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## **REVISITING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) IN INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL: CURRENT ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES**

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### **Abstract**

*Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been widely administered in Asian countries including Indonesia. This paper aims to investigate its implementation in Indonesian secondary school context using the previous research to present comparison. As identified, either target language issue and national examination as it is applied in the curriculum remain in the same situation. Another finding has indicated that the notion of TBLT contradicts to the cultural value of Indonesian students. Having reviewed the relevant studies, this article suggests some potential alternatives in order to move forward: 1) utilizing the teaching procedure called 'Engage, Study, Activate' (ESA), 2) employing 'mediated learning' and 3) embedding local culture in the teaching materials. Finally, this study addresses the possibility of TBLT in the future particularly in Indonesian context.*

### **Keywords**

TBLT, Indonesian Secondary School, Comparison, Alternatives, Possibilities

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

We should acknowledge that the practice of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been flourishing around the world; numerous of research has appeared with reports on its compatibility in the scope of Asian countries (Nunan, 2006; Littlewood, 2007; Butler, 2011; Lai, 2015). In regard to this concern, nevertheless, it is identified that the study regarding TBLT in Indonesian context is limited. It can be assumed that there should be some issues behind this phenomenon.

In response to this issue, Fachrurrazy (2000) has drawn a study about the review of implementation of TBLT in Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Firstly, he pointed out that the syllabus was not designed to meet with the goal of TBLT essentially. Secondly, it was about “the demand of evaluation (EBTA)” (Fachrurrazy, 2000, p. 74) or well known as national examination in Indonesia that is not in line with the concept of TBLT. He also highlighted the teachers’ belief that viewed TBLT is “not teaching” (Fachrurrazy, 2000, p. 74) since it relies more activities on students, the teachers argued that something can be considered as teaching if it is performed in traditional or deductive way. Lastly, the issue regarding target language is also underlined. The dilemma comes when the teachers have to use target language during classroom activity, but in the other hand the beginner students would encounter difficulty in understanding the language.

The description of Fachrurrazy as delivered above might be adequate to illustrate the problems. However, his study was published over fifteen years ago, therefore it should be updated for the reason of relevancy to current teaching practice. Having reviewed this issue, this essay attempts to investigate the current problems about the implementation of TBLT in Indonesian context. Furthermore, Fachrurrazy’s study is used as a comparison in order to see whether the problems as he mentioned are still occurred or not.

In the following, this essay begins with insightful explanation about definition and characteristic of TBLT. Next, the overview of TBLT issues in Asian countries is presented. Then, it highlights about how TBLT is administered in Indonesian curriculum. After that, the challenges on its implementation are also discussed. At the end of this paper, both suggestions and limitation of this study are formulated for the reason of improvement and future research.

## **1.2 Context**

As the raising of big demand for English, in Indonesian context, this subject is undertaken starting from secondary school consisting 3 years in junior high school and the rest 3 years in senior high school level. Moreover, English is also considered as a compulsory subject, therefore a big concern should be put on this issue. Relating to this, the author has narrowed the focus of this essay to secondary level by including both junior and senior high school.

Another reason is the prevailing of newest curriculum contributes various effects to teachers and learners. However, it should be informed that the latest curriculum called '*Kurikulum 2013*' has been reevaluated by the Indonesian government due to its controversy. For this reason, this paper excludes this curriculum and referring to the previous one namely '*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*' (School-Based Curriculum) that was officially launched in 2006.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Task-Based Language Teaching: Definition and Characteristics**

As the great extent of TBLT in the last twenty years, plenty of researchers have attempted to define the meaning of this concept. To take an example, Richards & Rodgers (2001) considered TBLT as a kind of approach which emphasizes 'task' as the central point for either planning or instruction in language teaching. Similarly, Ellis (2003) asserted that TBLT allows 'task' to be the key role in language teaching. In more detail, he explained that 'task' is a set of "workplan that is intended to engage the learner in meaning-focused language use" (Ellis, 2003, p. 5). Following this, Harmer (2007) argued that 'task' is extremely crucial for performance. It is believed that by focusing on task completion, the learners are likely to learn language function along with its structure. A further elaboration is presented by Nunan (2004) who stated that task in TBLT is "a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language" (Nunan, 2004, p. 4). In Nunan's point of view, form is not necessarily neglected, but it is highly interrelated with meaning. The process of learning form or grammar is expected to occur during communicative process where learners use language along with particular grammar.

Seen from the characteristic, TBLT has some features that make it easier to be identified. To begin with, it is important to notice that the notion of TBLT is derived from communicative approach. This idea was established and developed as a response to teacher-

dominated as well as form-oriented practice in English teaching (Van den Branden, 2006). Furthermore, Richards & Rodgers (2001) claimed that this concept corresponds to logical development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) due to its activities which requires real communication and gaining meaningful 'tasks'. The communicative action occurs during 'task' creates a clear-cut border with 'exercise' as it performs voiceless activities (Ellis, 2003). In other words, both TBLT and CLT activate communicative environment. Next, authenticity is demanded in TBLT practice. This is about relating 'task' to learners' real activity like survival task or borrowing a book in library (Ellis, 2003). Moreover, learner centered style is a recognizable feature in TBLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). Since the 'task' becomes the tool for teaching, learners are really exposed to social activities including collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving.

## **2.2 TBLT in Asian Countries: Phenomenon and Major Constraints**

In the scope of Asian countries, TBLT was introduced about two decades ago. Since the time, the premise of TBLT has attracted the governments and educators to adopt it in curriculum. For instance, in Hongkong, Littlewood (2007) reported that the Department of Education has started to promote TBLT in the mid-1990s in primary and secondary school. Meanwhile in China, as the raise of expectation to include communicative pedagogy in English teaching, task based teaching is eventually purchased in National Standard of English Language (Hu, 2005). Simultaneously, "the National English Curriculum in Korea also focusses on task-based approach" (Lee, 2005, p. 186). The trend even continues to the countries which are basically do not adopt TBLT in their curriculum. Rather than changing the curriculum, the concept of using 'task' is inserted through professional discourse (Littlewood, 2007).

The purchase of TBLT in national curriculum carries expectation to make a better learning environment. However, in its implementation, avoidance of using English of students has been a stumble. As carried out by Carless (2008), a reliance of learners on first language has been found in Hong Kong secondary school. This happens because the teachers allowed students to communicate in discussion or asking questions by using mother tongue. Similarly, Butler (2011) has also identified the enormous use of first language by the learners in Asian countries. He further explained that in order to achieve a greater absorbing of 'task', the use of L1 by the students is considerably needed. Then, the dilemma raises when the teachers have to decide the portion of how much L1 can be used by the students during

learning process. The more effort that is used to absorb 'task', the more opportunity that the students get to use L1.

Another critical issue is about teachers' understanding of TBLT. Although the curriculum is already formatted in task-based, the 'synthetic' approach that allows learning to be separately and step by step is still maintained (Nunan, 2006; Lai, 2015). As a result, the teachers make a strong emphasis on form during communicative activities because they feel so worry that grammar aspect will be ignored. Next, the concept of 'task' also brings confusion. This is about "what activities are (or are not) included in it" (Littlewood, 2007, p. 5). Next, Lai's (2015) report by using his own study, and supported with other source, that teachers experience problem in applying different stages of TBLT in classroom. In the end, this leads to overestimate on 'task' difficulty, the teachers afraid if the students cannot fulfil the language demands as required in 'task'.

### **3. TBLT in Indonesian Context: A Closer Look at the Curriculum**

This section explores TBLT in Indonesian English curriculum. After Fachrurrazy (2000) released his findings, the curriculum has undergone update twice. Therefore, the author only discusses the latest two curriculums in 2004 and 2007 respectively.

To start with, if we examine the essential things of Curriculum 2004 (Competency-Based Curriculum), it basically represents the concept of communicative approach. As described by Lie (2007), the objectives of this curriculum are composed to improve communicative skill either in spoken or written, and enables interrelation of language with culture. These two things are definitely the basic foundations of TBLT. Nevertheless, in practical situation the teachers were unsatisfied with this policy because the government took control of everything including determining the English national standard and the syllabus design. It is evident that the 'one for all' syllabus is not suitable for Indonesia which consist of hundreds of cultures. In the end, the teachers could not cover the local culture in teaching English.

As the problem that raised in Curriculum 2004, the government reacted by creating some revisions. Eventually, they launched the newest curriculum in 2006 which called '*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*' (School-Based Curriculum). This curriculum is still maintaining the principles of communicative approach. However, unlike the 2004 curriculum which was so centralized as the government sets for everything, the newest one gives a big freedom for school to design syllabus (Madya, 2007). The role of government, in this case is

just limited to ruling national standard. With the flexibility of the 2007 curriculum, teachers and stakeholder in school are able to design the syllabus based on local needs.

#### **4. Current Issues of TBLT in Indonesia**

In this part, the author addresses the issues of TBLT that happen in Indonesian context. For the purpose of portraying the current condition, the author examines the publication regarding Indonesian context that was available in the last ten years only. The reason for this is because the newest curriculum called '*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*' (School-Based Curriculum) has been implemented during that period of time, even continues until these days.

##### **4.1 Target Language Issue**

The concept of TBLT relies on English mastery of teachers. This concept is considered as a communicative approach that requires both teachers and students to interact during learning process. In order to get an effective result in TBLT, the use of target language is a compulsory. Accordingly, teachers have to utilize English during the whole class. Unfortunately, in Indonesian context, the previous research has shown that the teachers' proficiency in terms of giving instruction do not perform satisfactory result (Marcelino, 2008; Yulia, 2013). It is generally assumed that lack of exposure to English environment is the cause of this problem.

Moving into students, fluency in speaking has become a classic issue. Suryanto (2014) has reported that Indonesian students' oral proficiency is relatively low, even when they have already graduated from secondary level, they could not perform satisfactory result. This problem inhibits them in delivering ideas during classroom interaction. Moreover, the tendency to use vernacular during the class has become like something normal (Yulia, 2013), this makes the situation being more difficult. It seemingly communicative approach in English teaching is difficult to be implemented due to English is not used daily in Indonesia.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that target language is still far away to achieve. This problem is actually mentioned by Fachrurrazy (2000), but nowadays the condition becomes worse where both teachers and students tend to avoid using English despite they realize that target language is important.

##### **4.2 Cultural Barriers**

Cultural aspect is one of the vital elements to concern on in learning foreign language. It is believed that language and culture are the two things that should not be separated, these are "two faces of the same coin" (Al Farabi, 2015, p. 71). Unlike western students who are

treated to show critical thinking during learning process, the character of Indonesian students is in the contrary, they tend to avoid conflict or confrontation and enjoy to live in harmony as Indonesian culture taught them so (Suryanto, 2014). Consequently, this makes students' participation in classroom become minimum. In regard to TBLT practice, this obstacle affects the classroom interaction. The discussion among students for instance when they are facing with the 'task' about 'problem and solution' cannot run effectively.

Following this, Marcelino (2008) pointed out that the Indonesian students tend to be "unquestioning mind" (Marcelino, 2008, p. 58) during the class, they are rare to take the initiative to talk. The students believe that the only one who can speak in classroom is teacher, because teacher knows everything. As a result, it drives the students to be so dependent on teacher, they do not have confidence to express idea. Eventually, this leads to passivity during the whole class. This is probably the effect of adopting deductive teaching style, which puts teacher as the center of learning.

Compared to the previous condition as illustrated by Fachrurrazy (2000), the two cultural issues as mentioned above were not existed yet. These two things should be considered as serious problems since those could trigger drowsiness, stress reaction, and anger that would eventually affect language acquisition process (Al Farabi, 2015). Therefore, a big concern regarding solution to overcome these inhibitions is needed.

### **4.3 National Examination**

The decision of Indonesian government to update the curriculum of secondary school looks promising. The idea of the newest curriculum is essentially relevant to TBLT concept which relates English to social world, so that when the learners have finished, they can practically use English for professional career as well as continuing education at University. However, the policy to adopt National Examination (NE) that has been administered since 1980 remains the same. The test content is mainly focusing on analyzing grammatical error, and all the questions are set in multiple choice model. Sulistyono (2009) claimed that NE of English in Indonesia is highly academic oriented which leads learners to insensitivity to their social environment. He also agreed that NE does not reflect to trigger innovative thought and logical thinking. In TBLT, in order to measure students' cognitive skill, it is not limited into multiple option only, it can be designed in various forms such as formation gap activity, reasoning gap activity and opinion gap activity which have to be related to social context (Prabhu, 1987).

Furthermore, it is also identified that NE contributes negative impact to teaching activity. Firstly, the high pressure on teacher to improve students' ability in order to pass the examination has turned them to ignore other teaching materials. The teachers put so much attention on reading materials as these mostly appear in NE (Furaidah, Saukah, & Widiati, 2015). This makes the classroom situation turn into teacher centered all the time. Secondly, according to the author's observation, the NE oriented minded changes teaching method. The teachers can spend many hours only for reviewing previous test papers, even they spare additional time apart from school schedule. In other words, the idea of implementing TBLT will never be as it is expected if this situation does not change. Overall, NE would stimulate teachers to stick in deductive method rather than communicative which is essentially the notion of TBLT. Fachrurrazy (2000) has mentioned this problem, it is evident that there is still no alternative to overcome this stumble.

## **5. Looking Forward**

This section attempts to provide alternative solutions as the answer of problems that were mentioned previously. The solutions covering the way to improve the teachers' instruction, an idea to develop students' fluency as well as overcoming their cultural barrier.

### **5.1 Engage, Study, Activate (ESA)**

One of the primary concerns in Indonesian context is about poor instruction of teachers. In responding to this issue, probably teaching sequence trilogy of Harmer (2007) called 'Engage, Study, Activate' (ESA) can be introduced. Basically, he separates the activity into three stages. In 'Engage' section, teachers try to induce students' interest, so that they can be emotionally engaged to what they are going to learn. 'Study' focuses on how to construct something such as clauses, patterns, lexical phrases, and collocation. 'Activate' is the last phase, this is the time to encourage students to practice the language that they have learned.

In practical activity, the example could be about 'asking something in supermarket'. To engage students, teacher can perform a picture of supermarket, then ask students to give opinion about it. Following this, a follow up question like 'did anyone go to supermarket last week' or 'how often do you go to supermarket' can be delivered to get students personalize themselves and get them engaged with the materials. After that, continue with 'Study' which focusses on form of question, get the learners familiar with question 'have you got salt/sugar...'. Lastly, encourage them to practice the language through 'task'. Role play as costumer and shopkeeper is a good way to stimulate the language. The 'task' here plays the



most crucial role, it is “designed to activate the students’ language knowledge” (Harmer, 2007, p. 67).

## **5.2 Mediated Learning**

As highlighted previously, low level of oral proficiency also becomes an obstacle of Indonesian students. In dealing with this situation, the idea about implementing ‘mediated learning’ can be an alternative. Essentially, this notion comes from sociocultural theory of Lantolf (2000) who viewed learning activities are mediated. One of the kinds of mediation that he promoted was mediation through interaction. About this, Ellis (2003) goes so far, he agreed that the acquisition of L2 “is not an individual-based process but shared between the individual and other persons” (Ellis, 2003, p. 177). Dialogic interaction becomes the main part in this theory, the interaction allows teacher as an expert to assist students during learning process. Ellis (2003) further explained that verbal interaction or dialogic interaction “serves as the principal means by which children progress from other to self-regulation” (Ellis, 2003, p. 177). In other words, mediated learning through verbal interaction enables teacher to assist students when they are dealing with difficulties. For instance, when student is having difficulty in expressing idea about arguing something, then this is teacher’s time to fill the gap by prompting them with some phrases or questions.

## **5.3 Embedding Local Culture**

Cultural barrier of students in learning foreign language is not a new issue. Apparently, this problem is not only existing in Indonesia, but also happens in some Asian countries as the impact of local culture, it is found in Japan (Burrows, 2008), China (Xu, 2008), Saudi Arabia (Akasha, 2013) and Vietnam (Tuyet, 2013). Then the question becomes how to anticipate this obstacle. Royani (2013) has proven that the main challenge here is how to engage students, and this can be achieved if their local culture is inserted in ‘task’ through text. The cultural components like folktale, big days celebration, traditional food and national costume can be embedded through the text. It is believed that by putting the thing (local culture) that is really close to students’ life can increase their motivation to be active in doing the ‘task’.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper, the author has overviewed the issues in implementing TBLT in Indonesian context. In comparison with the findings of Fachrurrazy (2000), the problem about target language and national examination are still existing. This shows that there is no significant change in education system. On this account, it is unlikely to see TBLT can

progress better than these days. This essay also suggests some set of procedures as alternatives to cope with the constraints in TBLT practice. Finally, it should be noticed that this essay is a kind of conceptual review. Therefore, an empirical study is needed to conduct for the sake of a more comprehensive analysis.

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