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The impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on EFL learner's Engagement in Speaking Courses

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article info	abstract
	This study investigates the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on learner engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking courses. The research focused on how TBLT influences students' active participation, motivation, and oral language development. A quasi-experimental research design was employed, involving 63 second-semester students from the English for Professional Communication course. The experimental group received instruction using task-based methods, while the control group followed conventional teaching approaches. Data were gathered through pre- and post-speaking performance tests, semi-structured interviews with instructors, and student perception questionnaires. Quantitative findings indicated no statistically significant differences between the two groups; however, qualitative data revealed notable improvements in fluency, reduced usage of fillers, and increased speaking confidence among students exposed to TBLT. Instructors also reported higher levels of student engagement and interaction during TBLT sessions. The study concludes that TBLT holds considerable promise for enhancing learner engagement and speaking competence in EFL settings, particularly in vocational education contexts.

1. Introduction

In numerous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly within university settings, the development of English speaking competence is increasingly recognized as essential for students aiming to participate effectively in the global workforce (Zainuddin, Pillai, Dumanig, & Phillip, 2019). Proficiency in spoken English enables students to engage in international collaboration, access broader employment opportunities, and adapt to the communicative demands of multinational workplaces. Recent research highlights that employers consistently prioritize strong oral communication skills in English when recruiting graduates, especially in sectors where English serves as the lingua franca for business and professional interactions. For instance, a study published in the Journal of English for Academic Purposes underscores that university students with higher English speaking proficiency demonstrate greater confidence and adaptability in multicultural work environments, which enhances their employability prospects. Similarly, findings in English for Specific Purposes reveal that targeted speaking instruction within university EFL programs significantly improves

students' readiness for real-world professional communication tasks, including presentations, negotiations, and teamwork in international settings (Al-Khresheh, 2024). As globalization intensifies, universities worldwide are placing greater emphasis on integrating communicative English skills into their curricula to better equip graduates for the linguistic and cultural challenges of the modern workforce (Reynolds & Yu, 2018).

Traditional teaching approaches, which frequently emphasize rote memorization, teacher-centered instruction, and passive learning, often fail to foster active learner engagement in EFL classrooms. These conventional methods tend to limit opportunities for meaningful student interaction, critical thinking, and communicative practice, which are essential for language acquisition and long-term retention. Recent studies have shown that such approaches may lead to decreased motivation, lower participation rates, and insufficient development of practical language skills among students. For example, research published Amiryousefi (2019) found that EFL learners in classrooms dominated by lecture-based instruction exhibited significantly less engagement and communicative competence compared to those in classes utilizing interactive, learner-centered techniques. Similarly, Devira (2020) highlights that traditional methods often neglect the importance of authentic language use and collaborative activities, resulting in limited opportunities for students to practice speaking and listening in real-life contexts. As a result, there is a growing consensus in the literature that innovative, student-centered pedagogies-such as task-based learning, project-based activities, and technology-enhanced instruction-are more effective in promoting active engagement and supporting language development in EFL settings (Rezai, Ahmadi, Ashkani, & Hosseini, 2025).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a communicative and student-centered method, offers promising strategies for increasing interaction and language use in speaking classes (Long, Lu, & Yi, 2017; Willis, 2021). Unlike traditional approaches, TBLT structures learning around meaningful, real-world tasks that require active student participation and authentic communication. Recent studies highlight that TBLT enhances classroom effectiveness, boosts student participation, and significantly improves speaking proficiency by engaging learners in interactive and immersive communicative activities (Hasnain & Halder, 2023; Nurhadi, Nugraha, & Ridwan, 2024).

TBLT lessons typically involve stages such as pre-task activities to set expectations, main tasks where students use the target language to achieve specific outcomes, and post-task reflection for feedback and self-assessment (Nur & Butarbutar, 2022). These tasks often mimic real-life scenarios-such as problem-solving, group discussions, presentations, or role-plays-allowing students to practice language in contexts relevant to their future professional and social interactions. Research published in 2025 in the International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences confirms that TBLT is effective in developing communicative competence across various language skills, especially speaking, with learners reporting increased fluency, confidence, and motivation to use English in practical situations (Marzuki, 2022, 2023; Nghia & Quang, 2021).

Despite growing scholarly interest in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), its implementation and study remain limited within Indonesian vocational institutions. While TBLT has gained traction in various Indonesian educational contexts, including secondary schools and universities, research indicates that vocational schools have not widely adopted this communicative, student-centered approach. Several studies highlight that factors such as limited teacher training, contextual challenges, and the specific demands of vocational curricula contribute to the slow uptake of TBLT in these settings. For example, Islami and Senom (2024) notes that although TBLT aligns well with Indonesia's national qualification frameworks and higher education reforms, its application in vocational education is still emerging and requires more focused attention on teacher preparedness and material development. Similarly, Hibatulloh, Arganata, Latifah, and Kurniasari (2024) points out that while TBLT is effective in improving speaking skills in secondary schools, vocational institutions face unique challenges such as diverse student backgrounds and resource limitations that hinder widespread implementation. Moreover, studies emphasize the need for contextually relevant tasks and ongoing professional development to support vocational teachers in adopting TBLT effectively. Consequently, despite its potential benefits for enhancing communicative competence and employability skills, TBLT's integration into Indonesian vocational education remains under-researched and underutilized, signaling a critical area for future investigation and policy support. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how TBLT affects student engagement and participation in speaking tasks.

TBLT and Learner Engagement

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained prominence in second language acquisition (SLA) for its emphasis on meaningful communication through real-life tasks. Recent studies have explored how TBLT influences various dimensions of learner engagement, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. Studies show that learners develop more confidence, fluency, and collaboration through task engagement (Baharun et al., 2023). TBLT's focus on authentic tasks fosters a dynamic learning environment that enhances learner engagement. Ramesh, Mala, and Panda (2024) conducted a meta-analysis indicating that TBLT enhances both learner engagement and proficiency by providing meaningful and contextually relevant tasks that promote active learning and practical language use. Similarly, Mudinillah, Rahmi, and Taro (2024) noted that TBLT enhances language acquisition, particularly in developing speaking and listening skills, and fosters greater learner autonomy.

The integration of technology into TBLT has further amplified its impact on learner engagement. Alazemi, Gheisari, and Patra (2023) investigated the consequences of task-supported language teaching via social media, specifically the Telegram app, on academic engagement, emotion regulation, willingness to communicate, and academic well-being. The study revealed that utilizing Telegram alongside a Learning Management System (LMS) significantly enhanced EFL learners' engagement and well-being. Additionally, Putri (2023) explored students' perceptions and engagement in technology-mediated TBLT,

finding that the approach led to positive attitudes and increased behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive engagement.

Peer interaction is a critical component of TBLT that contributes to increased learner engagement. Baharun et al. (2023) explored EFL learners' peer interaction engagement within TBLT frameworks, highlighting that collaborative tasks encourage active participation and deeper cognitive processing. Such interactions not only enhance language proficiency but also build learners' confidence and motivation.

Despite the benefits, implementing TBLT poses challenges, including the need for adequate teacher training and curriculum alignment. Islami and Senom (2024) emphasized that successful TBLT implementation requires institutional support and flexibility to adapt tasks to specific educational contexts. Moreover, assessing the long-term impact of TBLT on learner engagement necessitates further longitudinal studies. Similar case is found in Indonesian tertiary institutions. Implementation of TBLT faces challenges such as time constraints and mixed proficiency levels (Sholeh, 2022). However, the learner-centered nature of TBLT aligns well with the vocational focus of institutions like PNP, where students must develop communicative competence for professional environments.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How does TBLT influence EFL learners' engagement in speaking tasks at Politeknik Negeri Padang?
2. What are the English instructors' perceptions of TBLT in enhancing student engagement?
3. How do students perceive TBLT in their speaking course?

2. Method

Research Design and Participants

The study used a quasi-experimental design with an experimental group (TBLT) and a control group (traditional instruction). A total of 63 second-semester students from the English for Professional Communication course participated—32 in the experimental group and 31 in the control group. Two English lecturers from a Politeknik, a vocational higher education institution in Indonesia, facilitated the teaching.

Instruments

Speaking performance was evaluated through pre- and post-tests using a locally adapted version of the TOEIC speaking module, ensuring that the assessment was both standardized and contextually relevant to the learners' linguistic environment. These tests aimed to measure improvements in oral proficiency attributable to the TBLT intervention. In addition to quantitative assessment, semi-structured instructor interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth insights into the practical aspects of TBLT implementation, challenges encountered, and observable changes in student behavior

and participation during tasks. To triangulate the findings and capture learner perspectives, a student questionnaire was administered after the intervention. This questionnaire was designed to assess students, perceptions of the task-based activities, their engagement levels, and their overall satisfaction with the learning experience, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the intervention,s effectiveness from both instructor and learner viewpoints.

Procedures and the TBLT Instruction

The instructional intervention was developed based on the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), aiming to promote authentic language use and meaningful communication (Ellis, 2017; Skehan, 2016). The course was delivered over eight weeks, with two 90-minute sessions each week. Each session was structured around the three standard phases of TBLT: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. During the pre-task phase, the instructor introduced the session,s topic, activated students, background knowledge, and reviewed key vocabulary and language structures needed for the upcoming tasks. Clear task objectives and success criteria were also presented to ensure that students fully understood the communicative goals.

In the task cycle phase, students engaged in authentic, communication-centered tasks such as role-plays, collaborative problem-solving activities, and simulated interviews. The tasks were specifically designed to mirror real-life speaking situations aligned with the competencies assessed by the TOEIC speaking module, such as describing pictures, answering situational questions, and proposing solutions. Throughout this phase, the instructor took on a facilitative role, minimizing direct intervention to encourage student autonomy and spontaneous language use. In the post-task phase, learners reflected on their performance and discussed effective strategies they had employed. The instructor then provided feedback focused on both fluency and accuracy, and, when necessary, conducted brief language-focused exercises to address common linguistic challenges observed during the task.

For the research procedure, participants were selected from two intact classes whose English proficiency ranged from basic to pre-intermediate level. A total of 63 students were chosen based on placement test results to ensure a relatively homogenous proficiency level at the start of the intervention. To establish a baseline, all participants undertook a speaking pre-test in the first week, using a locally adapted version of the TOEIC speaking module. This assessment involved tasks such as describing images, expressing opinions, and making suggestions. All tests were recorded and independently rated by two qualified assessors according to a standardized rubric to ensure reliability.

Following the pre-test, students participated in the TBLT instructional program described above. Throughout the intervention, the instructor kept observational notes

concerning student engagement, task participation, and language development. At the conclusion of the eight-week period, a semi-structured interview with the instructor was conducted to gather qualitative insights into the practicalities of TBLT implementation, observed shifts in learner behavior, and challenges encountered during instruction.

Subsequently, a speaking post-test was administered, mirroring the format and complexity of the pre-test to enable direct comparison of speaking proficiency before and after the intervention. These post-tests were again recorded and rated independently to maintain scoring consistency. Additionally, students completed a post-intervention questionnaire designed to evaluate their perceptions of the TBLT experience. The questionnaire included both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, allowing the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data regarding student engagement, motivation, and satisfaction with the task-based learning approach.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, paired-sample t-tests were employed to compare pre- and post-test speaking scores, determining the statistical significance of any observed improvements. Thematic analysis was used to process the qualitative data from the instructor interview, identifying patterns related to instructional challenges and learner engagement. Meanwhile, responses from the student questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the quantitative items and thematic coding for the qualitative responses. Together, these methods aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of TBLT on learner engagement and speaking proficiency.

3. Results and Discussions

Engagement in Speaking Tasks

The statistical comparison between pre-test and post-test speaking scores revealed no significant differences, as indicated by the paired-samples t-test detailed in table 1. This suggests that, quantitatively, participants' overall speaking proficiency, as assessed through standardized scoring criteria, remained relatively stable following the intervention. Despite this, closer qualitative examination of speech samples uncovered meaningful improvements in specific areas of oral performance, particularly in fluency-related features.

Analysis of test transcriptions highlighted a substantial reduction in filler usage (e.g., "uh," "um," "you know") and an increase in speech smoothness during post-test performances. In some cases, filler frequency dropped by over 40%, suggesting that participants became more confident and more adept at maintaining coherent and uninterrupted speech. Additionally, participants exhibited more natural pausing patterns and fewer hesitation phenomena, further signaling gains in fluency (e. g., Ellis, 2016; Fathi, Rahimi, & Derakhshan, 2024; Skehan, 2009).

The divergence between the quantitative and qualitative results underscores the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach to assessing speaking performance. While standardized scores offer valuable summative insights, qualitative discourse analysis can reveal nuanced improvements in learners' communicative behavior that may not be immediately captured through numerical assessment alone. Thus, although the intervention did not produce statistically significant score gains, it appeared to foster important micro-level improvements that contribute to learners' overall communicative competence and confidence.

Table 1.

T-test Results of Both Groups

Group	n	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (Rietdijk, van Weijen, Janssen, van den Bergh, & Rijlaarsdam)	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Experiment	32	74.3	6.9	0.65	0.52	Not Significant (p > 0.05
Control	31	73.2	7.0			

Teacher Insights

Table 2.

Interview Results of the Instructors

Theme	Description	Supporting Evidences
Increased Student Participation	Students engaged more actively during TBLT sessions.	*"Students were more eager to participate and volunteer answers."*
Enhanced Motivation	Tasks based on real-life scenarios boosted learner enthusiasm and effort.	*"Learners were noticeably more motivated when tasks resembled real-world situations."*
Greater Willingness to Communicate	Students showed more confidence and willingness to speak during activities.	*"They seemed more comfortable speaking, especially during simulations of meetings and interviews."*

The instructor interview provided valuable qualitative insights into the effects of TBLT on learner engagement. The thematic analysis revealed three key trends: increased student participation, enhanced motivation, and a greater willingness to communicate.

The instructor observed that students engaged more actively during task-based sessions, often volunteering to participate without prompting. She further remarked that motivation appeared noticeably higher when tasks were designed around real-life scenarios, such as workplace meetings and job interviews. These findings suggest that authenticity in task design played a significant role in fostering student enthusiasm and sustained engagement.

Additionally, the instructor noted a clear improvement in students' willingness to use English spontaneously during tasks. Learners appeared more confident and less hesitant when speaking, particularly in activities that mirrored authentic communicative contexts. This observation aligns with previous research highlighting the motivational benefits of TBLT when tasks are perceived as meaningful and directly relevant to learners' real-world needs (e.g., Ellis, 2016; Long, 2014; Rost, 2024). Overall, the instructor's perspectives provide strong qualitative support for the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing learner engagement and communicative competence beyond what is captured through standardized testing alone.

3. Student Feedback

Table 3.

Results of Students' Questionnaire

Item	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (Rietdijk et al.)	Interpretation
Preference for TBLT Activities	4.61	0.72	Strong preference for TBLT-based tasks and activities.
Motivation to Speak English	4.44	0.63	High motivation levels to engage in speaking activities.
Engagement in Speaking Tasks	4.53	0.54	Strong engagement in speaking tasks throughout the intervention.
Confidence in Speaking English	4.32	0.82	Improved confidence in using English for communication.
Appreciation for Peer Collaboration	4.74	0.63	Positive perception of collaborative tasks with peers.
Perception of Task Practicality and Relevance	4.51	0.71	Tasks were perceived as practical and relevant to real-life scenarios.

Note: The Likert scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire results indicated a strongly positive response from participants toward the TBLT activities. On average, students reported a high preference for TBLT tasks (M = 4.61, SD = 0.72), with most students agreeing that the tasks were engaging and beneficial to their learning experience. This preference suggests that the real-world relevance of the tasks and their focus on communication were highly valued by the learners.

When it comes to motivation, the mean score of 4.44 (SD = 0.63) indicates that the TBLT approach significantly increased students' enthusiasm for speaking English. Participants felt more motivated to speak and engage with the language, especially during the interactive task-based activities. Similarly, students reported strong engagement with the tasks (M = 4.53, SD = 0.54), highlighting that TBLT activities promoted active participation and sustained focus throughout the lessons. This result is indicative of the interactive and dynamic nature of task-based learning, which encourages students to engage meaningfully with language use. In terms of confidence, the average score of 4.32 (SD = 0.82) suggests an improvement in learners' speaking confidence as a result of the TBLT activities. This reflects how the focus on real-world tasks and collaborative work can help build students' belief in their ability to use English effectively.

Furthermore, the responses indicated that students greatly appreciated the opportunity for peer collaboration (M = 4.74, SD = 0.63). This finding suggests that the social aspect of learning, which is central to TBLT, was seen as a motivating factor. Students likely felt more comfortable practicing English in a supportive, peer-based environment. Lastly, the tasks were viewed as practical and relevant to learners' needs, with a mean score of 4.51 (SD = 0.71), suggesting that the authenticity of the tasks contributed to students' positive perceptions. Students recognized the tasks as useful for real-life situations, which in turn enhanced their motivation and engagement.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on learner engagement and speaking development (Soongpankhao, Aubrey, & Lambert, 2023). Although the statistical analysis of speaking test scores revealed no significant differences between pre-test and post-test performance, qualitative analysis of speech samples indicated meaningful improvements in micro-level discourse features, particularly in fluency and filler reduction. This suggests that while standardized assessments may not immediately capture early gains, learners were nonetheless developing important communicative competencies.

Instructor interviews further corroborated these findings, highlighting enhanced student participation, increased motivation, and greater willingness to communicate during TBLT sessions. Students were observed to be more confident and spontaneous, especially when engaged in tasks that mirrored real-life communicative contexts. Similarly, the questionnaire results demonstrated a strong student preference for TBLT activities, with high ratings for motivation, engagement, confidence, and perceived task relevance. Together, these findings suggest that TBLT creates an environment conducive to fostering not only linguistic competence but also learner autonomy and communicative confidence.

Implications for Research and Practice

These results carry important implications for both future research and classroom practice. From a research perspective, the study underscores the necessity of employing a multidimensional approach to speaking assessment. Reliance solely on quantitative standardized scores may obscure significant communicative developments that qualitative discourse analysis can reveal. Future studies should incorporate more comprehensive assessment frameworks that combine quantitative metrics with qualitative evaluations of spoken performance, especially focusing on fluency, discourse management, and interactional features.

For classroom practice, the findings advocate for the broader adoption of TBLT principles in speaking instruction. Teachers are encouraged to design tasks that reflect authentic, real-world communication scenarios, as these were shown to significantly enhance motivation, engagement, and learner confidence. Emphasizing peer collaboration and meaningful task outcomes can further support students' willingness to participate and use the target language spontaneously. In contexts where immediate gains in standardized speaking scores may not be evident, educators should recognize and value the micro-level fluency improvements that contribute substantially to long-term communicative competence.

Ultimately, TBLT offers a powerful pedagogical framework that not only aligns with learners' motivational needs but also supports the gradual and authentic development of speaking proficiency.

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