

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

In the multifaceted domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the development of speaking skills stands as an undisputed cornerstone, frequently emerging as the most sought-after and highly valued competency by learners across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This pre-eminence is not merely anecdotal; it is deeply rooted in the fundamental purpose of language itself: to facilitate effective communication. For EFL students, mastering spoken English often represents the ultimate objective of their learning journey, signifying their ability to engage directly with the global community, express their thoughts and ideas, share information, and participate meaningfully in an ever-increasingly interconnected world. The ability to communicate orally in English acts as a powerful enabler, opening doors to academic opportunities, professional advancements, and richer social interactions. Consequently, the curriculum design and pedagogical strategies employed in English language teaching institutions worldwide invariably place a significant emphasis on fostering and enhancing speaking proficiency. Indeed, Nunan (2010) suggests that speaking ability encompasses not only utterance production but also the skilful and contextually appropriate application of language.

The sheer importance of speaking in daily life cannot be overstated. It is through spoken discourse that individuals forge connections, negotiate understanding, express emotions, and navigate the complexities of social and professional relationships. In an academic setting, students need to present research,

participate in discussions, and articulate their understanding of complex concepts. In professional environments, effective oral communication is often a prerequisite for career progression, client interaction, and team collaboration. For EFL learners, who are often immersed in environments where English is not the dominant language, the ability to speak English fluently and accurately is a tangible measure of their acquired knowledge and a crucial tool for personal and professional empowerment. It is the most immediate and often the most visible manifestation of their language learning progress. Al-Tamimi et al. (2020) further emphasize the significance of speaking by highlighting its role as a means for learners to express ideas, share information, and build relationships, essential components of effective communication.

Despite its paramount importance, the journey towards achieving proficiency in spoken English is frequently fraught with a myriad of significant challenges for EFL students. A substantial body of research has consistently identified several common obstacles that impede learners' progress. These include, but are not limited to, speaking anxiety—a pervasive psychological barrier characterized by fear of judgment, embarrassment, or making mistakes; a pervasive lack of self-confidence, which often stems from past negative experiences or a perception of inadequacy; limited vocabulary resources, hindering the ability to express a wide range of ideas and concepts; grammatical inaccuracies, which can lead to misunderstandings or a lack of clarity in communication; pronunciation difficulties, impacting intelligibility and listener comprehension; and a critical lack of opportunities to practice authentically in a supportive, low-stakes environment where errors are viewed as learning opportunities rather than failures. These interconnected phenomena can collectively create a formidable impediment,

preventing students from achieving the desired levels of fluency and communicative competence. For instance, in countries like Vietnam, as highlighted by Thị & Ngọc (2023), many learners, despite years of formal English study, continue to struggle with speaking. This often can be attributed to pedagogical approaches that heavily favor teacher-centred lectures and rote memorization of grammatical structures, while providing insufficient opportunities for genuine, interactive communicative practice. This disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical application underscores a critical gap that needs to be addressed.

The dynamic and evolving landscape of language education is characterized by a perpetual quest for more effective and learner-centred pedagogical strategies that can successfully address the inherent complexities and multifaceted challenges faced by language learners. In this ongoing endeavour, a diverse array of innovative approaches has emerged, each aiming to optimize the learning process, enhance engagement, and ultimately improve learning outcomes. Among these, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has garnered significant scholarly attention and practical interest from educators worldwide. TBLT offers a distinct and compelling pedagogical framework that fundamentally prioritizes authentic communication and communicative problem-solving as the primary conduits for language acquisition. According to Jackson (2022), TBLT is characterized by its emphasis on authentic communication and the use of tasks as the central unit of instruction.

What sets TBLT apart is its core principle of centering the entire learning experience around the completion of meaningful, purposeful tasks. In this pedagogical model, the acquisition of language—whether it be grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation—is not treated as an end in itself, but rather as an emergent outcome of engaging with and successfully navigating the communicative

challenges inherent in these tasks. This approach represents a fundamental paradigm shift away from traditional, structure-based methodologies that often focus on decontextualized language elements, such as isolated grammar rules or discrete vocabulary lists. Instead, TBLT emphasizes the practical, functional application of language within authentic, real-world communicative scenarios. By prioritizing the use of language for achieving specific, tangible objectives, TBLT aims to foster deeper comprehension, more robust communicative skills, and a more naturalistic acquisition of language. Willis (1996) articulates this principle by highlighting TBLT's focus on using language to complete tasks, thereby shifting the emphasis from language forms to communicative functions.

Crucially, TBLT is widely recognized and embraced as a core component of the 'strong version' of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This classification is deeply rooted in TBLT's foundational assumption, robustly supported by seminal works from leading scholars such as Ellis (2003) and Freeman et al. (2011), which posits that language is most effectively and efficiently acquired through direct, meaningful communicative engagement and interaction. Within this framework, tasks are not merely supplementary activities or add-ons to a primary syllabus; rather, they serve as the fundamental building blocks for both curriculum planning and instructional delivery, as cogently articulated by Richards & Rodgers (2010). This foundational role of tasks underscores TBLT's unwavering commitment to an acquisition-driven, communication-centred approach to language education, where the focus is on using language to learn language.

The potential of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to significantly improve students' speaking skills is widely acknowledged and supported by research. This approach intrinsically encourages active participation by

emphasizing the use of language to complete relevant communicative tasks. By integrating both cognitive and affective dimensions into the learning process, TBLT strives to create a more effective, engaging, and ultimately more satisfying learning experience for students. Through the careful design of well-crafted tasks, students are naturally motivated and empowered to use language actively and spontaneously, which in turn cultivates their fluency and accuracy. This process transcends a mere focus on the formal aspects of language (grammar, vocabulary) and deeply engages with the functional use and meaning-making aspects of communication, enabling students to develop more comprehensive and versatile communication skills. Albino (2017) supports this view, demonstrating that TBLT can enhance fluency, grammar, and interaction in transactional conversations among EFL learners.

Moreover, TBLT demonstrates a profoundly positive impact on learners' psychological well-being and engagement. The experience of successfully completing a task, especially one that requires collaborative problem-solving and communication, can significantly boost students' self-confidence, foster a sense of accomplishment, and enhance their intrinsic motivation to continue learning. This positive reinforcement can effectively reduce the levels of speaking anxiety that so often act as a formidable barrier to progress. Research substantiates this perspective, with numerous studies providing evidence that TBLT can lead to marked improvements in students' speaking performance, often featuring significant gains in fluency, vocabulary range and accuracy, grammatical correctness, and pronunciation intelligibility (Albino, 2017). Furthermore, TBLT contributes to increased student motivation and engagement, as well as a demonstrable reduction in speaking anxiety, primarily due to its inherent focus on task completion, its inherent tolerance for errors as part of the learning process, and its emphasis on

meaningful communication over perfect form (Chua & Lin, 2020; Nget et al., 2020). Therefore, TBLT presents itself as a highly promising and effective learning strategy for empowering students in their pursuit of mastering speaking skills.

This study embarks on an exploration of the perceptions held by students at Universitas PGRI Madiun regarding the implementation of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach within their speaking skills classes. The escalating recognition of TBLT's substantial potential in enhancing not only language acquisition but also overall communicative competence, particularly within the Indonesian educational context, necessitates a deeper and more nuanced understanding of student perspectives. Previous research has illuminated both the significant benefits and the inherent challenges associated with the adoption of TBLT. For instance, studies have indicated that TBLT is often perceived by instructors as a 'right' or appropriate approach that actively engages learners, demonstrably increases motivation, and aligns well with curriculum demands. This was evidenced by the findings of Hima et al. (2021) in an Indonesian vocational school setting, who noted that TBLT provides superior learning opportunities and cultivates a more engaging classroom atmosphere, leading to heightened student motivation. Similarly, Douglas & Kim (2014) found that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors widely accepted TBLT as a suitable instructional methodology, citing its practicality, effectiveness, and learner-centeredness as its major advantages.

However, while Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a multitude of advantages in the realm of language learning, including the potential for enhanced speaking skills and increased student motivation, its practical implementation in the classroom is not without its own set of considerable hurdles.

The ultimate success of TBLT is heavily contingent upon the teacher's proficiency in designing and executing tasks that are both pedagogically sound and engaging for learners, as well as students' readiness and willingness to actively participate in the task-completion process. Nevertheless, various practical, pedagogical, and attitudinal factors can impede the full adoption and optimal utilization of this approach, making it imperative to meticulously identify and thoroughly understand these potential challenges. Hima et al. (2021) explicitly identified that teachers perceived TBLT as time-consuming in preparation, noted the complicated features of a task, and raised concerns about its potential irrelevance to exam preparation.

This approach, despite its considerable promise, also presents significant challenges in its practical application. From a teacher's perspective, TBLT is frequently perceived as being exceptionally time-consuming in terms of preparation. Educators need to meticulously design tasks that are not only authentic and relevant to learners' needs but also well-structured and scaffolded, a process that demands significant time and meticulous planning. Furthermore, the inherent complexity of the task features themselves can represent an additional burden for teachers. A common concern also revolves around the potential misalignment between the focus on task completion in TBLT and the often-paramount priority of exam preparation within formal education systems. Hima et al. (2021) explicitly identified that teachers perceived TBLT as time-consuming in preparation, noted the complicated features of a task, and raised concerns about its potential irrelevance to exam preparation.

Further challenges emerge from the student's side and from the broader learning context. Mismatched student expectations, particularly when learners are more accustomed to traditional, teacher-centred teaching methods, can become a

significant barrier to effective TBLT implementation. Limited classroom time is also a crucial issue, as TBLT often necessitates more time for exploration, negotiation of meaning, and task completion compared to more conventional, direct instruction methods. Excessive instructor preparation, as mentioned earlier, is a notable point, compounded by a potential ambiguity surrounding the precise definition and scope of TBLT itself, which can unfortunately lead to confusion and inconsistencies in its implementation. Douglas & Kim (2014) also pointed out several drawbacks, including mismatched student expectations, a general lack of sufficient classroom time, and excessive instructor preparation, alongside the aforementioned ambiguity regarding the definition of TBLT. These critical insights, drawn from both teacher-focused and indirectly student-focused perspectives, collectively underscore the complex, multi-layered nature of successful TBLT implementation.

An in-depth and comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions, encompassing their perceived benefits and challenges, will yield invaluable insights for educators and educational institutions alike. These insights can be instrumental in optimizing speaking teaching methodologies, refining curriculum design, and ultimately contributing to the advancement and continuous improvement of English language teaching practices within Indonesia. This study is therefore critically important to bridge the existing gap in understanding how TBLT is received and perceived by students in the local Indonesian context, specifically at Universitas PGRI Madiun, and to explore how these perceptions correlate with the overarching goal of competency-oriented language teaching. By focusing on the student voice, this research aims to provide a grounded perspective on the lived experience of learning speaking skills through TBLT.

B. Delimitation of the Study

This research is meticulously designed to specifically focus on exploring the perceptions of students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Universitas PGRI Madiun. The primary objective is to understand their subjective views, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the implementation of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach in their speaking skills classes. The core of this investigation lies in understanding how students perceive the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing their speaking abilities, encompassing aspects such as fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative competence. Furthermore, the study aims to delve into how TBLT influences their psychological states related to language learning, such as their self-confidence, motivation levels, and the presence or absence of speaking anxiety. In addition to these core areas, this study will also endeavour to identify and analyse the specific challenges and benefits that students subjectively experience throughout the learning process when engaging with TBLT methodologies. By concentrating on students' perceptions, this research aims to provide direct, firsthand insights into their lived learning experiences, offering a crucial learner-centred perspective on the application of TBLT.

It is important to clarify that this study is not an experimental or quasi-experimental investigation designed to objectively measure the efficacy of TBLT by comparing student outcomes against a control group or pre-defined benchmarks. Instead, it is a qualitative inquiry aimed at understanding the subjective interpretations and lived experiences of the students. The scope of "speaking skills" that this study will consider are those aspects that students themselves identify as being impacted by TBLT, which may include their ability to speak more fluently,

their confidence in spontaneous oral production, their willingness to engage in classroom discussions, and their perceived improvement in using appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures in spoken contexts. The rationale for this specific focus on student perceptions is that understanding the learner's viewpoint is crucial for developing effective, responsive, and ultimately successful pedagogical approaches. Learners are not passive recipients of instruction; their beliefs and attitudes significantly influence their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. By capturing these perceptions, educators and institutions can gain valuable feedback to refine teaching strategies, adapt curricula, and provide better support for learners.

Furthermore, this study explicitly excludes certain areas to maintain a clear and manageable focus. It does not aim to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding TBLT, nor does it seek to compare TBLT with other specific teaching methodologies. An in-depth linguistic analysis of student speaking performance (e.g., detailed error analysis) is also outside the scope of this research. The focus remains squarely on the students' subjective experiences and their interpretations of the TBLT approach in their speaking classes.

C. Problems of the Study

Based Based on the background and problem boundaries above, this research formulates the following questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions about Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing their speaking ability at Universitas PGRI Madiun?
2. What are the perceived challenges and benefits experienced by students in learning speaking skills through TBLT at Universitas PGRI Madiun?

D. Purpose of the Study

In The purposes of this study are:

1. To explore and describe the students' perceptions regarding the implementation of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach in developing their speaking ability at Universitas PGRI Madiun.
2. To identify and analyze the specific challenges and benefits that students perceive when learning speaking skills through the TBLT approach at Universitas PGRI Madiun.

E. Significance of the Study

This study is poised to make a meaningful and multifaceted contribution to the existing body of knowledge concerning the application and effectiveness of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach within the specific context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Indonesia. The research endeavours to enrich the current understanding of how TBLT is perceived by university students, particularly in an Indonesian setting, and to explore its potential impact on their language proficiency and their psychological well-being in speaking classes. By focusing on student perceptions, this study offers a crucial learner-centric perspective that complements

existing research, which often focuses on teacher perspectives or outcome-based evaluations.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can serve as a valuable theoretical foundation for future research endeavours that aim to innovate and advance language teaching methodologies in Indonesia. It can provide empirical insights that potentially strengthen or even refine existing theories regarding second language acquisition through communicative tasks, offering context-specific evidence.

a. For Lecturers/Teachers:

The findings of this study can provide invaluable practical insights for English teachers who are implementing or considering the implementation of TBLT in their speaking classes. It can offer a deeper understanding of:

1. **Practical Application Guidance:** How students experience TBLT can inform teachers on how to effectively design and select tasks that resonate with learners' needs and interests, thereby increasing engagement and learning.
2. **Addressing Student Concerns:** By identifying common challenges perceived by students, teachers can proactively address these issues, such as providing clearer task instructions, offering more scaffolding, or integrating more opportunities for practice.
3. **Enhancing Speaking Skills:** The study can highlight which aspects of TBLT are perceived by students as most beneficial for their speaking development, allowing teachers to leverage these aspects more effectively.
4. **Fostering Positive Psychological States:** Understanding how TBLT impacts student confidence and anxiety can help teachers create a more supportive and encouraging learning environment, promoting greater participation and reducing fear of making mistakes.

5. Informing Pedagogical Decisions: The research can encourage the adoption and adaptation of TBLT-based strategies tailored to the specific context of Indonesian classrooms, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach.

b. For Students:

This research can empower students by providing them with:

1. Enhanced Understanding of TBLT: Students can gain a clearer comprehension of the rationale behind TBLT and how it is designed to benefit their learning journey, particularly in developing their speaking skills.
2. Self-Reflection and Agency: The findings can encourage students to reflect on their own learning processes, identify the strengths and weaknesses of TBLT from their perspective, and actively seek ways to overcome challenges and maximize benefits.
3. Informed Engagement: A better understanding of TBLT can lead to more active and purposeful engagement in TBLT activities, as students can appreciate the communicative goals and learning opportunities embedded within the tasks.
4. Articulation of Needs: Students can use the insights gained to better articulate their learning needs and preferences to their instructors, fostering a more collaborative learning environment.

c. For the University/Institution (specifically, the English Department of Universitas PGRI Madiun):

The results of this study can offer crucial feedback and actionable recommendations for the university and its English Department regarding:

1. Current Teaching Methodologies: The findings can provide a data-driven assessment of the current teaching methodologies employed in speaking classes, highlighting the perceived strengths and weaknesses of TBLT implementation.

2. **Curriculum Development and Review:** The research can inform potential areas for curriculum development or revision, suggesting ways to integrate or refine the use of TBLT to better meet student needs and learning outcomes.
3. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** The study can identify specific areas where faculty might benefit from additional training or support in implementing TBLT, ensuring consistent and effective application of the approach across different courses and instructors.
4. **Quality Assurance:** The student perceptions gathered can contribute to the university's quality assurance processes for its language programs, ensuring that pedagogical approaches are aligned with learner expectations and effective learning outcomes.
5. **Fostering a Research-Informed Environment:** By undertaking and disseminating such research, the university can foster an environment that values research-informed teaching practices and encourages innovation in language education.

d. **For Future Researchers:**

This study can also pave the way for further scholarly inquiry by:

1. **Providing a Baseline for Future Studies:** The findings can serve as a baseline for subsequent research that might aim to replicate these findings in different Indonesian universities or explore similar student perceptions in other language skills or contexts.
2. **Identifying Areas for Deeper Investigation:** The challenges and benefits identified by students may highlight specific areas that warrant more in-depth investigation, perhaps through case studies, longitudinal studies, or mixed-methods approaches.
3. **Offering Methodological Insights:** The qualitative methodology employed in this study can offer insights into effective ways to gather and analyse student

perceptions in EFL contexts, informing the design of future research projects.

4. **Contributing to Theoretical Debates:** The empirical data generated can contribute to ongoing theoretical debates in second language acquisition and language pedagogy, particularly concerning the role of tasks and learner cognition in EFL settings.

F. Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and consistency in understanding the key concepts of this study, the following terms are defined operationally:

1. **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):** This pedagogical approach to language teaching fundamentally prioritizes the task as the primary unit of learning. The core tenet of TBLT is that language is most effectively acquired through its use in completing meaningful communicative tasks. In this framework, the emphasis is placed on authentic language use to achieve specific, communicative goals, where students actively employ English to accomplish tasks that are relevant to real-world situations or communicative functions. TBLT operates on the principle that meaning takes precedence over language form in isolation, particularly during the initial stages of task engagement. It is recognized as a significant component of the ‘strong version’ of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is underpinned by the assumption that language acquisition is best facilitated through active use and interaction. A typical TBLT lesson structure often involves a pre-task phase (introducing the topic and task), a task cycle (students perform the task, often in pairs or groups, followed by reporting and analysis), and a language focus phase (addressing specific language forms that arose during the task). The task itself is defined as an activity where learners are engaged in using language to achieve a specific outcome, with the primary focus on the message being conveyed rather than the linguistic form.

2. Speaking Ability: Speaking ability refers to an individual's overall competence in producing effective and intelligible spoken utterances in English. This multifaceted construct encompasses several key components, including:
 - a. Fluency: The ability to speak smoothly and at a natural pace with minimal hesitation or unnatural pauses. It involves the flow of speech and the ability to express ideas without undue effort or interruption.
 - b. Grammatical Accuracy: The correct application of grammatical rules in spoken English, including verb tense, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, and sentence structure.
 - c. Lexical Accuracy and Range: The appropriate selection and use of vocabulary, including the ability to employ a sufficiently wide range of words and phrases to express ideas effectively, as well as the correct pronunciation and usage of chosen words.
 - d. Pronunciation: The clarity and intelligibility of spoken English, encompassing phonemic accuracy (correct production of individual sounds), stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns that contribute to overall comprehensibility.
 - e. Discourse Competence: The ability to organize spoken language coherently and cohesively, including the use of discourse markers, appropriate turn-taking, and the ability to maintain a topic and develop ideas logically.
 - f. Strategic Competence: The ability to use communication strategies to overcome difficulties, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, or requesting clarification, to ensure effective communication is maintained.
 - g. Contextual Appropriateness: The ability to adapt one's speech to different social contexts, audiences, and purposes, demonstrating an understanding of register and pragmatics.

3. **Students' Perceptions:** Students' perceptions are defined as their subjective views, beliefs, attitudes, and interpretations concerning a particular learning method, process, or experience. In the context of this study, students' perceptions encompass their individual understanding and evaluation of the implementation of TBLT. This includes their beliefs about its effectiveness in developing their speaking skills, their attitudes towards engaging in TBLT activities, their interpretations of the benefits and challenges they encounter, and their overall feelings and opinions about the approach. These perceptions are shaped by their prior learning experiences, their learning styles, their personal goals, and their interactions within the classroom environment. They represent the learner's internal cognitive and affective response to the teaching methodology.
4. **Speaking Problems:** Speaking problems refer to the various difficulties and obstacles that EFL learners commonly encounter when attempting to produce spoken English. These challenges can be broadly categorized into several interconnected areas:
 - a. **Vocabulary-related problems:** This includes a lack of sufficient vocabulary to express ideas, difficulty in recalling the right words, using words incorrectly, or struggling with collocations and idiomatic expressions.
 - b. **Pronunciation-related problems:** These involve difficulties in producing correct English sounds, issues with stress and intonation that affect intelligibility, and accents that significantly hinder comprehension.
 - c. **Grammar-related problems:** This category encompasses errors in verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, article usage, prepositions, sentence structure, and other grammatical inaccuracies that can impede clear communication.
 - d. **Cohesion- and coherence-related problems:** Learners may struggle to connect their ideas logically, use appropriate linking words or discourse markers, or maintain a coherent flow of speech, leading to disjointed or difficult-to-follow utterances.

- e. Psychological problems: This significant category includes speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, shyness, and a general reluctance to participate in speaking activities due to apprehension about being judged or evaluated negatively. These psychological factors often exacerbate other linguistic difficulties.
- f. Lack of Practice Opportunities: Students may face problems due to insufficient opportunities to engage in authentic speaking practice in supportive environments, leading to a lack of fluency and confidence.