

Employing TBLT at a Military-Service Academy in Korea: Learners' Reactions to and Necessary Adaptation of TBLT*

Kichan Park

(Republic of Korea Naval Academy)

Park, Kichan. (2016). Employing TBLT at a military-service academy in Korea: Learners' reactions to and necessary adaptation of TBLT, *English Teaching*, 71(4), 105-139.

The necessity to adapt theoretical second language pedagogies to a context of instruction has been argued in the literature for a long time. This case study introduces an attempt to realize a context approach (Bax, 2003) to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) implemented at a Korean military-service academy. Considering the alleged need for studies that investigate learners' reaction to TBLT in actual English classrooms, an Action Research project was conducted at this institution. Based on the data collected through two surveys of 80 students, interviews with 25 students, video recordings of 10 lessons and the teacher's observation of the course throughout one semester, this study identifies several challenges for employing TBLT in this EFL context such as the learners' lack of L2 interactions and attention to feedback. This paper discusses ways to adapt TBLT to the English courses offered at Korean military-service academies while cautioning against excessive optimism for the effects of TBLT in some EFL contexts. The findings would contribute to understanding the reality of English classrooms at a Korean college and drawing implications for designing English programs suitable for EFL college students.

Key words: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), EFL contexts, learners' reactions, College English courses in Korea, military-service academies

1. INTRODUCTION

With the spread of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) worldwide, its influence on language pedagogy has become stronger in East Asia. In Korea, for example, the Ministry

* This study was funded by the Republic of Korea Naval Academy Maritime Institute.

of Education has encouraged Korean EFL teachers to develop their students' communicative competence by incorporating learner-centered task-based instruction (Hahn, 2008; Lee, 2005; Park, 2011). The Ministry of Education of China has also urged their English teachers to implement TBLT to overcome the limitations of traditional teaching methods in helping learners successfully communicate in English (Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011). These situations reflect Nunan's (2003) argument that, in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region, "TBLT (the latest methodological realization of CLT, Communicative Language Teaching) is the central pillar of government rhetoric" (p. 606). In addition, through the incessant efforts to raise teachers' understanding of TBLT at teacher training institutions, many EFL teachers in East Asia believe that adopting TBLT has many advantages for their students' learning of English (Carless, 2009; Hahn, 2008; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011).

On the other hand, although TBLT theories have significantly influenced the field of English education, language teachers still doubt that TBLT would really produce the alleged outcomes in their classrooms and that it could be efficiently implemented in reality. For example, Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) point out that many teachers feel uneasy about implementing CLT, which is the philosophical foundation of TBLT (Nunan, 2014). According to them, in spite of the focus on language structures through corrective feedback (Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Long, 1991), those teachers who are not familiar with *learner-centeredness* and the *analytic syllabus*¹ feel that they do not sufficiently provide students with "something concrete and tangible to go home with" (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005, p. 464). Research on language teaching practices in China (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2005) implies that such concerns could be particularly prevalent in East Asia where the influence of Confucian heritage is enormous. In this region, classroom education has been traditionally considered as the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student. In contrast, TBLT emphasizes the learners' autonomous accomplishment in that tasks "will engage naturalistic acquisitional mechanisms, cause the underlying interlanguage system to be stretched, and drive development forward" (Skehan, 1998, p. 95). Therefore, the findings of these studies illustrate the possibility of learners' resistance to participating in tasks and their dissatisfaction with TBLT in East Asian contexts.

Other studies (e.g., Carless, 2004; Hahn, 2008; Lee, 2005; Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007) indicate that students in EFL contexts do not have a sufficient level of English skills to

¹ *Analytic syllabus* refers to a syllabus that "presents the target language whole chunks at a time" and depends on "the learners' presumed ability to perceive regularities in the input and induce rules" (Long & Crookes, 1993, p. 11). This contrasts with a *synthetic syllabus* which "segments the target language into discrete linguistic items for presentation one at a time" and relies on "learners' ability to learn a language in parts independently of one another, and also to integrate, or synthesize, the pieces when the time comes to use them for communicative purposes" (Long & Crookes, 1993, p. 12).

accomplish learning tasks and are not motivated to improve their communicative competence. These studies attribute these learner-related problems to contexts in which students rarely have a chance to interact in English. Moreover, Hofstede (1986) revealed that students in collectivist societies tend not to actively participate in classroom interactions. His finding suggests that many EFL students in East Asia might avoid taking risks and making mistakes while trying to communicate in the English classroom because they do not want to lose face.

However, until now the student factors in the challenges to implementing TBLT in EFL contexts have been mainly drawn from teachers' perceptions (Littlewood, 2007). In addition, the amount of research reporting how students actually behave in TBLT lessons and how they evaluate the efficiency of these lessons has been relatively small (Carless, 2011; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Shehadeh, 2011). Thus, considering this lack of research on the implementation of TBLT, Swan (2005) strongly contends that there has never been sufficient evidence to support the assumed effects of TBLT. Furthermore, even though Carless (2009, 2011) argued the necessity for studies about the implementation of TBLT in various settings, the effects of TBLT in the EFL contexts of military educational institutions have been overlooked. Therefore, in order to expand the existing literature, this study will investigate students' reaction to and perception of TBLT at one of the military-service academies in Korea. At the same time, it will examine whether TBLT really produces the assumed outcomes in this setting. It will be meaningful as a reliable source for evaluating the usefulness of TBLT in an English class in Korea. At the same time, it will also contribute to finding ways to successfully adapt TBLT to the particular context of the Korean military-service academies for teachers who have had difficulty developing ESP programs at these institutions without any guidance for military English course design (Park, 2013).

2. A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON TBLT

It is really hard to define *task* in a few words because it has been explained in so many various ways (Long, 2015; Nunan, 2014). For example, Ellis (2003) regards that "a task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed" (p. 16). According to Willis (1996), tasks are "always activities where the target language is used by the learners for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (p. 24). Long (1985) draws a distinction between target tasks which are "identified as required in order for an individual to function adequately in a particular target domain" (p. 91) and pedagogic tasks that "teachers and

students will actually work on in the classroom, at least initially, until they are capable of tackling the full version of the target task” (p. 92). Despite the diversity of definitions of task, Skehan (1998) identifies five key characteristics of task that synthesize the various views. These are: “(a) meaning is primary; (b) there is some communication problem to solve; (c) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; (d) task completion has some priority; and (e) the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome” (p. 95).

However, although the summarized characteristics of task suggested by Skehan (1998) help us understand the general features of task, these common characteristics do not propose a single way to utilize task in syllabus design. In other words, this wide range of views on task has influenced the emergence of various types of task-based instruction (Ellis, 2014; Long, 2015). Considering this diversity, and in order to more easily illustrate the different uses of task in the many distinct approaches to language instruction, Skehan (2003) distinguished stronger forms of the task-based approach from weaker forms according to the extent of their focus on structure.

FIGURE 1
Two Dimensions in Task-Based Foreign Language Learning
Cited from Littlewood (2004, p. 324, Figure 2)

| | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Task | High task involvement Low focus on meaning (High focus on form) | High task involvement High focus on meaning (Low focus on form) |
| | Low task involvement Low focus on meaning (High focus on form) | Low task involvement High focus on meaning (Low focus on form) |
| Involvement | Focus on form ←← | →→ Focus on meaning |

For the same purpose, Littlewood (2004) also tried to suggest a continuum along which different researchers’ definitions of task could be distributed according to a certain criterion. However, he thought that it was difficult to choose only one criterion for the continuum due to the very complex and diverse aspects of the concept of task, so he suggested two dimensions for classifying tasks: (a) *focus on forms* and *focus on meaning*, and (b) *task involvement*, as shown in Figure 1 above. In this figure, the horizontal axis relates to the nature of a task, and teachers can locate any task on it relatively easily and accurately. On the other hand, the vertical axis represents the learners’ degree of involvement in a task. According to Littlewood (2004), teachers “should aim at as high a level of task involvement as possible” (p. 323). However, as he points out, it is never easy to achieve

this aim. Moreover, the degree of learners' involvement predicted by the teacher before a lesson is not always identical with the actual degree of learners' involvement in the task during the lesson.

In the stronger forms of the task-based approach (i.e., the use of *focus on meaning* tasks) such as the one suggested by Long (2015), the value of learner participation in authentic communication without the teacher's explicit pre-teaching of the language is considered high. This is because the learners' interaction provides them with valuable opportunities to receive the personalized and well-timed feedback that is crucial for their interlanguage development (Pica, 1994). In addition, while engaged in interactions, learners can increase their knowledge of the language through noticing new forms in the input (Schmidt, 1995) as well as the gaps in their own output (Swain, 2000).

In Long's (2015) version of TBLT, teaching forms based on a synthetic syllabus – called *focus on forms* by Long (1991) – is regarded as inefficient because understanding forms alone does not help learners use them correctly (Lightbown, 2003; Long, 1991). Instead, Long (1991) argues for the necessity of *focus on form* which refers to giving corrective feedback on what learners produce while engaging with pedagogic tasks. *Focus on form* is different from *focus on forms* because it does not compromise the value of natural communication in language instruction, even though it requires learners to give some of their attention to the forms of their output. Long (1991) believes that helping learners notice the forms that they currently lack is more efficient than explicitly teaching the structures chosen by teachers. This is because second language acquisition research has revealed that L2 learners do not learn forms in the order of instruction but can learn each particular form only when they are developmentally ready for it (Long, 2015).

In contrast, according to Skehan (2003), in the weak forms of a task-based approach, tasks are “not the driving force for syllabus design; that the use of tasks is an adjunct to structure-based teaching; and that it may be possible to ‘clothe’ structures through tasks without compromise” (p. 1). Thus, in this weak approach, task² is usually used just for practicing pre-selected new forms to improve learners' automatization.

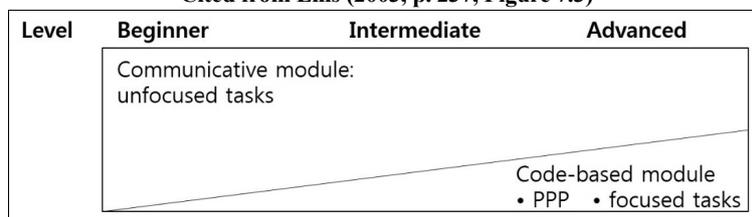
However, when the continuum of communicative purpose (i.e., the horizontal axis of Figure 1) is considered, it is possible to say that a version of TBLT suggested by Nunan (2004) is weaker than the version described above. While Long believes that explicit language instruction before learners are engaged with a given task is inefficient, Nunan considers it is beneficial to present the language model to learners and have them

² Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004) called this type of task *exercise* which refers to any activity in which learners are required to simply substitute items in model sentences provided to them rather than to produce their own messages. Ellis regarded this type of language class – in which exercises are used – as *task-supported language teaching* and distinguished it from *task-based language teaching* (2003, 2014).

reproduce these models while carrying out a controlled task. He also does not disregard the value of the synthetic syllabus unless forms are isolated and presented out of context as they are in more traditional teaching methods. From Nunan's perspective, presenting forms in a communicative context can be done by guiding learners to attend to linguistic elements in their classroom interactions or in language samples provided by the teacher.

Ellis's version of TBLT (2003) could also be considered weaker than Long's. Like Long, Ellis thinks that guiding learners to engage with *unfocused tasks* (tasks that are not selected for the purpose of teaching particular forms) is valuable. In other words, he believes that meaning-centered activities provide learners with opportunities to develop their accuracy and complexity as well as fluency. However, he does not totally negate the pedagogical value of the synthetic syllabus. Instead, he argues that a lesson consisting of two entirely separate modules – a communicative module and a code-based module as presented in Figure 2 below – is beneficial for teaching potentially difficult linguistic content and for helping learners acquire features proven difficult to learn naturally. According to Ellis, even traditional methodologies called focus on forms such as Present-Practice-Produce (P-P-P) can be used to explicitly teach language content. In addition, he maintains that knowledge of the target language can be taught through *focused tasks* such as structure-based production tasks, interpretation tasks and consciousness-raising tasks.

FIGURE 2
A Modular Approach to Designing a Task-Based Syllabus
 Cited from Ellis (2003, p. 237, Figure 7.3)



Considering this wide variety of TBLT, the course from which the data for this study were drawn was designed based on a combination of the different versions of TBLT. First of all, following Ellis's (2003) suggestion, each lesson of the course consisted of two separate modules: a communicative module and a code-based module. In the communicative module, both strong and weak versions of TBLT were employed. The code-based module used some of the weaker forms of TBLT along with exercises for teaching the process of effective writing as well as the linguistic features of particular genres. The organization of the syllabus and rationale for the course design will be explained more specifically below.

3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.1. Instructional Context

This case study was conducted at a Korean military-service academy, a four-year college founded to prepare young men and women to become professional officers of competence, character, and compassion. While studying at this institution, all students (called *cadets* or *midshipmen*) must take at least 6 English courses before graduation including *English Reading & , English Conversation & , English Writing* and *Practical Naval English*. In the English Conversation courses, midshipmen are guided to take part in various kinds of interactions in English by teachers who are native English speakers. The other English classes are taught by Korean English professors, usually with traditional methodologies such as the Grammar-Translation Method and P-P-P.

At this military-service academy, midshipmen are asked to take the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) or the TEPS (Test of English Proficiency developed by Seoul National University) annually. In addition, they are required to attain a minimum score (725 on TOEIC and 600 on TEPS) on at least one of these tests before their graduation. The reason for these requirements is that the military recognizes that Korean military officers have many advantages when they have a good command of English. These advantages include not only better performance of cooperation with militaries of other countries but also more chances to study or work abroad. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the cadets' motivation for developing their English proficiency would be comparable to that of civilian college students.

However, the learners in military-service academies are in a little different situation from English learners in civilian universities in terms of their future career. Unlike other college students, the cadets will all have identical occupations as a naval officer. Therefore, considering the suggested efficiency of employing the *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)* approach for enhancing learners' motivation and interest in learning English (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 2001), it is expected that English courses for occupational purposes would be more effective for the students than English courses for general purposes. In addition, because most of the cadets would not have to write academic papers or deliver academic presentations in English after their commissioning (Park, 2016) or even while studying at this institution, English courses for academic purposes may not seem suitable for these students.

The English proficiency level of midshipmen is considered relatively high among Korean college freshmen. This is because most freshmen cadets' English scores on the National College Scholastic Ability Test are within the top 10% of all graduates from Korean high schools. Thus, although the English test in this university entrance exam only

measures students' comprehension skills, the cadets' relatively high level of English comprehension and their motivation to study English were considered in the syllabus design for the English Writing course from which the data for this project were drawn.

3.2. Organization of the Course

English Writing is a course offered for Korean midshipmen at this military-service academy, and every midshipman is required to take it. The course is taught once a week for 16 weeks, and the length of each lesson is 90 minutes. Class sizes range from 11-21 students, and these students are a homogeneous group who will have the same vocation after graduation from this institution.

Traditionally, the focus of this course has been teaching English grammar. Accordingly, the most frequently used classroom activity was sentence translation, which led students to practice the use of English grammar rules. However, in order to adapt the concept of teaching ESP to this course, the researcher designed a new syllabus in which the primary goal of instruction was to teach the appropriate way to write military documents. Specifically speaking, based on a needs analysis of English for Korean naval officers (Park, 2016), the researcher focused on teaching how to effectively write four genres of military documents: email, naval message, business letter and PowerPoint slide while preparing the students to successfully accomplish given target tasks in their future workplaces. In order to achieve these objectives in a TBLT course, the teacher divided each lesson into two separate modules (Ellis, 2003). Then, in the code-based modules, he guided the students to acquire targeted knowledge through pre-designed classroom activities before a formal presentation of this knowledge, thus employing a *process approach*³ to teaching composition. Even though these activities were learner-centered, they were not all *tasks* as defined by Skehan (1998) because some of the activities did not require students to communicate with others.

However, lessons were not composed solely with activities designed to raise students' awareness of the features of target genres and the process of effective writing. Considering the identified importance of fluency rather than accuracy in military communication and the list of military officers' target tasks (Park, 2016), the researcher decided to also use communicative tasks in communicative modules even though the course was a writing class. Furthermore, the fact that practice writing short military documents does not require as much time as writing an academic research paper also supported this decision.

³ A *process approach* refers to a feature of the syllabus of this course in which the teacher assigns students to write a draft, then get feedback and revise, sometimes more than one iteration (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014).

Before every lesson, students were asked to read short articles or to watch video clips about other navies, weapons systems or the policies of other militaries. In the communicative modules, they were then asked to discuss the topic of the assignment or to conduct *information gap* and *opinion gap* tasks based on their understanding of the input materials. (see Appendix A for an example of the tasks used). The rationale for these types of task is from Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Willis and Willis (2007) who argued the importance of providing students with the necessary input and the efficiency of using the information provided by the input to accomplish a classroom task. According to them, interesting content is beneficial for enhancing students' motivation. Moreover, these researchers maintained that the provided input could be a valuable source for students to learn vocabulary and grammar useful for their own writing and speaking.

Other kinds of tasks were also used in the communicative modules of this *English Writing* course. In several classes, the teacher aimed to help students accomplish several specifically identified target tasks for naval officers (Park, 2016) by guiding them to perform related pedagogic tasks, as Long (2015) suggests. For example, in a lesson in which one of the objectives was to help students conduct a tour of a naval vessel, the students were asked to describe pictures of the school and famous tourist attractions before they described and explained pictures taken in various areas of a ship. In addition, the teacher sometimes provided language samples to the students and let them use these samples to carry out communicative tasks (Nunan, 2004). For example, in one of the lessons, the teacher gave students a standard procedure for ship inspection via radiotelephones and asked them to practice inspecting ships located in different situations. The primary reason to use these tasks was that effective writing was not the only goal of this ESP course. It was also expected that the tasks given to students in the communicative modules could also provide them with precious opportunities to use the vocabulary and grammar rules that they learned in the code-based modules.

For teaching structures in the communicative module, *focus on form* rather than *focus on forms* was often employed. In other words, before engaging in tasks, grammar was not directly taught to the students, although they were allowed to consult input materials. After the students had accomplished the tasks, the teacher then addressed errors they produced, or taught structures and new words that the students felt they needed while carrying out the tasks.

4. METHODOLOGIES

4.1. Research Questions

Although many studies have described the nature of individual tasks, the number of studies that investigate students' reactions to TBLT courses in the setting of the natural language classroom is not great. Thus, considering this gap in the literature on TBLT, Carless (2012) strongly argued the necessity of "detailed qualitative accounts of what is really taking place in classrooms in which the teacher is trying to implement some version of TBLT" (p. 355).

Moreover, among the identified studies that have investigated this issue (Eguchi & Eguchi, 2006; Lee, 2005; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007), none was conducted for Korean college students. In addition, while some of the researchers (e.g., McDonough & Chaikitmongkil, 2007) presented learners' positive perceptions of TBLT in Thailand, others (e.g., Eguchi & Eguchi, 2006; Lee, 2005) documented challenges for implementing this approach in other EFL contexts. Thus, it is difficult to predict how Korean cadets would evaluate the value of TBLT employed in their English courses. Therefore, keeping these purposes in mind, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do the cadets behave in a TBLT course?
2. To what extent do the students appreciate communicative tasks?
3. Do student interactions present evidence for the hypothesized process of language acquisition in an EFL context?

4.2. Data Collection

Carless (2012) contends that qualitative research involving naturalistic classroom observations and associated interviews with participants is necessary because he believes that this type of study can contribute to advancing the research on TBLT in EFL settings. Therefore, this researcher has designed this study following Carless's suggestion. The researcher then planned to administer two surveys to fill potential gaps in the qualitative data with quantitative statistics.

The data for this study were collected in the *English Writing* course offered for sophomores. This course was taught by the researcher in five separate classes, and the total number of students who took the course was 80.

Two surveys were administered, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the semester, to check for changes in the students' attitudes toward the course. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher explained the purpose of the surveys and

asked the students to participate voluntarily. For that reason, not all the students took part in the surveys. The first questionnaire was designed to investigate the students' expectations for the course. The second questionnaire was developed based on the first one to additionally examine the sophomores' perception of the TBLT that they had experienced (See Appendix B for the questionnaires).

In order to objectively observe student interactions in the classroom, two lessons in each of the five classes were video-recorded. The first recording was made in the third week, and the other was recorded in the twelfth week. The original intention was to compare these two videos to determine whether the students' reactions in the TBLT course had changed over time. McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) reported a change of Thai college students' attitude toward a TBLT over a year, but their argument depended only on the participants' perception presented in interviews conducted and written notes made at the end of the academic year. Because these sources of data do not provide observable evidence of change, this researcher designed a study method whereby this gap in the literature could be filled. However, the teacher/researcher recognized none of the significant changes in behavior that were observed at a Thai university by McDonough & Chaikitmongkol (2007). Therefore, thinking that comparing the two lessons would not be very meaningful, the researcher changed the original plan. Instead, the researcher gave students a describe-a-picture task in the twelfth week lesson in order to elicit samples of student interaction, even though this task was not very closely related to the course objectives (see Appendix C for the picture for this task). These samples were expected to be usefully exploited to examine whether the student interaction in this EFL context entails evidence of language acquisition like that reported in other studies in other contexts (Varonis & Gass, 1985; Pica, 1994).

Even though the anonymous surveys were beneficial for gathering quantitative data and for exploring sensitive issues such as the students' honest opinions on the course, observations from the surveys were limited to the answers to the questions (Brown, 2001). Therefore, in order to obtain information beyond what the questions required, semi-structured interviews were conducted. For these interviews, the researcher introduced this project in one of the lessons and recruited volunteers who wanted to share their opinions on the course with the researcher. A large number of students volunteered to take part in the interviews, but the researcher selected only five students from each class due to time limitations. The interviews were conducted from the eleventh to the fourteenth week of the semester, so the researcher knew the extent to which each volunteer had taken part in classroom interactions. Thus, in order to collect data from both active learners and quiet learners, the researcher carefully selected participants of both types from the pool of volunteers. The interviewees from each class were interviewed collectively due to their tight schedule, and an interview for each group took about one and a half hours on average.

All the interviews were audio-recorded by the participants' agreement. Since it was a group interview of five students, it was possible that some participants' ideas could be affected by other students' opinions. On the other hand, because they were interviewed together, the participants seemed to feel comfortable presenting their thoughts freely. Moreover, the group format allowed students to develop and elaborate on their ideas together, giving the researcher a more complete and nuanced picture of their distinctive opinions.

Along with all of these methods for data collection, the teacher/researcher also wrote observation notes at the end of each lesson that could be used as a good source of information for Action Research (Burns, 2010). In these notes, the teacher recorded unexpected and impressive student reactions in the classroom in a descriptive and narrative style to reflect the lessons that he taught.

4.3. Analysis

For analysis of the data from the surveys, the researcher entered all the information obtained from the questionnaires into the researcher's personal computer and saved it as an XML document. He then carefully read the results to determine the targeted information. Several questions had been developed as open-response questions in order not to limit the participants' opinions to a range of pre-selected categories (Brown, 2001). When analyzing these responses, the answers were coded into more general, encompassing categories identified through the researcher's examination of the data.

The strategy of analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) was adopted to analyze the qualitative data. Thus, the coding categories for this project were not predetermined but rather emerged from examining the data. For data analysis of the interviews, the researcher transcribed all the participants' answers to the interview questions in Korean and saved them as a DOC file. Then, while repeatedly watching the recorded lessons and reading the transcripts of interviews and observation notes, the researcher identified and noted recurrent themes and salient comments. In order to minimize the influence of the researcher's prejudice and misinterpretation of the interview data, quotations are used in the findings section to allow readers to judge for themselves the answers made by interviewees. The themes subsumed under some of the categories are presented below.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Students' Desires for English Courses Before and After Taking the Course

It has been widely acknowledged that public assessment systems (standardized tests) present a great challenge for implementing CLT because the demands of these systems are not compatible with what CLT and TBLT pursue (Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007; Park, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011). At the institution in which this study was conducted, the students are asked to submit a transcript from the TOEIC or the TEPS annually. There is also an exit requirement related to these standardized English proficiency tests, so no student is allowed to graduate unless he or she gets a higher score than the minimum. Moreover, many students know that they will have better career opportunities after commissioning if they can attain a higher score than other officers on these standardized tests. In this situation, it was estimated that students are not much interested in developing their productive skills because the high-stakes tests measure only their comprehension skills.

For that reason, in order to objectively determine the degree of influence of this institutional factor, students were given an open-response survey question at both the beginning and in the end of the semester asking what they wanted to learn in the English courses offered at the college. Because it was an open-response question that was designed to not limit the students' opinions with pre-selected options, several students wrote multiple answers. Thus, all of these multiple answers were counted when analyzing the data. When interpreting the data, although the students' answer "English conversation" could include the desire to develop their listening skill, this answer was not counted as "listening." This was because this answer seemed to relate more to a desire to develop their speaking skills in a general sense. Table 1 shows what students wanted at the beginning and end of the semester. The discrepancy between the number of participants in the two surveys occurred because the researcher asked the students to take part voluntarily.

In EFL contexts, many teachers worry that learners would dislike a course that is not oriented to their high-stake examinations (Shim & Baik, 2004). Although it is not valid to conclude that TBLT is unsuitable for learners preparing for an exam (Willis & Willis, 2007), this is the reason why traditional norm-referenced, summative, vocabulary and grammar focused standardized tests are regarded as such a great challenge for the implementation of TBLT (Li, 1998; Shehadeh, 2011). Fortunately, however, Table 1 below illustrates that negative washback from standardized English tests is not very great at this military-service academy. The majority of participants in the first survey noted that they wanted to take "English conversation" or "Speaking" classes. In addition, many students still wanted to improve their English conversation and speaking skills even after

taking the course. These data show that students might not be demotivated to take a course or lose their interest in it just because it does not seriously address the standardized tests. Furthermore, considering Korean naval officers' similar wants for developing oral fluency more than the comprehension and grammar skills that are necessary for getting good scores on standardized English proficiency tests (Park, 2016), TBLT classes that focus on improving actual communication skills seemed appropriate in terms of addressing the learners' current and future wants.

TABLE 1
Students' Wants for the English Courses Offered at the College

| Students' wants for the course | No. of respondents (Percentage of the respondents) | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| | At the beginning of the semester (<i>n</i> = 60) | At the end of the semester (<i>n</i> = 80) |
| English conversation or speaking | 49 (81.7%) | 63 (78.8%) |
| TOEIC or TEPS | 13 (21.7%) | 13 (16.3%) |
| Writing | 5 (8.4%) | 2 (2.5%) |
| Reading | 4 (6.7%) | 1 (1.3%) |
| Grammar | 1 (1.7%) | 0 |
| Listening | 1 (1.7%) | 2 (2.5%) |
| Vocabulary | 1 (1.7%) | 0 |
| American and British culture | 0 | 2 (2.5%) |
| Military / Naval English | 0 | 2 (2.5%) |

5.2. Students' Overall Impression of the Course

TABLE 2
Students' Perception of the Course (*n* = 80)

| Question | Very little | A bit little | Normal | A bit much | Very much | No answer | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|-------------|--------------|--------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| How much were you satisfied with the contents of the course? | 0% | 1.3% | 7.5% | 40.0% | 48.8% | 2.5% | 4.40 | 0.69 |
| How beneficial for improving your writing skill was the process approach employed in this course? | 0% | 11.3% | 27.5% | 42.5% | 18.8% | 0% | 3.69 | 0.91 |
| How beneficial do you believe the communicative tasks provided to you were for improving your communication skills? | 1.3% | 12.5% | 15.0% | 36.3% | 31.3% | 3.8% | 3.87 | 1.06 |

The survey administered at the end of the semester asked the students several questions examining their perceptions of the course. Table 2 presents the results of this survey. One thing that should be noted here is that, unlike Hadi (2013), I did not solely rely on the students' responses in the survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the course. This is because, while the information from the survey was not meaningless to understand the

students' overall impression of the course, it did not seem valid to regard it as the only evidence proving the efficiency of the approaches taken in the course. It seemed also risky to consider this information an exact representation of the students' perceptions drawn from their deep reflection because the participants had answered the questionnaire within very short time. Therefore, while regarding this information as a useful source, I tried to double-check and confirm the findings from the survey through qualitative data obtained from the interviews, video recordings and teacher observation notes. How the gathered data were interpreted is discussed in detail below.

5.3. Learners' Satisfaction with the Contents of the ESP Course

Most students responded that they really liked the contents of the course. According to the survey, 88.8% of the participants responded that they were a bit or very much satisfied with the course contents. In the interviews, one interviewee said, "I believe that our practice writing the four genres of documents would be really helpful for me when I need to write such texts in reality." Another interviewee mentioned, "lessons dealing with topics related to our jobs made me feel more interest in learning the contents of the course." These answers support the claim that course content clearly relevant to the English learners' needs improves their motivation and makes learning better and faster (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Long, 2015; Nunan, 2014; Robinson, 2001).

5.4. A Process Approach for Improving Writing Skill

Process approaches refer to pedagogies that "devote attention to procedures for identifying and solving problems, discovering novel ideas, expressing them in writing, and emergent texts" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014, p. 65). These approaches are contrasted with more traditional product-oriented instruction in which teachers "define a rhetoric form, pattern, or *mode*, such as comparison and contrast, in terms of rather rigidly prescribed rules or formulae" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014, p. 63) by analyzing influential literary sources. Although process approaches are not perfect because learners also require knowledge of genre and grammar (Hyland, 2002), Markee (1996) introduced an effective ESL writing course offered at a U.S. university in which learners could have many opportunities to improve their writing skill by experiencing the writing process while engaged with carefully designed classroom activities and homework. Therefore, in order to see whether these approaches could be effective even for Korean students, a process approach was employed in the course from which the data for this study were drawn.

Therefore, in this course for cadets, the teacher sometimes asked the students to plan, draft, read and revise their writing. After experiencing this type of instruction, more than

60% of the students responded in the survey that they believed these activities were “a bit” or “very much” helpful for improving their writing skill as illustrated in Table 2 above. In the interviews, several students mentioned that they believed the student-centered activities they had experienced in the course would be beneficial for them.

However, even though the statistics show that many students perceived student-centered activities positively, one thing that should not be disregarded is that their degree of satisfaction with this type of activity is not as great as their satisfaction with the course contents. As illustrated in Table 2, approximately 40% of the students replied that they were not very sure about the effect of the student-centered activities they had experienced in the lessons. In addition, the mean score of the students’ answers to this question was not as high as that of their satisfaction with the course contents. Furthermore, the researcher witnessed that many of the students did not eagerly participate in the classroom activities provided in the lessons. The reasons why they did not consider the process approach effective could be identified through their interview responses.

In the interviews, eight students indicated that they were not very motivated to carry out activities given by the teacher even though they knew that it might be helpful for them to be engaged with these activities. For example, a learner answered:

I think it would be good to practice writing in the classroom. However, I am not sure the reason, but I usually could not concentrate on it when I was required to do that in the middle of lessons. I sometimes actually didn't do anything meaningful when the teacher gave time for writing.

In particular, two of students replied that their lack of motivation to perform writing activities might be due to the classroom culture to which they were very accustomed. This is well represented by a learner’s comment:

I had usually been expected to passively accept the provided knowledge not only in the English classes I had experienced before but also in most of the other courses offered at the current institution. For that reason, although I think it is not useless that teachers make us do something in the classroom, I am not sure what I could actually learn in this type of class. I feel that some knowledge could be learnt faster and more easily when teachers explicitly teach it in lectures.

Moreover, another student answered, “I think the given tasks were sometimes very annoying because performing them made me feel much more uncomfortable than passively listening to a teacher’s lecture.”

Another five participants left similar comments. They mentioned that it was difficult for them to put much energy into the classroom activities because they were usually tired during class. These students pointed out that their busy life was an important reason why they could not pay much attention to conducting tasks that required a lot of mental energy as represented well in a student's remark: "I had often already been physically exhausted when I arrived at the classroom because midshipmen's life starts very early in the morning and they have to do various activities before class hours. Therefore, I could not do well writing tasks that required my concentration."

Another two students reported that they did not have much willingness to experience the writing process because they expected that the teacher would summarize important points soon, even though they did not find answers by themselves. One student added, "I feel not only I but also many other students consider only the points taught by the teacher as important because only this knowledge would be tested on the mid-term and final exams." All of these comments imply that the effectiveness of process approaches to writing instruction might not be as great as it is argued in the literature, at least in this EFL context.

5.5. Usefulness of Tasks for Improving Oral Communication Skill

Nunan (2004) argues, "if the learners have been conditioned by years of instruction through a synthetic approach, they may question the legitimacy of a program based on an analytic view of language learning" (p. 15). He also believes that students' negative view of the course they are taking could influence their learning outcome. For this reason, the learners' perception of tasks was also investigated in this study.

Although more than two thirds of the participants in the survey (67.6%) replied that tasks were *a bit much* or *very much* useful for improving their oral communication skill, a third of the interviewees expressed their doubts about the effectiveness of tasks. For example, a student answered, "I do not think my English skills have improved significantly for having engaged with tasks in the classroom." Another added, "It is hard for me to believe that participating in English conversations for just several minutes a week would improve my English speaking skill." Another two replied that they felt that their level of English proficiency was too low for them to gain meaningful outcomes through taking part in communicative tasks. One of them remarked, "It might be beneficial for me to be engaged with given tasks in the classroom, but I feel that I am not ready to take advantage of the tasks because I cannot speak much due to my limited speaking skill." Two other students pointed out the lack of feedback in group work. One of them explained:

In interactions between students, the teacher did not give feedback. Thus, I think poor quality of speech produced by my partner would not be beneficial

for me to improve my listening skill. In addition, neither could I get a chance to realize my errors by someone's feedback nor be provided with help to express my thoughts from the teacher. Therefore, I did not think the interactions were meaningful.

Moreover, another indicated:

I actually did not have sufficient chances to practice speaking English, even in group work, particularly when there were more than two students in the group. It was hard for me to take an opportunity to present my ideas when other fluent and active students were eagerly attempting to express their thoughts.

One more interview response to note is the reason several students gave for why the tasks were helpful. Four students thought that tasks were helpful just because they helped them to recognize that their current level of English proficiency was insufficient to accomplish the tasks. Even though learners' notice of gaps in their interlanguage is considered valuable (Swain, 2000), what these students referred to was not particular gaps but their overall poor English proficiency. Thus, although motivation is also very important for language acquisition, it seemed not valid to regard these participants' answers as evidence that supports the benefits of employing TBLT because these comments did not come from a sound understanding of the advantages of tasks. This implies that many of the students who experienced TBLT did not actually realize the alleged value of tasks despite the teacher's frequent attempts throughout the semester to explain the rationale for the course design.

5.6. The Reasons Why the Students Did Not Participate in Tasks

In the video recordings of the third week lessons, the students had been asked to read different parts of a newspaper article before the lesson. They were then requested to take part in *information gap* and *opinion gap tasks* in the classroom (See Appendix A for these tasks).

The video recordings showed the teacher asking the students to make groups of three with those who had read different parts of the article. He then announced that each group would be asked to present the results of their group discussion after they had time to synthesize all the information from the other group members. In the following group discussion, the video showed most of the students very actively engaged in interactions with their group members. However, even though the teacher had asked them to use English as much as they could, all the students spoke in Korean. Moreover, not all of the

interactions were for accomplishing the task, and many of them centered on other issues related to their life at the school. Thus, even though *negotiation for meaning* (learners' collaborative efforts to find the best way to express their ideas) using L1 is believed to be helpful for their second language acquisition (Swain & Lapkin, 2000), it seemed inappropriate to conclude that all of these students' interactions were helpful for developing their interlanguage. In addition, because the amount of learners' use of English was so small, they did not seem to have many chances to experience the creative and instantaneous use of English that is argued to be beneficial for facilitating implicit and explicit language learning (Long, 2015).

The reasons why students did not interact in English were investigated in the interviews. The most salient answer was that it was difficult for them to express their ideas in English. According to the interviews, 12 out of 25 participants replied that they communicated in Korean just because they did not have sufficient command of English to accomplish the given tasks. For example, a student commented, "Although I really dreamed of myself fluently expressing all of my ideas in English, I could not do that because my English speaking skill was insufficient." Another added, "I felt it might be better if the teacher had taught useful expressions first before the students were asked to carry out the tasks because we did not have sufficient competence to perform what the teacher wanted."

The influence of face seemed not a great factor in students' inhibition against using English. One student who had spent several months in a civilian university before entering this military institution said, "I felt shier when I was asked to communicate with my current classmates, with whom I had close relationships, than when I had interacted with classmates in the civilian university whom I did not know at all." However, two others mentioned that they did not feel that face was an important reason not to be actively engaged with tasks. For example, one of them replied, "I felt more comfortable interacting in English with classmates who were my close friends." Their reports support Ellis's (2004) argument that a short distance between participants in a conversation is beneficial for stimulating interaction, although the recorded video reveals that close relationships with interlocutors who shared similar experiences could also be an obstacle.

Four students said that they felt sorry when trying to speak only in English in front of other students or those who could not speak English fluently. Two others mentioned the atmosphere of the classroom. For example, one of them stated, "I feel participating in tasks so actively could give my classmates a negative impression of myself." Interacting with these interviewees, the researcher could feel that it is never easy for them to stand out in a culture where modesty and maintaining harmony are considered so very important. Particularly at this military institution where the learners spend a lot of time together, the influence of the collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1986) seems much greater than at civilian universities in Korea.

5.7. Interactions Facilitated by Pedagogic Tasks

The first video recording mentioned above was beneficial in identifying how students behave in group work. However, it was difficult to determine the characteristics of the students' interactions using just two video recorders, one installed in the front and one in the back of the classroom. It was nearly impossible to listen to what had been recorded when so many students spoke simultaneously while engaging with group work. Nevertheless, installing additional microphones for each group could make the students' interactions unnatural due to anxiety and self-consciousness (Forster, 1998). Thus, in the second video recording, the teacher/researcher asked the students to engage in a whole-class task (see Appendix C for the task) in order to easily recognize what the students said in a 'normal' classroom setting.

The collected data shows that interactions in a real EFL classroom context were very different from those reported to occur in the classroom in the literature (Lightbown, 2003; Long & Porter, 1985; Long, 2015; Pica, 1994). For example, Pica (1994) maintained that learners negotiate to repair breakdowns in their interactions for clear comprehension of meaning. Moreover, she contended that the input provided as a result of this negotiation of meaning is invaluable for learners' language acquisition. However, in the video recordings, the students were rarely engaged in negotiation for meaning, even when they did not understand their interlocutors' utterances. In addition, the quality of the input was too poor to be useful for the hearers' language acquisition. The following extract clearly shows this tendency.

Student A: Helicopter head change, head change. And smaller, smaller

Student B (Drawer): (Erases the helicopter that she drew first.)

Student C: Very smaller.

Student A: Smaller and head is right.

Student B (Drawer): (Draws just a smaller helicopter.)

Student A: Ahh, no. Head right, right.

Student D: Head, head.

Student B (Drawer): Head?

Student A: Tail left, tail left.

In the extract above, Student B, who was responsible for drawing the picture while listening to her classmates' description, did not often speak even though she did not understand what her peers had said. Instead, she depended mainly on a guessing strategy, avoiding any negotiation of meaning like that observed in Korean elementary schools (Lee, 2005). Furthermore, even though Student B asked a question for better understanding of

meaning, the answer did not seem valuable as feedback that could lead to her learning of structures or expanding her vocabulary.

Another remarkable characteristic of the learners' interactions was their frequent use of minimalized and indexicalized language. According to Swain (2000), providing learners with chances to produce output is valuable because it can help them notice the gap in their interlanguage and fill this gap through seeking input. In this sense, tasks have been believed very beneficial because they "push" learners to use the target language (Long, 2015). However, the learners observed in these video recordings did not seem to have many opportunities to find gaps in their interlanguage or try to stretch and upgrade their utterances because they just used basic words. This minimalization and lexicalization of language use is illustrated in the example below.

Student E: On the parasol, there's ... a two colors.

Student F (Drawer): (Points to the parasol he drew on the board.)

Student G: Black, white, black, white.

Student E: They are separated five parts, and one two three is...

Student G: Black.

Student E: And two four is white.

Student H: Girl reading book.

Student F (Drawer): (Points to the girl he drew.)

Student H: Back, back to sky.

Student I: Back to sky.

Student J: Suntan, suntan pose.

Student H: Suntan pose.

Student F (Drawer): (Erases the girl on the board.)

Student H: Yes, yes.

Student J: Head up.

Student H: Head up.

Student F (Drawer): Ah!! (Draws a person lying toward the opposite direction.)

Of course, it cannot be denied that the limitations of these learners' interactions might be due to the type of the task because the learners could accomplish it with just the use of lexicalized words. In other words, the students might try to stretch their output if they encountered a more complex task that required more use of their language resources (Ellis, 2003). However, the same characteristics noted in these students' interactions were sometimes observed by the teacher during other types of tasks throughout the semester, although they were not recorded. Therefore, it is not legitimate to conclude that the students' reactions to the task reported above were unique to this particular task.

6. DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide answers to the research questions that were posed to investigate the reality of an English class at a military-service academy. These answers are helpful to understand the challenges of implementing TBLT in English courses offered at the military-service academies in Korea. In addition, these findings have useful implications for making this theoretical approach to language instruction more suitable to the context of these institutions. Thus, in this section, several measures for adapting TBLT to the context of these academies are discussed based on additional findings from the teacher's observations as well as the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

6.1. Scaffolding

The learners' frequent use of their mother tongue and their responses to a question that investigated the reasons why they did not participate in given tasks imply that the Korean cadets were not fully ready to gain the alleged outcomes of TBLT while actively engaging with tasks. However, it is premature to conclude that TBLT is not very efficient in this EFL context because none of the proponents of the versions of TBLT addressed in the literature review section of this paper expect that learners would naturally learn a language while successfully accomplishing provided tasks by themselves.

For example, Long (2015) argues for the necessity of a carefully designed set of pedagogic tasks that gradually increase in cognitive complexity to help learners prepare to perform a target task. On the other hand, Nunan (2004) contends that giving learners language samples that could be exploited for accomplishing the target task is also valuable because learners who are not able to produce the target language independently could learn the language by borrowing and recycling the provided input. Willis and Willis (2007) also agreed that providing learners with necessary language resources such as vocabulary before they are asked to carry out a task is helpful because they believe that this facilitates learners' engagement with the task. All of these kinds of help are meaningful for getting learners linguistically prepared to get into the task. In addition, this scaffolding, providing a supporting framework within which the learning takes place (Nunan, 2004), is useful for lowering the cadets' psychological barrier to speaking in English. This is because some students feel that they do not stand out so much when they are not the only ones in the classroom able to successfully carry out the task.

Although scaffolding can be useful for encouraging learners' participation in the task, it does not mean that providing sufficient help ahead of the task is always beneficial for them. For example, giving language samples (Nunan, 2004) can sometimes negatively influence learners' language acquisition. Throughout the semester, it was often observed that the

students did not produce creative and autonomous language when language samples that they could depend on were provided.

Providing no language resources for performing a task was also ineffective. Long (2015) is opposed to teaching elements of language that were pre-selected by the teacher. This is because he believes that interactions drawn from performing a task provide individual learners with the best opportunity to learn linguistic features implicitly and intentionally in a personalized and psycholinguistically optimized sequence. However, although his argument might be persuasive from a theoretical perspective, designing a course at this institution based solely on Long's ideas was very difficult for several reasons.

First of all, even though the efficiency of Long's (2015) version of TBLT depends on the quality of pedagogic tasks, it was never easy to design good pedagogic tasks that could guide the students to successfully accomplish the identified target tasks. Moreover, even though Long thinks that a task-based, criterion-referenced performance test should be used to demonstrate a successful implementation of TBLT, it was not easy to adopt this test in an institution where the rule of the school requires teachers to rank students on the curve and give letter grades based on this arrangement. Therefore, it seems that more research seeking solutions to these problems is prerequisite to successfully adopting Long's argument.

Considering these challenges to scaffolding as suggested by Nunan (2004) and Long (2015), the one most efficient and feasible scaffold for novice teachers at this institution is to provide the key words necessary for conducting a task. They can do this through materials or teacher-led whole class discussions in the priming phase of their lessons (see Willis & Willis, 2007). In this class, the provision of a few of key words helped learners engage with tasks more actively while avoiding an excessive concern with forms that could result from an intense grammar lesson preceding their engagement in the task (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Although my finding suggests that providing vocabulary can be a starting point for adequate scaffolding for Korean cadets, it is not my intention to argue that it is always the best. It might be more useful for teachers to select a more appropriate scaffolding among those suggested (Long, 2015; Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007) according to their particular learners' level of English and objectives of lessons. Language courses using a variety of creative approaches to instruction rather than monotonous and repetitious lectures would be effective for improving learners' target language because they would help maintain motivation and interest (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

6.2. Use of Tasks for Negotiation of Meaning

In the above section, it was argued that scaffolding could facilitate learners' interactions

in the classroom. However, more learner interactions do not necessarily create more opportunities for them to negotiate for meaning. Context matters too.

For example, in this Korean military academy there are virtually no opportunities for learners to use English outside of the classroom. And because students would not be using English in the emergent future, they could not be motivated to fill gaps in their linguistic knowledge by noticing them through provided input while only focusing on accomplishing tasks (Eguchi & Eguchi, 2006; Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007). Although this argument seems contrary to the cadets' greatest desire for the course, improving their oral communication skills, the recognition of motivation as an unstable concept that is affected by context (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Cho, 2012) helps us understand this irony.

The findings of this study imply that the cadets might have a strong wish for an ideal L2 self like the Korean high school students in Cho's (2012) study. However, the participants' responses in the interviews and their behavior in the classroom suggest that the intensity of this motivation had diminished while they lived a very demanding life at a military-service academy with tight schedules and rigid military traditions. In other words, influenced by institutional factors such as the hierarchical culture in the dormitory and the heavy academic and physical burdens in their everyday life, the learners' interest in developing their communicative competence seemed to falter. In addition, the influence of collectivist societies, which is very strong in military organizations, seemed to be another great challenge for learners' negotiation of meaning because giving feedback to others could make a student anxious about standing out.

This understanding of context suggests the necessity for tasks to be carefully designed to facilitate learners' negotiation of meaning. For example, a teacher could ask his or her students to record their interactions in their groups using their smart phones while carrying out a task. After that, the teacher could let them transcribe all the utterances in their interactions and revise them. Then, if the students were required to present what they came up with in the group work and to find errors in other groups' presentations, they would begin to negotiate for meaning with their peers (Shean Manning, personal communication, July 7, 2016).

6.3. Task Design

Task design is also related to facilitating student interaction, so that efficiency of TBLT greatly depends on selecting, grading and sequencing tasks appropriately (Long, 2015). This is the reason a great number of studies have been conducted to identify the effects of various kinds of tasks. For example, from Ellis's (2003, 2014) perspective, the cadets who used only single words and formulaic chunks while conducting tasks would produce more complex utterances if they were asked to perform open tasks with more planning time.

Nonetheless, because the purpose of this study was to deal with less researched areas and to provide new insight, it does not address this topic in detail. However, teachers could raise their understanding of what can be done with different types of tasks through other studies (see Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998 for reviews of the literature on design characteristics of tasks).

7. CONCLUSION

The weakness of this study of the challenges of TBLT lies in its reliance on data from an imperfectly designed version of TBLT implemented in my classes. Nevertheless, the results of the study are still useful to achieve its purposes.

The first purpose was to identify how the students in an EFL context behave in a TBLT course and what they think of the effect of tasks. It was also expected that this study could identify new challenges and fill the gap in the literature that reports obstacles to implementing TBLT as perceived by teachers. However, despite this researcher's expectation, most of the challenges observed in this study had already been addressed in the preceding studies. Nonetheless, considering the alleged discrepancy between teachers' and learners' perspectives on task-based activities (Jeon, 2005), this project is not meaningless because it proves that the reported teacher perceptions of TBLT are not significantly different from the students' perceptions, at least in the context of this study.

The second purpose of this study was to find the ways to make TBLT more suitable to the setting of Korean military-service academies while taking into account the purported importance of understanding contexts for the efficient adoption of theoretical approaches to language pedagogies (Bax, 2003; Bruton, 2002; Holliday & Cook, 1982; Ellis, 2014). The findings of this study show that most of the students thought of TBLT very positively, even though there were challenges. The overall positive student response identified by this study provides a sound basis to adopt TBLT to English courses offered at these military institutions in Korea. This paper also discusses ways to employ TBLT more effectively in this particular context and to overcome difficulties such as learners' lack of participation, their dependence on L1 and the lack of opportunities to engage with negotiation of meaning.

However, several challenges are still unresolved. The first is the learners' unfamiliarity with the concept of collaborative and transformative learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2005; Littlewood, 2007). Answers in the survey reveal that approximately a third of the students were unsure about the effects of learner-centered approaches such as the process approach to writing and TBLT. Moreover, in subsequent interviews and the teacher's observations of the course, it was also verified that many of the students felt that these

approaches were not very effective for them. All of these findings imply that Korean cadets are still not very familiar with this new paradigm of education despite the Korean government's decades-long efforts for curricular innovation in secondary education.

The students' reservations about the effects of collaborative and transformative learning seem to be closely related to the low efficiency of both the teacher's focus on form and of negotiation of meaning among the students in this EFL context. Learners need to notice the relevant material in the input afforded by the environment (Schmidt, 1995) to learn a language. However, in a culture in which the results of major exams are considered more important than the process of learning, students seemed not to pay much attention to instant and personalized feedback because they thought that the information given through feedback would not be tested by important written exams. Moreover, unlike college students in Thailand (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007), the Korean cadets showed no significant change in their classroom behavior or in their perception of learner-centeredness despite the teacher's consistent effort to effect a paradigm shift in students' learning practices.

In addition, the students' responses in the interviews imply that inattention to processing the linguistic knowledge provided through feedback during class is the result of the institutional pressure midshipmen endure all day outside the classroom. In other words, they seemed determined to save their mental energy for their many other exhausting out-of-classroom activities. For these students, passively writing and memorizing what the teacher says before a big test was a good way to not consume much mental energy.

The influence of this challenge could be diminished if the teacher would officially give feedback on commonly observed errors and then test this grammatical knowledge in written exams. The students might then give more attention to teacher feedback. However, this would result in less attention devoted to focus on form, which would make use of learners' psycholinguistically and emotionally optimal state for learning a language (Long, 2015). Therefore, this finding warns against excessive optimism concerning the effect of TBLT (Lee, 2005, Swan 2005) in spite of Long's (2015) strong belief in it regardless of contexts.

Conditions in Korean military-service academies are not conducive to language acquisition, and this is another big challenge to implementing TBLT in English classes. SLA research has determined that "grammar learning is not rule-based or deductive, but driven by experience and induction" (Ortega, 2009, p. 113). Moreover, from the perspective of the *Emergentists*, who have suggested persuasive new theories of second language acquisition, the acquisition of linguistic structures requires that students notice frequent and salient linguistic elements in the input (Ellis, 2006), and iterate and adapt the target language while producing output (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). In this sense, TBLT provides a good way to help learners have the necessary experience for language

acquisition, but the Korean military-academic context precludes that opportunity.

The problem in this EFL context is that we cannot be sure that this exclusively classroom experience offers sufficient conditions for successful language acquisition. The studies on interlanguage development have revealed that learners are engaged in simplification, overgeneralization, restructuring and u-shaped behaviors as they learn the new grammar (Ortega, 2009). This means that language is not acquired within a few hours or in a linear fashion. However, at the Korean military-service academies, learners do not have many chances to be provided with English input or to produce English output unless they are greatly motivated by emergent needs such as getting a required score on a standardized English proficiency test or applying for exchange programs with military institutions overseas. Therefore, the learners rarely have opportunities to notice particular elements of English input or to test and reinforce what they have noticed while producing output.

Considering the cadets' lack of attention to interactions and feedback in the TBLT lessons along with the disadvantageous environment of the Korean military-service academies for language acquisition, TBLT seems to entail a great risk of failure in getting the students to feel that they have learned something meaningful (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). For this reason, institutional factors require the inclusion of a syntactic syllabus in the English courses offered at these military institutions (Ellis, 2003, 2014). The knowledge of grammar as presented by the teacher is something the students could take from English courses when no language acquisition occurs due to the above-mentioned obstacles. Even though the literature points out the weak interface between knowing grammar and the ability to use it (Ellis, 2003, 2014; Lightbown, 2003; Long, 2015; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1998), grammar rules might be valuable when learners are ready to use them for communication (Swan, 2005; Ortega, 2009). In other words, this knowledge could help learners progress faster when they are someday located in a better context for language acquisition.

However, grammar is not the only knowledge that could be included in a synthetic syllabus for these students. Considering their great satisfaction with the course contents (such as the characteristics of particular types of military documents and the general organization of frequently encountered military discourses), information about military genres can also be good content for instruction (Hyland, 2002). Moreover, based on military officers' identified needs (Park, 2016), we can validly infer that teaching necessary background knowledge such as the chain of command of the US military and the procedures to conduct combined military exercises could contribute to the students' better performance of target tasks in their workplaces.

Furthermore, based on Ribe and Vidal's (1993) argument, Nunan (2014) suggests that TBLT contributes to developing the whole learner with foreign language learning as a

vehicle. This idea provides useful insight into the role of English courses offered at the Korean military-service academies. Their stated aim is to develop the qualifications for ethical and competent military officers, and they propose the necessity to design English courses in alignment with the schools' overarching goals.

All of these suggestions require further research for genre analysis of military discourses and for developing effective pedagogic tasks. If teachers could provide this kind of knowledge while effectively employing TBLT, the students would not only improve their command of English (although the degree of improvement might not be easily observed) but would also provide useful knowledge for successful communication. Furthermore, English courses could even contribute to developing excellent military officers while helping the learners take the feeling of accomplishment.

REFERENCES

- Bax, S. (2003). The end of CLT: A context approach to language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 57(3), 278-287.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. London, U.K.: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brown, J. D. (2001). *Using surveys in language programs*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching*. New York: Routledge.
- Bruton, A. (2002). From tasking purposes to purposing tasks. *ELT Journal*, 56(3), 280-288.
- Carless, D. (2004). Issues in teachers' re-interpretation of a task-based innovation in primary schools. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 639-662.
- Carless, D. (2009). Revisiting the TBLT versus P-P-P debate: Voices from Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 19, 49-66.
- Carless, D. (2012). TBLT in EFL settings. In A. Shehadeh & C. A. Coombe (Eds.), *Task-based language teaching in foreign language contexts: Research and implementation* (pp. 345-358). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1996). English teaching and learning in China. *Language Teaching*, 29(2), 61-80.
- Cho, Y. (2012). The relationship between L2 learning motivation and context among Korean EFL students. *English Teaching*, 67(1), 79-105.
- Eguchi, M., & Eguchi, K. (2006). The limited effect of PBL on EFL learners: A case study of English magazine projects. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8(3), 207-225.

- Ellis, N. C. (2006). SLA: The associative cognitive CREED. In B. VanPatten, J. Williams & A. F. Williams (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (pp. 77-96). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language teaching and learning*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2014). Taking the critics to task: The case for task-based teaching. In M. K. Aishah, S. K. Bhatt, W. M. Chan, S. W. Chi, K. W. Chin, S. Klayklung, M. Nagami, J. W. Sew, T. Suthiwan, & I. Walker (Eds.), *Knowledge, skills and competencies in foreign language education*. Paper presented at the Sixth CLS International Conference, Singapore, 4-6 December (pp. 103-117). Singapore: NUS Centre for Language Studies.
- Ferris, D. R., & Hedgcock, J. S. (2014). *Teaching L2 composition: Purpose, process, and practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Foster, P. (1998). A classroom perspective on the negotiation of meaning. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(1), 1-23.
- Gatbonton, E., & Segalowitz, N. (2005). Rethinking communicative language teaching: A focus on access to fluency. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 61(3), 325-353.
- Hadi, A. (2013). Perception of task-based language teaching: A study of Iranian EFL learners. *English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 103-110.
- Hahn, J. (2008). Challenges of task-based language teaching: With reference to Korean EFL teachers' beliefs. *English Language and Literature Teaching*, 14(3), 49-68.
- Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural difference in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, 301-320.
- Holliday, A., & Cooke, T. (1982). An ecological approach to ESP. In A. Waters (Ed.), *Issues in ESP* (pp. 123-143). Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Hu, G. W. (2005). Contextual influences on instructional practices: A Chinese case for an ecological approach to ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(4), 635-660.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2002). Specificity revisited: How far should we go now? *English for Specific Purposes*, 21, 385-395.
- Jeon, I. (2005). An analysis of task-based materials and performances: Focused in Korean high school English textbooks. *English Teaching*, 60(2), 87-109.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2006). The emergence of complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the oral and written production of five Chinese learners of English. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(4), 590-619.
- Lee, S. (2005). The pros and cons of task-based instruction in elementary English classes.

- English Teaching*, 60(2), 185-205.
- Li, D. F. (1998). "It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine": Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(4), 677-703.
- Lightbown, P. M. (2003). SLA research in the classroom/SLA research for the classroom. *Language Learning Journal*, 28, 4-13.
- Lightbown, P., & Spada, N. (1999). *How languages are learned* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (2004). The task-based approach: Some questions and suggestions. *ELT Journal*, 58(4), 319-326.
- Littlewood, W. T. (2007). Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 40, 243-249.
- Long, M. H. (1985). A role for instruction in second language acquisition: Task based language teaching. In K. Hyltenstam & M. Pienemann (Eds.), *Modeling and assessing second language acquisition* (pp. 77-99). Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters.
- Long, M. H. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K. de Bot, R. Ginsberg, & C. Kramsch (Eds.), *Foreign language research in cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 39-52). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Long, M. H. (2015). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. West Sussex, U.K.: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Long, M. H., & Crookes, G. (1993). Units of analysis in syllabus design: The case for task. In G. Crookes & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Tasks in pedagogical context: Integrating theory and practice* (pp. 9-54). Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters.
- Long, M. H., & Porter, P. A. (1985). Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(2), 207-228.
- Markee, N. (1996). *Managing curricular innovation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McDonough, K., & Chaikitmongkol, W. (2007). Teachers' and learners' reactions to a task-based EFL course in Thailand. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(1), 107-132.
- Nunan, D. (2003). The impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(4), 589-613.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (2014). Task-based teaching and learning. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 455-470). Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning.
- Ortega, L. (2009). *Understanding second language acquisition*. New York: Routledge.

- Park, K. (2016). Pedagogical implications of naval officers' needs for developing communicative English programs for naval purposes. *Korean Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 32(1), 107-141.
- Park, M. (2012). Implementing computer-assisted task-based language teaching in the Korean secondary EFL context. In A. Shehadeh & C. A. Coombe (Eds.), *Task-based language teaching in foreign language contexts: Research and implementation* (pp. 215-240). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Park, P. (2013). A study on the current situation of English education for military aviation personnel. *Korean Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 29(1), 101-126.
- Pica, T. (1994). Research on negotiation: What does it reveal about second-language learning conditions, processes, and outcomes? *Language Learning*, 44, 493-527.
- Ribe, R., & Vidal, N. (1993). *Project work step by step*. Oxford, U.K.: Heinemann.
- Robinson, P. (2001). Task complexity, cognitive resources, and syllabus design: A triadic framework for examining task influence on SLA. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 287-318). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidt, R. (1995). Consciousness and foreign language learning: A tutorial on the role of attention and awareness in learning. In R. Schmidt (Ed.), *Attention and awareness in foreign language learning* (pp. 1-63). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii, National Foreign Language Resource Center.
- Shehadeh, A. (2012). Introduction: Broadening the perspectives of task-based language teaching scholarship: The contribution of research in foreign language contexts. In A. Shehadeh & C. A. Coombe (Eds.), *Task-based language teaching in foreign language contexts: Research and implementation* (pp. 345-258). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Shim, R., & Baik, M. (2004). English language teaching in East Asia today: Changing policies and practices. In H. Kam & R. Wong (Eds.), *English language teaching in East Asia today* (pp. 241- 261). Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Skehan, P. (2003). Task-based instruction. *Language Teaching*, 36(1), 1-14.
- Swain, M. (2000) The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 97-114). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2000). Task-based second language learning: The uses of the first language. *Language Teaching Research*, 4(3), 251-274.
- Swan, M. (2005). Legislation by hypothesis: The case of task-based instruction. *Applied*

Linguistics, 26(3), 376-401.

Varonis, E., & Gass, S. (1985). Non-native conversations: A model for negotiation of meaning. *Applied Linguistics*, 6, 71-90.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for the task-based learning*. Edinburgh, U.K.: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

Xiongyong, C., & Samuel, M. (2011). Perceptions and implementation of task-based language teaching among secondary school EFL teachers in China. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 24(2), 292-302.

APPENDIX A

A Worksheet Used in a Communicative Module

1. Based on your understanding of the newspaper article and background knowledge you have, compare the capabilities and limitations of the ROK Navy with those of the Korean People's Navy. At the same time, think of the capabilities and limitations of the U.S. Navy also.

| Institution | Capabilities | Limitations |
|--------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| The ROK Navy | | |
| The Korean People's Navy | | |
| The U.S. Navy | | |

2. Do you think that the ROK Navy has sufficient capability to efficiently deal with potential threats by the Korean People's Navy? If not, how do you think the ROK Navy can overcome their weaknesses? Think about them in terms of building naval strength and cooperation with the U.S. Navy.

| | |
|--|--|
| Which areas of the naval power should be strengthened? | |
| What kinds of military cooperation with the U.S. Navy are needed for the ROK Navy? | |

APPENDIX B

Questions for the Surveys

<Questions for the first survey>

1. Which range is your best score on TOEIC in?

- a. Below 500 b. 500 ~ lower than 600 c. 600 ~ lower than 700
 d. 700 ~ lower than 800 e. 800 ~ lower than 900 f. 900 or higher than 900
2. What would you like to learn when you have a chance to take an English course? (e.g., TOEIC, Writing skill, Oral conversation skill)
 3. List the four language skills in order you would like to improve. (e.g., reading-listening-writing-speaking)
 4. Do you believe English is important or not after your commissioning? Why do you believe so?
 5. What skills do you believe would be necessary when you serve as a naval officer?

<Additional questions in the second survey>

6. Did you like the course which focused on improving your productive skills rather than your comprehension skills?
 - a. very little b. a bit little c. normal d. a bit much e. very much
7. Did you like the teacher's English-medium instruction?
 - a. very little b. a bit little c. normal d. a bit much e. very much
8. How much of the contents did you understand when the teacher taught in English?
 - a. less than 50% b. 50% ~ 70% c. 80% ~ 90% d. 100%
9. How much were you satisfied with the contents of the course?
 - a. very little b. a bit little c. normal d. a bit much e. very much
10. If you were satisfied with the contents, what makes you feel like that? If you were not satisfied, what do you think are weaknesses of this course?
11. How much did you think the process approach employed in this course was beneficial for improving your writing skill?
 - a. very little b. a bit little c. normal d. a bit much e. very much
12. How beneficial did you believe the communicative tasks provided to you were for improving your communications skills?
 - a. very little b. a bit little c. normal d. a bit much e. very much
13. How much did you participate in the communicative tasks given by the teacher?
 - a. very little b. a bit little c. normal d. a bit much e. very much
14. What are the things you felt good about in this course?
15. What do you think should be revised in this course for more effective instruction?

APPENDIX C

Task Used to Examine the Features of the Students' Interaction



* Describe the picture below to help your classmate draw it listening to your description.

APPENDIX D

Questions for the Interviews

1. Did you believe being engaged with given tasks would be helpful for you?
2. Do you feel your English skills have improved significantly after taking this course?
3. What do think you have learned from this course?
4. Did you actively participate in classroom discussions or interactions among the students?
5. Why did you not try to actively interact with your teacher or peers in the classroom?
6. Did you eagerly try to carry out classroom activities designed to teach the process of effective writing and linguistic features of several genres?
7. Why were you not engaged with these activities?
8. What do you think of the course that you have experienced this semester?

Applicable levels: Tertiary

Kichan Park
English Department
Division of Humanities and Social Sciences
Republic of Korea Naval Academy
1 Joongwon-ro, Jinhae-gu, Changwon-si,
Gyeongnam, 51704, Republic of Korea
Phone: 055-549-1213
Email: navyet60@gmail.com

Received on September 1, 2016

Reviewed on October 15, 2016

Revised version received on November 15, 2016