

**TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING:
UNDERSTANDING OF THE TASK**

**PENGAJARAN BAHASA BERBASIS TUGAS:
MEMAHAMI TUGAS DALAM KONTEKS TBLT**

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Abstract

The characteristic of ESP that puts more emphasis on the ability of students to perform tasks relevant to the world of work requires a learning approach that allows the transfer of authentic activities in the work field to the learning activities in the classroom. Many studies then suggest that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach meets this special trait. The application of this approach, however, still confuses some ESP teachers or lecturers in which they find it difficult to distinguish the terms of “task” in TBLT with tasks in ordinary classes. This descriptive qualitative research then seeks to describe the nature of tasks in TBLT and reveal the lecturers’ knowledge on that approach. The subjects of the research were all of the lecturers teaching ESP classes at State University of Padang (UNP). The data were obtained through a literature study and interviews. The data gathered then were analyzed qualitatively. The results of the research reveal what task in TBLT is and the extent to which the ESP lecturers know about TBLT.

Keywords: *ESP, TBLT, Target Tasks, Authentic Activities*

Abstrak

Karakteristik ESP yang lebih menekankan pada kemampuan siswa dalam melaksanakan tugas-tugas yang relevan dengan dunia kerja memerlukan pendekatan pembelajaran yang memungkinkan adanya transfer kegiatan otentik di lapangan ke kegiatan pembelajaran di kelas. Banyak penelitian kemudian menyarankan bahwa pendekatan Pengajaran Bahasa Berbasis Tugas (TBLT) memenuhi kekhasan ESP ini. Namun, penerapan pendekatan ini masih membingungkan bagi sebagian guru atau dosen ESP. Mereka mengalami kesulitan dalam membedakan istilah “tugas” dalam konteks TBLT dengan “tugas” di kelas biasa. Penelitian kualitatif deskriptif ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan hakikat tugas dalam TBLT, dan melihat pengetahuan dosen mengenai

pendekatan tersebut. Subjek penelitian ini adalah seluruh dosen pengajar mata kuliah ESP di Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP). Data diperoleh melalui studi pustaka dan wawancara. Data yang terkumpul kemudian dianalisis secara kualitatif. Hasil penelitian mendeskripsikan bagaimana tugas dalam konteks TBLT berbeda dengan tugas pada konteks lain, dan sejauh mana pengetahuan dosen ESP mengetahui TBLT tersebut.

Kata kunci: *ESP, TBLT, Target Tasks*, dan Kegiatan Otentik

Introduction

The basic principle of learning ESP is simply the reason why students learn English. This principle then becomes the primary basis for selecting teaching materials and determining learning methods. Based on the results of field observations and searches on Google Scholar, it was found that teachers in the ESP class have a high interest in adapting teaching materials to the needs of their students. This can be seen from many studies that focus on the area of needs analysis in various disciplines, such as Eslami (2010), Spence & Liu (2013), Prachanant (2012), Chen (2016), Andi & Arafah (2017), Putri (2018), Putri (2019), Malicka et.al (2019), and millions of others. They cover studies examining learning needs from various perspectives including stakeholders, practitioners, and students themselves. These studies have contributed positively to the implementation of ESP learning at various levels of vocational education. Policies for syllabus preparation, teaching materials, and teaching approaches tend to refer to the results of these studies, which of course must be relevant and need to be adapted to different classroom conditions.

At State University of Padang (UNP), ESP learning has been carried out in several faculties such as the Faculty of Engineering (FT), the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (FMIPA), the Faculty of Sport Sciences (FIK), the Faculty of Economics (FE), and the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality (FPP). This is a very good dynamic in preparing graduates to face the challenges of the international workforce. Through the ESP class, students will be equipped with English language skills that are relevant to the disciplines they are in and to the potential employment opportunities. According to Putri (2018), to meet the need at work, students must have English competency at the Intermediate level. Unfortunately, the research also reveals that more than 50% of FPP students have basic level of English skills in listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills. This indicates that most of them have not been able to meet the demands of the hospitality and tourism world of work.

The inability of students to meet the work demands, surprisingly, is unrelated to learning objectives, time allocation, lecturers, teaching materials, and opportunities to practice English outside the classroom (Putri, 2019). Students admit that the learning objectives have been clearly formulated, the time allocated for each lesson is very adequate, the lecturers who teach in the ESP class have good English competence, the teaching material is relevant to the students' major and is introduced gradually, and they are given the opportunity to practice English outside the classroom. Students also admit that they feel motivated and excited about learning English. In other words, the problem of the low English language skills of FPP students at this time has nothing to do with the aspects mentioned above.

Interviews conducted with ESP lecturers teaching ESP courses at FPP uncovered the common thread that potentially made FPP students' English skills incompatibility with the needs at work. According to the lecturer, English was taught through lectures, discussions, and dialogue performances on average. The students were



encouraged to read various kinds of texts related to hotels and tourisms, wrote and perform dialogs commonly performed at work, and learn some language structures. The application of these methods, actually, is not contrary to the English teaching, but an ESP class just needs an approach that could help students to use English as a means of communication to complete the prescribed task at work.

Slightly different from the General English class, learning English in the ESP class emphasizes the ability to complete tasks in a condition using English as a communication tool. The learning process is more centered on the meaning of the message conveyed, not on the accuracy of the language structure so that students get used to using English in a real context. Packaging English teaching materials and encouraging students to practice them through a set of tasks relevant to the world of work is assumed to be able to help students improve their English competence. According to Ellis (2003), to improve learners' competence in using English they must use the language in situations they encounter outside the classroom and they must experience how the language is used as a communication tool. Ellis argues that "Tasks" are the most appropriate tools to be used in the intended learning. For this reason, the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is considered to be able to bridge the gap between the students' low English competence and the high demands of English skill at work. Unfortunately, many teachers or lecturers are still confused to distinguish the concept of task in TBLT from that in another approach (CBI, for instance). There are many researches actually describing the procedure of applying TBLT in the classrooms, but none of which present it in comparison to other approaches. This is regarded as important for improving the lecturers or teachers' understanding of the concept of tasks of different approaches. Furthermore, prior to the implementation of TBLT in ESP classes in UNP, it is essential to see the extent to which lecturers teaching ESP classes know about TBLT. The survey was conducted in a broader scope involving lecturers not only from FPP but also from other faculties at UNP. This paper seeks to describe how the nature of ESP and the extent to which ESP lecturers know about TBLT. The result of this research would be much beneficial for determining whether those teaching ESP in either university or vocational schools need special training or not in order to design an appropriate ESP course.

Method

This research employs descriptive qualitative design. The subjects of the research were lecturers teaching ESP classes at State University of Padang (UNP). The data were obtained through literature study and interview. The data gathered then were analyzed qualitatively.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of literature review, the researchers describe the way task is organized in ESP classes applying TBLT approach. It then is compared to the task presented in CBI approach. This part also describes the extent to which ESP lecturers know about TBLT.

1. The Nature of Tasks in TBLT

To see a clear difference between TBLT and another approach in terms of tasks, the writers compared it with Content Based Instruction (CBI) approach. Yousif and Jasim (2011) explain that through CBI the target language is acquired through subject

matters. Here, students not only learn about the language but also the knowledge and skills contained in it. Some experts also argue that CBI is one approach that is deemed suitable to be applied in ESP classes. Compared to TBLT, it deals with the process of acquiring a language through content learning (one of the characteristics of ESP learning), while TBLT focuses on completing work in the workplace by means of language (the goal of ESP learning). The close relationship between TBLT and CBI to ESP leads the writer to compare how the tasks and learning activities of the two approaches are distinguished in an ESP class.

A number of experts have classified and explained the types of tasks in language learning. Nunan (2004) for example, underlined that tasks can be divided into real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks. Real world tasks are those performed using language in the real-world outside the classroom, such as handling reservations at a hotel, writing business letters, welcoming guests, leading a meeting, dealing with customers' complaints, and so on. On the other side, pedagogical tasks are those carried out in order to activate students' knowledge and skills in the classroom. These tasks should focus on meaning rather than on forms and be related to the target tasks performed at work. They could be completing missing information while listening to an audio, solving a problem based on the knowledge they have already acquired, etc.

Furthermore, Celce-Murcia (2001) classifies the tasks performed in the classroom into reproductive and creative tasks. Reproductive tasks require students to reproduce language based on the models provided by teachers, while creative tasks have the students to make use of what they have learned to produce either written or spoken text using their own words (Yu: 2015; Calvache: 2003; and Debarge: 2019). Reproductive tasks might include writing a dialogue about reservation based on a video already watched, writing a business letter based on the samples given, or doing a role-play based on a model given. Meanwhile creative tasks might be in the form of dealing with customers' complaints during their stay. Through creative tasks, students are expected to be able to construct sentences in order to make statements, give answers, or provide appropriate responses in unpredictable ways. The language they produce is not resulted from the process of memorizing, but it is somewhat meaningful and contextual.

In addition, Ellis (2003) divides tasks into two types including focused and unfocused. The first are kind of manipulated tasks designed to help students learn linguistic forms while they are being exposed to the language. On the other side, unfocused tasks are much more about real life situations through which students learn the language. Tasks to be completed in a TBLT class are those called as real-world tasks, creative tasks, and unfocused tasks. The three types of tasks are closely related to tasks carried out at workplace. Meanwhile pedagogical tasks, reproductive tasks, and focused tasks are meant to lead students to be able to come to the first three tasks.

The way tasks and learning activities in TBLT different from another approach (CBI) is presented in the following table:

Table 1: Tasks in TBLT and Tasks in CBI (Content Based Instruction)

TBLT	CBI
<p>Topic: Reservation</p> <p>Learning objective: Students are able to handle reservation in various situation using appropriate language</p> <p>Pre-Task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students watch a video on hotel reservation 	<p>Topic: Reservation</p> <p>Learning objective: Students are able to perform a dialog about hotel reservation</p> <p>Pre-Activities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students read a phrase "Hotel Reservation" on the whiteboard 2. The students are asked about:



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2. Students are asked about:
 - a. How does the receptionist greet the customers in the video? Is he/she a good receptionist? What makes him/her good or bad?
 - b. What can he/she do to improve his/her service?
 - c. What information does a receptionist want to know from the customers?
 - d. What questions do you ask when you want to know about:
 - Their reservation
 - Identity
 - How long they will stay
 - Type of room and bed
 - Room view
3. Students are asked about:
 - a. What do you know about hotel reservation?
 - b. Who are involved in a hotel reservation?
 - c. Is it important to make a hotel reservation?
 - d. What does a hotel usually do when guests cancel their reservation?

Whilst Activities

1. Students read a dialog on Hotel Reservation
2. Students answer several questions (orally or in written form) related to the texts
3. Students may discuss about several new words
4. Students practice the dialog in pairs
5. Students may be asked to memorize the dialog and perform it in front of the class

Post-Activities

1. In pairs, students are asked to write a dialog about Hotel Reservation using their own words
2. Students may be asked to perform/present the dialog in front of the class
3. Other students are asked to comment on their presentation

4. Students are asked to guess what the people are saying in the displayed pictures?
5. Students are asked to watch a video on Hotel Reservation in

Good morning (sir/ma'am)

Good afternoon (sir/ma'am).

Good evening (sir/ma'am)

Welcome to (name of hotel/restaurant, etc)

How are you this morning (afternoon, evening, today)?

How can I help you?

What can I do for you?

Can I help you?

4. Students are asked to guess what the people are saying in the displayed pictures?
5. Students are asked to watch a video on Hotel Reservation in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovrzq0QEJQg>

or for authentic video they are asked to watch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyqfYJX23lg&t=86s>

During Task

Create a situation through which students have to handle an online reservation

Post-Task

Students are asked to comment on certain tasks performed by their friends.

- Is he/she a good

receptionist? Why/ why not? - Is the customer happy with the service? - What do you think she/he can do to make the service better?

The above table clearly presents learning activities in a TBLT class compared to those in a CBI class. The learning objectives of the two approaches are similar; the TBLT class aims to enable students to handle reservations in various situations using appropriate language while the CBI class aims to enable students to perform a dialogue about hotel reservation. At first glance, there is no striking difference between the two classes in terms of the formulation of learning objectives because both intend to make students able to carry out a dialogue about hotel reservations. Examining more deeply, the TBLT class is more focused on completing actual assignments: real tasks that actually occur in the field; and tasks that may require students to be able to handle reservations using language that may have different patterns and choices of words from what they have already learned in class. Meanwhile, related to learning objectives, the CBI class wants students to be able to present a dialogue on the topic being taught. Students can practice the vocabulary and structures they have learned in the dialogue according to the model given. In this case, students are unable to get out from the patterns of the modeled dialogue. In other words, posed to a statement or question that is different from the modeled dialogue, students will find it difficult to provide relevant responses. With CBI, students are likely to have a large vocabulary of certain content, but they might be less skilled in using it for communicative purposes.

2. The ESP Lecturers' Knowledge on TBLT

The following table presents the result of interviews done with 9 lecturers teaching ESP in UNP on their familiarity with TBLT.

Table 2: ESP Lecturers' Knowledge on TBLT

Participants	Their Familiarity with TBLT	Their Background of Education
X1	⊖	Non-English Language Teaching
X2	⊖	Non-English Language Teaching
X3	⊖	Non-English Language Teaching
X4	⊖	Non-English Language Teaching
X5	⊖	Non-English Language Teaching
X6	⊖	Non-English Language Teaching
X7	⊕	English Language Teaching
X8	⊕	English Language Teaching
X9	⊕	English Language Teaching

Table 1 above shows that the lecturers teaching ESP classes at UNP come from different disciplines. Few of them are majoring in English Language Teaching and many are from other fields of studies. In terms of familiarity with TBLT, lecturers who graduated from English Education all admitted to being familiar with this term while



those coming from Non-English Education Department had no idea of what TBLT was, and indeed they had never known the term previously.

The familiarity of the last 3 lecturers with ESP, in fact, does not signify that they are all able to describe what TBLT is about.

X7: “Yeah, of course. It stands for English Language Teaching, right? The tasks are different, I mean the concept is different. Tasks in TBLT are meant to help students to perform certain jobs at work. Like in my faculty, for example, students are taught how to handle reservation. The goal of learning English is to enable them to perform that job. Soft skills are also included in learning. So students learn the language through the tasks, yaaa... language is a means of completing the tasks”.

X8: “TBLT? Ya...I think I know it. I learned it when I was in my S1, but.... hehehe...it is about tasks....but I don't remember the details. Ummmm...sorry...I have no idea, I forget, hehe”

X9: Oh...It's a task based-learning. Of course, it's different from other tasks, but I'm not sure, hehe. I think in TBLT, students get an understanding of the materials by means of tasks. The tasks are given in the beginning of the learning, then they would understand the learning concept and theory through the completion of the tasks. Am I right?

From the above script, it is learned that only X7 who were able to explain the concept of TBLT fairly well. He knows the nature of tasks and the way language is acquired through TBLT. Meanwhile X8 is likely to remember only the term as she learned the approach when she was at university, and now she cannot recall the details as she never employed the approach in her classes. Furthermore, X9 seemed to misunderstand the concept of TBLT. She argued that tasks in TBLT are similar to the tasks assigned in common classroom, they might be different in the order they are presented. X9 believes that the tasks in TBLT are presented in the beginning of the lesson and the students would get an understanding of the materials through the tasks.

Based on these findings, it is shared that most of the ESP lecturers at UNP did not have sufficient knowledge about TBLT, even they had never heard this term at all. In general, TBLT is not the only best approach that can be applied in the ESP class, but TBLT has been shown to make a positive contribution, support and conform to the basic principles of ESP (Chang: 2012 and Milarisa: 2019). For this reason, having knowledge of TBLT and modeling capabilities based on this approach seems important.

The lack of lecturers' knowledge about TBLT, as presented in Table 2 seems to have a close relationship with their educational background. As previously mentioned, most of the teachers do not major in English Teaching, but they are lecturers of certain disciplines who have good English competency, for example Physics, Economics, and Chemistry. They may have a large stock of English vocabulary and be able to communicate in the language quite well, but they have less knowledge on the way language is acquired and taught.

From these findings, it seems that ESP lecturers need a training or workshop to increase their knowledge and understanding of language, especially those related to TBLT.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it is concluded that the tasks given in a TBLT class are different from those in other classes, in this case, CBI. These tasks facilitate students to be able to perform the prescribed jobs at the workplace. In other words, the tasks in TBLT are actually real tasks carried out in the world of work that are transferred to the classroom. Unfortunately, there are still many lecturers teaching ESP classes who do not yet have knowledge of TBLT. For this reason, institutions carrying out ESP teaching need to hold training on TBLT to help either teachers or lecturers to design learning activities based on this approach.

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