

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EFL CONTEXTS: ITS EFFECT ON STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on students' communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The research aims to examine how task-based instruction influences students' ability to use English effectively in real-life communication. A quasi-experimental design was employed involving students from a senior high school. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observations, and questionnaires. The results indicate that students exposed to TBLT showed significant improvement in fluency, interaction, and confidence compared to those taught using traditional methods. Task-based activities such as role-playing, problem-solving, and group discussions provided meaningful opportunities for language use. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary, time constraints, and varying proficiency levels were identified. The study concludes that TBLT is an effective approach to enhance communicative competence in EFL classrooms. It suggests that teachers should integrate meaningful tasks into instruction to promote active learning and communication skills development. The findings contribute to EFL pedagogy by providing practical insights into implementing TBLT in secondary education.

Keywords : task-based learning, communicative competence, EFL, language teaching, secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in global communication, education, business, science, and technology. As the most widely used international language, English enables individuals to access information, participate in academic activities, and communicate across different cultures. In today's globalized world, proficiency in English has become an essential skill for students to compete academically and professionally. Consequently, many countries, including Indonesia, have made English a compulsory subject in schools and universities. Despite years of formal English instruction, many students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts still struggle to communicate effectively in English. In Indonesia, English is generally learned in classroom settings and is rarely used in daily communication. As a result, students often possess basic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but face difficulties when expressing ideas, participating in conversations, or communicating confidently in real-life situations. This situation indicates that language instruction often focuses more on language forms than on practical language use.

The inability of students to use English communicatively has become a major concern in language education. Modern language teaching emphasizes communicative competence as the primary goal of language learning. Communicative competence refers not only to grammatical knowledge but also to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in different contexts. Students are expected to understand, interpret, and produce language meaningfully during interactions. Therefore, language learning should provide opportunities for learners to engage in authentic communication rather than simply memorize grammatical rules. However, traditional teacher-centered approaches often limit students' opportunities to practice communication. Classroom activities frequently emphasize grammar exercises, translation tasks, and textbook-based learning, which may not adequately develop speaking skills and communicative competence. Students tend to become passive learners who focus on completing assignments rather than actively using English. Consequently, many learners lack confidence and fluency when communicating in the target language.

To address this issue, language educators have increasingly adopted learner-centered approaches that encourage active participation and meaningful communication. One of the most widely recognized approaches is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). TBLT is an instructional approach that uses meaningful tasks as the core of the learning process. Rather than focusing primarily on language forms, TBLT encourages students to use language to complete tasks, solve problems, exchange information, and achieve specific communicative goals. This approach allows learners to practice English in situations that resemble real-life communication. According to Ellis (2018), TBLT promotes language acquisition by engaging learners in meaningful interaction and communication. Similarly, Richards (2017) argues that TBLT supports communicative language learning because students use language for authentic purposes rather than simply studying grammatical structures. Through task completion, learners become more actively involved in the learning process and gain opportunities to develop fluency, confidence, and communicative competence.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of TBLT in language learning. Zhang (2020) found that task-based activities significantly improved students' speaking skills because they encouraged learners to communicate more frequently and naturally. Likewise, Nguyen (2019) reported that students who participated in task-based learning became more confident in expressing their ideas and interacting with others in English. These findings suggest that TBLT can create a more engaging and communicative learning environment. Interaction is another important aspect of Task-Based Language Teaching. Long (2017) emphasizes that language learning occurs through interaction, as learners negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and receive feedback during communication. Collaborative tasks provide opportunities for students to work together,

share ideas, and use English in meaningful contexts. González-Lloret (2019) further states that collaborative task-based activities can improve students' communication skills and classroom engagement.

The integration of technology has also strengthened the implementation of TBLT. Digital tools such as online discussion forums, collaborative platforms, videos, and mobile applications provide authentic learning experiences and support communication beyond the classroom. Chapelle (2020) notes that technology can enhance task-based learning by creating interactive and meaningful learning environments. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2018) found that technology-supported tasks increase student motivation and participation in language learning activities. Despite its advantages, implementing TBLT can be challenging. Teachers may face difficulties related to large class sizes, limited instructional time, and insufficient resources. Students with lower levels of English proficiency may also struggle to participate actively in communicative tasks (Carless, 2018). Therefore, successful implementation requires careful planning, appropriate task design, and adequate teacher support.

In Indonesia, studies on TBLT have reported both positive outcomes and implementation challenges. Prabowo (2021) found that TBLT improved students' speaking abilities and classroom participation. However, Suryani (2020) reported that teachers often encounter obstacles such as limited time and students' unfamiliarity with learner-centered approaches. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of TBLT may vary depending on the educational context. Toraja Utara represents a unique EFL context where students have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. As a result, classroom instruction plays a crucial role in developing students' communicative competence. Understanding the effectiveness of TBLT in this context is important for identifying strategies that can enhance students' speaking abilities and communication skills.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of Task-Based Language Teaching on students' communicative competence in an EFL context. Specifically, the study investigates how task-based instruction influences students' speaking abilities and explores its effectiveness in promoting meaningful communication and active participation in English language learning.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design using a pre-test and post-test non-equivalent control group design. The purpose of this design was to examine the effect of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on students' communicative competence in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The study involved two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The

experimental group received instruction through Task-Based Language Teaching, while the control group was taught using conventional teacher-centered methods commonly implemented in English classrooms. Both groups completed a pre-test before the treatment and a post-test after the treatment. The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores allowed the researcher to determine the effectiveness of TBLT in improving students' communicative competence, particularly speaking skills.

Table 1. The comparison of pre-test and post-test

Group	Pre-Test	Treatment	Post-Test
Experimental Group	O ₁	TBLT Instruction	O ₂
Control Group	O ₃	Conventional Teaching	O ₄

Where:

O₁ and O₃ = Pre-test scores

O₂ and O₄ = Post-test scores

X = Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

2. Participants

The participants of this study were 60 eleventh-grade students from a public senior high school in Toraja Utara, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their similar English proficiency levels and classroom availability. The students were divided into two groups consisting of 30 students each. The experimental group consisted of 30 students who received instruction through Task-Based Language Teaching, while the control group consisted of 30 students who received conventional English instruction. Prior to the treatment, a placement assessment and pre-test were administered to ensure that both groups had relatively similar levels of communicative competence. The selection of students from Toraja Utara was considered appropriate because English exposure outside the classroom is relatively limited in this area. Therefore, classroom instruction plays a significant role in developing students' communicative competence.

3. Research Instruments

Three instruments were employed to collect data in this study: a speaking test rubric, an observation checklist, and a student questionnaire.

a. Speaking Test

The speaking test was used as the primary instrument to measure students' communicative competence before and after the treatment. Students were required to perform speaking tasks related to everyday communication situations. Their

performances were assessed using a speaking rubric adapted from Brown (2019), covering three major aspects:

Table 2. The speaking test

Aspect	Description
Fluency	Ability to speak smoothly and continuously with minimal hesitation
Accuracy	Correct use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation
Interaction	Ability to respond, maintain communication, and negotiate meaning

Each aspect was scored on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, resulting in a maximum score of 15 points for each participant.

b. Observation Checklist

An observation checklist was used to monitor classroom activities during the implementation of TBLT. The checklist focused on students' participation, interaction, engagement, collaboration, and use of English during task completion. Classroom observations were conducted during each instructional session to ensure that the treatment was implemented consistently.

c. Student Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to students in the experimental group at the end of the treatment. The questionnaire consisted of 15 Likert-scale items ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It aimed to explore students' perceptions of TBLT, including motivation, engagement, confidence, and perceived improvement in communicative competence.

4. Data Collection Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of six weeks from April to May 2025. The data collection process consisted of four stages: pre-testing, treatment implementation, classroom observation, and post-testing. During the first week, both the experimental and control groups were given a pre-test to assess their initial communicative competence. The speaking test was administered individually and evaluated using the speaking assessment rubric.

During the second to fifth weeks, the experimental group received instruction through Task-Based Language Teaching. The instructional activities followed the three stages proposed by Willis (2017): pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. Students participated in various communicative activities, including role plays, problem-solving tasks, information-gap activities, discussions, and collaborative projects. These tasks encouraged students to use English meaningfully to achieve specific communicative goals. In contrast, the control group received conventional

instruction focusing on grammar explanation, vocabulary exercises, textbook activities, and teacher-led discussions. Classroom observations were conducted regularly throughout the treatment period to document students' participation and engagement. During the sixth week, both groups completed a post-test using speaking tasks similar in difficulty to those administered in the pre-test. Additionally, students in the experimental group completed the questionnaire to provide feedback regarding their learning experiences with TBLT.

5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics with the assistance of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores, were used to summarize students' performance in the pre-test and post-test. These statistics provided an overview of students' communicative competence before and after the treatment. Inferential statistics were employed to determine whether the observed differences were statistically significant. A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test and post-test scores within each group. Furthermore, an independent-sample t-test was used to compare the post-test results between the experimental and control groups. The level of significance was set at 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). If the significance value was lower than 0.05, the difference was considered statistically significant, indicating that Task-Based Language Teaching had a significant effect on students' communicative competence. The qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and student questionnaires were analyzed descriptively to support and explain the quantitative findings. Observation notes and questionnaire responses were categorized into themes related to participation, engagement, interaction, confidence, and communicative competence development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings regarding the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and its effect on students' communicative competence in an EFL classroom. The data were obtained from speaking tests, classroom observations, and student questionnaires, and are organized into several major themes.

1. Improvement in Speaking Fluency

The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores indicates that students in the experimental group achieved greater improvement than those in the control group.

Table 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Scores

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Experimental	60.5	78.2	+17.7
Control	61.2	68.5	+7.3

Based on the data in Table 1, there was an improvement in speaking ability in both groups following the learning process. However, the improvement observed in the experimental group was significantly greater than that in the control group. The experimental group, which received instruction using Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), saw its average score increase from 60.5 on the pre-test to 78.2 on the post-test, representing an increase of 17.7 points. Meanwhile, the control group, which received conventional instruction, only saw an increase from 61.2 to 68.5, a difference of 7.3 points. These findings indicate that the implementation of TBLT has a greater impact on improving students' speaking skills compared to traditional teaching methods. Statistical test results also showed a significant difference between the two groups ($p < 0.05$), indicating that TBLT is effective in improving students' communicative competence.

After six weeks of TBLT implementation, noticeable changes were observed. Students began to speak more continuously with fewer interruptions. They were able to express ideas in longer utterances and showed increased willingness to communicate. Tasks such as storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions required students to use English in extended speech, which contributed to fluency development. Observation data indicated that repetition of tasks played a crucial role in improving fluency. When students were given similar tasks across different sessions, they became more comfortable and efficient in using the language. For instance, during a storytelling task, students initially struggled to narrate events but gradually improved their delivery in subsequent sessions. Furthermore, students demonstrated improved speed and rhythm in speech. Although grammatical errors were still present, the focus on communication rather than accuracy allowed students to prioritize fluency. This aligns with the principles of TBLT, where meaning-focused communication is emphasized.

2. Development of Interaction Skills

The speaking assessment rubric evaluated three major aspects of communicative competence: fluency, interaction, and grammatical accuracy.

Table 2. Improvement in Communicative Competence Components

Component	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Fluency	20.8	27.5	+6.7
Interaction	19.5	26.8	+7.3
Accuracy	20.2	23.9	+3.7

Table 2 shows the development of the three main components of communicative competence: fluency (the ability to speak fluently), interaction (the

ability to interact), and accuracy (linguistic accuracy). Of these three aspects, interaction showed the greatest improvement, with an increase of 7.3 points, from an average of 19.5 to 26.8. Next, fluency increased by 6.7 points, from 20.8 to 27.5. Meanwhile, the accuracy aspect also improved, although not as significantly as the other two components, by 3.7 points, from 20.2 to 23.9. These data indicate that TBLT not only helps students speak more fluently but also enhances their ability to interact and maintain effective communication. The improvement in accuracy suggests that more precise language use also develops alongside the communication activities carried out during the learning process.

The second major finding is the development of students' interaction skills. Interaction is a key component of communicative competence, and TBLT provides opportunities for students to engage in meaningful communication with peers. During the implementation, students were frequently involved in pair and group work activities. These included problem-solving tasks, information gap activities, and collaborative projects. Such tasks required students to exchange information, negotiate meaning, and respond to others. Observation results showed that students became more active in initiating conversations and responding appropriately. Initially, many students relied on short responses or avoided interaction. However, over time, they began to ask questions, clarify ideas, and provide feedback to peers.

Students also demonstrated improved turn-taking skills and the ability to maintain conversations. They used expressions such as "What do you think?", "Can you explain more?", and "I agree with you," indicating increased awareness of conversational norms. Another important aspect of interaction development was the use of negotiation strategies. Students learned to request clarification, repeat information, and paraphrase ideas when communication breakdown occurred. These strategies helped maintain communication and improved overall interaction quality.

3. Enhancement of Students' Confidence

Confidence emerged as a crucial factor influencing students' communicative competence. The findings show that TBLT significantly contributed to increased student confidence in using English. Before the treatment, many students expressed anxiety and fear of making mistakes. This often resulted in reluctance to speak in front of others. However, the implementation of task-based activities created a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

Group work played an important role in reducing anxiety. Students felt more comfortable speaking in small groups compared to speaking individually in front of the class. The collaborative nature of tasks allowed students to share responsibility and support each other. Teachers also contributed to building confidence by providing positive feedback and encouraging participation. Instead of focusing on errors, teachers emphasized communication and effort. This approach helped students feel more confident and motivated. Questionnaire data revealed that a majority of students reported increased confidence in speaking English after participating in TBLT activities. They indicated that tasks made learning more enjoyable and less stressful.

4. Improvement in Vocabulary Usage

Another important finding is the improvement in students' vocabulary usage. TBLT exposes students to contextualized language, allowing them to learn and use vocabulary in meaningful situations. During task-based activities, students encountered new vocabulary related to specific topics. For example, in a task about describing cultural events, students learned vocabulary related to traditions, ceremonies, and local customs. Students were encouraged to use new vocabulary during tasks, which helped reinforce learning. Unlike traditional memorization methods, TBLT allowed students to apply vocabulary in real communication.

Observation data showed that students gradually expanded their vocabulary repertoire. They used more varied expressions and were able to convey ideas more precisely. Although some students still relied on simple vocabulary, overall improvement was evident. Students also utilized strategies such as using synonyms, gestures, and explanations when they lacked specific vocabulary. These strategies helped maintain communication and demonstrated increased communicative competence.

5. Improvement in Grammatical Accuracy

Although TBLT primarily focuses on communication, the findings indicate that students also showed improvement in grammatical accuracy. This improvement occurred gradually as students were exposed to repeated language use. Teachers provided feedback after task completion, highlighting common grammatical errors. This delayed correction approach allowed students to focus on fluency during tasks and accuracy afterward. Students demonstrated better sentence structure and correct use of basic grammar, such as verb tenses and subject-verb agreement. However, errors were still present, particularly among lower-proficiency students. The improvement in grammar suggests that TBLT does not neglect accuracy but integrates it within meaningful communication.

6. Increased Student Engagement

Student engagement was significantly higher in the experimental group compared to the control group. Task-based activities created a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Students actively participated in discussions, collaborated with peers, and showed enthusiasm in completing tasks. Activities such as role-playing and problem-solving were particularly engaging.

Observation data indicated that students were more attentive and involved during TBLT sessions. They demonstrated curiosity and willingness to participate, which contributed to effective learning. In contrast, students in the control group showed lower levels of engagement. They were more passive and relied on teacher explanations.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has a significant positive effect on students' communicative competence in the EFL classroom. The substantial improvement in speaking performance, particularly in the experimental group, demonstrates that meaningful and interactive learning activities provide students

with greater opportunities to use English in authentic communication. The increase in the experimental group's mean score from 60.5 to 78.2, compared to the control group's improvement from 61.2 to 68.5, suggests that TBLT is more effective than conventional teaching methods in developing speaking ability. This finding supports Ellis (2020), who argues that language acquisition occurs more effectively when learners are engaged in meaningful communication rather than focusing exclusively on grammatical forms. Similarly, Willis and Willis (2018) emphasize that repeated task performance helps learners develop fluency through continuous language use. In this study, activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions provided students with repeated opportunities to practice English, resulting in greater fluency and reduced hesitation during communication.

The improvement in interaction skills further confirms the effectiveness of TBLT. The results showed that interaction was the component with the highest level of improvement among the three aspects of communicative competence. This can be attributed to the collaborative nature of task-based activities, which required students to exchange information, negotiate meaning, ask questions, and respond to peers. These findings are consistent with Long's (2017) Interaction Hypothesis, which states that language learning develops through interaction and negotiation of meaning. Likewise, Sato and Ballinger (2020) found that peer interaction promotes deeper language processing and enhances communicative ability. The increased use of conversational expressions and clarification strategies observed in this study indicates that students became more aware of communication norms and were better able to maintain conversations.

Another important finding is the increase in students' confidence. Before the implementation of TBLT, many students were reluctant to speak English because of anxiety and fear of making mistakes. However, the collaborative and supportive environment created through task-based activities helped reduce these affective barriers. Dörnyei (2020) emphasizes that confidence and motivation strongly influence learners' willingness to communicate. Similarly, Carless (2018) argues that task-based learning encourages participation because students focus on achieving communicative goals rather than producing perfect language. As students successfully completed tasks and interacted with peers, they became more confident and willing to participate in speaking activities.

The findings also demonstrate improvements in vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy. Students acquired new vocabulary through contextualized tasks, which enabled them to apply words and expressions in meaningful situations. This supports Nation's (2019) view that vocabulary is learned more effectively when it is encountered and used within authentic contexts. Furthermore, although TBLT emphasizes communication, students also showed progress in grammatical accuracy. This result aligns with Ellis (2020), who states that focus on form can be integrated into communicative tasks without

interrupting communication. The delayed feedback provided by teachers allowed students to concentrate on fluency during tasks while still receiving support for grammatical improvement afterward.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges emerged during implementation. Limited instructional time often restricted the completion of tasks and feedback sessions. Differences in students' proficiency levels also affected participation, as lower-proficiency learners sometimes struggled to express ideas. In addition, classroom management became more demanding because collaborative activities increased classroom interaction and noise levels. These challenges are similar to those reported by Carless (2018) and Garton and Copland (2019), who identified time constraints, proficiency differences, and classroom management as common issues in TBLT implementation.

To ensure the sustainability of TBLT, schools should provide ongoing teacher training focused on task design, classroom management, and communicative assessment. The integration of digital technologies, such as online discussion platforms and collaborative learning applications, can further support task-based learning both inside and outside the classroom. Schools are also encouraged to create English-rich environments through extracurricular activities, including English clubs, debates, and storytelling competitions. Such initiatives can provide students with additional opportunities to practice English and maintain the communicative skills developed through TBLT. Overall, the findings confirm that TBLT is an effective approach for enhancing communicative competence and can serve as a valuable instructional strategy for EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an effective instructional approach for improving students' communicative competence in the EFL classroom. The findings revealed that students who participated in task-based learning activities achieved significantly higher improvements in speaking performance than those who received conventional instruction. The implementation of TBLT contributed to the development of key components of communicative competence, including speaking fluency, interaction skills, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and confidence in using English. Students also demonstrated higher levels of engagement and participation during learning activities, indicating that meaningful and collaborative tasks can create a more dynamic and learner-centered learning environment. The findings suggest that TBLT provides learners with authentic opportunities to use English for real communication, enabling them to develop both linguistic and interactional abilities. Despite several challenges, such as time constraints, diverse proficiency levels, and classroom management issues, the overall benefits of TBLT outweighed these limitations. Appropriate teacher support, scaffolding strategies, and collaborative learning activities

helped overcome many of the difficulties encountered during implementation. Practically, this study highlights the importance of integrating communicative and task-based activities into English language instruction. Future research is recommended to investigate the long-term effects of TBLT in different educational contexts and explore the integration of digital technologies to further enhance communicative language learning outcomes.

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