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**A critical exploration into the effects of task-based learning
upon a year 10 French class of demotivated students: an
Action Research project**

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Abstract

Task-based learning provides an alternative approach to more traditional methods of second language teaching and has remained relatively unexplored in the UK foreign language classroom. This study aims to research the implications of introducing task-based learning to a group of demotivated year 10 pupils in a comprehensive secondary school, with a focus on motivation, student progress and pupils' perceptions. A scheme of work was constructed, according to the relevant literature, outlining the criteria of what constitutes a task. The findings indicated a noticeable increase in motivation and students' perceptions were positive. However, I found that using this approach can be a lot more time-consuming and I still had to exert some control over the language that students were using in the task.

A critical exploration into the effects of task-based learning upon a year 10 French class of demotivated students: an Action Research project

Introduction

This action research project is based upon a teaching intervention over a series of three 100-minute lessons in a year 10 French class of 11 low performing students (4 girls: 7 boys). The research took place at a 13-18 comprehensive secondary school and sixth form during the last month of the Easter half term (3rd March – 31st March 2014). The aim of this research is to implement strategies into my own teaching which will influence my own and others' practice. My choice of research area was TBLT (task-based learning and teaching) as this was something relatively new within UK FL (foreign language) classrooms. TBLT is essentially the construction of tasks as an organisational unit for teaching that “invite [students] to focus primarily on meaning exchange and to use language for real-world, non-linguistic purposes” (Van den Branden, 2006: p. 1).

The TBLT approach was finalised for this research after extensive observations of the class I had chosen and discussions with the class teacher. It was obvious that the pupils in this class showed a lack of motivation and engagement during the lessons and the MFL (modern foreign languages) department was aware that the students in this class had developed a lack of interest in learning French. Furthermore, pupils' focus on language learning was often lost due to unnecessary disruptions from quite a few of the boys within the class. After speaking to pupils about their views on French they seemed to be uninspired and demotivated due to “learning from the textbook just for exams” and from this I got the impression that they would perhaps benefit from a change in pedagogical approach.

The attitudes of these students towards learning French seem to be reflected in other schools across the UK. Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc (2007) conducted a large-scale survey which found that KS3 UK school pupils' motivation towards MFL seemed to be “in chronic decline” (p. 9) and the results showed that languages were still pupils' least favourite subject despite various recent national initiatives seeking to enhance learners' interest in languages. As stated in the new NC (National Curriculum), language teaching “should provide opportunities for [learners] to communicate for

practical purposes” (Department for Education, 2013: p. 1), which is one of the key characteristics of TBLT as defined by Ellis (2012). Therefore I felt that this pedagogical approach could perhaps have a positive impact upon these year 10 learners’ motivation and progress in languages.

In terms of my own teaching practice, I hoped that researching the use of TBLT could help to tackle low-level disruption in lessons and demotivation in MFL learning, which are things that had been highlighted in my teaching as needing development. I hoped this project would provide important implications for my own teaching.

In this research I will firstly review the relevant literature related to TBLT and motivation which will then lead to the construction of my RQs (research questions) and consequently the design of my research methodology. This will then be followed by the presentation and discussion of my findings from the project. Finally, conclusions are drawn in response to my over-arching RQ: What are the effects of TBLT upon a group of demotivated pupils?

Literature Review

The following review of literature focuses on three important and interrelated areas of TBLT research: the definition and stages of TBLT, research into TBLT and motivation and finally the potentially problematic nature of TBLT.

Definition and stages of TBLT

TBLT is “a strong form of CLT (communicative language teaching)” (Ellis, 2003: p. 196) which is becoming increasingly popular worldwide. Various research projects have been carried out implementing this pedagogical approach, although there are fewer involving FL (foreign language) classrooms within the UK (Pachler, Evans, Redondo, & Fisher, 2014). One of the key issues related to TBLT is the process of defining a ‘task’ and distinguishing it from other classroom activities such as an ‘exercise’. In the literature related to TBLT various definitions have been offered of what constitutes a ‘task’ that range “quite widely in scope and formulation” (Van den Branden, 2006: p. 3), so it must be acknowledged that there is no universally accepted interpretation. There are various “implementation variables”, a term developed by Ellis (2012: p. 201), whereby definitions are not dichotomous but rather offer a series of choices. Ellis (2003) also identifies some key criteria to clarify what constitutes a ‘task’, drawing on various other pieces of research. Some of the

main criteria are that firstly TBLT should incorporate some form of ‘information gap’ and the learners should be motivated to use language in order to close this gap, therefore meaning they are acquiring new language incidentally and consequently progressing. According to Ellis, TBLT should also involve “real-world processes of language use” (2003: p. 162), meaning tasks are aimed at achieving situational authenticity whereby the task relates to some real life activity. One of the other key distinguishing features of a task is that it has a primary focus on meaning and the achievement of mutual understanding and communication as opposed to an emphasis on form and accuracy (Ellis, 2012).

There are three main identified phases within TBLT which should be used to provide a framework for designing lessons involving tasks. Firstly there is the pre-task phase involving consolidation of prior knowledge and potentially the prediction of the language elements students will need to use. The during-task phase then follows this, which will involve “a number of pedagogical decisions” (Pachler et al., 2014: p. 129) as the teacher will have to consider and react to how pupils are responding and progressing to the task and adapt aspects if necessary such as support or timing. Finally there is the post-task phase which Ellis identifies as providing the opportunity to perhaps then focus on the form of the language acquired as learners “temporarily suspend attention to meaning in order to focus on form” (2003: p. 26). TBLT is considered an alternative approach to the more traditional and “weak” (Ellis, 2003: p. 28) method of PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production). Ellis argues that the PPP pedagogical approach does not reflect how learners acquire language according to research (2003). Ellis claims that TBLT can provide the basis for an entire language curriculum, a claim which does not yet appear to be backed up by sufficient research.

TBLT and motivation

With TBLT introducing a more practical application of language learning, there could be a positive effect on students’ motivation for engaging with FL learning (Pachler et al., 2014). Ruso (2007) conducted research into TBLT and its effects upon student motivation. The context for this study was a group of 54 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. In this study, learners’ opinions about TBLT were investigated through different data collection methods: a questionnaire, diaries and semi-structured interviews. The use of diaries proved to be a valuable data collection method during the study, providing a real insight into students’ perceptions of the approach. However this does require a lot of preparation and has to be implemented over a longer period of time to show

true effect. The findings of the study revealed that implementing a TBLT approach in EFL classes created “variety for the students” (Ruso, 2007: p.10). Moreover, it enhanced both their learning and motivation since the tasks encouraged student involvement and lead to significant improvements regarding their language performance. The study draws upon a variety of different data collection methods and the use of each method has been clearly justified and any potential weaknesses have been acknowledged. However, one of the potential limitations of this study is that it does not provide any direct quotes when relating the findings of the research, which could have shown more concrete evidence from the semi-structured interviews or reflective diary entries. Furthermore, the analysis of data could have included the results of the questionnaire in numerical terms as the lack of quantitative data shown within the study potentially gives it less authority. In order to do this, visual representations of statistical data such as graphs showing the trend for progress and motivation pre and post TBLT would have been beneficial. The findings of the study are clearly laid out and although the evidence has been analysed in-depth to form the conclusions, there is not enough proof of the data collection. Overall, this study highlighted important positive effects within these students’ language learning experiences, specifically increased motivation, more student target language (TL) use and the ability of students to self-reflect upon their experiences.

Although Ruso’s research has shown that students’ motivation was enhanced by using TBLT, it has been found to be difficult to conceptualise or measure “motivational variables that would likely determine success in second-language learning” (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: p. 11-12). However, studies related to TBLT have used motivational and attitudinal measures as designed by Gardner and Lambert as a basis to measure students’ motivation in TBLT. Pyun (2013) carried out research to explore learner’s attitudes towards TBLT and how motivation to learn can affect this. 91 college students of Korean as a foreign language participated in this questionnaire study. This research was carried out in the form of a case study as the research focused on a particular teaching phenomenon in a particular context. These learners participated in various task-based communicative classroom activities including dialogues, role-plays and problem-solving tasks all with an information gap. The data from the study implied that students with a personal interest and motivation in language learning rated TBLT more positively. This research therefore indicates that pupils who are motivated in FL learning will respond well to TBLT, which could contrast Ruso’s research which suggests that TBLT itself can motivate learners. However, as Pyun’s research is a case study there can be no certainty as to whether TBLT has affected motivation or if it is actually vice versa. Although Pyun’s research provides an abundance of quantitative data such as statistical metrics for

variables within the study, there is a noticeable lack of qualitative data within the research. The study could have followed up the questionnaire data collection with interviews to discuss learner's responses so as to gain perhaps more reasoning into what students' attitudes were towards TBLT. The use of one specific data collection method can give the study less depth and validity.

The studies I have discussed related to TBLT (Ruso, 2007; Pyun, 2013) involve samples of learners of different ages. The age of the learners could be an important factor in the outcome of the research because in Ruso's and Pyun's studies the participants were 17-23 and 19-25 respectively so they could be more willing independent learners. This means they could be more suited towards an approach such as TBLT which favours the opportunity for learners to use language for themselves and move away from a teacher-led classroom environment (Willis & Willis, 2007). However, there are many other factors which can affect responses to TBLT; for example the language learner's motivation can "affect and be affected by" (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) different pedagogical approaches, as the aforementioned studies have exemplified. The fact that these pieces of research have not been conducted in the UK could also make a difference to the outcome of the research. Across the globe the individual commitment and motivation to language learning is growing, but the UK seems to be an exception to this with motivation "stuttering" (Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc, 2007,p.2).

Van den Branden (2006) believes that in TBLT "motivation is highly dynamic in nature" (p. 81) but it is also a complex phenomenon. In second language learning, attention should be given to both the learning outcomes and "the intensity of motivation shown by the language learner" (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: p. 15). Motivation can be dependent on task performance and at the same time it can influence it (Van den Branden, 2006). This ideology reflects the findings from Ruso's study, where motivation relied upon task performance, and also Pyun's research, where motivation influenced learners' responses to TBLT. The suggestion by Van den Branden is that both motivation types can occur simultaneously and this answers the question posed by Gardner and Lambert (1972) as to whether motivation facilitates achievement, or achievement in the second language results in the development of motivation. TBLT is not about letting "learners loose on tasks" (Pachler et al., 2014: p. 130) as the teacher still has an important role in "motivating...scaffolding, monitoring [and] intervening" (Pachler et al., 2014: p. 130). Although the teacher has an influence in generating motivation, specifically during the pre-task phase, "the extent to which motivation will be maintained will be strongly influenced by the learner's interaction with other task participants"

(Van den Branden, 2006: p. 82). This highlights other important decisions the teacher has to make in terms of how to group the class appropriately in order for TBLT to have maximum effect and for learners to interact successfully and be motivated. It also shows how teachers have to consider how much support and scaffolding different individuals or groups need during TBLT and when to intervene and perhaps choose to initiate a “focus-on-form episode” (Ellis, 2012: p. 205).

The potentially problematic nature of TBLT

An individual case study carried out by Mendoza and Keranen (2012) looked into the difficulties and issues associated with implementing TBLT into a traditional grammar and vocabulary teaching-based syllabus in an EFL classroom. The main methodology for the study was reflective diaries kept by the teacher and the students which were modelled on Ruso’s 2007 research. Unlike Pyun’s study, Mendoza and Keranen acknowledged the need for data triangulation and so used other data collection methods such as student group interviews and a survey. The reason for the change in pedagogical approach to TBLT stemmed from the fact that the learners in the teacher’s class “many times appeared demotivated and bored” (Mendoza & Keranen, 2012: p. 108). The RQs from this study involved the problems experienced when using TBLT in the classroom and the effect it has upon teaching practice. The first RQ regarding problems with TBLT is perhaps not worded correctly because it implies that the findings from the case study will highlight problems or negative aspects of TBLT. This may not necessarily be the case, so instead of “problems” it should, for example, be questioning the “effects” of TBLT. The sample for the study involved university students from different educational programmes who had to attend compulsory English lessons. The students had different levels of English language proficiency, which again gives the teacher important decisions to make regarding differentiation within TBLT. The study does provide extracts from both students’ diaries and the teacher’s diary, which provides a useful insight into the different perceptions of TBLT. One of the key problems with TBLT that the teacher identified was that “students did not perform the tasks as expected or did not use the language [they were] expected to use” (Mendoza & Keranen, 2012: p. 114) so rather than closing the ‘information gap’ they found an alternative way to reach the outcome. This could be problematic: although students are reaching the defined outcome of the tasks they are not acquiring the new language that they may need in order to progress, considering that FL learning is linear and builds upon previous knowledge. Furthermore, the teacher found that it was difficult not to correct students’ errors and to accept the lack of control over students’ use of language that TBLT implies. In this case the teacher

could have planned focus-on-form episodes to address any common errors, which would not necessarily deviate from TBLT.

Unlike in Ruso's study, Mendoza and Keranen found that when the students were performing the tasks there was very little TL use. The teacher suggests this was perhaps due to the fact that the students did not have enough TL proficiency to carry out the task, which could indicate that TBLT is more suited to learners with an adequate level of TL fluency. Timing was also an issue as the teacher "had difficulty determining how much time the tasks were going to take" (Mendoza & Keranen, 2012: p. 117). Despite the overwhelming number of negative comments from the teacher which dominate the study pupils appeared to respond well to TBLT and interacted more than usual in the TL; although it was still a very minimal amount it was an improvement. Students were also a lot more engaged in the tasks and became more active learners. However, the study appears to focus more on the negative points of introducing TBLT unlike Ruso's and Pyun's studies. Mendoza and Keranen's study uses plenty of diary excerpts but perhaps over-relies on this and rather than analysing it the researchers tend to just show the extracts without elaboration or explanation. The study also uses a superfluous recurring simile to describe the difficulty of changing teaching practice, comparing it to daring to dive into the sea and the unknown rather than staying comfortable on the beach. This confuses the flow of the research and means the fundamental argument becomes slightly lost at points.

Overall, by reviewing and discussing the literature related to TBLT there are key issues and points to consider when undertaking research myself implementing this pedagogical approach. The activities prepared must match the criteria to constitute a 'task' in order to analyse the full effects of the action research project. I will be using the criteria as set out by Ellis (2003) to design and implement my task cycle. Motivation is also a key point to consider in TBLT, and there appears to be the potential for students to become motivated in FL learning through using this approach. As little research has been conducted in the UK regarding this topic, and especially with younger students at secondary level for example, my research may complement or contrast any of the aforementioned literature. An important aspect to consider in educational research is that of learner progression, and the analysis of the effects of TBLT should also reflect on whether learning has taken place and if students' L2 (second language) knowledge has been enhanced in some way.

In light of this literature review it is apparent that TBLT can have numerous effects upon students' learning and can provide a different and potentially more motivating and engaging approach to the more traditional PPP method. However, there still remains a lack of empirical research within the UK to support its effectiveness in the FL classroom. Therefore I have constructed the following RQs for my own research into TBLT, which I hope will enable me to gain a better insight into this pedagogical approach:

RQ1: What effects does the introduction of TBLT have upon students' motivation in French?

RQ2: How does the implementation of TBLT impact upon learners' progress in French?

RQ3: What are students' perceptions of TBLT to enhance their learning?

Research Design

I designed my methodology around the aforementioned RQs. These RQs were based on the issues and recurring themes emerging from the literature analysis. I was interested specifically in finding out if TBLT could increase motivation whilst at the same time progressing students as language learners, as it has been shown that "motivation is one of the most significant predictors of success in foreign language learning" (Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc, 2007).

I used various different methods of data collection in order to gather evidence for my research, as summarised in the table below:

Research question	Method of data collection
RQ1: What effects does the introduction of TBLT have upon students' motivation in French?	Questionnaire pre and post intervention Student interviews
RQ2: How does the implementation of TBLT impact upon learners' progress in French?	Students' written and oral work
RQ3: What are students' perceptions of TBLT to enhance their learning?	Questionnaire pre and post intervention Student interviews

Table 1: Table to show the different methods of data collection used to answer each research question.

By using a combination of questionnaires, interviews and student work as evidence for my research I was attempting to improve the trustworthiness of my findings.

In order to answer the RQs I carried out my investigation in the form of action research. This is a type of study whereby a problem is identified and action is taken. The consequences of the action are then reflected upon through data gathering and by drawing conclusions from validated evidence (McNiff, 2001). In this context, having identified a lack of motivation in the classroom, I implemented a TBLT approach in order to try and combat this issue and measure the effects of this intervention upon student motivation and learning.

Questionnaires

As motivation is recognised as a “complex, multi-faceted structure” (Dörnyei, 1998: p. 117) it was difficult to find a way to accurately convey pupil motivation or lack of through data collection. I therefore decided that pupils should be asked to respond to a questionnaire (see appendix 1) self-evaluating their motivation after a normal PPP lesson and then comparing this to their responses to the same questionnaire after a TBLT lesson.

In the questionnaire pupils were asked to rate from 1-5 how motivated they felt during both lessons and I also collected qualitative data through this by getting each student to expand on this numerical score and write a brief explanation for their rating so that I could analyse if the change in approach was a factor in any change of score. Although I considered using other motivation measures such as the intrinsic motivation questionnaire used in Ruso’s study, the measures that Ruso chose gave more of a general view of pupils’ motivation in language learning before implementing TBLT rather than focusing on specific lessons and the effect that a change in approach has. I also used this questionnaire to investigate students’ interest and enjoyment of both the TBLT lesson and the PPP-based lessons so I could use this to answer my final RQ and gain more insight into students’ opinions of TBLT.

The questionnaire therefore contained three closed-ended questions followed by one open-ended question. I made sure I put the latter at the end of my questionnaire as Denscombe (2010) argues that putting questions from least to most personal in a questionnaire enables successful completion by participants. Open-ended questions are also useful as they allow participants to explain and qualify their responses from the closed-ended questions. Essentially questionnaires are much easier

and less time consuming to construct and complete than other methods of data collection and they also provide more honest answers because they are not affected by interpersonal factors (Denscombe, 2010).

Using the Likert items as the basis for my closed-ended questions does however present some points for consideration which must be acknowledged. Firstly, participants with a limited motivation, which may be the case in the context of my research, “may choose the first option that appears acceptable to him or her without examining all the options” (Weng & Cheng, 2000: p. 909). Weng and Cheng’s study into Likert-scale responses also showed the clarity of questions to be a key factor in the reliability of answers. With the questionnaire I constructed some students were not sure what exactly was meant by the question asking how motivated students were and how this differed from the question about their interest in the lesson. Therefore on reflection I feel as though I should have perhaps piloted the questionnaire with a different group so that I could adapt it as necessary in order to make it easier to complete. Furthermore, I decided to use a numerical scale for the questionnaire, specifying that number 1 was the lowest level and number 5 was the highest level for each response. In practice, I feel I should have been more specific about what each number on the scale actually represented, as one student’s perception of a score of 3 out of 5, for example, could be different from another.

Interviews

As a follow-up to my TBLT sequence of lessons and also my questionnaire responses I decided to carry out interviews with some pupils in the class to provide me with data to answer RQs 1 and 3. Due to time constraints I was only able to interview three pupils from the class about their experiences with TBLT. In order to provide a representative sample of the class in my interviews I chose to use stratified sampling as it reduces the possibility of errors from the sample information. I therefore divided the class into ability groups: those who were more able, middle ability students and weaker students. I then randomly selected one pupil from each of these groups to interview. Denscombe (2010) suggests that using this type of sampling means that “crucial people or factors are covered” (p. 171). With the interviews that I conducted it could have been more beneficial to ensure I interviewed pupils that showed differing responses from the questionnaire in terms of their motivation levels. However, by using stratified sampling with ability as the “crucial factor” I was unable to guarantee this. I should have perhaps used motivation levels as the key factor for my

stratified sampling instead, which would have given me a wider range of perspectives to explore during interview.

I also decided to audio-record and transcribe my interviews with consent from the participants because this allowed me to have accurate quotes to discuss and analyse. For this research project I decided it would be most beneficial to conduct semi-structured interviews. Although I had a series of questions which needed to be answered in relation to RQs 1 and 3, I wanted to “let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely” (Denscombe, 2010: p. 175) on the questions I asked. I developed a list of questions for my interviews (see appendix 2) which I felt were important as a continuation from the questionnaire responses and from this students could choose to answer as they wanted. At first I wanted to use focus groups as a data collection method as this would have allowed me to adopt more of a facilitator role in discussions. However on reflection I felt that the different personalities of the students in the class would not be suited towards this method; the more shy students would not voice their opinions, whereas the more confident boys in the class would dominate the discussion. By conducting one-to-one interviews I eliminated this possibility.

Interviewing can also present some potential disadvantages, which makes it important to use a variety of data collection methods in research. The impact of the interviewer can mean that “what [participants] say they prefer cannot automatically be assumed to reflect the truth” (Denscombe, 2010: p. 193). In spite of this I felt that using interviews would provide rich qualitative data and as Cohen, Marion and Morrison (2011: p. 433) suggest, children are “the best sources of information about themselves” so directly speaking to them about the TBLT would give me plenty of information to discuss and analyse.

Students’ work

In order to answer RQ2 I felt that students’ work from the final task outcome would help me to gauge if the intervention had any effect on pupil progress. As the outcome of TBLT involved both oral and written work I made sure that I recorded students’ presentations and also had a copy of all written work throughout the sequence of lessons including the final task product. This enabled me to see if students were able to use new language which they had not been taught before implementing TBLT and showing if they had filled the ‘information gap’ effectively.

Using educational data such as samples of students' work allows researchers to "highlight some effective practices" (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2008: p. 2) and therefore helps to connect research with improving teaching practices. There are numerous other benefits to analysing students' work: it provides concrete examples of student learning and progression (or not, as the case may be). In the long term, this analysis can lead to "improved identification of students' learning needs as [an] outcome of data use" (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2008: p. 3) and consequently improve student learning, which is fundamental.

Ethical Considerations

When constructing my research methodology it was also crucial to consider the ethical guidelines as set out by the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011). Before carrying out my sequence of lessons the students in the class were all made aware of the research I was conducting and the reasoning behind it so that "all participants in the research understand the process in which they [were] to be engaged" (BERA, 2011: p. 5). All pupils within the class gave written voluntary consent to participate in my research project. Each student was given a pre-prepared form outlining the nature of the research and students were asked to sign this form if they were happy to participate. I also made sure that my research did not impede on students' time outside of lessons, and that my study did not affect their overall workload. All aspects of the intervention took place inside allocated lesson time. Furthermore, pupils knew that any data from the research would be treated with anonymity and in confidence.

Outline of the Sequence of Lessons

In order to plan for the different stages of my own TBLT I found it most beneficial to start by creating an outcome for the task that would be relevant to the unit of work students were studying. The scheme of work indicated that students were moving on to module 4 of the Expo 4 French textbook entitled *Allons-y*. This involved introducing students to language related to location, directions, food, clothes and transport. I therefore decided to get students to plan and organise a party using the different aspects of the textbook module as a basis for criteria they had to consider for their event. For the outcome of the task each group of students had to produce an invitation to the party along with a presentation including all the different criteria and justifying the choices for their party.

After much consideration, and also due to time constraints, I decided that the TBLT implementation would require a sequence of three 100 minute lessons, which would give me enough time to complete one full cycle of TBLT. As students were a low ability set I knew they tended to take longer during activities than other more able pupils, so this was something I needed to be mindful of. Furthermore, the task I constructed was quite open-ended; although there were criteria students needed to complete I allowed about 200 minutes altogether for them to reach the outcome. I created a scheme of work (see appendix 3) for the sequence of lessons to provide myself with an outline for timings and the different aspects that needed to be achieved within the cycle.

In order to prepare students for the task clear instructions were given as to the content which needed to be covered in order to achieve the outcome. I chose to put pupils into groups of similar abilities, although I decided not to use exact ability groupings. The rationale behind this was that I felt it was important that all students within a group felt confident enough to contribute their ideas, which would be easier if they were with people of a similar ability. However, I did not want to put students in exact ability groups as some groups may have felt they were at a disadvantage in terms of what they could achieve and could consequently become demotivated. Furthermore, I wanted to have a mixture of boys and girls in the groups as a large number of boys within the class tended to easily disrupt each other, so I thought this grouping would help avoid any potential behavioural problems.

The pre-task phase was fairly short; pupils were given the task brief in French (see appendix 4) and shown a model of a party invitation in order to provide the extra support I felt they needed due to their ability levels. As a whole class we also brainstormed different vocabulary that could help to complete the task thus consolidating prior knowledge. Students also participated in a quiz to determine the budget for their parties. I felt that giving them a budget for their task would allow them to reach higher-order cognitive skills such as those identified in Bloom's taxonomy of education objectives (1984), the main example being problem-solving. These higher-order thinking skills can be challenging to reach in second language learning. Pupils within each group also assigned roles to each other using the criteria, which gave the students some autonomy over their work. One thing I insisted on was the use of French music and food so that pupils were also enhancing their cultural awareness during the task.

After this pupils then engaged in the task phase where they were provided with computers to help them research the information they needed for their party. For this phase I adopted more of a facilitator role by monitoring the work and independent research carried out by each group. This also acted as a behaviour management tool to deter off-task behaviour.

To provide a transition to the post-task phase students' presentations and invitations were peer-assessed by the other groups and I also gave some verbal feedback. I noted down any common errors that students were making from their presentations or in the invitations, which were then addressed as a whole class. I would have liked to spend more time on the post-task phase but as the task phase took longer than anticipated I was unable to do this.

Findings

RQ1: What effects does the introduction of TBLT have upon students' motivation in French?

The data used to answer this RQ were gathered from my questionnaire responses which included both quantitative and qualitative data, and I also drew on the interviews with three students. The effects of the introduction of TBLT on student motivation are depicted below in figures one and two and then analysed thereafter.

As these visual representations of data show there was definitely a noticeable difference between the scores from the questionnaires received after the PPP lesson and those received after the TBLT lesson. During the PPP lesson students' levels of motivation were lower than during the TBLT lesson, as shown by the bar chart in figure one. Pupils' motivation levels for the PPP lesson were concentrated around the lower end of the scale, only reaching 3 out of 5 for about half the pupils (n=5 out of 11). Although there was a wide range of motivation levels in both the PPP and the TBLT lessons during the latter lesson no student rated themselves lower than 3 out of 5 in terms of their motivation with approximately half of the students (n=5) rating themselves on the highest level of motivation from the scale. In terms of the change between both lessons, figure two clearly shows an increase in motivation for the majority of pupils in the class (n= 9) with no pupil showing a negative effect towards the introduction of TBLT on their motivation. This quantitative data suggests that the introduction of TBLT on this class has showed a positive effect on students' motivation in French.

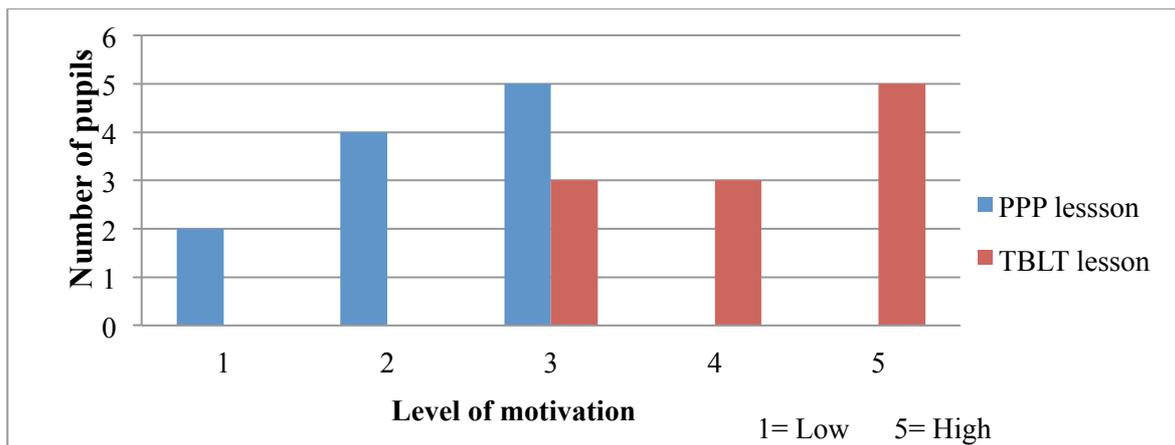


Figure 1: Bar chart to show a comparison of students’ motivation levels during a PPP lesson and a TBLT lesson using the questionnaire responses

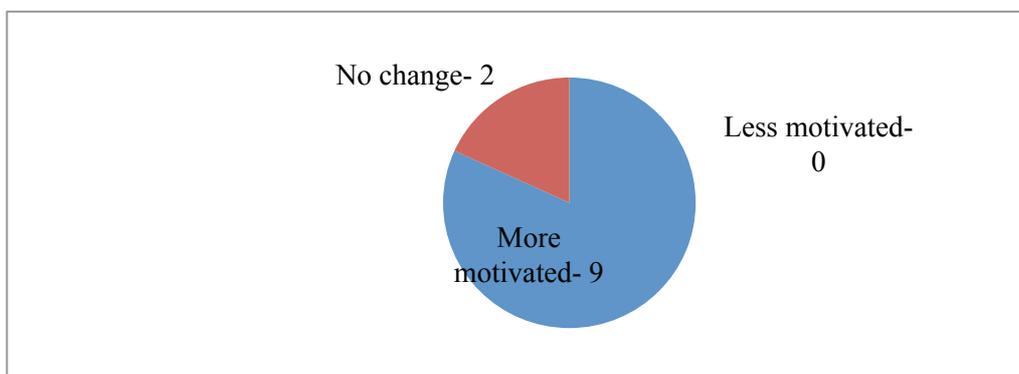


Figure 2: Pie chart to show pupils’ change in motivation from a PPP lesson to a TBLT lesson using the questionnaire responses

In terms of students’ written comments from the open-ended question on the questionnaire the PPP lesson yielded very neutral responses to the session with some students using adjectives such as “OK” and “a bit boring” to describe why they gave a certain score for their motivation. Students’ questionnaire responses from the TBLT lesson suggest that students overall had a more positive view of TBLT. Students’ comments reflected how they enjoyed this lesson more and the quantitative data gives a good indication of an increase in motivation between the lessons. A few students alluded to their increase in motivation from the open ended questionnaire response. One student’s comment of “I actually (sic) felt like I wanted to learn French!!!” after a TBLT lesson does indicate that their motivation for language learning has been increased during that lesson. Another student noted that “doing something fun and real like planning a party is motivatin (sic)” which

shows that the real-life aspect of TBLT is important in increasing motivation. However in order to provide more explanation as to why other students felt this motivation increase more exploration was needed during the interview stage to see what particular aspects of TBLT influenced this change.

Each of the three pupils I interviewed about TBLT responded positively when I asked them if they thought the task increased their motivation in French. Two of the pupils I interviewed felt their increase in motivation was due to an increase in interest because the task was “fun”. Therefore this comment would suggest that the fact the task was interesting was a determining factor in their increase in motivation. One student also said it was motivating because they could work independently on their role in the project so they had a sense of responsibility and at the same time they could use their group for support and help if need be. They also felt it was good that they could do things as they wanted without “being told what to do”. This would suggest that this particular pupil’s increase in motivation has stemmed from TBLT and its favouring of more pupil-led lessons. Each pupil I interviewed seemed to provide different reasoning for their increase in motivation, thus showing how motivation is very personal, so talking directly to the students was the best way to answer the RQ.

RQ2: How does the implementation of TBLT impact upon learners’ progress in French?

I analysed students’ written and oral work in order to help answer the above RQ. I wanted to see if students had bridged the ‘information gap’ that they were presented with when they were first given the task. The ‘information gap’ involved new language I expected students to be able to use related to directions, food, transport, location and clothes in French (please see appendix 5 for all translations). All groups effectively completed the majority of the 11 criteria (n= 10 out of 11) I asked them for as specified on the task brief. As long as I could understand the meaning of what students had written or said I felt that this showed effective communication and therefore the criterion had been achieved. For example, one group used “tourner à gauche” in their directions section and although this may not be grammatically accurate, the meaning is clear. However, not all use of language showed inaccuracies: one group’s directions using “puis allez directement au rond-point” shows care to form as well as meaning. As all groups only missed one element of the criteria in their final presentation and invitation, this is most likely due to a lack of time to finish it more than an inability to understand.

One of the key issues I observed from using TBLT is that although students were able to be independent in their research I found that I needed to exert some control over the resources they used, especially for finding the vocabulary that they needed. Often the sources they chose were unreliable and some examples of students' work showed this. For instance, although students were already provided with the word for 'party' in French ('fête' on their task brief sheets), within their work some students (n=3 out of 11) translated it as "parti" instead. Once I realised that students were not using accurate online translation tools I brought the groups together in order to remind them of the importance of using reliable websites and sources for vocabulary and I also provided some useful online resources for students. I felt this guidance was necessary in order for pupils to complete their work using a good level of French and to enable them to progress properly. This problem is something which is less likely to occur during PPP lessons as pupils are already provided with the correct vocabulary and use dictionaries to look up unfamiliar vocabulary.

While pupils were finding different foods and drinks for their party one student found an online shopping website for a French supermarket. Here, students could find different types of food and drink to 'virtually' buy and add the prices together. This proved an invaluable resource for students' understanding of food and drink vocabulary. One extract of a food list produced shows accurate French, "chips, chocolat, biscuits secs", because a reliable source has been used. Using this website achieves accurate use of language and also allows the student to understand the meaning of the words as they have specifically chosen the item and made a connection between the image and the word. TBLT allowed students to access these types of authentic resources and did enable them to make progress in French.

Although the different examples above show that TBLT has had a positive impact upon learners' progress academically and students have been able to complete the task without much teacher input, one of the problems I encountered was that the amount of written work done during a TBLT lesson was considerably less than during a PPP lesson. As pupils had to spend a lot of time researching and finding the vocabulary they needed, rather than simply being presented with it, this obviously affected the quantity of their work as they had less time to then construct their own French sentences. However, the quality of students' written and oral work was not necessarily affected by the implementation as the learning objective for the task was still achieved and the examples of pupil work do show a good attention to meaning.

From the interviews, students also commented that they felt the information they had acquired in completing the task was more “memorable” and would “stick in [their] head” more than during a “normal” lesson.

RQ3: What are students’ perceptions of TBLT to enhance their learning?

Questions two and three of the questionnaire aimed to elicit pupils’ enjoyment and interest levels from both a PPP and a TBLT lesson. The following figures represent the findings of the responses for both these questions in numerical form and will be discussed after.

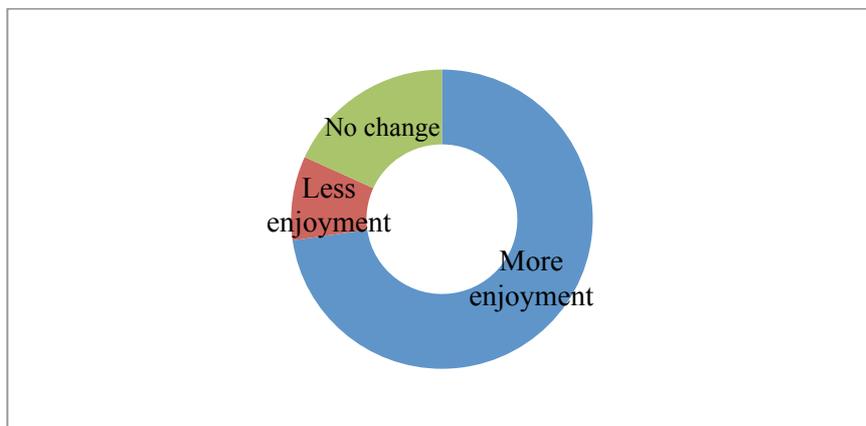


Figure 3: Pie chart to show students’ change in enjoyment between a PPP lesson and a TBLT approach lesson

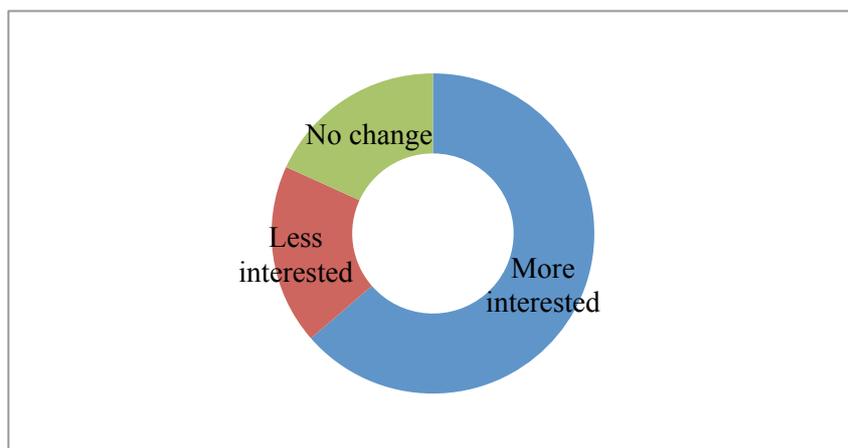


Figure 4: Pie chart to show students’ change in interest between a PPP lesson and a TBLT approach lesson

Displayed in table 2 below is a frequency table to show the types of comment students made from the open-ended part of the questionnaire and the interviews regarding what they liked about TBLT post-intervention, arranged by recurring themes.

Student comment	Number of students (out of 11)
Working on computers was good	5
Got to work in groups	4
Organising a party is fun	4
Something real	2
Liked having a budget	2
Being independent	2

Table 2: Table to show types of comments made by students regarding what they liked about a TBLT lesson and the amount of students making each comment.

This table supports the positive views of pupils towards TBLT from the quantitative data taken from the closed questions. No student made any negative comment after the TBLT lesson. Pupils' own perceptions do seem to reflect the observing teacher's classroom observations of the TBLT lessons. It was noted that "all students are focused and on-task" during the sequence of lessons and that they seemed to enjoy the independence they had been given by working on the computers and getting to do something different and "realistic".

The interviews I conducted also allowed me to gather more qualitative data regarding students' views of TBLT. Overall, the three students I questioned regarding their views on TBLT were very positive about this change in approach and did recognise a positive difference between the task they were given and "normal" lessons. They specifically enjoyed TBLT as they got to work in a different classroom environment than usual which was much more relaxed; as the lower ability student commented, "I could do things at my own pace so I didn't feel rushed". This could show that TBLT made this weaker student feel more comfortable working at their own pace rather than being pressurised to move between activities. Contradictory to this, the high ability student felt that if they were to do this task again it would be more beneficial with "stricter times" and deadlines by breaking the task into smaller, more manageable chunks.

Discussion

The above findings suggest that the implementation of TBLT in this particular context have shown both positive results and points for consideration. In terms of student motivation and RQ1, the quantitative data gathered along with the qualitative data seem to show that TBLT has increased students' motivation in the majority of pupils. The fact that no pupils showed a decrease in their motivation towards learning French is a positive outcome. This finding links strongly to the findings from Ruso's study (2007), which showed that TBLT enhanced pupil motivation. However, due to the nature of this research direct causality cannot be guaranteed. There were many other factors that could have affected pupils' increase in motivation such as using the computers and working in groups, which were mentioned by students in the questionnaires. These aspects are not necessarily always included in the TBLT approach so different types of task could produce very different results. These students had been recognised as being demotivated prior to the study and seem to have shown a visible increase in motivation. This contradicts the conclusions drawn by Pyun's (2013) research which argues that students need to be motivated in the first place in order to respond well to TBLT. The question that remains is to what extent this increase in motivation can be attributed to a change in pedagogical approach using TBLT as opposed to the more traditional PPP method.

It must be acknowledged that the very nature of the task-based activities could have influenced the fact that students' motivation increased after the introduction of TBLT. During the intervention students experienced an approach to teaching which was novel to them and this may have altered their motivation levels. Some students mentioned that the task was 'fun', and this could suggest that their motivation may have increased due to the more interesting nature of the task. In order to allow for this factor when drawing conclusions from this study further exploration would be required. For example, in an extended study a different task could be set which did not involve some of the key factors that the students described as 'fun'. In my view, however, too much should not be made of this issue. If students are more motivated by TBLT because it is perceived as more 'fun', then that is a reasonable and valid aspect of the TBLT approach.

By looking through and analysing students' work from the task to answer RQ2 it can be shown that all groups of students have successfully filled the 'information gap' (Ellis, 2003: p. 213) with vocabulary that the task required them to use. There was no particularly significant variation in the

quality of pupils' work compared to during a PPP lesson as although TBLT favours meaning over form, the type of mistakes that students made were typical of their ability and normal classwork. The advantage of TBLT was that the post-task phase allowed these common errors such as mistakes with adjectival agreements to be addressed. In the long term this should improve the standard of their work, but this would require further research. Although Mendoza and Keranen felt it was difficult for the teacher to control the language students were using during TBLT, by addressing the use of accurate and appropriate resources for vocabulary and translation I felt that I could have some control over language use. I felt this was necessary for my group of students and this did not, in my view, go against the principles of TBLT.

Whilst responses from the interviews regarding pupils' perceptions of TBLT were wholly positive, there were still some important aspects highlighted by pupils which require some attention for future practice as shown through the findings of RQ3. Timing is an issue that needs to be managed carefully during TBLT, as identified by Pachler et al. (2014). Similar to the findings of Mendoza and Keranen's study (2012), one of the main disadvantages I identified of using a TBLT approach with this group was the amount of time it took for students to complete the task phase. They were much slower at completing each stage of the task than I initially expected. As one of the students mentioned and during my discussion with the observing teacher, in retrospect it would have been better to set mini-deadlines within the overall task. This could have reduced the overall amount of time needed to complete the task phase because students would be more aware of the amount of time they had to complete each section as the deadline would be more imminent.

There are also other factors which need further discussion. Because the research I analysed during the literature review was carried out with older participants, I believe that the TBLT intervention I taught could have worked better with older students as they might require less guidance and structure to their lessons and could therefore thrive better working independently. Furthermore, I feel the ability of the students could also have been a factor in the pace of the lessons; carrying out TBLT with more able students could be more efficient and students may have a greater language basis to work from in order to help them complete the tasks. Likewise, although the students were kept on task during the sequence of lessons due to observation by the observing teacher and me, the class was very small with only 11 students. Having a larger class of students could also affect the task outcome and results. With such a small sample for my research there is no opportunity for generalizability, as the context is specific.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Whilst the majority of pupils reported an increase in motivation when participating in TBLT this is not necessarily a result of the teaching intervention. It is difficult to draw any conclusive arguments from my research as it was conducted over a very short period of time and with a small sample of pupils. However, the challenge is now to maintain this level of motivation within the class. By taking students' positive comments from the project, these can help to create a classroom environment which instils motivation and positive attitudes towards language learning. This could be achieved by trying to make activities that allow students to be independent and which also have some relation to a real-life situation so that pupils feel the French they are learning has a sense of purpose.

In terms of my own development as a trainee teacher I feel this project has improved my understanding and awareness of different approaches to language teaching.

This project has certainly shown TBLT to be enjoyable and interesting for the majority of students, although this research project could yield different results if conducted with other ages and abilities of students. Despite the fact that pupils' perceptions of the TBLT approach were very positive, pupil progress must always be taken into account and this was considerably slower in comparison to a PPP lesson. Although pupils felt the vocabulary they learnt from TBLT was more memorable, with pressure in preparation for exams it may not always be possible to spend this amount of time on a certain unit of work.

Undertaking this research project has led me to try and answer some key questions regarding the transition from a PPP approach to TBLT. I do not believe that TBLT can completely replace PPP; there is too much focus on the completion of the task and not enough emphasis on the processes behind this. I feel that a combination of both PPP and TBLT would work well in the creation of an engaging language curriculum. The existing practice of PPP works well in preparing students for exams but does not necessarily develop their communicative abilities. However in order to achieve this combination students would need more practice at dealing with tasks in order to make the approach a more workable model because students are used to learning in more of a teacher-centred environment. Therefore I believe that using both PPP and TBLT would result in more learners being able to communicate effectively in the TL. After reviewing the literature it does appear that a

lot of the criticism TBLT receives stems from the difficulties for the teacher rather than for the students.

There are some important recommendations which have emerged from this project. It is evident that more research is still needed within the UK regarding TBLT. Some particular ideas for research could involve more exploration into the effects of TBLT, particularly with higher ability students, and also KS3 students. There are other potential effects of TBLT which need further exploration such as student TL use. On a wider scale, it would also be interesting to see if Ellis' claim is feasible: can TBLT provide the basis for an entire language curriculum in the UK?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Blank questionnaire

1= Not at all → 5= Very/ a lot

How motivated were you during this lesson?

1 2 3 4 5

How interested were you during this lesson?

1 2 3 4 5

How much did you enjoy this lesson?

1 2 3 4 5

Can you explain why you chose your answers?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. How have you found the last three lessons in French?
2. What have you enjoyed most about planning the party?
3. What have you not enjoyed?
4. Were you interested in the task? Why?
5. Was there anything you would do differently if you could do the task again?
6. What could be improved about the task to help you more?
7. Are you happy with the outcome of your party?
8. Do you feel as though you have progressed in French?
9. Do you feel this task changed your motivation in French?
10. Did you enjoy this task more than normal French lessons?
11. Do you think you were more interested in this task than you were during a normal French lesson?

Appendix 3: Scheme of work

Lesson 1 (100 mins)	Lesson 2 (100 mins)	Lesson 3 (100 mins)
<p>LESSON OBJECTIVES:</p> <p><u>ALL</u>: To have started researching the different criteria for their party.</p> <p><u>MOST</u>: To have researched the different criteria for their party and started creating their invitation.</p> <p><u>SOME</u>: To have researched the different criteria for their party, created their invitation and started preparing their presentation.</p> <p>PRE-TASK PHASE (50 mins)</p> <p>Provide task brief sheet and explain what needs to be achieved</p> <p>Pupils complete quiz to determine budget for party</p> <p>Brainstorm to consolidate prior knowledge</p> <p>Pupils assign roles for each other</p> <p>Pupils given model to help them</p> <p>Support sheets for presentation provided to EAL students</p> <p>Materials provided for students</p> <p>TASK-PHASE (50 mins)</p> <p>Students in computer rooms completing research and working in groups to complete task</p>	<p>LESSON OBJECTIVES:</p> <p><u>ALL</u>: To have researched the different criteria for their party, created their invitation and prepared their presentation including all the different criteria whether accurate or not.</p> <p><u>MOST</u>: To include at least 3 different opinion phrases in their presentations and a variety of different adjectives. They should also use vocabulary to describe food and clothing accurately.</p> <p><u>SOME</u>: To include a range of different opinion phrases in their presentations and a variety of different adjectives. They should also use vocabulary to describe food and clothing accurately and construct accurate directions in French.</p> <p>TASK PHASE (100 mins)</p> <p>Students working in groups to complete task</p>	<p>LESSON OBJECTIVES:</p> <p><u>BRONZE</u>: To give an oral presentation on their chosen party including all the necessary criteria in French, as well as showing an invitation they have prepared. Pupils' spoken language should be understandable.</p> <p><u>ARGENT</u>: To give an oral presentation on their chosen party including all the necessary criteria in French, as well as showing an invitation they have prepared. Pupils should use a wide variety of adjectives and opinion phrases and use generally accurate French.</p> <p><u>OR</u>: To give an oral presentation on their chosen party including all the necessary criteria in French, as well as showing an invitation they have prepared. Pupils should justify their choices well using accurate French with correct grammar and vocabulary.</p> <p>TASK PHASE (50 mins)</p> <p>Students working in groups to complete task</p> <p>POST-TASK PHASE (50 mins)</p> <p>Peer-assessment of presentations and feedback as whole class</p> <p>Focus on any common mistakes during presentations, with a focus on form</p>

Appendix 4: Task brief

On prépare une fête

Vous vivez à Nevers en France et vous allez organiser une fête pour quelqu'un de votre choix.

Vous avez un budget de €.....

Vous devez partager les responsabilités pour chaque élément de la fête :

1. Le lieu
2. Les directions
3. Le transport
4. La nourriture et les boissons
5. La date et l'heure
6. Le code vestimentaire
7. La musique
8. Le spectacle
9. Les cadeaux pour les invités

Vous devez créer une invitation pour votre fête avec toute l'information nécessaire. Aussi, vous devez préparer une présentation sur votre fête, avec les justifications pour chaque élément.

Exemple d'une invitation :

Nous vous invitons à notre fête!

.....

Au Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Le 10 mars 2014

De 14h00 à 19h00

De la gare, allez tout droit, tournez à gauche, puis tournez à droite.

Code vestimentaire : élégant- robes et costumes

Appendix 5 : Translations

French	English translation
Tourner à gauche	Turn left
Puis allez directement au rond-point	Then go straight to the roundabout
Chips, chocolat, biscuits secs	Crisps, chocolate, biscuits