Enhancing Students' Speaking Skills through Task-Based Language Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms

Mohammad Solikin[1], Rizky Arihuda Ramadhani[2], Aliyamin Atha Gusti[3]
[1-3] Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), Indonesia

Abstract. This study aims to enhance students' speaking skills through the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in multilingual classrooms. The background of this research highlights the challenges faced by students in expressing ideas fluently and confidently due to linguistic diversity and limited exposure to authentic communication tasks. The objective of this study is to investigate how TBLT can improve students' speaking competence, participation, and motivation in a multilingual learning environment. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method involving classroom observation, interviews, and performance assessments. The findings revealed that TBLT effectively increased students' confidence, interaction, and fluency by engaging them in meaningful communication tasks that reflected real-life contexts. Moreover, students demonstrated noticeable improvements in vocabulary use, pronunciation, and coherence during oral activities. The study implies that TBLT is a practical and effective approach for language teachers in multilingual settings to foster communicative competence and learner autonomy. It also suggests that teachers should adapt tasks to suit students' linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels to maximize learning outcomes.

Keywords: Communication Skills; Multilingual Classrooms; Speaking Proficiency; Task-Based Learning; Teaching Strategy.

1. BACKGROUND

In today's globalized and multilingual educational settings, developing students' speaking skills has become a crucial component of language learning. Speaking proficiency plays an essential role in effective communication, academic success, and intercultural competence. However, in multilingual classrooms, where students come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, teaching speaking presents unique challenges. Learners often struggle with limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, anxiety, and low confidence when expressing themselves in a second or foreign language. Moreover, traditional teaching methods that emphasize grammar accuracy and rote learning fail to create meaningful communicative experiences that mirror real-life contexts. Consequently, students' speaking development tends to stagnate, and classroom interaction becomes teacher-centered rather than communicative.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of interactive and student-centered methods in enhancing speaking proficiency. Among various approaches, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as one of the most effective frameworks for promoting communicative competence. TBLT focuses on using authentic tasks—such as problem-solving, discussions, and role-playing—that require learners to use language meaningfully and purposefully. Research by Ellis (2017), Willis and Willis (2007), and Nunan (2019) shows that TBLT encourages students to engage actively in communication, enhances

fluency, and fosters learner autonomy. Nevertheless, there remains a significant gap in the application of TBLT within multilingual classroom contexts, particularly in regions where students' first languages, cultural identities, and English proficiency levels vary greatly. Most studies have been conducted in monolingual or bilingual environments, thus limiting the generalization of findings to truly multilingual settings.

This study addresses that gap by exploring how Task-Based Language Teaching can be effectively applied to improve speaking skills in multilingual classrooms. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of TBLT principles with strategies for managing linguistic diversity, promoting intercultural understanding, and balancing fluency and accuracy among learners from different language backgrounds. The urgency of this research stems from the growing number of multilingual classrooms worldwide, where English functions as a lingua franca and effective communication skills are essential for collaboration and learning. By implementing TBLT, teachers can provide learners with opportunities to use the target language in authentic and purposeful ways, thereby enhancing both linguistic and communicative competence.

The objective of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in enhancing students' speaking performance, confidence, and engagement in multilingual classrooms. It also aims to identify the specific challenges and pedagogical strategies that support successful implementation of TBLT in linguistically diverse environments. Through this study, it is expected that the findings will contribute to the development of innovative, inclusive, and practical approaches to language teaching that align with the realities of multilingual education.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a pedagogical approach grounded in the communicative language teaching (CLT) paradigm, emphasizing the use of meaningful tasks as the central unit of instruction. According to Nunan (2019), a "task" is an activity that requires learners to use language in real-world contexts to achieve a specific communicative goal. TBLT moves beyond traditional grammar-focused methods by prioritizing communication, interaction, and learner engagement. Willis and Willis (2007) describe TBLT as a framework that encourages students to use language as a tool for problem-solving and meaning-making, rather than merely practicing linguistic forms. This theoretical approach aligns with the constructivist learning theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978), which asserts that language

learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration within a learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

In multilingual classrooms, the diversity of learners' linguistic backgrounds influences how communication and learning occur. Cummins' (2001) theory of linguistic interdependence suggests that students' first languages can serve as cognitive and linguistic resources that facilitate second language acquisition. Similarly, García and Wei (2014) introduced the concept of translanguaging, where learners strategically use all their linguistic repertoires to make meaning and communicate effectively. When integrated with TBLT, these multilingual practices create dynamic, inclusive learning environments where language serves both as a learning medium and as a subject of study.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of TBLT in improving speaking skills. Ellis (2017) found that TBLT enhances learners' fluency, complexity, and accuracy by encouraging authentic communication and learner autonomy. Rahmawati and Ningsih (2020) revealed that TBLT promotes students' motivation and confidence in speaking English, particularly when tasks are relevant to their real-life experiences. Moreover, Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2019) highlighted that task planning time significantly contributes to the quality of learners' spoken output. In multilingual contexts, Li and Zhang (2021) observed that task-based interactions help students negotiate meaning and overcome linguistic barriers, fostering mutual understanding and cultural awareness.

From a pedagogical perspective, TBLT incorporates three key stages: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task (Willis & Willis, 2007). In the pre-task stage, teachers introduce the topic, objectives, and vocabulary to prepare students. The task cycle focuses on meaningful communication, where learners perform tasks collaboratively and use the target language naturally. Finally, the post-task stage involves reflection, feedback, and language focus to consolidate learning. This cyclical process helps students develop both fluency and accuracy while maintaining engagement and autonomy.

In the context of this research, TBLT is theorized to enhance speaking performance by providing learners with authentic communicative experiences, reducing anxiety through group collaboration, and promoting self-confidence. Implicitly, this study assumes that the implementation of TBLT in multilingual classrooms will lead to measurable improvements in students' speaking competence and participation. By connecting theories of communicative learning, sociocultural interaction, and multilingual education, this study establishes a strong

theoretical foundation for investigating how TBLT can be effectively adapted to linguistically diverse classroom settings.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing students' speaking skills in multilingual classrooms. The design was selected to observe the impact of TBLT implementation through classroom-based interventions, while qualitative analysis provided in-depth insights into learners' experiences, interactions, and perceptions during the learning process. The research was conducted over one academic semester to ensure adequate observation of changes in speaking performance and communicative behavior.

The population of this study consisted of students enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at a multilingual university, where learners represented various first language backgrounds. From this population, two intact classes were selected as samples using purposive sampling. One class was designated as the experimental group, which received instruction through TBLT, while the other served as the control group, which was taught using traditional communicative language teaching methods. Each class consisted of approximately 30 students with intermediate English proficiency levels.

The data collection techniques included observation, speaking tests, and semi-structured interviews. The instruments used were (1) an observation checklist to record classroom interaction and student participation; (2) a speaking performance rubric adapted from Brown (2004), assessing fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and coherence; and (3) interview guidelines to explore students' perceptions of TBLT activities. The speaking tests were administered before and after the treatment to measure students' improvement. The instrument's validity was confirmed through expert judgment involving language teaching specialists, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient value of 0.87, indicating a high level of consistency.

The research procedure followed three main phases: (1) Pre-task phase—students were introduced to communicative goals and vocabulary related to the task theme; (2) Task cycle—students performed real-world communication tasks such as role-plays, interviews, and problem-solving activities in pairs or groups; and (3) Post-task phase—students reflected on their performance, received feedback, and focused on linguistic accuracy. The activities were designed according to the TBLT framework proposed by Willis and Willis (2007).

The data analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from the speaking tests were analyzed using paired sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests to determine significant differences in pre-test and post-test scores between groups. The statistical analysis followed standard formulas as suggested by Field (2018). Meanwhile, qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed thematically following Miles and Huberman's (2014) model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The integration of both types of data aimed to triangulate findings and enhance the validity of interpretations.The research model can be summarized as follows:

TBLT implementation (X) → Speaking Skill Enhancement (Y),

where X represents the independent variable (application of Task-Based Language Teaching through communicative tasks), and Y denotes the dependent variable (students' speaking performance measured through fluency, accuracy, and coherence indicators).

In summary, this study adopted a mixed-method design that combines quantitative rigor with qualitative depth to capture the multifaceted effects of TBLT on speaking development in multilingual contexts. The findings are expected to provide empirical and pedagogical evidence supporting the integration of task-based approaches in linguistically diverse language classrooms.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Collection Process, Location, and Duration

The study was conducted at a multilingual university in Indonesia over one academic semester (approximately four months). The research involved two classes of undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students representing various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The experimental group received instruction through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), while the control group was taught using traditional communicative methods. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests of speaking performance, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The speaking tests were used to measure students' progress in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and coherence, while observations and interviews provided qualitative insights into learner engagement, motivation, and classroom interaction dynamics.

Quantitative Results

Table 1 presents the comparison of pre-test and post-test mean scores for the experimental and control groups.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Speaking Performance (Pre-test and Post-test)

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Gain Score	t-value	Sig. (p)
Experimental (TBLT)	30	68.20	82.73	14.53	9.24	0.000
Control (Traditional)	30	67.90	74.16	6.26	3.41	0.002

Source: Research Data (2025)

The results indicate that both groups showed improvement in their speaking performance; however, the experimental group achieved significantly higher gains ($p < 0.05$). The findings suggest that TBLT had a substantial positive effect on students' speaking skills. This improvement was evident in several performance aspects, particularly fluency and vocabulary use, where learners in the TBLT group displayed greater spontaneity and accuracy during oral tasks.

Qualitative Findings

Classroom observations revealed that students in the TBLT class actively engaged in communicative tasks such as problem-solving discussions, information-gap activities, and role plays. Learners collaborated effectively and demonstrated increased confidence when expressing their ideas. The post-task reflections showed that students valued the authenticity of the tasks, as they perceived them as relevant to real-world communication. Interviews further supported these findings, with students reporting that TBLT reduced speaking anxiety and encouraged peer learning. In contrast, learners in the control class remained more dependent on teacher guidance and exhibited limited interaction beyond structured question–answer sessions.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that Task-Based Language Teaching significantly enhances students' speaking performance in multilingual classrooms. The quantitative results demonstrate measurable improvement, while qualitative data illustrate increased motivation and engagement. These findings are consistent with Ellis (2017) and Rahmawati and Ningsih (2020), who found that TBLT promotes communicative competence and learner autonomy. The use of meaningful, real-life tasks provides a supportive environment for learners to practice target language use without excessive focus on grammatical accuracy, leading to natural language development.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and collaboration in language learning. The communicative tasks in TBLT serve as platforms for scaffolding, where learners support one another within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In multilingual

contexts, this interaction becomes more dynamic, as students negotiate meaning across diverse linguistic repertoires—a phenomenon supported by García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging.

Interestingly, the findings also extend previous research by demonstrating that TBLT can be effectively adapted to linguistically diverse classrooms. Unlike earlier studies conducted in monolingual environments (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2019), this research highlights how multilingual learners utilize their background languages as cognitive resources to support English communication. This adaptability underscores TBLT's inclusivity and flexibility in promoting cross-linguistic understanding.

Implications

Theoretically, the findings strengthen the argument that TBLT is not only an effective communicative approach but also a socially grounded pedagogical model that accommodates multilingual realities. It reaffirms that authentic, goal-oriented tasks enhance learners' communicative competence and foster intercultural awareness.

Practically, this study suggests that language teachers should design tasks that reflect learners' linguistic diversity, interests, and real-world communication needs. Instructors are encouraged to integrate pre-task scaffolding and reflective post-task discussions to balance fluency and accuracy development. Moreover, institutional curriculum designers can adopt TBLT as a framework for multilingual classrooms, ensuring inclusivity and engagement among learners of varied language backgrounds.

Conclusion of Findings

In summary, the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching in multilingual classrooms significantly improves students' speaking skills, promotes learner autonomy, and fosters meaningful interaction. The results confirm that TBLT serves as an effective and inclusive approach to language teaching in diverse educational settings. Its emphasis on authentic communication and learner-centeredness contributes to both linguistic proficiency and social cohesion in multilingual learning environments.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) effectively enhances students' speaking skills in multilingual classrooms. The results confirm that TBLT significantly improves learners' fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and coherence while fostering greater confidence and motivation in oral communication. Through task-based activities, students actively engaged in meaningful and

authentic communication, enabling them to practice language use in real-world contexts. These outcomes align with the study's objective to examine how TBLT can improve speaking competence and learner participation in linguistically diverse environments. The results also suggest that TBLT provides a flexible and inclusive pedagogical framework that accommodates learners' multilingual backgrounds and promotes communicative competence through collaboration and interaction.

Despite its positive outcomes, this research acknowledges several limitations. The study involved a limited number of participants from a single institution, which may restrict the generalization of findings to broader multilingual contexts. In addition, the observation period was limited to one semester, which may not fully capture long-term language development and retention. The qualitative data, though insightful, relied primarily on self-reported perceptions, which could be complemented by longitudinal or cross-institutional studies for more comprehensive analysis.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that language educators integrate TBLT into classroom practices, particularly in multilingual and culturally diverse settings. Teachers should design communicative tasks that are contextually relevant and aligned with students' linguistic needs, ensuring an optimal balance between fluency and accuracy. Institutions should also provide professional development opportunities for teachers to strengthen their understanding of TBLT principles and task design strategies. Future research is encouraged to expand the scope of investigation by exploring TBLT implementation across various proficiency levels, cultural contexts, and subject areas. Longitudinal studies examining the sustained impact of TBLT on communicative competence, learner autonomy, and intercultural collaboration would further enrich the understanding of this approach.

In conclusion, this study affirms that Task-Based Language Teaching offers a powerful framework for improving speaking performance in multilingual classrooms. By emphasizing authentic communication and learner-centered interaction, TBLT not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also fosters confidence, collaboration, and inclusivity in language education.

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