



TASK-BASED TEACHING AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN ACQUIRING CULTURAL NORMS

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Abstract: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a prominent pedagogical approach prioritizing authentic communication and meaningful task completion over traditional form-focused instruction. This paper examines the intersection of TBLT and cultural norm acquisition, exploring how task-based methodologies facilitate the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Drawing on recent research from 2024-2026 across diverse educational contexts—including Hong Kong, China, Japan, Ecuador, Australia, Turkey, and Europe—the study synthesizes evidence regarding the effectiveness of culturally-infused task design. The findings indicate that task-based teaching significantly enhances learners' acquisition of cultural norms when tasks are designed with authenticity, cultural relevance, and reflective components. However, research also reveals that the relationship between task-based approaches and cultural learning is mediated by contextual factors, including learners' cultural backgrounds, teachers' intercultural competence, and the alignment between task frameworks and local conceptions of teaching and learning. The paper concludes by outlining key strategies for integrating cultural norm acquisition into task-based teaching and provides recommendations for practice and future research.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching, cultural norms, intercultural communicative competence.

Introduction

The increasing globalization of communication and commerce has elevated the importance of not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate cultural norms and practices effectively. In the field of language education, this dual focus has crystallized around the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC)—the capacity to interact appropriately and effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Simultaneously, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained prominence as an



approach that prioritizes authentic, meaningful communication through the completion of real-world tasks.

Despite the parallel trajectories of these two developments, the integration of cultural norm acquisition within task-based frameworks has received insufficient attention. As Leonardi (2026) argues, while TBLT offers numerous advantages for language learning—including authenticity, learner-centeredness, and engagement—it often neglects the cultural component that is essential for truly effective communication. This gap is particularly significant given that cultural norms underpin not only linguistic choices but also the interpretation of meaning, the management of relationships, and the navigation of intercultural encounters. This paper addresses the question: How can task-based teaching facilitate the acquisition of cultural norms, and what is the significance of this integration for language learners? By examining recent theoretical developments and empirical studies from diverse educational contexts, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the intersection between TBLT and cultural norm acquisition, offering insights for educators, curriculum designers, and researchers. Task-Based Language Teaching represents a evolution within communicative language teaching that places tasks at the center of instructional design. Ellis (2003) defines a task as "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". Key principles of TBLT include:

1. Authenticity: Tasks should reflect real-world language use and communicative purposes
2. Learner-centeredness: Learners take an active role in meaning-making and task completion
3. Focus on meaning: Primary attention is on communicating content rather than manipulating forms
4. Outcome-orientation: Tasks have clear, achievable outcomes that drive engagement

Nunan (2004) further elaborates that effective task design incorporates six essential elements: goals, input, activities, roles, settings, and evaluation mechanisms. These elements provide a framework for designing tasks that can accommodate cultural content. The concept of intercultural communicative competence, as articulated by Byram (1997), extends beyond linguistic proficiency to encompass five interconnected dimensions:

Attitudes: Curiosity, openness, and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures



Knowledge: Understanding of social groups, products, practices, and interactional norms

Skills of interpreting and relating: Ability to interpret documents and events from other cultures

Skills of discovery and interaction: Capacity to acquire new cultural knowledge in real-time

Critical cultural awareness: Ability to evaluate perspectives, practices, and products critically

This multidimensional framework provides a comprehensive target for cultural learning that extends beyond superficial knowledge of customs and traditions to encompass deeper values, beliefs, and interactional patterns. The integration of TBLT and cultural norm acquisition is theoretically grounded in several complementary frameworks. Sociocultural theory, derived from Vygotsky's work, emphasizes that learning occurs through mediated social interaction—a principle that aligns with both the collaborative nature of tasks and the socially-constructed nature of cultural norms. Within this framework, tasks serve as cultural tools that mediate learners' engagement with target culture practices. Holliday's (2016) metaphorical framework of "Cultural Blocks and Threads" offers another useful lens for understanding how task-based learning can facilitate cultural acquisition. Within this view, "blocks" represent essentialist, reified conceptions of culture, while "threads" represent the fluid, negotiated, and personally-experienced aspects of cultural engagement. Effective task design should move learners from encounters with cultural "blocks" toward recognition and navigation of cultural "threads." Research conducted by Lu and Diaz (2026) at Hong Kong universities provides important insights into the relationship between task-based teaching and cultural learning. Through self-reflective narratives from tertiary teachers, the study examined how TBLT is perceived by Hong Kong students within English-medium instruction contexts. The findings revealed that the pre-task, while-task, post-task framework—as applied in Hong Kong settings—operates "at odds with the Hong Kong cultural conception of both 'learning' and 'teaching'".

This misalignment has significant implications for cultural norm acquisition. When the task framework itself conflicts with local cultural understandings of educational roles and relationships, learners may struggle to engage authentically with the cultural content embedded in tasks. The researchers argue that "the integration of these cultural concepts into the TBLT framework is therefore necessary for the successful adoption of the TBLT approach to English language teaching and learning". This finding underscores that cultural considerations must inform not only task content but also task



structure and implementation. A rigorous quasi-experimental study by Wang and Abhakorn (2026) investigated the effects of cultural content-based creative tasks on Chinese EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. The study involved 111 third-year English majors at a provincial university in China who engaged in creative tasks incorporating Chinese, British, and American cultural content over two months. The results demonstrated significant differences between students' self-reported ICC scores before and after the intervention. Moreover, observed classroom performance—evaluated using the RAICC Rubrics at three stages—showed "an upward trend in observed ICC performance scores across lessons also indicating growth in cultural knowledge, competence in managing intercultural interactions, and openness to cultural diversity".

This study provides robust empirical evidence that "cultural content-based creative tasks within TBLT to foster ICC in EFL contexts" is highly effective. The integration of creative task design with cultural content enabled learners to develop not only declarative knowledge about cultures but also procedural skills for navigating intercultural encounters. Complementary research by Tao (2025) explored task-based teaching design for cultivating intercultural competence among Chinese university English majors. Through two detailed case studies—a simulated cross-cultural business meeting and a cross-cultural festival promotion project—the study demonstrated that TBLT "not only improves students' language proficiency, but also effectively develops their intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and strategic competence". The research emphasized the importance of designing tasks based on principles of authenticity, interactivity, and reflection.

In the Japanese higher education context, research has highlighted the challenge of getting students to produce language for authentic communication. A study advocating for "a new intercultural framework of teaching methodologies and student learning for constructing instructional environments conducive to developing intercultural communicative competence" identified task-based learning through collaboration as a promising approach. The Japanese context presents particular challenges related to cultural norms of classroom participation and communication. Task-based approaches that emphasize collaborative, authentic communication can help address these challenges by creating structured opportunities for interaction that respect local cultural sensitivities while gradually expanding learners' communicative repertoires.

Oliver's (2025) longitudinal research with Aboriginal vocational students in Western Australia offers unique insights into designing culturally appropriate tasks for diverse learners. The study, spanning 15 years of work



with Aboriginal students from remote locations who have English as their second, third, or fourth language, employed ethnographic needs analysis to develop tasks that are "contextually relevant, culturally appropriate, and serve the learners' long-term needs". This research demonstrates that authentic tasks can simultaneously support vocational skill learning and second language development while respecting and incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. The needs analysis process—incorporating classroom observations, interviews, and analysis of trade manuals—provided "the evidence necessary to develop and select suitable tasks" that honor learners' cultural backgrounds while preparing them for vocational contexts. The Australian case highlights a crucial principle: cultural norm acquisition through tasks must be bidirectional. Learners need not only to acquire target culture norms but also to have their own cultural frameworks recognized and valued within the learning process.

Alarcón Rodas's (2024) methodological proposal for introducing Ecuadorian Montubian culture to A2 undergraduate learners through task-based teaching addresses the challenge of incorporating marginalized cultural identities into language education. The study, conducted at the University of Guayaquil with 127 students, implemented strategies for integrating Montubian heritage—including gastronomy, music, and dance—into language tasks. The results demonstrated that TBLT "significantly improved students' language skills, cultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness." Interactive tasks centered around Montubian culture were "particularly effective in engaging students and enhancing their learning experience". This research illustrates how task-based teaching can serve not only to introduce learners to target cultures but also to validate and strengthen connections with local cultural heritage. Saygi and Altay's (2025) chapter on integrating culture in language learning through a task-based approach provides a practical model for increasing students' cultural awareness. The lesson plan, designed for 20 adult students preparing to study in the United States, employed a task-based approach with authentic materials—including an image from a humor magazine—to develop cultural awareness through contextualized, student-centered reading tasks.

The three-stage design included:

Warm-up: Discussion of American cultural elements

Main activity: Decoding an authentic image from a humor magazine, with technology integration through mobile phones

Post-activity: KWL (Know, Want, Learned) chart completion to activate reflection and feedback



This study serves "as evidence for how students can be presented with relevant cultural materials in the language classroom while also reviewing some theoretical perspectives". The use of authentic cultural texts—particularly humor, which often encodes deep cultural assumptions—provides learners with opportunities to engage with cultural norms in meaningful ways. Verma's (2024) case study on task-based language teaching in European secondary schools, conducted as part of the Engaging Languages in Intercultural Virtual Exchange (E-LIVE) project, examined how TBLT in virtual exchange settings fosters critical cultural awareness. Dutch and Spanish students participated in tasks requiring them to present local and national festivities to their partner schools. Key findings highlighted that "successful TBLT assisted VE hinges on the alignment of teachers' values and student preparation and student's relevance for sharing the festivity." The research demonstrated that virtual exchange tasks can create authentic opportunities for cultural learning when they:

- Allow students to share personally meaningful cultural content
- Are supported by teacher preparation that values cultural exchange
- Create conditions for genuine interaction rather than superficial presentation

This study broadens the discourse around virtual exchange by "offering new research into connecting students from multicultural communities through VE using TBLT".

Uzbekistan: Sociocultural Features in Formal Communication

Research by Kosimova and Fayzullayeva (2026) explored the communicative and sociocultural features of teaching formal communication in English, with specific attention to task-based activities. The mixed-methods study, involving semi-structured interviews with five EFL teachers from a public school in Uzbekistan, revealed that "communicative features, such as task-based learning and fluency-building role-plays, foster practical skills, while sociocultural elements, including cultural norms and power dynamics, improve relational dynamics and reduce misunderstandings". The findings underscore that "integration of these features was shown to boost learner engagement and effectiveness in formal interactions." The research contributes to understanding how task-based approaches can be adapted to specific cultural contexts while maintaining their core pedagogical principles.

Authentic Materials and Cultural Texts. The use of authentic materials—including humor magazines, advertisements, films, and digital media—emerges as a consistent theme across effective interventions. Authentic texts embed cultural assumptions, values, and norms in ways that contrived materials cannot, providing rich opportunities for cultural learning. However,



as Saygi (2025) demonstrates, authentic materials require careful scaffolding to ensure learners can decode both linguistic and cultural meanings. Needs Analysis for Cultural Relevance. The Australian Aboriginal case powerfully illustrates the importance of thorough needs analysis in designing culturally appropriate tasks. This process should attend not only to learners' linguistic needs but also to their cultural backgrounds, values, and aspirations. When tasks honor learners' cultural identities while introducing new cultural norms, they create conditions for meaningful engagement. Multiple studies emphasize the importance of reflective components in cultural learning tasks. The KWL chart used by Saygi (2025), the reflective discussions in the Chinese studies, and the emphasis on critical cultural awareness in Byram's framework all point to the necessity of structured reflection. Learners need opportunities to notice cultural patterns, compare them with their own frameworks, and consider their implications for communication.

The inherently social nature of cultural norms suggests that collaborative task design is essential for cultural learning. Peer interaction in tasks creates opportunities for learners to negotiate meanings, encounter diverse perspectives, and practice cultural strategies in relatively low-stakes environments. Technology-Mediated Cultural Encounters. Virtual exchange and technology-enhanced tasks offer expanding possibilities for authentic cultural encounters. The European virtual exchange study and the technology integration in the Turkish study demonstrate how digital tools can connect learners with cultural others and provide access to authentic cultural materials. The Hong Kong research and Uzbekistani study both highlight the critical role of teacher cultural awareness and pedagogical flexibility. Teachers must be able to recognize potential mismatches between task frameworks and local cultural norms

- Adapt tasks while maintaining their core pedagogical value
- Facilitate cultural learning through questioning and guidance
- Model curiosity and openness toward cultural difference
- Challenges and Limitations

Despite the promising evidence, several challenges emerge from the research synthesis. Cultural Mismatch of Task Frameworks: As documented in Hong Kong, the TBLT framework itself may conflict with local cultural conceptions of teaching and learning, requiring thoughtful adaptation rather than wholesale adoption.

Assessment Difficulties: Measuring cultural norm acquisition presents significant challenges. While some studies have developed robust assessment approaches, the field continues to grapple with how to validly and reliably assess intercultural competence development.



Teacher Preparation Gaps: Many teachers lack preparation in both task-based methodology and intercultural education, limiting their ability to design and implement effective integrated instruction.

Resource Constraints: Access to authentic materials, technology for virtual exchange, and time for task implementation remain significant barriers in many contexts.

The significance of this integration extends beyond language classrooms. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to navigate cultural norms—to interpret, adapt, and communicate across cultural boundaries—has become essential for professional success, civic participation, and personal relationships. Task-based teaching, with its focus on authentic, meaningful communication, provides a uniquely powerful vehicle for developing these capabilities. Future research should address several pressing needs: longitudinal studies examining the durability of cultural learning from task-based interventions; investigations of teacher development programs that prepare educators for integrated task-based and intercultural teaching; exploration of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, for creating authentic cultural learning experiences; and development of robust assessment approaches that capture the multidimensional nature of intercultural communicative competence. For educators and curriculum designers, the implications are clear: task-based teaching and cultural norm acquisition are not separate endeavors but deeply interconnected dimensions of language education. By designing tasks that engage learners with cultural content, creating opportunities for reflection and interaction, and adapting approaches to local contexts, educators can help learners develop the intercultural communicative competence they need to thrive in our globalized world.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the intersection of task-based teaching and cultural norm acquisition, synthesizing recent research from diverse international contexts. The evidence supports several key conclusions: Task-based teaching offers significant potential for facilitating cultural norm acquisition when tasks are deliberately designed with cultural content and reflective components. The authenticity, interactivity, and learner-centeredness of TBLT create conditions for meaningful engagement with cultural norms that traditional instructional approaches cannot replicate. Effective integration of cultural learning within TBLT requires attention to multiple dimensions of task design: authenticity of materials, cultural relevance to learners, opportunities for reflection, collaborative interaction, and where possible, technology-mediated encounters with cultural others. The relationship between task-based teaching and cultural learning is mediated by contextual factors,



including learners' cultural backgrounds, local conceptions of teaching and learning, teachers' intercultural competence, and available resources. Successful implementation requires thoughtful adaptation rather than mechanical application of frameworks. The evidence from diverse contexts—including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, Ecuador, Turkey, Europe, and Uzbekistan—demonstrates that culturally-infused task-based teaching can be effective across widely varying educational settings, though the specific forms of implementation must be responsive to local conditions.

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