TASK-BASED TEACHING PRACTICE PERCEIVED BY CIVIL ENGINEERING STUDENTS: A LOCAL EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of the approaches that can significantly enhance students' communicative language competence. Numerous studies on TBLT demonstrate favorable outcomes, and a notable number of educators affirm that TBLT is among the effective approaches they can employ. By the same token, many students view TBLT positively. However, a significant portion of recent research seems to concentrate exclusively on English students, while TBLT holds potential applicability for non-English students across various disciplines. These students exhibit distinct characteristics due to language exposure in the classroom. This study investigates non-English students' perception of TBLT practice, specifically civil engineering students at Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis. The purposive sampling technique was used, 47 students who learned English with the TBLT approach. This study utilized a perception questionnaire comprising 17 items. It covers three essential considerations in TBLT namely the nature of tasks (5 items), the difficulty level of tasks (6 items), and the teacher's roles during the practice (6 items). The finding revealed that non-English students had a positive attitude towards TBLT, as they expressed strong agreement with the positive statements in all three constructs. This shows that TBLT is viewed favorably by English and non-English students alike, regardless of their characteristic differences.

Keywords: *Non-English students, Perception, Task-Based Teaching, TBLT*

INTRODUCTION

Task-Based Language Teaching (commonly known as TBLT) is one of the communicative approaches advocated by language teaching researchers to "enforce" students to perform their target language competence in communicative ways. In this respect, TBLT accentuates the use of specific tasks as an essential unit of learning (Harris, 2018; Skehan, 2003). These tasks have main principles namely focusing on meaning, having communicative outcomes, engaging, and reflecting on real-world activity which helps students to use and simultaneously understand the language

within a context (Harris, 2018; Moore 2018; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2007). Given that way, the learning experience can become more exciting and reasonable. Hence, TBLT is encouraged by language teaching researchers when the specific goal is students' communicative language production.

Some argue that TBLT practice is slightly challenging when it comes to the task design phase and learners' attributive factors into consideration (Nunan, 2004; Robinson, 2001). To date, however, significant numbers of TBLT practices continue growing and are proven to be effective to elevate students' communicative language ability and their motivation (Bao & Du, 2015; Chen & Wang, 2019; Chua & Lin, 2020; Milarisa, 2019; Nita, et. al., 2020; Sukma, et. al., 2020). These phenomena have shown that the TBLT approach is favorable. It improves not only students' language skills but also another decisive feature in successful language learning, i.e., motivation. These are, concurrently, become the prominent reasons why numerous teachers see TBLT as one of the finest approaches (Hao, 2016; Liu & Ren, 2021; Musazay & Khalid, 2017; Pham & Nguyen, 2018; Saragih, et. al., 2022). Although they have to play some specific roles such as facilitator, organizer, leader, motivator, etc. (Willis & Willis, 2007), to this end, most English language teachers agree that TBLT is advantageous for the students.

Similar to many teachers, students also hold a positive view of TBLT. A lot of research shows that students appreciate TBLT (Hadi, 2012; Meng & Cheng, 2010; Sahrawi, 2017; Sukma, et. al., 2020). However, the research primarily evaluates the opinion of English language learners. In EFL settings like Indonesia, English is taught to English majors and students of other disciplines such as Engineering, Economics, Psychology, etc. Hence, applying the TBLT approach is rational and the students' opinions toward the approach are also relevant to observe. Up until now, there has been limited research focusing on the perception of TBLT among non-English students. Non-English students exhibit subtle distinctions compared to their English counterparts due to inadequate language exposure in classroom walls. In addition, non-English students encounter distinct challenges in language learning (Rintaningrum et. al., 2017; Shen, 2012). Based on this point, non-English students may have different perceptions of teaching instruction assigned to them, which is TBLT in this case.

A well-practiced TBLT has many considerations to take into account. Among others are task design which should match the task characteristics in the TBLT principle, the difficulty level of the design task, and the role of the teacher while implementing the approach. Task design should capture the students' interest, make meaning the primary focus, reflect real-world activities, have priority completion, and have communicative outcomes (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). The difficulty level of the task involves three intersecting variables which include learners (their motivation, language repertoire, learning experience, etc.), the task (cognitive complexity, grammatical necessity, etc.), and the text, whether it is short or not (Nunan, 2004). The roles of teachers are the part to be played by the teacher during students' task performance (Nunan, 2004). The roles of the teacher in TBLT are leader and organizer, facilitator, motivator, language knower and adviser, and language teacher (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). When properly considered, these three constructs make TBLT practice influential.

Considering the points made above, it is crucial to undertake this research because the majority of previous studies have centered on English major students.

Non-English students, who possess unique traits, might perceive Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) differently when it is applied to them. Consequently, this study aims to offer comprehensive insights into non-English students' perspectives regarding TBLT. The findings can serve as a foundation for the assertion that TBLT may be highly valued by both English and non-English students.

METHODOLOGY
Subject
The population of this study was civil engineering students at Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis. They consist of 174 students in total. The purposive sampling technique was used to determine the sample of the study. This is because not all of the students were assigned to the TBLT approach while learning English. 47 students (divided into two classes) were chosen as the sample. These students learned English for the Workplace Communication subject from February to June 2023. During the teaching and learning process, the students were taught by using the TBLT approach. Their perception of the practice was then measured at the end of the semester.

Design and Procedures
This study used a descriptive approach. It described the perception of Engineering students about the practice of TBLT. These students were given different tasks which enabled them to produce and use target language during task completion. The assigned tasks were: 1) conversation at the workplace, 2) making a telephone call, 3) discussion & meeting, 4) making a presentation, 5) writing a business letter, 6) writing a CV, and 7) job interviews. After completing these tasks, the students were given a perception questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed students' opinions on the task nature, task difficulty, and the teacher's role in TBLT implementation.

Data Collection and Data Analysis
The data in this study were collected using a perception questionnaire. It consisted of three essential TBLT constructs namely task characteristics, task difficulty, and teacher roles during the practice. Specifically, the questionnaire consisted of 17 items. The Likert scale was used to distinguish each research participant's response. Below is the blueprint of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Blueprint of perception questionnaire about TBLT practice.

No	Construct	Item in Questionnaire
1	Task characteristics	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2	Task difficulty	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
3	Teacher roles	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17

The data obtained from the perception questionnaire were then organized, classified, and analyzed with the assistance of SPSS Software. The result of the data analysis was presented descriptively.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Finding
There are three constructs measured in this study. The first one is regarding the characteristics of the assigned task. The students were asked to give their thoughts on the nature of the tasks. Below is the result of their perception.

Table 2. Students' perception of the characteristics of assigned tasks

Characteristics of the tasks	Response					N_{total}
	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	N (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)	
Real-world reflection	(29/61.70%)	(7/14.89%)	(7/14.89%)	(4/8.51%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Communicative language use	(32/68.09%)	(9/19.15%)	(6/12.77%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Meaning is primary	(20/42.55%)	(18/38.30%)	(6/12.77%)	(3/6.38%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Engagement	(15/31.91%)	(20/42.55%)	(6/12.77%)	(6/12.77%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Outcome-based activity	(11/23.40%)	(28/59.57%)	(3/6.38%)	(5/10.64%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)

Note:
SA   : Strongly agree
A   : Agree
N   : Neutral
D   : Disagree
SD   : Strongly Disagree
N   : Number of the student

From the table above, it can be seen that there were five sub-constructs of the characteristics of tasks, they were real-world reflection, communicative language use, meaning is primary, engagement, and outcome-based activity. 47 students in total gave their opinion about these sub-constructs (N_{total}=47). In terms of real-world reflection, more than half of the students (61.70%) admitted that the given task was real-world reflection (29 students out of 47). In other words, the assigned tasks were those which were commonly being conducted by people in real-life situations. Then, there were 7 students out of 47 (14.8%) who agreed that the task was a real-world task. Similarly, there were 7 students out of 47 (14.8%) who couldn't decide whether the task was a real-world reflection or not. It follows that there were 4 students out of 47 (8.51%) who disagreed about the real-world sense of the task, saying that the given tasks were not commonly performed in real-life situations.

In the case of communicative language use, it can be seen from the table that there were 32 students out of 47 (68.09%) who strongly agreed that the assigned tasks were those that prompted them to use the target language communicatively for meaning exchange. There were 9 students out of 47 (19.15%) who also agreed with the statement. There were only 6 students out of 47 (12.77%) who couldn't decide the communicative sense of the assigned tasks. Besides, no student denied the statement. Further, in regards to meaning-focused activity, most of the students

agreed that the assigned tasks focus on meaning, given the fact that there were 38 students out of 47 who chose strongly agree and agree response. At this point, there were only 3 students out of 47 (6.38%) who disagreed that the tasks focus on meaning. This implies that the given tasks, based on students' opinions, allowed them to use their target language competence comfortably (there was no excessive interference with grammatical mistakes).

In the sub-construct of task engagement with the students, most of the students agreed that the assigned tasks were engaging. Based on the table, there were 42.55% of students (20 students out of 47) who agreed that the assigned tasks were engaging. It was followed by 31.91% (15 students out of 47) who absolutely agreed that the tasks were engaging. Despite the fact that there were 6 students (12.77%) who disagreed and couldn't decide their position, it didn't change the point that the tasks had an engaging sense to most of the students. For the last sub-construct, as to outcome-based activity, there were 59.57% (28 students out of 47) who agreed that the given tasks were outcome-based activities. This means that most of the students realized that task completion was a priority in the learning process. Thus, they would attempt to accomplish the given tasks by all means, within their groups. Based on the table, there were only 5 (10.64%) students who disagreed with the statement that the given tasks were outcome-based ones.

The second measured construct is students' perception of task difficulty level. This includes sub-constructs such as code complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative stress. The result of the data analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' perception of the task's difficulty level

Task difficulty		Response					N$_{total}$
		SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	N (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)	
Mediocre code complexity		(20/42.55%)	(21/44.68%)	(3/6.38%)	(2/4.26%)	(1/2.13%)	(47/100%)
Cognitive complexity	Appropriate cognitive Familiarity	(12/25.53%)	(16/34.04%)	(13/27.66%)	(4/8.51%)	(2/4.26%)	(47/100%)
	Appropriate cognitive processing	(10/21.28%)	(13/27.66%)	(15/31.91%)	(8/17.02%)	(1/2.13%)	(47/100%)
Communicative stress	Appropriate time limit/pressure	(29/61.70%)	(8/17.02%)	(10/21.28%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
	Appropriate length of text used	(28/59.57%)	(11/23.40%)	(6/12.77%)	(2/4.26%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
	Interaction control opportunity	(35/74.47%)	(10/21.28%)	(2/4.26%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)

Note:
SA   : Strongly agree
A   : Agree

N : Neutral
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N : Number of the students

  From the table above, it can be seen in the sub-construct of code complexity that most of the students, 87.23% in total (20 students strongly agree and 21 students agree), acknowledged that the code complexity level of the assigned tasks was appropriate to them. However, 3 students in total (2 students disagree and 1 strongly disagree) stated that the code complexity of the task was pretty hard for them. This means that these students couldn't understand the linguistic complexity of the task.

  In terms of cognitive complexity, particularly in cognitive familiarity appropriateness, there were 28 students in total (who responded strongly agree and agree) who stated that the assigned tasks were familiar to them. Unfortunately, 13 students couldn't decide the familiarity of the tasks. In addition, a few students (6 students out of 47) declared that they disagreed with the statement, meaning that they were not familiar with the tasks at all. In cognitive processing, there were 23 students in total (48.94%) who strongly agreed and simply agreed that the assigned tasks were appropriate, saying that the information given in the tasks was clear, sufficient, and well-organized.

  In terms of communicative stress sub-constructs, there were three things counted. First, the appropriateness of time limit or pressure. From the table, it can be highlighted that most of the students (29 students out of 47) agreed that the amount of time given to accomplish the task was appropriate. There were 10 students out of 47 who couldn't decide whether the time given was appropriate or not. Moreover, there were no students who regarded that the time given was not enough. Regarding the length of the text used, most students (28 students out of 47) believe that the text given to them was appropriate, saying that it was neither too long nor too short. 6 students couldn't decide their response to the statement, whereas 2 students stated that the length of the text wasn't appropriate for them.

  The last one is about interaction control opportunities provided by the tasks. From the table, it can be seen that there were 35 students out of 47 (74.47%) who strongly agreed that the task provided an opportunity for them to control interaction, which also means that these tasks focused on meaning and trained them to use the target language communicatively. None of the students (0%) declared that the tasks provided no control for interaction.

  Then, the last construct is about the role of the teacher during the implementation of TBLT in the classroom. Six sub-components will be investigated. Table 4 shows the result of the analysis. It can be seen that six important roles should be performed by the teacher during TBLT practice. From the data, most of the students agreed that the teacher has played the roles accordingly. However, among the six roles, most of the students strongly agreed (74.47%) that the teacher played the role well as language teaching. It was then followed respectively by the role of motivator (70.21% strongly agree), language knower and adviser (65.96% strongly agree), leader and organizer (53.19% strongly agree), manager of the group (40.43% strongly agree), and facilitator (38.30%). No student negatively responded to the roles the teacher played in TBLT practice. It was indicated by the fact that none of

them (0%) disagreed with the statement in the questionnaire. Yet, few students could not decide whether or not the teacher has played the roles, particularly in roles such as leader and organizer (17.02%), manager of the group (8.51%), and facilitator (17.02%).

Table 4. Students' perception of the role of the teacher in TBLT practice

Teacher Roles	Response					N_{total}
	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	N (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)	
Leader and organizer	(25/53.19%)	(14/29.79%)	(8/17.02%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Manager of the group	(19/40.43%)	(24/51.06%)	(4/8.51%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Facilitator	(18/38.30%)	(21/44.68%)	(8/17.02%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Motivator	(33/70.21%)	(14/29.79%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Language "knower" and adviser	(31/65.96%)	(16/34.04%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)
Language teaching	(35/74.47%)	(12/25.53%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(0/0%)	(47/100%)

Note:
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Discussion

The result of the data analysis above discloses some notable findings. To begin with, regarding the nature of the task, there are five sub-constructs considered namely real-world reflection, communicative language use, meaning is primary, engagement, and outcome-based activity. Based on the analysis, it is found that most of the students agree that the assigned tasks meet the terms of those sub-constructs. This means that the assigned tasks are specifically task-based language teaching tasks. The work of these tasks allows the students to communicatively practice the target language. The foremost reason for this criterion meet is that the assigned tasks

draw students' interest. According to Willis & Willis (2007), interest is key in TBLT tasks, particularly in the task-design stage. In this respect, the students enjoy having conversations at the workplace, doing presentations, and discussions, writing CV, etc. because these tasks are simply interesting. Yet, frequently asked questions might arise as to how to make a task interesting.

Generally speaking, an interesting task is an engaging one. Philp and Duchesne (2016) say that interest is one of the characteristics of engagement, along with activeness, effort, concentration, and responsiveness. It implies that interest has a firm relationship to engagement. Otherwise speaking, to raise students' interest, engagement between students and the task is highly important. According to Ellis (2003), to engage students with the task, it has to meet criteria such as essentiality, naturalness, and utility. The task essentiality only occurs when the linguistic element is required for task completion. Task naturalness exists when the linguistic item naturally occurs as learners perform the tasks, and task utility is when the linguistic element is used for effective task completion. Once it occurs, engagement between students and the task will be potentially high, and it will promote an interesting sense.

Regarding this study, the assigned tasks have been carefully designed by considering aspects of essentiality, naturalness, and utility proposed by Ellis above to make the tasks interesting. In CV writing tasks, for example, the essentiality exists since to complete the CV, linguistic elements such as semantics and syntax are employed. The naturalness of the task is also there because when students start to write and discuss the task, linguistics items including vocabulary and sounds naturally occur. Utility is identified, particularly when the linguistic element is also employed to complete the task effectively. Following this, high engagement of the task will automatically occur. It will eventually affect meeting other sub-constructs such as meaning focus, outcome-based activity, and communicative language use.

The second finding reveals that task difficulty level is fairly appropriate for the students; even though few students disagree in sub-constructs like code complexity and cognitive complexity. This is due to their insufficient language ability which is below average. Task difficulty and learner factors are closely related. The highest number of neutral responses is also identified in sub-constructs like cognitive processing. This means that the students were confused about whether or not the task or information given was clear to them. As previously noted, according to Nunan (2004), deciding the difficulty of the task is somewhat problematic. Robinson (2001) also states that task difficulty involves attributive factors from both the learners and the tasks themselves. Thus, determining the difficulty of the task relies mostly on these factors.

In this study, for the tasks to be appropriately challenging for the students, there are some considerations made. Concerning code complexity (language that is required), there is a small linguistic complexity attached to the task. In conversation at workplace tasks, for example, the linguistic features are less complex whereas the vocabulary is recognizable for the students. Yet, to avoid the task being effortless, the context of the workplace is provided. In addition, the writing tasks like CV writing and writing business letters, the context of writing is also provided i.e., for business purposes. The presence of context is useful for at least two important reasons namely to make target language production meaningful, and to challenge students' ability to a certain extent.

In cognitive complexity (the thinking required), the topic for the assigned tasks is somewhat familiar to most of the students. During TBLT practice, these students admit that they have seen other people doing the same task in real-life situations, as revealed in the previous sub-construct measurement. In addition, the teacher helps the students by providing clear information about the task and the topic. This helps to readjust the difficulty level of the assigned task. Furthermore, in communicative stress (performance conditions demanded by the task), the students are given enough time to climb up every stage of the task cycle including preparation of the task, task completion, task report, and evaluation. Ji (2017) argues that time availability is very important for successful TBLT practice. Specifically, in Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis where the present study was conducted, English is categorized as a practicum subject, implying that the provided time for one credit hour is 120 minutes. Such an amount of time is more than enough for the students to perform TBLT frameworks thoroughly. In discussion or presentation tasks, for example, the students are given some virtual models from which they observe people perform the same tasks. In addition, the language used to express specific expressions to complete the task is also presented. Likewise, the language used during the discussion activity is exposed to them. This helps the students to appropriately use the language in the upcoming stage of task completion.

The last construct discusses how students see the teacher's role during TBLT practice. Based on the data, it is revealed that most of the students strongly agree that the teacher acts and plays roles as suggested by TBLT conception. The highest number or percentage is when the teacher acts as a language teaching role. The main reason for this is that the students are still associated with the traditional way of learning; the teacher is depicted as a dominant figure in the classroom, especially in the Asian context (Harris, 2018). Consequently, the students regard that the teacher plays the intended role, that is as a language teacher who gives them knowledge. A similar rationale also prevails in the finding that few students could not firmly determine that the teacher thoroughly acts as a leader and organizer, a manager, and a facilitator during the practice. These few students chose neutral responses since they still habitually rely on the teacher in the classroom. In other words, they could not see the different roles the teacher plays, either as a leader, manager, or facilitator.

Fortunately, within the practice, it is also found that the students are certain that the teacher plays other specific roles like motivator, facilitator, leader and organizer, etc. This finding is not a surprise since within the implementation of the TBLT approach, the teacher has realized that he would have specific roles to play in a communicative classroom. According to Nunan (2004), in this kind of classroom, a teacher should act as a facilitator of communicative activities, as a participant, and as an observer and learner. Concerning this study, in discussion and meeting tasks, for instance, the teacher has helped learners in ways of scaffolding their communicative activities during the task cycle. The teacher observed every group to ensure that the groups started with the right task instruction. Once it was certain, the teacher continued to act as a participant or learner by joining the group during the task cycle, organizing the flow of discussion, leading the unfamiliar topics to give insight to the students, readjusting students' target language production mistakes implicitly, etc. Through constant application of these acts, the students feel that the teacher has played specific roles which is dissimilar from the traditional method of instruction.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The present study measured non-English students' perceptions regarding the practice of TBLT in their English classroom. There were three essential constructs measured namely the characteristics of the task, the difficulty level of the task, and the roles of the teacher in the classroom. For the whole construct, it was found that the students view the practice of TBLT positively. In particular, they believed that the tasks fulfilled task-like criteria, the difficulty level was somewhat appropriate for them, and the teacher acted accordingly during the practice. Despite there being few students for each construct who negatively viewed the practice, some plausible reasons have been rationalized. To this end, it is safe to conclude that, despite the existence of characteristic differences between English students and non-English ones, their perception regarding TBLT practice remains the same. However, since this study measures only Civil Engineering students at Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis, further related research could consider incorporating other disciplines or characteristics that students might possess, including educational background, gender, age, etc.

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