play activity you directed or guided.

The selection of LTTs implemented in the log questions was informed by (a) the literature—in particular, teacher education literature and practice-oriented teacher guidelines (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Bailey, 2005; Helgesen & Brown, 2007; Sešek, 2007)—and (b) expert panelists from the field of English language teaching and assessment. The expert panel provided input on common LTTs as well as skills that are oftentimes the focus of instruction. For the purposes of this study, we organized the LTTs according to the five stages of instruction identified in the literature review section of this report.

## Methods of Analysis

The five themes, or stages, of teaching practice outlined in the literature review were used as starting points in the otherwise inductive coding procedure. Following Creswell's (2005) multistep design for qualitative analysis, the collected data were first extracted from SurveyMonkey into Excel and then imported into NVivo Version 10 (QSR International) for computer-assisted analysis. Then, the log entries were segmented and coded iteratively for LTTs. Codes were specified in reference to each of the five teaching themes, allowing for detailed analysis of the data. First, we applied the codes to one log entry from each of the teachers to standardize the coding scheme between the two coders (i.e., two of the authors). We then coded the remaining data independently. While standardizing, we resolved areas of disagreement in a subsequent consensus coding. Code definitions were revised to better capture the coders' consensus. In total, both coders independently coded 89 out of 92 log entries, while the remaining three entries were coded together. The overall percentage of agreement in the independently coded log entries was 80%.

## Results

The analysis of the online logs reported by the respondents revealed a number of LTTs pertaining to the five teaching stages. In the following section, we first present descriptions and frequency counts of the LTTs across the five teachers. A specific focus will then be placed on categorizing the LTTs into the five teaching stages identified in the literature review. Given that we organized the LTTs under five language skill/content areas in the log instrument, we also make reference to

**Table 2** Most Frequently Occurring A Priori Identified Language Teaching Tasks Across Teachers

Stage of teaching practice	Task number	Description of task	Frequency
Planning, developing, and organizing instruction	8	Reading published materials for the purpose of selecting resources for instruction and assessment, for example, books, newspapers, magazines, Web sites.	23
	9	Reading supplementary instructional materials (e.g., lesson plans and objectives, teacher tasks and instructions)	18
	1	Adapting written materials (e.g., comprehension questions, reading text, word recognition, matching exercises) from existing instructional materials for classroom use	16
	3	Creating lesson plans or parts of lesson plans	14
Presenting subject material and communicating lesson content	22	Activating students' background knowledge about the topic of the reading passage	26
	20	Identifying the main idea, details, and conclusions to help students understand a reading passage	26
	21	Helping students scan the text for specific information	25
	27	Covering grammatical structures in the lesson	22
	10	Comparing and contrasting different reading texts on the same topic or event	15
	28	Teaching vocabulary	13
Managing classroom activity	12	Teaching cohesion between sentences and paragraphs (i.e., how sentences are linked with other sentences and paragraphs with other paragraphs)	12
	29	Giving directions for students to perform speaking activities (e.g., information gap, narrating a story, describing a picture)	10
Providing feedback	38	Providing written feedback to students on their writing	11

the skill or content areas the particular LTTs relate to. Finally, we focus on the teachers' perspectives, presenting individual, instructor-based usage of LTTs while highlighting commonalities and individual differences between instructors.

### Language Teaching Tasks: Description and Frequencies

The log instrument showed a total of 1,150 cases of task performance reported across all teachers, including repeated uses of tasks within one lesson. These cases were categorized into 49 different LTTs performed by the educators in their EFL instructions (see Tables A1 and A2).

We looked at the frequency of the a priori identified LTTs across all five teachers. Of the 38 teaching tasks, 13 were observed with a frequency of 10 or higher (see Table 2). A closer look at the 13 most frequently occurring LTTs suggests that EFL teachers were primarily performing tasks that pertained to the following four stages of instruction: (a) planning, developing, and organizing instruction, (b) presenting subject material and communicating lesson content, (c) managing classroom activity, and (d) providing feedback. Interestingly, assessing students' learning was not reported very frequently.

### Categorization of Language Teaching Tasks

#### *Planning, Developing, and Organizing Instruction*

Teachers reported the following tasks: (a) reading published materials for the purpose of selecting resources for instruction and assessment (e.g., books, newspapers, magazines, websites), (b) reading supplementary instructional materials (e.g., lesson plans and objectives, teacher tasks, and instructions), (c) adapting written materials from existing instructional materials for classroom use (e.g., comprehension questions, reading text, word recognition, matching exercises), and (d) creating lesson plans or parts of lesson plans. Teachers' descriptions of creating lesson plans or parts of lesson plans did not reveal detailed information about how teachers wrote a lesson plan but was instead an overview of what resources shaped the lesson. The following log excerpt contains a brief description one teacher provided about writing a lesson plan.

It illustrates how writing lesson plans might involve writing instructional materials: “The lesson plan was created long before the lesson starts. Most of the PowerPoint slides are explicitly teaching and demonstrating the demos and samples of introduction and conclusion” (Yuan, electronic log, October 26, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, for the task of adapting written materials from existing instructional materials for classroom use, teachers mostly described what outside materials they used for their instruction without describing how they adapted these materials, as in the following log excerpt: “I collected samples of letters of complaints from online newspapers” (Chiara, electronic log, October 15, 2012).

### ***Presenting Subject Material and Communicating Lesson Content***

With regard to the second stage, instructors engaged in tasks within the phase of presenting subject material and communicating lesson content primarily to cultivate their students’ reading skills. To this end, teachers focused on supporting students to (a) understand the main idea, details, and conclusion of a passage (Task 21); (b) comprehend the passage better as teachers activate students’ background knowledge related to the passage (Task 26); (c) help students scan the text for specific information (Task 22); and (d) compare and contrast different reading texts on the same topic or issue (Task 27).

Furthermore, when presenting subject material and communicating lesson content, teachers reported the use of tasks that were aimed at engaging students in learning grammar and vocabulary. In 22 instances, teachers reported having focused on grammatical structures in the lessons; there were 13 reported instances of teaching vocabulary. When relating how they covered grammatical structures, the teachers mostly described what students did with the grammatical structures, as in the following log excerpt: “Students had a set of 14 verbs and had to sort them out into 2 columns: verb + infinitive and verb + -ing. Then, they completed sentences using the verbs.” Other teachers partially described what they did to cover grammatical structures through interactions with students, as in the following excerpt:

I taught them inductively. First I gave situations with targeted examples covered on the screen. Then I elicited targeted examples with their forms and use Students practiced in pair, using the structures “should’ve done” “could’ve have done” “could do” to express “regrets,” “missed opportunities” or “suggestions” respectively.

### ***Managing Classroom Activity and Providing Feedback***

Although the majority of the reported LTTs belonged to the first two themes, tasks in the managing classroom activity and providing feedback stages were also reported, albeit to a lesser degree. For example, in relation to the task of giving directions for students to perform speaking activities (e.g., information gap, narrating a story, describing a picture), the teachers provided very general descriptions of the directions given, such as in the following extracts from Chiara (electronic log, October 16, 2012): “In this activity you’ll have to use at least 3 new metaphors seen today.” Chiara also reported asking the students to discuss and rank a set of quotations based on their level of controversy: “Students had a set of quotations on controversial topics to discuss and rank according to how controversial these topics are.”

Providing feedback appeared to be less of a focus in teachers’ L2 instruction, given that instructors reported only 11 instances of providing written feedback to students on their writing. One instructor who reported on feedback implementation was Quang (electronic log, October 16, 2012), who explained that his feedback was rather global and that he would encourage students to correct sentence-level issues by themselves; then he would check their self-corrections later on. Although it remained unclear how exactly Quang implemented peer evaluation and feedback, he maintained that he.

underlined problem sentences. Sometimes I wrote comments like “Off-topic” “Make it short and simple” “Write more details” “Write one more concluding sentence” I told them to correct the sentences themselves and sent their corrections to my email which I would print them out and conducted peer assessment the following week. (electronic log, October 16, 2012).

Yuan’s account for the task of providing feedback appeared to be more systematic, in that she first focused on coherence between topic sentences and supporting examples and then moved to more mechanical aspects of the writing, such as language and grammar. Yuan explained her provision of feedback (electronic log, October 31, 2012) as follows:

I gave written and oral feedback to students personally in terms of three aspects. The first time focused on the structure, then checked topic sentences to see whether the two subpoints were well supporting the thesis and supporting examples, then language and grammar.



## Emerging Tasks

The open-ended responses describing how teachers implemented and/or performed particular tasks were used to identify further LTTs (henceforth referred to as emerging LTTs). LTTs pertaining to the following three teaching themes were identified: planning, developing, and organizing instruction; presenting subject material and communicating lesson content; and managing classroom activity. Table A2 shows the list of emerging LTTs and their frequency counts across all five teachers.

In the instructional stage of presenting and communicating lesson content, the following three LTTs featured most prominently: (a) teaching test-taking strategies, (b) referring to the textbooks, and (c) providing individual support. For example, the following excerpt from Yuan's log presents an instance of referring to the textbooks. It showcases how closely she followed the test preparation book. Yuan's log even contained language strongly reminiscent of instructions from a textbook:

Exercise Topic: Children and Lifestyles -Analyzing the question. - Read the task and underline the key words and phrases. - what is the idea you are expected to discuss in your answer? - What should you do if you agree or disagree with the question? - List as many ideas as you can think of. -Studying a sample answer. - Look at the words or phrases in capitals. Choose the word or phrase which sounds more formal by underlining it.

Also, examples of communicating lesson content by interacting with (individual) students emerged when teachers described how they discussed a topic with their learners and elicited students' opinions about the topic. As shown in Table A2, when interacting with learners, a key feature all instructors provided was individual support, such as in the form of reiterating lesson content or providing support during group work. This LTT was not only found across all teachers but also featured very prominently ( $n = 99$ ), suggesting that ad hoc (individualized) support in the classroom constitutes a main aspect of EFL instruction.

Another task that teachers also reported quite frequently ( $n = 70$ ) was guiding students through a set of language structures. This LTT emerged when the teachers guided students' understanding of the structure by modeling the expression and/or explaining grammatical aspects before asking learners to apply the given rule. For example, both the Vietnamese teacher (Quang;  $n = 24$ ) and the Mexican teacher (Chiara;  $n = 25$ ) used this activity quite often. The following excerpt from Chiara's log exemplifies how she discussed a grammatical rule with her students and then encouraged them to deduce the grammatical rule when completing exercises:

i explained the 2 different ways to describe one same problem: my pant are stained - they have a stain on them the jacket lining is torn - it has a tear in it. the tabletop is damaged - there is some damage on the top then i wrote the rules on the whiteboard: subject + be + past participle subject + have + noun then i gave them some flashcards with things with problems and they wrote some sentences based on the drawings.

Similarly, in one of his excerpts, Quang reports guiding students through learning a rule and working on example sentences using *had better* and *should*, as in the following excerpt:

I introduced our lesson by asking "So what's our lesson today?" Students were able to answer the question but I told them there are different ways to give advice, using "should/ought to/had better" -Students then read grammar notes from the coursebook to get the form themselves. -I conducted some drills to help them be familiar with the structures of "ought to" and "had better (not)" e.g. Me: "not listen to your dog" and pointed to "had better" Students: "You shouldn't listen to your dog" -After that I elicited the difference in usage between "should" and "had better" (strong advice).

## Teacher-Based Practices: Individual Approaches and Commonalities

As expected, the frequency and manner of performing the LTTs varied across the teachers. As shown in Tables A1 and A2, each teacher performed the tasks to different degrees. However, certain commonalities between teachers were observed in the data. For example, Chris and Chiara reported setting up interactive classroom activities (e.g., role-plays) quite frequently. Chris reported 23 instances of implementing interactive activities, whereas Chiara's log featured 29 instances

(see Table A2). In contrast, Lin's and Yuan's logs only featured four and five instances, respectively, of the same LTT. Similarly, LTT 29 (i.e., giving directions for students to perform speaking activities) was found repeatedly in Chris's and Chiara's log reports, whereas no instances were mentioned by their colleagues. Chiara, in particular, provided further insights into instructional management steps she took to implement interactive activities, such as "write the script, practice it in the classroom"; "gave them 10 minutes to prepare"; or "1) choose a country; 2) make a poster including photos or drawings of landmarks, foods, etc.; 3) write a small outline based on that; 4) talk to us about it." Hence, while Chiara, Chris, and Quang (to some extent) mentioned the implementation of interactive classroom activities, Yuan and Lin did not. A potential explanation for Yuan's and Lin's lack of interactive classroom activities could be the predominant emphasis on test preparation and the development of test-taking strategies in their classrooms.

In contrast to their lack of interactive classroom activities, Lin's, Yuan's, and Quang's logs showed more instances of teaching test-taking strategies and providing explicit feedback than the logs of their Latin American colleagues. They reported a total of 173 instances of teaching test-taking strategies, whereas Chris and Chiara did not report this LTT at all. Moreover, Lin, Quang, and Yuan reported having provided feedback (LTT 28) to the students slightly more often than the other two teachers. For example, Yuan focused on improving students' academic writing to prepare them for taking a test. The following excerpt illustrates how she provided feedback to correct a student's writing assignment:

Student's sentence: "In the nuclear factories have a large number of radioactive materials, if they are leaked out of here in any event, the ecotope will be suffered the destory, and the whole world will be in dangerous." The student was asked to analyze her sentence by underline the subject and the predicate. Then we discussed the correction.  
Correction: The storage of radioactive substance which poses a serious threat to human health in nuclear factories is a complicated problem. If they leak out of the plant in any event, it will cause risk of catastrophic disasters.

Lin described the feedback she offered to her students when correcting their grammatical errors or assisting them in choosing appropriate terms. She also acknowledged the role of summarizing students' points as a way of providing feedback and encouraging them to participate in the discussion: "Every time after student answers a question, I will try to summarize the important point and encourage student by praising their thoughts."

While some of the trends that were outlined earlier in terms of commonalities and differences across teachers could be explained by the respective focus and goal of their instruction, the data also revealed LTTs that appeared to be preferred by some teachers but not by others. Next, we present the distinct patterns observed within each teacher's log.

### **Chris**

Chris seemed to have her students engage most frequently in speaking tasks (i.e., implementing interactive activities). Given that Chris and Chiara most frequently implemented LTTs related to providing students with sentence starters and giving directions for students to perform speaking activities, we asked them to describe how they implemented the speaking-oriented activities listed in their teacher logs. The report highlights that Chris predominantly focused on communicating lesson content by providing individual support and guidance and interacting with individual (groups of) students. For example, when describing how she set up interactive activities, Chris reported the following in one of her logs:

students had a set of quotations on controversial topics to discuss and rank according to how controversial these topics are. In groups of fours, students worked on asking and answer a series of pre-prepared questions (the slips contained prompts only) Step 3: In a big group, students had to appoint the most controversial topics. There was also room for error correction and language input.

As shown in this excerpt, Chris emphasized oral and auditory activities to illustrate grammatical rules and offer direct written and oral feedback to students. In setting up the instructional activities, Chris also seemed to have relied on resources external to her immediate school context. For example, when writing about her lesson planning, Chris made reference to the resources she used. An example of an external resource is illustrated in the following entry (President Obama's victory speech):

I selected some parts of pres. Barack Obama's victory speech. Students had the following questions to answer: Have you been following the American election campaign? Have you heard any extracts from Barack Obama's speeches? If you have, did you hear them in English, or in your own language? Did you think he was an effective speaker?

### **Chiara**

Similar to Chris, Chiara's instruction seemed to have most frequently focused on speaking and listening activities. The LTTs she enacted in the classroom were similarly related to setting up interactive activities (LTT 48) and communicating content by interacting with students individually (LTT 47). The following excerpt from Chiara's log illustrates how she implemented interactive activities:

1. They worked in pairs and modified the conversation we discussed in the book. Then, they practiced it with their partner. Semi-controlled activity
2. It was a role-play activity. I assigned them their partner and told them who they were going to be. Then, I asked them to perform the conversation and told them their time limit.

Featuring professional language, such as semicontrolled activity, Chiara's descriptions of her lessons also revealed that she integrated reading, listening, and speaking activities, requiring students to use the target language to practice functional language use, such as making requests. While doing so, she seems to have provided students with opportunities to practice language structures through various oral activities. For example, in one of her lesson descriptions, Chiara talks about providing linguistic structures for students to practice how to make requests:

We were working with the different ways to make requests: can you lend me your car? could you lend me your car? would you mind if i borrow your car? the textbook focused on the questions only therefore, I gave them different ways to answer: its ok. it doesnt matter. ok. i do mind! dont even think about it! 0. i dont. Etc.

Further, Chiara, unlike other teachers, engaged in spontaneous or scripted teacher talk using the target language. For example, Chiara describes her narration of a travel story to her students:

I narrated a personal story and then, had all of them brainstorm about the different areas/people we have problems with. I told them about the time I went to Belize and how afraid I was of the bugs there, particularly of Dr. Fly (i wrote that on the whiteboard) then, i described her procedure to bite people \*made some drawings on the whiteboard and introduced words like skin layers, isolated, homesick and needle.

### **Quang**

Like Chris and Chiara, Quang showed a primary focus on the emerging LTT interacting with learners providing individualized support (LTT 47). Unlike the other teachers, though, he interacted with the students to facilitate their understanding and analysis when reading texts. Lesson content, in Quang's case, was mostly focused on improving students' reading skills. For example, in the following excerpt, Quang depicts a brief scenario in which he facilitated students' acquisition of skimming and scanning skills in reading by interacting with them: "There was a discussion about the topic sentences and other key sentences of each paragraph and the structure of the text to help the student better understand the text and practice how to skim and scan the text quickly." While focused on helping students to read and write better, Quang seemed to have guided students through inferring meaning of unknown language structures or vocabulary from the context, as the following excerpt suggests:

Our focused skill today is guessing words from context. We read a text about city of Mumbai in India. One specific example is "...Mumbai (derived from the Hindu goddess Mumba)..." The word we needed to guess is "derived" I asked the whole class what it meant and there was one student who got it correctly.

Compared to other teachers, Quang reported more frequent implementations of peer feedback (e.g., when students read each other's writing samples or played the role of the examiner on a major standardized language test). As students were engaged in this activity, Quang focused on giving instructions or directions. Furthermore, his instruction also seemed to have aimed at teaching test-taking strategies, which were mostly driven by the textbooks or test preparation materials that he was consulting (LTT 43).

### **Lin**

Even more than Quang, Lin reported having most frequently focused on test-taking strategies with her students. While teaching test-taking strategies, Lin often seemed to have planned lesson content using internally available test preparation

resources. In fact, her lesson descriptions are scripted and seem to have been taken directly from an IELTS test preparation book for teachers, as showcased in the following excerpt:

IELTS Writing 1. A brief introduction about the writing section of IELTS. - This test consists of two tasks. It is suggested that candidates spend about 20 minutes on Task 1, which requires them to write at least 150 words, and 40 minutes on Task 2, which requires them to write at least 250 words. Task 2 contributes twice as much as Task 1 to the Writing score.

In her lesson descriptions, Lin also mentioned that she used Chinese most of the time because she was teaching a test preparation foundation writing course targeting students with “little concept in English studying for abroad” (electronic log, October 30, 2012). She believed that the students would not be able to understand the content in English. However, while Lin frequently introduced activities in Mandarin, she mentioned that at times she explained content and provided feedback in English.

### **Yuan**

Yuan focused on improving students’ academic writing to prepare them for taking a test. Most of her lesson descriptions also made it clear that Yuan was also relying on test preparation and thus on externally and internally available resources. Yuan mentioned the website of a particular testing agency to “get up-to-date information and to get the free test preparation materials and tips” (electronic log, August 22, 2012). Yuan also referred to test preparation materials and a test preparation book for a major standardized language test used at her school and emphasized that all passages used in classroom instruction were from this book. Like Lin’s, Yuan’s lesson descriptions, such as the one that follows, seem to be scripted from a textbook or test preparation resource:

1. connect their previous knowledge by asking the student to brainstorm cause and effect linkers. Help him to distinguish some oral and formal functions.
2. Show him two paragraphs that contain cause and effect linkers, ask him to underline.
3. ask him to finish a match exercise
4. present one TOEFL writing question, and work with the student to create two sentences that contains cause and effect linkers.
5. Present another TOEFL writing question, ask him to create two sentences alone

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

Overall, teachers reported a variety of LTTs ( $n = 49$ ) within each of the five stages of teaching. As expected, the majority of LTTs ( $n = 24$ ) that were recorded pertained to the instructional stage presenting subject material and communicating lesson content, emphasizing that the majority of teaching focused on content instruction. The LTTs emerging from teachers’ descriptions of how they carried out tasks in the classrooms suggested that teachers primarily provided grammatical, morphosyntactic, and strategic instruction to their students, including test-taking strategies, specific language structures and rules, and sentence starters. The second set of LTTs teachers engaged in were tasks related to planning, developing, and organizing instruction ( $n = 13$ ), which highlights the importance and prominence of planning for EFL instruction—an activity that could be strengthened in benchmark or teaching performance assessments. The third group of reported LTTs is centered on the management of classroom activities ( $n = 6$ ), followed by assessing and evaluating student learning ( $n = 4$ ) and providing feedback ( $n = 2$ ). Given that activities such as managing classroom activities or assessing and evaluating students oftentimes happen “on the fly” in classroom interaction, the relatively smaller number of LTTs reported for these stages may be due to teachers being unaware of having carried out LTTs in these categories. Classroom observations may be an appropriate way of further investigating the frequency and prominence of particular LTTs educators perform when managing a classroom or providing feedback (Pianta & Hamre, 2009)—a clear limitation of this study due to the practical constraints.

Despite the individual differences observed between teachers and their respective approaches to L2 instruction, the LTTs identified also revealed commonalities across teachers. For example, while some LTTs, such as teaching test-taking strategies (LTT 42) or directing or guiding a drama/role-play activity (LTT 30), appeared more or less frequently relative to the given teaching objective, we found that all five EFL teachers (a) drew upon external resources to inform and/or complement the materials provided by their institution, (b) interacted with individual learner groups in every lesson to provide individualized support, (c) taught grammatical structures, and (d) provided written feedback, among others.

We found that all teachers frequently drew on external and internal resources to prepare their lessons, which requires the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize materials from various resources to establish a coherent material outline for a lesson (i.e., task of planning lesson content using internal and external resources). Moreover, while EFL teachers whose classroom LTTs centered on setting up interactive activities and interacting with students to provide individualized support (e.g., sentence starters) seemed to be employing less textbook-driven language, all five instructors relied on textbook-driven language to communicate their lesson content (i.e., task of communicating lesson content driven by textbook). Although the extent to which textbooks provide scaffolding for instructors might still need to be investigated, this finding highlights a major responsibility for designers of L2 materials, as it shows that teachers (and those with advanced English proficiency) not only rely on the materials to structure their instructional practices (Tsayari, 2009) but also use textbooks as a means of communicating their lesson content.

The LTTs identified in this study may also provide insights for teacher education and language testing. For teacher education, for example, it is important to prepare future EFL teachers for the tasks they will be carrying out as L2 instructors. Moreover, though it remains to be investigated, these tasks may require teachers to have particular target language skills that may be quite different from what is generally referred to as *communicative language ability*. For example, listening to audiovisual materials for the purpose of selecting materials for classroom use (LTT 6) may require different listening skills and strategies than listening to students' speech while they are talking to each other in English as part of a specific classroom activity (LTT 34). Hence the LTTs identified in the present study could be implemented in teacher education to prepare EFL teacher candidates for the activities and language demands of their future profession.

Moreover, among the emerging tasks, three LTTs featured most prominently: (a) teaching test-taking strategies, (b) referring to the textbooks, and (c) interacting with learners, providing individualized support. Given that these LTTs were not identified a priori by this study's group of language teaching experts, these LTTs may currently be underestimated by experts in the field of teacher education. As they seem to feature quite prominently in EFL instruction, future teachers may need to be prepared for these tasks in the course of their studies. Thus the instruction of test-taking strategies, the appropriate use of textbooks, and the use of interaction strategies may require as much emphasis in EFL teacher education as the development of content and (meta-) linguistic knowledge, the implementation of feedback options, and assessment practices. Raising teacher candidates' awareness of classroom-based processes and preparing future EFL teachers to execute LTTs may provide them with a more profound theoretical knowledge of instructional practices, leading to more informed instructional decisions in the field (K. E. Johnson, 1999).

While LTTs constitute one aspect of teacher education, another area, which was beyond the scope of this study, regards the further investigation of language skills that need to be implemented into teacher education to better prepare teachers for their jobs. For example, different LTTs may require teachers to have particular target language skills that may be quite different from what is generally referred to as *communicative language ability*. For instance, reading students' written work to give them feedback about their mistakes (LTT 36) may require different reading strategies than reading a novel or newspaper for entertainment or reading published materials [such as a novel or newspaper] for the purpose of selecting resources for instruction and assessment (LTT 8). Hence, though the LTTs could be implemented in teacher education to prepare EFL teacher candidates for the demands of their future profession, further research may be required to investigate which target language skills and pedagogical knowledge may require special emphasis to prepare university-level students for the effective implementation of the different LTTs in their jobs as EFL instructors (for first studies in that area, see, for example, Trappes-Lomax, 2002; Tsui, 2003).

In terms of language testing, LTTs are important for defining the construct for assessments of the language proficiency of EFL teachers (Elder, 2001; Sešek, 2007). To delimit the TLU domain for teaching performance assessments, this study provides a range of LTTs that could be operationalized as assessment tasks to reflect, to the extent possible, the real-world activities that EFL instructors engage in. For example, benchmark assessments aimed at evaluating EFL instruction could be enhanced by including assessment tasks that reflect common LTTs, such as the selection (and justification) of instructional materials from a number of provided sources. Moreover, approaches to identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing different materials to design and outline a lesson plan—or presenting subject materials to foster the reading strategies of a given group of English language learners—could be integrated into assessments of EFL teachers' language proficiency. Though the themes and tasks identified in this exploratory study provide first insights into which LTTs are employed by EFL instructors, further research is needed to investigate in more detail (a) how teachers implement and execute the LTTs

and (b) which components of L2 proficiency and pedagogical content knowledge instructors need to perform these LTTs effectively.

Owing to logistical and practical constraints, this study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, instructional practices gleaned from a sample of five teachers are not sufficient to draw exhaustive conclusions about the tasks that EFL teachers typically enact across various contexts. However, the different cases presented in this study provide first insights into LTTs across different instructors and (socio)cultural contexts, revealing a number of variables that may inform future research. Second, some teacher participants in the present study focused on test preparation and the development of test-taking strategies. The LTTs observed in these teachers' logs may not represent the regular variety of LTTs teachers perform. Hence additional investigations are needed to obtain a more detailed and comprehensive list of LTTs. A third limitation relates to the instrument used to collect data in the present study. Although teacher logs were a convenient tool for data collection in diverse classroom contexts and for an extended period of time, it is very likely that classroom observations, combined with follow-up interviews, would have yielded more fine-grained insights into the teachers' daily practices, the teaching tasks they engaged in, and, in particular, the language competencies teachers drew on when they were engaged in particular LTTs. The descriptions provided in the teacher logs varied in specificity and detail, resulting in some LTTs that were very specific (e.g., designing activities to provide students with sentence starters) and others that were more general (e.g., teaching vocabulary). Thus somewhat vague LTTs, such as guiding students through a set of given language structures (LTT 41), will need to be further investigated to explore how exactly they were accomplished.

To conclude, this study provides a starting point for further, much needed foundational research into the field of LTTs. Despite its limitations, this study has identified a list of LTTs used by practitioners across a range of countries and different EFL contexts. These LTTs have potential to inform assessment and instructional practices. Language testing specialists can draw on the list of tasks compiled to inform the construct definition for a test or language benchmark qualification for EFL teachers. Item developers can refer to these real-world tasks to implement them in LSP performance assessments, thus grounding the assessments in context-relevant activities. Last, but not least, teacher educators can consider these LTTs in training future EFL teachers, preparing them for what they will face in their future careers.

## Notes

- 1 Note that all quotations taken from the logs are direct representations of the original responses which are presented verbatim and may thus contain linguistic inaccuracies.

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## Appendix

**Table A1** A Priori Identified Teaching Tasks Across Teachers

Stage(s) of teaching practice	Description of LTT	Instances of LTT reported					Total
		Chris	Chiara	Lin	Yuan	Quang	
PDO	1. Adapting written materials (e.g., comprehension questions, reading text, word recognition, matching exercises) from existing instructional materials for classroom use	1	0	4	10	1	16
PDO	2. Writing down learning goals for your students	1	0	4	3	0	8
PDO	3. Creating lesson plans or parts of lesson plans	1	0	4	9	0	14
PDO	4. Creating your own written materials (e.g., comprehension questions, reading passage, word recognition, matching exercises)	0	0	4	0	0	4
PDO	5. Listening to instructional materials to identify specific instructional goals	0	2	0	0	2	4
PDO	6. Listening to audiovisual materials for the purpose of selecting materials for classroom use	3	0	0	2	3	8

Table A1 Continued

Stage(s) of teaching practice	Description of LTT	Instances of LTT reported					Total
		Chris	Chiara	Lin	Yuan	Quang	
PDO	7. Examining and adapting audiovisual materials to support your instructional goals	2	0	0	0	1	3
PDO	8. Reading published materials for the purpose of selecting resources for instruction and assessment (books, newspapers, magazines, Web sites, etc.)	3	0	16	0	4	23
PDO	9. Reading supplementary instructional materials (e.g., lesson plans and objectives, teacher tasks and instructions)	0	2	16	0	0	18
PDO	10. Comparing and contrasting different reading texts on the same topic or event	2	1	10	0	2	15
PDO	11. Designing activities to provide students with sentence starters (e.g., it is nice of you to . . .) or formulaic expressions (e.g., safe journey)	3	4	0	0	0	7
SM&LC	12. Teaching cohesion between sentences and paragraphs (i.e., how sentences are linked with other sentences and paragraphs with other paragraphs)	1	1	2	6	2	12
SM&LC	13. Creating your own sentences in the classroom to explain language structures (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, functions)	0	1	4	1	1	7
SM&LC	14. Performing any prelistening activities to activate the students' background knowledge about the listening material	3	3	0	0	2	8
SM&LC	15. Guiding students' understanding of a listening passage by using "while-listening" activities (e.g., gap filling, listening for main or specific information)	3	2	0	0	3	8
SM&LC	16. Leading one or more postlistening activities (e.g., having students compare answers in pairs or small groups, checking students' answers to comprehension questions)	3	2	0	0	4	9
SM&LC	17. Teaching listening strategies explicitly	0	0	0	0	3	3
SM&LC	18. Summarizing a reading passage	1	1	12	0	8	9
SM&LC	19. Teaching reading strategies explicitly	1	2	16	0	8	9
SM&LC	20. Identifying the main idea, details, and conclusions to help students understand a reading passage	2	1	14	0	9	26
SM&LC	21. Helping students scan the text for specific information	4	2	15	0	4	25
SM&LC	22. Activating students' background knowledge about the topic of the reading passage	5	2	12	0	7	26



Table A1 Continued

Stage(s) of teaching practice	Description of LTT	Instances of LTT reported					Total
		Chris	Chiara	Lin	Yuan	Quang	
SM&LC	23. Providing oral examples of new content (vocabulary, grammar, etc.)	1	2	0	0	0	3
SM&LC	24. Orally paraphrasing text or recorded materials to help students understand	1	0	0	0	0	1
SM&LC	25. Narrating a story from memory or using aids, such as notes or pictures	0	1	0	0	0	1
SM&LC	26. Rephrasing students' speech when they were talking to each other in English as part of a specific classroom activity	1	0	0	0	0	1
SM&LC	27. Covering grammatical structures in the lesson	8	6	1	1	7	22
SM&LC	28. Teaching vocabulary	3	2	1	1	6	13
MCA	29. Giving directions for students to perform speaking activities (e.g., information gap, narrating a story, describing a picture, etc.)	3	6	0	0	0	9
MCA	30. Directing or guiding a drama/role-play activity	1	3	0	0	0	5
MCA	31. Designing activities for various speech functions (e.g., expressing an opinion, agreement/disagreement/likes/dislikes, starting a conversation, making a request, asking for permission, making an argument)	1	1	0	0	0	2
MCA	32. Asking students to find specific information in the listening passages (e.g., specific sentence structures that the speakers used in the listening passage)	3	1	0	0	3	7
ASL	33. Paraphrasing on the board in writing what students wrote or said during classroom activities	0	0	3	4	0	7
ASL	34. Listening to students' speech while they were talking to each other in English as part of a specific classroom activity	1	1	0	1	3	5
ASL	35. Monitoring your students' comprehension of explicit and implicit information in a listening passage	2	2	0	2	1	7
ASL	36. Reading students' written work to give them feedback about their mistakes	1	0	0	0	1	2
PF	37. Providing oral feedback to students on their speaking skills	1	0	0	0	0	1
PF	38. Providing written feedback to students on their writing	1	1	3	3	3	11

Note. ASL = assessing student learning; LTT = language teaching task; MCA = managing classroom activity; PDO = planning, developing, and organizing instruction; PF = providing feedback; SM&LC = presenting subject material and communicating lesson content.

**Table A2** Emerging Language Teaching Tasks Across Teachers

Stage of instruction	Description of LTT	Instances of LTTs reported					Total
		Chris	Chiara	Lin	Yuan	Quang	
PDO	1. Using external resources (e.g., newspaper clipping)	12	2	5	31	8	58
PDO	2. Using internal resources	1	4	15	33	3	56
SM&LC	3. Guiding students through a set of given language structures	6	25	4	11	24	70
SM&LC	4. Teaching test taking strategies	0	0	22	136	15	173
SM&LC	5. Communicating lesson content driven by textbook	3	17	8	99	25	152
SM&LC	6. Illustrating the grammatical rules	14	13	0	33	7	37
SM&LC	7. Communicating lesson content through teacher monologue (spontaneous or scripted)	1	5	4	4	2	16
SM&LC	8. Providing language frames to help students' oral production in the L2	4	12	1	1	4	22
SM&LC	9. Interacting with learners, providing individualized support	16	25	4	37	17	99
MCA	10. Setting up interactive classroom activities	23	29	4	5	16	77
MCA	11. Implementing peer feedback	0	3	1	1	6	11

*Note.* LTT = language teaching task; MCA = managing classroom activity; PDO = planning, developing, and organizing instruction; SM&LC = presenting subject material and communicating lesson content.

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