
Implementation of Task-Based Learning for Non-English Students: A Practice in Malikussaleh University

Implementation
of Task-Based
Learning

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how the task-based learning model influences the motivation of students of the Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) Department at Universitas Malikussaleh in learning English. Also, the present study attempts to find out the effectiveness of the implementation of this model in the English class as well as assess their attitudes toward the use of the model. This research involved 35 students of the first semester who were doing the English-I course.

Design/Methodology/Approach – This research combined a qualitative and quantitative approach with a direct application procedure through experimental study. The data were collected through a test, questionnaire, and interview.

Findings – The result shows that the task-based learning model helps non-English students to improve their English proficiency which in turn increases their motivation to learn English and therefore their attitudes toward using this model in their classroom is positively seen as a better way to learn English.

Research Limitations/Implications – Unlike many findings on similar studies, this research found that motivation cannot be utilized to predict grades in the peripheral university. New approaches should be developed to find out the predictors for student grades.

Practical Implications – To understand the influencing aspects for students' grades attainment, more variables should be used. Both internal and external motivation factors failed to predict students' grades.

Originality/Value – Research on students learning motivation specifically at the peripheral university has been studied.

Keywords Task-based learning, motivation, English proficiency

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1. Introduction

In Indonesia, English is taught from elementary school to college. This is as mandated by the government policy through Ministerial Decree No. 096/1967 (Huda, 1999). The regulation is touted as the forerunner to the inclusion of English as a compulsory subject in the curriculum and the education system in Indonesia.

After a long time, English has been promoted as a mandatory lesson in Indonesia, and the reality shows that there has been no significant change to the development of English teaching in formal educational institutions in Indonesia, including at the college level. In fact, with the development of the globalization era, the important role of English is increasingly evident almost in all sectors of life, especially in the job market. Global economic and employment competition has forced job seekers, including college alumni, to have sufficient English skills to compete in a free job market.

However, the fact that lack of ability of many university alumni in mastering English, especially the alumni from non-English majors, has raised many questions from the observers and experts in the field of education and teaching English. Studies show that there are many factors that influence English learning, which can be seen from two perspectives: students and the teaching process (Ellis, 2006). Motivation is a major problem that is seen from the context of students while teaching methods or techniques are issues that arise from teachers or the teaching process.

In response to this phenomenon, a communicative and effective learning model is promoted by socio-cultural theories. They believe that learning language is a social interaction by communicating using authentic language such as speaking in real situations (Long and Crook, 1991). The main characteristic of this theory is that teacher-centred learning processes become student-centred by utilizing tasks or activities to improve students' motivation and their communicative language skills (Candlin, 1987). Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region reveal that task-based learning is effective in terms of enhancing communicative language skills (Nunan, 2006). Therefore, this research is relevant to examine an English learning model that is considered effective to be implemented in the classroom, especially for non-English students by using a communicative approach through a task-based learning (TBL) model.

2. Methods

To achieve the present research objectives, several instruments were used: tests, questionnaires, and interviews. The test was conducted to measure the level of students' comprehension and their ability to master the materials provided during the class session by using the TBL model. Pre-test was administered in the first meeting prior to starting the TBL teaching process. Meanwhile, post-test was given when the teaching process ended after the 14th meeting of the class session. In addition, close-ended questionnaires were also distributed to all participants in order to figure out their attitudes towards the implementation of the model. A questionnaire was designed to scale up students attitudes based on the Likert scale parameter. The answer option is categorized as an attitude statement: Strongly Agree (SS), Agree (S), Neutral (N), Disagree (TS), and Strongly Disagree (STS). The questionnaire was presented in a multiple choice format with four options: a, b, c, and d.

Furthermore, an interview was conducted to find out the expression of the students regarding the motivation they have toward learning English using the TBL technique. The questions of the interview consisted of free questions correlating to their opinion, feeling, and preferences of learning English using the TBL model, which eventually indicates the nature of their motivation in learning English.

2.1. Sample and Population

The present study was undertaken using first semester students from the Anthropology Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, with the total of 35 students who were taking English-I course.

3. Results

Based on both pre- and post-tests conducted for all participants in the classroom, comparison and difference of value can be drawn between two aspects of measurement: Reading Comprehension and Written Expression. In addition, questionnaire responses show similar patterns between students indicating that most of the students still have positive attitudes toward learning English, especially by implementing the task-based learning techniques. The picture of the comparison can be seen in average value as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that there were some improvements during the experimental practices in the classrooms by comparing achieved scores between pre-test and post-tests, although it still does not show a significant value particularly in relation to the Reading skill (41.07–41.84). For written expression, however, participants showed essential improvement during their learning session (29.2–32.36).

Based on the data presented in Figure 1 and Table 1 the difference between the value on the pre-test and post-test can be seen, although with a value that is not too significant. The average values that emerged from the pre-test result were 41.07 (Reading Comprehension) and 29.2 (Written Expression), while the post-test value for Reading Comprehension increased from 0.8 to 41.84 points and Written Expression increased from 33.4 to 32.36 points.

4. Discussion

From the above comparative results, it can be concluded that there is an increase in the ability of students in learning English by using the task-based method. While other variables such as participants' motivation to learn in the group while the students' motivation in group experiments increased sharply, this finding could be due to the appropriate use of TBL in the classroom. Willis (1998) claims that TBL provides learners with a variety of advantages, for example, a comfortable learning environment that allows shy students to cope with stress or fear to talk or discuss with others. As a result, students in the experimental group are motivated to perform their duties. Another factor to explain the increased level of student motivation in the experimental group may also be due to the assignment itself. This text-based task is designed to be real, meaningful, and centered on the learner by Skehan (1998, cited in Bygate, 2001) which then encourages students to take an active role and participate in the learning process. Therefore, their motivation increases. This situation can be seen clearly in Table 1 that shows the respondents' questionnaires about their attitude toward this method of learning.

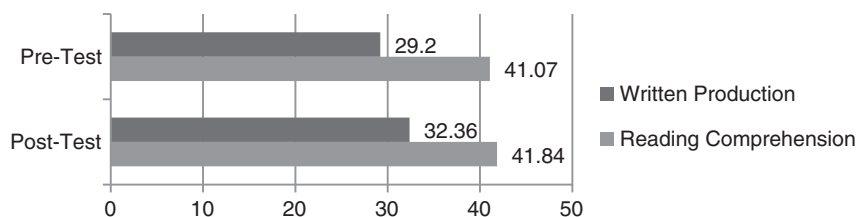


Figure 1.
Average Score from
Two Tests by
Aspects

No	Questions*	1	2	3	4	5
<i>(Section 1)</i>						
1	I like learning English	87	11	2	–	–
2	English is a boring subject	1	2	4	75	18
3	English is a fun subject	92	2	6	–	–
4	English is a rather easy subject	22	45	25	8	–
5	I learn English to find myself easy to read materials written in English	72	18	10	–	–
6	I learn English for job qualification and requirement	85	11	4	–	–
<i>(Section 2)</i>						
1	Do you like the strategies used by your english teacher during this semester?	85	10	5	–	–
2	Do you agree that the current techniques are easier for you to follow and effective for learning English?	87	8	5	–	–
3	Do you feel more comfortable to learn English in this way?	78	16	4	2	–
4	You prefer to interact with your friends/peers rather than with your teacher during the class session.	90	10	–	–	–
5	Having this techniques in English classroom makes me feel better and more love to learn English.	88	8	4	–	–
6	Learning English in this way makes me feel more confident to interact and practice my English in the classroom	85	11	4	–	–
7	Technique and method of learning English like this is the first time for me	98	2	–	–	–
8	Learning in this situation makes me easy to memorize and master some new vocabularies	76	14	7	3	–
9	This techniques and strategies motivates me to learn English more and more.	77	16	7	–	–
*Original version is in Bahasa Indonesia.						

Table 1.
Response of
Participants on
Questionnaires (%)

The findings indicate that the motivation of the students increased substantially after the experiment. This study shows that the use of TBL with the experimental group can improve students' motivation in learning English. This study reinforces the role of TBL in improving student learning as suggested by Ruso (2007).

5. Conclusion

These findings have given a new picture of the effectiveness of TBL in helping non-English students learn English, especially students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Malikussaleh University. Moreover in improving their motivation to learn English, this research can increase teachers' awareness of students' attitudes toward TBL and be able to encourage English teachers, especially in higher education level, to take advantage of this method in their classrooms. This research has given us insight into how the TBL method plays an important role in improving students' motivation in learning and assisting them in mastering English. Although this research was focused on non-English students, the present study is only limited to students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences majoring in Anthropology studies. In future, similar studies need to be conducted in other contexts and settings.

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