TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN VIETNAMESE EFL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS: TEACHERS' ROLES IN THE DURING-TASK PHASE AND THEIR BELIEFS

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Abstract: This article explored the roles the Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers performed during students' task work. Data were collected over the course of 10 weeks in a Vietnamese high school where nine Vietnamese EFL teachers and their nine respective classes were observed and audio and video recorded. The teachers were also interviewed after the observed lessons. For the present paper, the teacher's talks during student-student task execution in normal classroom schedules were audio recorded and analysed by microgenesis method. The results demonstrated a wide array of emerging fluid pedagogical roles the teachers played in response to the unfolding task work at hand. The different roles the teachers adopted were underpinned by their beliefs, awareness and thoughts. The study offers practical implications for how teachers could mediate task-based learning in EFL classroom contexts and perhaps in similar settings.

Keywords: tasked-based language learning, Vietnamese EFL teachers, teacher roles, beliefs

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VIỆC HỌC NGÔN NGỮ QUA NHIỆM VỤ
Ở CÁC LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH THPT Ở VIỆT NAM:
VAI TRÒ VÀ NIỀM TIN CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TRONG QUÁ TRÌNH
HỌC SINH THỰC HIỆN NHIỆM VỤ

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Tóm tắt: Bài báo này tìm hiểu vai trò sư phạm của giáo viên tiếng Anh thể hiện trong quá trình học sinh thực hiện các nhiệm vụ nói trên lớp học. Số liệu được thu trong khoảng thời gian 10 tuần ở một trường THPT ở Việt Nam, bao gồm 9 giáo viên được dự giờ, thu âm và thu hình ở 9 lớp học của họ, và sau đó được phỏng vấn. Đối với bài báo này, tương tác giữa giáo viên và học sinh trong quá trình học sinh thực hiện nhiệm vụ nói được thu âm và phân tích dùng phương pháp tạm dịch là phân tích chi tiết (microgenesis method). Kết quả cho thấy giáo viên phản hồi linh hoạt với nhiều vai trò khác nhau trong quá trình học sinh thực hiện các nhiệm vụ nói theo nhóm/cặp nhằm hỗ trợ học sinh học tiếng Anh tốt nhất theo suy nghĩ và nhận thức của họ. Dựa trên các kết quả này, bài báo thảo luận các gợi ý sư phạm liên quan đến vai trò của giáo viên trong việc dạy học qua nhiệm vụ ở các ngữ cảnh lớp học tiếng Anh là ngoại ngữ.

Từ khóa: học ngôn ngữ qua nhiệm vụ, giáo viên tiếng Anh, vai trò của giáo viên, nhận thức của giáo viên

1. Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has recently received increasing attention from researchers and practitioners as it allows learning to occur through tasks (Jackson, 2022). A task is a meaning-focused activity with a 'non-linguistic outcome' that students use whatever linguistic means to achieve (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). In essence, TBLT posits that "the performance of functional tasks involving meaningful language use is the starting point, primary mechanism, and final goal of educational activity" (Van den Branden, et al., 2009, p. 6). In other words, by doing tasks, learners engage in naturalistic processes of acquisition that drive language development (Skehan, 2003).

The value of interaction through tasks has been well recognised regardless of any theoretical stances one might adopt (VanPatten et al., 2020). Teacher help in the form of different types of corrective feedback (Ellis et al., 2006; Loewen & Sato, 2018) has provided useful insights into how to push learners to attend to language forms in task-based interaction. However, corrective feedback represents only part of what the teacher can actually do to support student task work (Philp, 2016; Samuda, 2001). How teachers help through task execution in the pre-task, during-task and post-task stages is useful to inform pedagogical planning for second language (L2) development (Van den Branden, 2016). Some research has explored teacher assistance with language-related or task-related issues when the task is in action, though in English as a second language (ESL) settings (e.g., Dao & Iwashita, 2018; van Compernolle, 2015). This line of research has pointed to the indispensable role of the teacher in creating opportunities for learning through task interaction. However, the tasks used in these studies are

often designed in accordance with the researcher' intentions and purposes. Little research has further documented what the teachers reason about their displayed roles in real life classrooms. Understanding how teachers perform different pedagogical roles during students' task-based interaction in the during-task phase and their underlying beliefs is highly necessary. Such an analysis is likely to reveal important elements of teacher practice and thinking that could inform a "researched pedagogy" (Samuda et al., 2018, p. 15) with a view of bridging the gap between theory and classroom practice. The present study thus fills these gaps by exploring teacher roles in the wider context of student-student task work and their underlying beliefs in Vietnamese EFL high school classrooms, a setting that is underrepresented in research of this kind. In so doing, it hopes to contribute to our understanding of how the teacher navigates the "pedagogical spaces" that tasks allow (Samuda, 2015, p. 278) and address the pressing call for more classroom-based research (Samuda et al., 2018). It seeks to answer these two research questions:

1) What roles do teachers play during students' task work in pairs/groups?

2) What are the teachers' beliefs underlying the roles they perform during students' task work in pairs/groups?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Roles of the Teacher in TBLT

Teacher roles are quite often described in practical guidebooks for English teaching in general (Harmer, 2012) or for doing TBLT in particular (Samuda, 2015; Van den Branden, 2016; Willis & Willis, 2007). For example, Harmer (2012) describes a range of teacher roles such as controller, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, organiser, performer, role model, comprehensible input provider, feedback giver, assessor, and motivator. Depending on the stages of the lesson, the teacher can relax their control and undertake appropriate roles. In the particular field of TBLT, Willis (1996) proposed a framework in three stages: pre-task (introducing task, and topic), task cycle (task, planning and report), and language focus (language analysis, practice). Viewing task implementation in this way, each stage might involve different teacher roles from *leader, organiser, motivator, co-converser* and *language teacher* (Willis & Willis, 2007, pp. 149-150). Van den Branden (2016) further defines the role of the teacher as "the decisions and actions that teachers can (and should) take to optimally promote students' learning from the task-based work they engage in" (p. 167). In particular, he describes the role of the teacher as a "mediator for language learning" (p. 167) in the three phases of task implementation. In the pre-task phase, the teacher is in charge of "selecting content and determining the focus of the classroom activity" (Van den Branden, 2016, p. 167), which requires them to make decisions on what task to engage students in, what kind of input to provide, how much time to allocate for task performance, etc. In the during-task phase when the task is in action, according to Van den Branden, the teacher performs three main roles: a *motivator, organiser,* and *conversational partner and supporter* (pp. 168-169). These three roles are captured in Van den Branden's (2009) words:

> The teacher remains a crucial interactional partner in task-based language classrooms, by taking the role of *motivator* (i.e., launching the students into action by constructing joint projects), *organizer* (making sure that students know what they are expected to do and organizing temporal and spatial aspects of task performance), and, last but not least, *conversational partner and supporter*, as the more proficient, knowledgeable

interlocutor who can feed the language-learning needs of different students in a wide variety of ways. (italics added, p. 284)

While teachers play a key role in learner success (Hattie & Anderman, 2020), surprisingly, the role of the teacher has not received sufficient research attention in TBLT (Van den Branden, 2016; Xu & Fan, 2022) as it should in comparison to burgeoning research on task features and learner factors (e.g., Bygate, 2016; Choi & Iwashita, 2016; García Mayo & Azkarai, 2016; Skehan, 2016).

It is assumedly challenging for the teacher to take on different roles in class work. In the words of Griffiths (2021), "it is not always easy, for instance, to be both a controller and a facilitator, a performer and a participant, but these kinds of sometimes rapid role-swaps are part of what is required of a teacher" (p. 2). This could be even more challenging in TBLT, as TBLT allows for individual (re)interpretations of the target tasks and thus requires the teacher to be ready to respond to the unpredictability that arises while students are doing a task at hand (Skehan, 2003). Unpredictability here denotes that the designed task might not turn out as planned and it depends on how students interpret and realise it. As Skehan argues, this uncertainty can be difficult for some teachers to adjust to, and may cause many of them to avoid task-based teaching. As the nature of teacher roles in TBLT is evolving and dynamic (Han, 2018), performing multiple roles is daunting. It is important to understand how teachers in real world classrooms take on their roles in student task work and why they do so.

2.2. Sociocultural Theory

From a sociocultural theory (SCT) perspective, the role of the teacher could be viewed in terms of the mediation or scaffolding they provide to the learners to induce mediated learning (Lantolf, 2012). SCT, drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978), among others, proposes that human cognition development is mediated by means of social interaction with others, self and artefacts. Human cognition develops and evolves first and most importantly in the interpsychological mode through interaction between people (Vygotsky, 1978). One key concept is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which was originally defined as the level of development that one can attain with assistance which otherwise cannot be achieved without being guided and assisted (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD requires social interaction, especially with a more capable interlocutor such as a teacher, an adult or a more proficient learner. In the SCT lens, the teacher plays the role of not only a more capable learner but also a creator of social environments for L2 development that, according to, Poehner and Leontjev (2022) might not necessarily involve teacher direct input.

Research has shown mediation helps learners internalise target items and construct knowledge starting from other regulation to self-regulation (Lantolf, 2012). Particularly viewed from a SCT perspective, *collaborative dialogue* (Swain, 2000) emphasises the output process as both a cognitive and social activity where interlocutors (teachers and students) use language to mediate learning. As such, according to Lantolf (2000), the ZPD should be "more appropriately conceived of as the *collaborative construction of opportunities*" (italics added, p. 17). In this regard, the SCT is additionally relevant in that how the teacher provides support or mediated learning in the different roles they perform for the co-construction of the learning opportunities in peer interaction is important. Assumedly, the teacher acts upon and responds to a sequence of utterances that come about in students' work and undertakes multiple roles that extend the much-focused role of language mediator in existing literature (Dao & Iwashita, 2018). That said, the SCT aligns with the microanalysis method employed to conduct utterance-by-utterance analysis in the present study, with additional attention paid to "what happened

before and what happened next" (van Compernolle, 2016, p. 176) within episodes of relevance.

2.3. Related Studies

A number of researchers have explored teacher assistance by focusing exclusively on teacher-student (whole-class) interaction in ESL contexts. For example, Samuda (2001) examined how a teacher in one intact ESL university classroom of nine students in North America, created 'a need to mean' first through a task focusing on modality (e.g., may, might, must, can, could). Through the teacher's skilful eliciting and scaffolding, students were able to forge links between form and meaning and use the targeted items more naturally. Also targeting teacher interaction with the whole class, Gibbons (2003, 2006) explored how a teacher mediated language learning from a socio-cultural perspective. Her study was conducted in two content-based ESL classrooms with primary school students in Australia. She found that the teachers mediated language learning through recasting and eliciting clarification. Through subsequent students' clarifications and explanations, the teachers were able to scaffold the learning of science concepts (magnetism) and associated English forms.

In a more recent study, Dao and Iwashita (2018) focused on Chinese L2 learners of English living in Canada and two experienced teachers (one native speaker and one ESL teacher). They drew on sociocultural theory to explain two forms of teacher support given during student interaction: task-related support and language support or mediation. The findings show that teacher support in terms of task management and language mediation through different forms such as recast or repetition helped students in many ways in the process of task execution and realisation.

Researchers in Flanders have investigated how primary school teachers implement tasks developed by professionals, from setting up the task to monitoring and providing interactional support throughout student task performance (Berben, et al., 2007; Van Gorp & Bogaert, 2006; Van den Branden, 2009). For example, Berben et al. (2007) studied how the teachers and primary school students in three schools in Flanders re-interpreted the intended tasks. Gorp and Bogaert (2006) emphasised how teachers supported students in an interactional manner played a role in enabling students to solve problems themselves. Similarly, the teachers in Van den Branden's (2009) study were found to mediate between "order and chaos" (p. 264) as they sought to accommodate students' re-construing of tasks in relation to task requirements and their teaching beliefs. He contended that it is within the complexity and unpredictability of students' task (re)construal that the role of the teacher as supporter, organiser, and social conversation maker is called for to lead and help learners "move about the pedagogical spaces" (Samuda, 2015, p. 278) that tasks provide. This has shown the teacher plays the role of a mediator who supports students' task work in different ways at different stages of task implementation.

Though set in different contexts, and with varying purposes, these studies reviewed here are the important contributions of the teacher in assisting students' learning through tasks. In general, research into TBLT to date has tended to document teacher support in task-based interaction largely in ESL contexts where students use English outside the classroom, and mostly either in teacher-student interaction or student-student interaction or at the most teacher roles in isolation. Little research has explicitly analysed teachers' interactional moves and their intertwined roles in the context of student-student interaction in EFL environments where students share their first language and limited out-of-class communication in the target language.

TBLT has been adopted at different levels of foreign language education in Vietnam (Cao, 2018), with the aims of developing school students' communicative competence and ability to use the target foreign language to achieve real life purposes (MOET, 2010, 2018). TBLT research in Vietnam has largely explored the TBLT implementation in general and found limited uptake of TBLT in the classroom due to students' shared L1, mismatch between the curriculum and high-stakes tests learners' low English proficiency, teacher resistance, thus rendering teachers to revert to the traditional role of knowledge transmitter that focuses on language forms (e.g., Barnard & Nguyen, 2010; Tran et al., 2020). Other studies (e.g., Duong & Nguyen, 2021) demonstrated that the Vietnamese EFL secondary school teachers encountered a wide range of challenges in implementing TBLT in their classrooms. Class size, preparation time, teachers' uncertainty of their role as a facilitator were among additional cited problems. Indeed, these numerous contextual factors have also been found to hinder TBLT implementation in wider Asian EFL contexts (Butler, 2017).

The question of how Vietnamese EFL teachers enact their roles in task-based lessons has been largely neglected. Nguyen et al. (2015) focused on the pre-task phase, and found that the teachers in a high school in Vietnam prepared students for the upcoming tasks in different ways which imply the different roles including controller, organiser initiator, and language input provider. In order to implement TBLT, how to sensitively manage the learning environment is crucial (Willis, 2005). In this respect, research that explores the roles that the teacher undertakes in the during-task phase and teacher beliefs underpinning their roles is highly warranted. The present study thus examines the roles that teachers perform in student-student task interaction in a Vietnamese high school context and the beliefs underpinning their classroom practices.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Nine teachers of English (three at each grade level: 10, 11, and 12) from a high school in Vietnam and their nine respective classes participated in the present study on a voluntary basis. They all gave their written consent for the data to be collected and used for the purpose of this research. As summarised in Table 1, the teachers were aged between 22 and 47 and most of them were female. Five held a bachelor's degree and four a master's degree in Applied Linguistics or TESOL. All had between 11 to 23 years of teaching experience except two new teachers who were recent graduates. Student participants were 15-18 years old and had been studying English as a compulsory subject since grade 6. *Tieng Anh* books for high school students by Hoang Van Van and colleagues were used in these classes to guide EFL teaching and learning.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

	Teachers	Gender	Age	Years of EFL teaching experience	Class size	Gender
Grade 10 (n = 3)	Teacher 1	F	34	11	31	Mixed (16F/15M)
	Teacher 1	F	43	17	32	32F
	Teacher 3	F	22	2 months	28	Mixed (14F/14M)
Grade 11	Teacher 4	F	25	3	46	Mixed (32F/14M)

	Teacher 5	F	24	Two months	28	Mixed (9F/19M)
(n = 3)	Teacher 6	F	42	11	29	Mixed (8F/11M)
	Teacher 7	M	38	15	40	Mixed (19F/21M)
Grade 12 (n = 3)	Teacher 8	F	39	17	27	Mixed (5F/22M)
	Teacher 9	F	47	23	26	Mixed (7F/19M)

Note: F: female; M: male

3.2. Data Set

The larger research project (Nguyen, 2013) shows that the teachers in this context first had students carry out the task in pairs/groups (task rehearsal) and then invited as many groups of students to perform the task in front of the class as time allowed (task performance). For the present paper, student task rehearsals in pairs or groups were audio recorded in the wider context of 45 classroom observations made to the nine teachers mentioned above (five per teacher). Different audio recorders were placed in different pairs/groups to gather the data in different positions of the lessons where the teachers used oral tasks. In total, 48 recordings were reliably audible to be transcribed and thus used for the current analysis of the roles that the teachers performed during student-student interaction. The transcribed rehearsals totalled 247.97 minutes, ranging from 4.08 to 9.07 minutes (M = 5.16; SD = 1.09). Students were involved in mostly open-ended tasks that the teachers created themselves or adapted from the textbooks (see Nguyen et al., 2018). Some examples of these tasks are as follows:

- Work in pairs, discussing a plan for a picnic for the next three days off.

- Work in pairs, discussing your future jobs, why you like that job, and why.

- Work in groups, discussing five essential things to bring on an overnight camping trip.

- Work in groups, discussing causes of overpopulation.

- Work in pairs, doing a role-play between a person who seeks advice to attend a job interview and an advisor who gives advice.

Field notes and video-recordings were additionally employed to further describe the context for the during-task phase and annotate the roles that the teachers performed alongside the audio recordings.

The audio/video recordings were used in subsequent stimulated recall sessions with the teachers (cf. Gass & Mackey, 2000). The recall sessions did not focus closely on teachers' moment-to-moment thinking but aimed to provide a starting point for the teachers to talk about what underpinned their displayed roles as observed. The teachers were interviewed as soon as practical after the recorded lessons. The Vietnamese language was used in all these sessions to establish rapport and prevent misunderstanding. Borg (2009) voiced a concern that teachers might provide post-hoc rationales that might not necessarily govern their practice. To minimise this, multiple-session interviews (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 135) were used to elicit teachers' confirmation and elaboration on what they said. Each teacher was interviewed twice: once after the observed lesson and one follow-up for the teachers to explain and elaborate, totaling 18 interviews for the current analysis. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and was audio recorded with the teachers' prior consent.

3.3. Data Analysis

The 48 audio recordings of student-student group interaction that contained teacher talk

were transcribed and closely analysed for teacher roles in different forms (see the transcription symbols in the appendix). Their roles were qualitatively identified as they emerged from the data and analysis was guided by the taxonomy of teacher roles identified in the literature (e.g., monitor, motivator, resource, conversational partner). The microgenesis method that involves utterance-by-utterance analysis (Guitiérrez, 2008) was further employed to analyse how teacher roles mediated students' task enactment. Each sequence of interaction that involved teacher mediation and student-student interaction was analysed in great detail, turn by turn; each turn was analysed by reference to the preceding and subsequent turns to uncover what was revealed from the teacher talk and their embedded teacher roles with the aim of understanding "what happened before and what happened next" (van Compernolle, 2016, p. 176). Due to space constraints, for illustration, three excerpts that contained teacher talk in student-student task work were randomly selected to showcase teacher roles and how students responded to the teacher's responsive support and mediation to capture the before and after happenings, a distinct feature of the microgenesis approach (van Compernolle, 2016).

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed in its entirety, and double-checked by an EFL teacher researcher for accuracy. All the interview texts were analysed in the source language of Vietnamese in an iterative open manner for themes that appeared. The themes that were mentioned were prepared in a Microsoft Excel sheet for further analysis. Transcripts of interaction between the teacher and student groups, not the whole task interaction were analysed, and selective excerpts were presented to illustrate the points being made. Each role that the teacher performed was analysed in relation to other roles in the wider context of the interaction which unfolded. As such, excerpts of extended discourse with multiple roles were presented instead of individual episodes that focus on one single role as quite often portrayed in existing research (e.g., Dao & Iwashita, 2018). Due to the space limit, only the translated versions of the interview quotes were reported. They were re-checked for accuracy of translation by an EFL teacher and researcher.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings show that the teachers constructed a wide range of roles in the process of students enacting oral classroom tasks in their private pairs or groups. Notably, these roles include facilitator, mediator, feedback provider, monitor, mediator, resource provider and motivator, among others, and were displayed simultaneously in a conversational manner and responsively to the task in progress. It was further found that the teachers navigated their roles fluidly, leading behind and mediating students' task enactment. In addition, the teachers' classroom practices were driven by their well-articulated beliefs about how to enhance oral task engagement in TBLT. Due to space constraints, the following excerpts representatively reveal how the teachers adopted these roles, in response to student task work underway by different groups of students.

Excerpt 1 indicates how a grade 11 teacher, after introducing the task and putting students into groups, moved between groups to manipulate her roles in an oral task where students worked in groups, discussing causes of overpopulation.

Excerpt 1
01 S1: Truyền thống lạc hậu là chi là old traditional à? [Self-translating 'old tradition?]
02 T: Tradition, old tradition
03 S2: Because of old tradition, they don't know family planning. Women have more children ….(…)
In another group

04   T: Speak up! Speak up! Any ideas?
05   S1: The first is old tradition
06   T: Uh uh, because of the old tradition. Old tradition, can you clarify?
07   S2: Because they think they will have more happiness if they have many children
08   T: Really? Anything else?
09   S3: erm… the more the better
      (…)
In another group
10   S1: Teacher! Teacher!
11   T: Yes?
12   S2: Y tế là medical phải không cô? ('Y tế' is medical, teacher?)
13   T: Medical service
14   S2: Not good medical service. Chi nữa? (What else?)
      (…)
In another group
15   S1: Làm chi rứa? (What are we doing?)
16   S2: Đâu, làm chi rứa đâu? (What, what are we supposed to do?)
17   S3: Lý do vì sao bùng nổ dân số (Discuss why overpopulation occurs)
18   T: English, please. Try to speak in English.
      (…)
In another group
19   S2: Help please, Teacher!
20   S4: Làm mới được ba cái chơ mấy (we have just got three ideas)
21   S3: Please three ideas
22   S4: Three reasons
23   T: Ok, tell me the first reason
24   S1: The first tề (Focus on the first (reason)!)
25   S4: Erm family planning
26   T: Family planning?
27   S3: There are not
28   S4: don't have
29   S2: Không có *[translating S4]*
30   S3: There are not
31   S5: Enough a (enough)
32   S3: Families haven't
33   S4: Hiệu quả là chi? (How to say 'hiệu quả' in English?)
34   S1: Effect
35   S3: haven't family planning
36   T: Uhuh … uhuh
37   S3: And second erm
38   S4: Want to have many children,
39   T: Want to have many children
40   S3: Especially sons, many sons
41   T: Yeah, that's right.
42   S3: And three and three … medical
43   S1: Service
44   S3: medical service is more and more developed *[stressing the first syllable of the word 'developed']*
45   S4: Everyday
46   S5: Developed *[correcting pronunciation error, stressing the second syllable of the word 'developed']*

    47   S1: Developed

    …

In her moves in the pedagogical spaces (Samuda, 2015) that the task allows, the teacher performs a wide array of roles in a fluid and responsive manner. For example, as a feedback provider, she drops in one group and gives unrequested feedback 'old tradition' (line 02) in response to the student's use of the incorrect form 'traditional' (line 01). Sensing one student group are silent, the teacher approaches and encourages talk (line 04), thus playing the role of a prompter. She asks for clarification (line 06) and elicits more ideas (line 08). When students begin to talk (line 09), the teacher continues her circulation between other groups as a monitor. Responding to a call for help (an explicit request for an English expression (medical service) (lines 10-13) from another group, she drops in as a resource provider and the provided form is subsequently used in the student's turn (line 14). Her moves within the pedagogical spaces the task allows continue. She also acts as a monitor through reminding and encouraging students to use English (line 18). Then, her manoeuvring keeps operating responsively to another group who explicitly call for assistance (lines 19) by stopping in and kicking the ball rolling by eliciting the first reason (line 23). When students resume and join back in, she then withdraws by taking a less directing role (co-communicator) by co-conversing with students throughout the subsequent chunk of interaction (lines 26, 36, 39, 41). Interestingly, the teacher' repetition (questioning/back channeling) (line 26) triggers multiple turns (lines 27-35) of student co-construction as they resource their performance, though occasionally using Vietnamese L1. Also, by being simply a co-communicator (line 41-*Yes, that's right*.), students have gained an impetus, and continue their task work independently of the teacher's support from line 42 onwards while the teacher continues her pedagogical moves between other groups. Now students fill in each other's speech (lines 43, 45) and correct others (line 46) and their task execution just carries on. Clearly, the teacher leads behind student task rehearsal in a way that, above all, enables "students to say what they want to say" (Ellis, 2006, p. 30). The teacher takes up the mediational role through "*conversational interweaves*" (Samuda, 2001, p. 130) to motivate students to overcome certain impasses during the meaning-making process of task execution. Importantly, the teacher responds to both the message and language being conveyed, though more on the former. She drops in as needed, responds as appropriate and withdraws in a way that facilitates student task enactment. In other words, the teacher tunes in the lead of students and responds to their task work without disrupting the communication flow. Still, the excerpt is illuminating in demonstrating how the teacher flexibly adopts a variety of roles, not linearly but interwovenly, emergently and fluidly. Talking about how her roles, the teacher in Excerpt 1 commented:

> "*I always walk around from group to group or from pair to pair to help students with things they might need, a word or a phrase to mean something; or just some suggestions on task performance if they ask. Otherwise, I monitor by encouraging students to use English, encourage group members to make contributions because usually there might be some lazy or shy students in the group or sometimes just check how far they have done the given task.*" (Teacher 4, Grade 11)

Clearly, this teacher is well aware of a multitude of roles to readily take on and these include from being a resource providing the lexical resource that was asked for to a manager reminding students to use English, encouraging participation from reticent or less responsible students or observing behind. Other teachers are well articulated about their responsivity to act upon the evolving and unpredictable nature of the task work:

> "*I am there, ready to help students with things they want to ask. Although you have to be*

prepared for things related to the task that students might ask, you don't really know what they are going to ask. They often ask you questions as they come along with the task, with what they want to express.” (Teacher 2, Grade 10)

“I move around to see how students are doing and students might need you there to feel 'secure' that there's somebody who follows them, though for any help to move along the task or not.” (Teacher 3, Grade 10)

These comments distinctly illustrate that the teachers are anticipating the variability involved in task work and their readiness to simply 'lead' behind, from being a mental supporter to responding to language-related or task-related issues. Another teacher well identified the source of difficulty and was ready to provide support:

“Students do not necessarily like doing language exercises more than communicative tasks. Speaking is hard for them, this is true. So the teacher's guidance, support and encouragement are needed.” (Teacher 7, Grade 12)

In Excerpt 2, a grade 10 student group were discussing their plans for a picnic in groups of four. It further demonstrates other aspects of unpredictability of the unfolding task where students renegotiate the task requirements that showcase the teacher's multiple roles.

Excerpt 2

(…)

01 S1: Biển X rác nhiều (A lot of garbage at X beach!)
02 S4: Lên núi đi! (Let's go to the mountains!)
03 S2: Y Hill! *[(Y is name of the hill]*
04 S1: Đi cắm trại! (Let's go camping!), camping!
05 T: Try to speak in English!
06 S2: Mấy đứa mình đừng làm hội thoại nữa (Hey, our group should not be doing a dialogue!)
07 S3: Cô ơi, cô ơi (Madam! Madam!)
08 S4: Excuse me! Đừng làm hội thoại được không cô? (Teacher! Is it possible that our group is not doing a dialogue?)
09 T: Erm, in what way?
10 S2: To make erm … a report
11 T: A report? Yeah *[Nodding]*
12 S2: Được *[Teacher said it's ok to do a report]*
13 T: Try to speak in English!
14 S2: Now it's very cold, and we have erm … too much homework, too much have to do at school nowadays, so erm …. today we're very … Nowadays ….
15 S3: Today! *[Correcting]*
16 S2: Today we're very tired with our homework, because erm … we have too much homework, too much have to do at school so we often feel tired. What should we do? ….. My group, include me, P, V, T decide to go to a place, an interesting place to relax, it is Old city X, ah Y hill.
17 S3: Y hill
18 S2: …Y Hill, we're going erm … with some classmates. We are going to… to …
19 S1: go camping
20 S3: Đi với ai? (Who to go with?)
21 S4: Friends
22 S1: Family
23 S2: We are going together with our family. Erm …because … when you go out with parents is safely and you are erm…. an tâm (secure). You … erm … Make sure that …pleased, pleasure được không? (pleasure is OK?)
24 S4: Pleasure là vui vẻ hả? *[Checking the meaning of 'pleasure']*
25 S3: Cũng cố tinh thần gia đình (to consolidate family spirits)

26   S4: Thư giãn đi (to relax)
27   S2: Safely and enjoyable. And erm …we erm ... have a lot of … activities at Y hill, …Y hill is very … erm … is very wonderful, it's very beautiful …. with a river
(…)

Here students start the task with a few turns in mostly Vietnamese (lines 01-04) and feel like doing a report instead of a conversation between members about their plan for a picnic (line 06). After S2 initiated a change of the task genre (line 06), the other members appeared to agree by calling out to the teacher and explicitly re-negotiate the task outcome (a report) with her (lines 07-12). Accordingly, the teacher undertakes the role of an immediate decision maker, allowing flexibility for students to construe the task in their own way and this flexibility or the acquired space students proactively reach out for appears to take effect in the subsequent turns in the students' talk. Lines 14-27 show that a spate of talk is generated as students are beginning to resource their report, even though S2 seems to be dominant and L1 use occasionally occurs. A new boost was observed in students' happy voices as an apparent effect of the fact that the teacher allowed them to perform the task in their own way. Apparently, by responding to students' negotiation, the teacher created opportunities for learning. Concerning her role in this case, the teacher justified:

> "*A group report or a conversation is ok with me in this case. The purpose is speaking, as long as students produce the target language, it doesn't matter. I should let students do the task in the way they want, because if they prefer this way, they will do better*." (Teacher 2, Grade 10)

The teacher appears ready to accommodate different interpretations of the target tasks. She was driven by the perceived key aim of helping students to produce English talk. Accompanying was a central concern with students' preferences and engagement that guided teachers to act. In this case, these students wanted to assign someone from the group to report what they planned to do in the given three days off, instead of all performing a conversation in front of the class audience. Clearly, the role of the teacher here is important in timely giving a go-ahead for students to proceed with the task in the way they renegotiate.

Excerpt 3 below, very much describes the responsivity of the teacher during the course of students' task execution. The teacher was diverging from a textbook speaking task, converting a textbook discussion task into an information gap task, where she split the class into two big groups, one of which discussed problems associated with overpopulation while the other made a list of solutions to overpopulation. After that, she merged some students from each group to form a new group to discuss solutions to problems. When students were doing the task in their private groups, the teacher began to circulate between groups and this piece of interaction follows. Again, she performed varying roles in a responsive fashion.

Excerpt 3
01   S1: Punishment
02   S2: Sinh nhiều con là tăng thuế (Increase tax for those who give birth to so many children!)
03   S1: Thuế là chi rứa cô (What is 'thuế' in English, Teacher?)
04   T: Tax, t-a-x
05   S1: tax … erm increase tax
In another group
06   T: One or two solutions are ok!
07   S1: Sinh nhiều con gây nguy hiểm erm (Giving birth to so many children causes danger)
08   T: Danger
09   S1: Đúng rồi danger (Yeah, danger!). What else?
(…)
(In another group)

10   T: Speak in English! One or two problems are fine!
      (…)
In another group
11   T: First of all, you listen to the problems from this group and then offer solutions
12   S1: Rồi, để bạn nêu vấn đề (Ok. I'll raise problems)
13   S2: Cô, có nghĩa là hội thoại hả cô? Cô! có nghĩa là hội thoại hả cô? (Teacher! are we supposed to do a conversation? Teacher, are we supposed to do a conversation?)
14   T: Uhuh
15   S1: P tề, hội thoại! Chọn một vấn đề thôi hi (Hey, P, a conversation! Choose one problem!)
16   S2: Chọn một vấn đề thôi (Choose only one problem)
17   S1: Ô nhiễm môi trường đi (Let's do environmental pollution)
18   S4: Chọn một vấn đề cho dễ… (It's easy to do one problem)
19   S1: Overpopulation causes environmental pollution
20   S3: Faster and faster
21   S2: Đầu tiên là raise awareness of people, với là … (First, raise awareness of people and …)
22   S1: Make a lot of new sources, source and future sources such as …
23   S2: Chi hè, đầu tiên là tìm ra nguồn năng lượng sạch (Well, first find fresh sources of energy)
24   S1: Năng lượng là energy *[Self-translating]*
25   S2: Find out erm a lot of new energy sources, energy of wind, năng lượng của gió (wind energy)
26   S3: Thiếu đất, shortage of land *[self-translating]*
In another group
27   T: Speak in English! One or two problems are fine!
      (…)

We can see that the teacher functions as a resource in response to an explicit request (line 03) for an English equivalent word (line 04) and to an implicit difficulty (line 06) in mobilizing the English form by using Vietnamese (lines 07-08). The word 'tax' is then taken up and the word 'danger' is confirmed in the subsequent turns (lines 05, and 08 respectively). In other lines (06, 10 and 27), the teacher swaps her roles into a prompter and a motivator by clarifying the task requirements (lines 11-14) and repeatedly prompting and encouraging students from different groups by explicitly reducing the task demand, '*One or two solutions are ok.*' (Line 06), '*Speak in English! One or two problems are fine!*' (Lines 10, 27). Relating to these pedagogical moves, the teacher commented:

> *"The students did not seem to be producing much, possibly because the task was still hard for them; so I intervened, and reduced the requirements. May be confining the discussion to one or two problems or solutions will make them feel lighter. It's good to enable them to speak in English, even less is better than none."* (Teacher 5, Grade 11)

The teacher makes an informed responsive move upon perceiving a limited amount of talk was being produced during that particular task execution. Again, in her belief, students producing oral English output is the ultimate goal that drives her different responsive acts including adjusting the requirements, or reducing the cognitive burden ('make them feel lighter'). It was not only about the amount of English output, but also the naturalness of student talk that the teachers attended to. For this, many teachers were attentive to discourage excessive writing during task execution, as "*Note-taking is good, writing is not what speaking is. I always tell them to speak as naturally as they can.*" (Teacher 9, Grade 12). Evidently, "the teacher's role is not, in the first place, to solve the pupil's problems, but rather should take the form of *interactional support* in which the teacher mediates between task demands, and the learner's

current abilities" (Van Gorp & Bogaert, 2006, p. 102, emphasis added). The teaching process is a "socially negotiated one" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 401) where through social interaction between the teacher and groups, student task execution is mediated in different forms. Lines 10 and 13 again reveal how the teacher responds to each individual group. For this group, she re-explains task instructions (line 10) and responds to students' confirmation checks (line 13). With the teacher's mediation between the task demand and students' difficulty, in lines 15-17, students begin to re-conceptualise the task demand by deciding to discuss one problem only. From line 17 onwards, students seem to be in fuller swing, and communication in English carries on, though with intermittent Vietnamese.

Taken together, the data have vividly shown the multiple roles taken by the teachers during students' oral task work. The process is, in fact, a social activity where all the participants (the teacher and students) interact and co-construct learning opportunities (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Swain, 2001). The findings broadly echo previous research on teacher mediation (e.g., Berben, et a., 2007; Dao &Iwashita, 2018; Samuda, 2001; Van den Branden, 2009) which show the teacher provided language-related and task-related support. Yet the present study additionally essentialises teacher roles not in static predicted but concurrent responsive and fluid forms. Importantly, the teachers were well aware of the space wherein they should move and realise their roles in supportively accompanying students through the unfolding task execution and mediating it. In the words of Nunan (2004), "giving the learners a more active role in the classroom requires the teacher to adopt a different role" (p. 67). That is a reactive role, responding to how students do the task at hand. This points to the complementary function of the task and the teacher, with the former providing opportunities for meaning-making while the latter 'leading behind' and providing support (Samuda, 2001).

Note that the different roles the teachers adopted were justified to be guided by their beliefs, awareness and thoughts. Indeed, in their classroom practices they realised the roles that they aspired to perform as they believed in what worked for students in their teaching context. It becomes salient that tasks might involve unpredictability due to their holistic nature (Skehan, 2003; Van den Branden, 2009), thus calling for the responsiveness of the teacher as students (re)construe the intended task. Each student task execution in progress presents different territories for the teachers to carry out their roles as monitor, resource provider, mediator, co-communicator, consultant, and motivator, etc. It is these roles appropriately set in that mediate task enactment and language learning through tasks. While the reality of task-based language teaching in Asian EFL classrooms presents not so much a strong uptake of what TBLT claims to promote (e.g., Barnard, & Nguyen, 2010; Deng & Carless, 2009; Hood, et al., 2009; Tran et al., 2020), this study empirically provides insights into the practical roles of the teachers to impact upon student-student task-based interaction. "The relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization, can only be realised within the domain of application, that is, through the immediate activity of teaching" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 30). Significantly, the present study has explored this relationship by documenting teacher roles in light of how teachers created, stepped in and manoeuvred the pedagogical task spaces supposed to be for both themselves and their students to enrich experiential learning through tasks. In addition, teachers' classroom role performances were informed by their beliefs in TBLT specific to their EFL teaching context that interactional support matters to engage students in task work and mediate English language production and learning.

5. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusions

The present research aimed to explore the different roles the Vietnamese EFL teachers performed during student task execution. The findings have shown a wide array of pedagogical moves the teachers made in response to the unfolding task enactment. Their timely response and linguistic assistance allowed students to engage and progress in their task work, creating favourable conditions for task completion, and importantly for students' task (re)constructions. Given that students might re-interpret an intended task in different ways (Coughlan & Duff, 1994), responsive pedagogical moves, not necessarily any constant heavy direct intervention should not be underestimated. Equipping teachers with a range of strategies and examples of different types of roles to perform would be useful in TBLT training workshops to benefit teachers.

The task might unfold in different ways as students work on it necessitates teachers to be attentive and sensitive to their students' needs. It is challenging as these needs are not always explicit in the form of requested assistance but they could be implicit via unsolicited help. This requires sensitivity, alertness, flexibility and skillfulness on the part of the teachers to identify what students need at given time points during their task work and fluidly manage their interdependent roles. Timely provision of mediated support (Lantolf, 2012; Poehner & Leontjev, 2022) could move the task forward for language knowledge to be co-constructed as well as learning opportunities to be created. As such they would render themselves *change agents* (Van den Branden, 2016) in the classroom, who will add more positive notes to the feasibility of TBLT in real life classrooms. It follows that teachers' classroom practices guided by their cognition are important for professional development (Borg, 2009; Borg & Sanchez, 2020). Thus teachers should be aware of the importance of the different roles they could perform, and how they should be fluid and responsive. Practical demonstrations through workshops and training would also benefit teachers to grow professionally.

Of course, it is not always practically possible to guarantee students' constant access to teacher expertise, especially in a large-sized EFL class which is not uncommon in many Asian EFL contexts. In this regard, it is important to train more capable learners or group leaders to be mediators who play the different roles of negotiators, facilitators, and language providers among others. Equipping them with a taxonomy of implicit and explicit moves for mediation and support (Poehner & Leontjev, 2022) could be a preliminary step so that students could play a complementary role alongside the teacher as creators of opportunities for learning.

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, it explored the teacher's roles during student-student interaction in EFL classes at only one high school in Vietnam, thus limiting the generalisability of the findings. Research of this kind should continue in other contexts to further understand the role of the teacher. Secondly, the study did not provide evidence of how teacher support helps language development beyond moment-to-moment task discussion in private groups, though the data from the larger project (Nguyen, 2013) demonstrated that these students transferred what they were able to achieve in groups (rehearsal) to their subsequent public performance. Future research could also consider incorporating post-task tests to measure learning transfer from teacher-mediated language/task support in peer interaction. Next, the present study used simple transcriptions of the interaction, further research might consider using conversational analysis (Hall, 2022; van Compernolle, 2015) as a more fine-grained tool of analysis to yield richer insights; video recordings of individual group interaction would also be insightful to explore non-verbal support. Despite these limitations, the original contributions of the present study lie in its central focus on the multiple emerging roles that

teachers take on in facilitating classroom task execution and student interaction, a research area that has remained underexplored in TBLT research. It has brought together not only what the teacher can do to create opportunities for learning but also their cognition and beliefs, highlighting the necessity to examine teacher roles in the wider context of student task enactment and the underlying beliefs that guided their practices.

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Appendix

Transcription Symbols Used in the Paper

Symbol	Meaning
( )	English translation of Vietnamese L1 utterances
[ ]	The researcher's comments/explanations
(.)	Short pause (.05-3 seconds)
…	Long pause (>= 4 seconds)
(…)	Deleted texts
[	Overlapping
a-b-c-d	The speaker is spelling out the word.
?	The speaker is asking a question or raising the intonation.
.	Falling intonation
,	Continuing intonation
!	Emotional emphasis at the end of a phrase/sentence
T	Teacher
S1	Student 1
S2	Student 2