

Task-Based Language Teaching in Indonesia: Overcoming Constraints for Effective Language Learning

Izzuddin¹, Mustain²

¹ Department of English Language and Culture, Universitas KH. Bahaudin Mudhary Madura, Indonesia

² Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received October 1, 2024

Revised October 2, 2024

Accepted November 17, 2024

Kata Kunci:

Pengajaran Bahasa Berbasis Tugas,
Pengajaran bahasa komunikatif,
Rancangan kurikulum.

Keywords:

Task-Based Language Teaching,
Communicative Language Teaching,
Curriculum Design

ABSTRAK

Di Indonesia, bahasa Inggris telah diintegrasikan ke dalam sistem pendidikan, namun tetap menjadi bahasa asing dengan paparan yang terbatas di luar kelas, yang menimbulkan tantangan bagi pencapaian pembelajaran bahasa yang efektif. Studi ini mengkaji kelayakan Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) sebagai pendekatan pedagogis alternatif di kelas-kelas Indonesia untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut. Dengan menggunakan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis interaksi antara guru dan siswa serta keterlibatan mereka selama fase-fase TBLT, yaitu pra-tugas, siklus tugas, dan fokus bahasa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa TBLT menawarkan keseimbangan antara pengajaran tata bahasa dan kompetensi komunikatif, menjadikannya pendekatan yang layak diterapkan dalam keterbatasan pendidikan di Indonesia. Tantangan-tantangan yang diperkirakan, seperti ukuran kelas, ketidakreleasan siswa, dan kesesuaian kurikulum, dapat diatasi melalui pelatihan guru, penggunaan tugas-tugas yang menarik, dan pengembangan materi. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa TBLT, khususnya versi lemahnya, sangat selaras dengan konteks Indonesia, di mana pendekatan ini memiliki potensi untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbahasa sambil tetap sesuai dengan persyaratan kurikulum.

ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, English has been integrated into the educational system, yet it remains a foreign language with limited exposure outside the classroom, posing challenges to effective language acquisition. This study examines the feasibility of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an alternative pedagogical approach in Indonesian classrooms to address these challenges. Utilizing a qualitative case study, this study analyzes teacher-student interactions and engagement during TBLT's pre-task, task cycle, and language focus phases. The findings indicate that TBLT offers a balance between grammar instruction and communicative competence, making it a viable approach within Indonesia's educational constraints. Anticipated challenges, such as class size, student reluctance, and curriculum alignment, can be mitigated through teacher training, the use of engaging tasks, and developed materials. This study suggests that TBLT, particularly its weak version, aligns well with the Indonesian context, where it has the potential to foster language skills while accommodating curriculum requirements.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.



Corresponding Author:

Mustain
Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Surabaya, Indonesia
E-mail: mustain.19004@mhs.unesa.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

English, although widely regarded as an international language, is not the most spoken language globally. It comes second to Mandarin, which has more speakers. However, while Mandarin remains largely concentrated in China, English has spread across the world. One reason for this widespread use is that former British colonies, after gaining independence, retained English as either a second language or an official language. Countries like India, Singapore, and Malaysia are examples where English holds this status [1].

Regarding the global distribution of English, Kachru (1985 as cited in Harmer, 2015) proposed a model dividing English-speaking regions into three concentric circles. The Inner Circle refers to countries where English became the dominant language through migration, such as the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia. The Outer Circle consists of countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and India, where English was introduced during colonization and now serves as a second or official language alongside local languages. Lastly, the Expanding Circle includes nations such as Japan, China, and Indonesia, where English is learned primarily in classrooms and is viewed as a foreign language [2].

In Indonesia, despite its past under Dutch rule, the government opted for English over Dutch as the primary foreign language due to the political and economic benefits associated with it [3]. Although English is not recognized as a second language in Indonesia, unlike in neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, the government has still given considerable attention to English instruction. English has been part of the school curriculum since Indonesia's pre-independence period, beginning with its inclusion as a mandatory subject in MULO (Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs), a Dutch-established school equivalent to today's junior secondary school [4]. Under the current 2013 Curriculum, English remains a compulsory subject in secondary education and is tested in the National Examination [5].

Despite the government's focus on enhancing English proficiency, the foreign language status of English in Indonesia brings certain limitations. Firstly, English use is largely confined to the classroom. As Broughton et al. (2002) note, in contrast to ESL countries, where English is prevalent in media such as newspapers, television, and radio, EFL countries like Indonesia see English mostly restricted to the educational domain. This limited exposure makes it harder for students to develop strong communicative skills, as they encounter fewer opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Research underscores that exposure to a target language is critical for language acquisition, including English [6][7][8]. For instance, Krashen (1982, as cited in Lin 2015), posits that the language output students produce is closely linked to the input, or exposure, they receive [9]. Thus, while regular exposure to English can enhance student language acquisition, a lack of it poses significant challenges.

Secondly, many Indonesian learners are motivated by instrumental reasons for studying English, a situation shaped by English's status as a foreign language. According to Mistar (2005), the societal position of a language influences students' motivation to learn it [4]. In

Indonesia, most students pursue English primarily to pass exams, secure employment, or achieve other practical goals. This instrumental motivation creates challenges for communicative approaches like CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) in Indonesian classrooms. Instead of focusing on speaking and interaction, students often prioritize learning grammar, reading, and writing—the skills they perceive as most useful for passing exams.

Musthafa (2001) corroborates this, noting that Indonesian students primarily focus on passing the national exam, which unfortunately does not include a speaking component [10]. Consequently, teachers may find it difficult to implement CLT effectively, as it may not align with students' priorities. Additionally, Fadilah (2018) observes that Indonesian teachers tend to favor grammar-based approaches while also aiming to enhance speaking skills, although the latter is often secondary [11].

Given these considerations, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerges as a potentially more suitable approach for the Indonesian context. The next section will explore TBLT and its characteristics in more detail.

2. METHOD

The research employed a qualitative approach to explore the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Indonesian classrooms. A case study methodology was utilized, focusing on a specific context, namely an Indonesian secondary school where English was taught as a foreign language. The study's participants included Grade 12 students from Al-Maulidiyah Secondary School in East Java, Indonesia. This class consisted of 16 students, aged 18-19 years old, with a B1 proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Data collection techniques included document analysis and classroom observations, focusing on capturing the interactions between teachers and students during each of the three phases of TBLT: the pre-task phase, task-cycle, and language focus. Teacher-student interactions, student engagement, and the effectiveness of group collaboration were documented. Additionally, document analysis of lesson plans, worksheets, and student work provided further understanding of how TBLT tasks were designed and performed. Finally, data analysis was carried out through thematic analysis, where data from observations and interviews will be coded to identify common themes related to the implementation of TBLT

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 TBLT and Its Suitability for the Indonesian Context

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerges as a promising alternative to earlier approaches like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as it addresses some of the challenges associated with CLT [12]. As described by Wilkins (1976, cited in Nunan, 2010), TBLT was created as a response to the dichotomy between synthetic and analytic approaches to language instruction [13]. While synthetic approaches emphasize language structures as the focal point, analytic methods focus on learners and their purposes. In a similar vein, Ji and Pham (2018) assert that TBLT seeks to balance communicative competence and traditional instruction that focuses on grammatical aspects [14].

The core idea of TBLT is that language instruction must acknowledge the importance of grammar ("focus on form") alongside communication [15]. According to Doughty and

Williams (1998), TBLT operates on the principle that students should aim to produce meaningful language while also paying attention to grammatical structures [16]. Thus, TBLT integrates traditional grammar-focused teaching with modern meaning-centered instruction, making it an appropriate approach for the Indonesian classroom, where there is a strong need to teach grammar without neglecting speaking skills.

TBLT can be applied in two main ways: the weak and strong versions. In the weak version, tasks are used to encourage communication, but the teacher still adheres to curriculum and syllabus requirements. In contrast, the strong version places tasks at the heart of the curriculum and lesson planning [17]. Given that Indonesian teachers primarily function as curriculum implementers, the weak version of TBLT is more applicable in this context [18].

3.2 Anticipated Challenges of TBLT

Despite TBLT's suitability, there are certain classroom conditions that may hinder its effectiveness, such as large class sizes, student reluctance toward tasks, and curriculum constraints. Each of these challenges can be addressed with careful planning.

3.2.1 Class-Size Challenges

Implementing TBLT in large classrooms may present difficulties [14]. Harmer (2015) recommends that classrooms have between 10 and 15 students for optimal outcomes [2]. Overcrowded classrooms are a common obstacle to effective TBLT implementation in many Asian countries [20]. However, class sizes in Indonesia's public secondary schools, capped at 33 to 36 students, fall within manageable limits [5]. Providing teachers with training to manage student behavior and classroom dynamics during TBLT tasks could help mitigate potential issues [21].

3.2.2 Student Reluctance Toward Tasks

Tasks form the foundation of TBLT [2], but students may be hesitant to engage with them. To counteract this, teachers should ensure that tasks are both engaging and motivating. Numerous studies underscore the importance of motivation in second language achievement. For example, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) highlight the correlation between student motivation and language success [22]. Leong, Ming, and Chen (2013) further suggest that student interest enhances their engagement in classroom activities [22].

Research has shown that students' positive reactions to tasks are crucial for the success of TBLT. For instance, Meng and Cheng (2010) found that Chinese students enjoyed the variety of tasks in TBLT and believed that these tasks improved their performance [23]. Similarly, Huang (2015) found that TBLT increased motivation among English Language Teaching (ELT) students [24]. Additionally, a study by Hadi (2013) on 88 Iranian female students revealed that TBLT fostered collaboration and natural interaction in the target language, further motivating learners [25].

3.2.3 Curriculum Constraints

TBLT emphasizes meaningful tasks and language proficiency [2], but there may be a mismatch between TBLT and existing curriculum demands [26]. Indonesia's education system is built on a top-down approach (Poedjiastutie et al., 2018), which limits teachers' ability to

fully integrate TBLT into the classroom. However, by adopting the weak version of TBLT, teachers can balance the core principles of TBLT with curriculum requirements [18].

If designed carefully, this balance between TBLT and the curriculum can greatly enhance the success of the approach. For example, Sundari et al. (2018) conducted an experimental study in Indonesia that demonstrated the positive impact of task-based materials on students' writing skills, particularly in areas such as content, organization, and grammar [27]. Poedjiastutie et al. (2018) also found that innovative TBLT tasks contributed to improved reading skills among Indonesian university students [28].

3.3 TBLT in Practice

TBLT consists of three main phases: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus [2], which are outlined below.

1. Pre-task: During this phase, the teacher introduces and prepares the tasks that students will complete in the next stage. This step serves as a warm-up activity to ensure students are mentally and emotionally prepared for the task [2]. Teachers can use this time to brainstorm and connect the task to students' personal experiences, making it more relevant and meaningful [29].
2. Task Cycle: In this phase, students perform the main task, often in groups, to promote collaboration [30]. Group work is particularly effective in classrooms with varying levels of language proficiency [31].
3. Language Focus: In the final phase, the teacher addresses specific grammar points or features used during the task cycle. Additionally, teachers can provide corrective feedback, either to the whole class or individually [2].

The meaningful nature of tasks is crucial to the success of TBLT [2]. Prabhu (1987) classifies tasks into three types: information-gap tasks, where students exchange information; reasoning-gap tasks, which require students to reason or draw conclusions; and opinion-gap tasks, where students express preferences or feelings [32].

4. CONCLUSION

This essay has explored the theoretical framework of English's status and its influence on adopting TBLT in the Indonesian context, along with practical implementation strategies. Despite potential classroom limitations such as class size, student hesitation, and curriculum alignment, these challenges can be managed with thoughtful solutions. Suggested strategies include enhanced teacher management training, designing motivating tasks, and employing customized materials—factors likely to contribute significantly to the successful integration of TBLT in Indonesian classrooms.

REFERENCES

- [1] G. Broughton, C. Brumfit, A. Pincas, and R. D. Wilde, *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. Routledge, 2002.
- [2] J. Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2015.

- [3] B. D. Smith, "English in Indonesia," *English Today: The International Review of the English Language*, vol. 7, no. 2 [26], pp. 39-43, 1991. DOI: 10.1017/S0266078400005526.
- [4] J. Mistar, "Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Indonesia," in *Teaching English to the World: History, Curriculum, and Practice*, G. Braine, Ed., Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2005, pp. 71-80.
- [5] Ministry of Education and Culture, "Silabus Mata Pelajaran Sekolah Menengah Atas/Madrasah Aliyah/Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/Madrasah Alyah Kejuruan (SMA/MA/SMK/MAK) Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris," Jakarta, Indonesia, 2016.
- [6] J. L. Lemke, "Language development and identity: Multiple timescales in the social ecology of learning," *Language Acquisition and Language Socialization*, pp. 68-87, 2002.
- [7] S. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon, 1982.
- [8] M. Turnbull and J. Dailey-O'Cain, eds., *First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning*, Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2009.
- [9] Lin, A.M.Y., "Conceptualising the potential role of L1 in CLIL," *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 74-89, 2015. DOI: 10.1080/07908318.2014.1000926
- [10] B. Musthafa, "Communicative language teaching in Indonesia: Issues of theoretical assumptions and challenges in classroom practice," *English Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 63-69, 2001.
- [11] E. Fadilah, "Rethinking the maintenance of CLT in Indonesia: a response to Ariana's 'The need for maintaining CLT in Indonesia'," *TESOL Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 224-236, 2018.
- [12] M. Celce-Murcia and D. Branton, eds., *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 4th ed., Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning, 2014.
- [13] D. Nunan, "A task-based approach to materials development," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 135-160, 2010.
- [14] Y. Ji and T. Pham, "Implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT) to teach grammar in English classes in China: Using design-based research to explore challenges and strategies," *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, pp. 1-14, 2019. DOI: 10.1080/17501229.2018.1545021.
- [15] C. Doughty and J. Williams, *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition*, The Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- [16] M. I. Ahmed, "Is Task-based Language Teaching 'The Answer'?", *Language in India*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2013.
- [17] R. Adams and J. Newton, "TBLT in Asia: Constraints and opportunities," *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 1-17, 2009.
- [18] A. Lie, "Education policy and EFL curriculum in Indonesia: Between the commitment to competence and the quest for higher test scores," *TEFLIN Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 1-15, 2007. [Online]. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v18i1/1-15>.
- [19] W. Littlewood, "Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms," *Language Teaching*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 243-249, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480700043>.
- [20] Y. Liu and T. Xiong, "Situated Task-Based Language Teaching in Chinese Colleges: Teacher Education," *English Language Teaching*, vol. 9, no. 5, pp. 22-32, 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n5p22>.
- [21] A. Masgoret and R. Gardner, "Attitudes, Motivation, and Second Language Learning: A Meta-Analysis of Studies Conducted by Gardner and Associates," *Language Learning*, vol. 53, no. S1, pp. 167-210, 2003.
- [22] C. Long, Z. Ming, and L. Chen, "The study of student motivation on English learning in Junior middle school: A case study of No. 5 middle school in Gejiu," *English Language Teaching*, vol. 6, no. 9, p. 136, 2013. <http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n9p136>.

- [23] Y. Meng and B. Cheng, "College students' perceptions on the issues of task-based language teaching in mainland China," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 434-442, 2010.
- [24] D. Huang, "A study on the application of task-based language teaching method in a comprehensive English class in China," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 118–127, 2015.
- [25] A. Hadi, "A comparative study of Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perspectives on task-based instruction," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 300-312, 2013.
- [26] G. W. Hu, "Contextual influences on instructional practices: A Chinese case for an ecological approach to ELT," *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 635–660, 2005. [Online].
- [27] H. Sundari, R. H. Febriyanti, and G. Saragih, "Using Task-based Materials in Teaching Writing for EFL Classes in Indonesia," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 119-124, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.7n.3p.119>.
- [28] D. Poedjiastutie, D. Darmaji, M. Musrina, and R. Novikasari, "Task-based language teaching: An alternative approach in teaching reading comprehension in Indonesia," *Journal of Asia TEFL*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 856-863, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2018.15.3.22.856>.
- [29] M. Van Manen, *The Tact of Teaching: The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness*. Routledge, 2016.
- [30] D. A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. FT Press, 2014.
- [31] N. V. Hung, "Review of notion and framework of task-based language teaching," *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 39-48, 2014.
- [32] N. S. Prabhu, *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford University Press, 1987.