

STUDENT TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract

Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia (SEA Teacher) is a project providing opportunity for pre-service teachers from universities in Southeast Asia to have teaching experiences (practicum) in schools in other countries in Southeast Asia. This study presents the experiences of four pre-service English teachers who enrolled in SEA Teacher internship program. The participants were interviewed and the data were analyzed via thematic narrative analysis. Research credibility was enhanced through multiple data sources including interview transcript, lesson plans, and student teachers' report. The Findings revealed that soft or weak form of task-based language teaching (TBLT) was implemented, varying from those similar to traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) paradigm, to stronger forms, such as task-supported language teaching. Strong forms of TBLT remained unproven due to students' linguistic challenge.

Keywords: *Pre-service English Teachers, SEA Teacher Program, Task-based Language Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

In the era in which most of Southeast Asia nations have agreed on shared vision and community, it is important that pre-service English teachers of the region have a global mobility program that responds to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse contexts and students. Among Southeast Asia nations, English has the potential to be the region's lingua franca but it is still considered differently in each nation - it is a second language in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, while in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao P.D.R., Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, it is considered as a foreign language (Kam, 1998). Different status of English in the region makes English language skills are included to one of the widest skill gaps followed by computer skills, as well as thinking and behavioural skills even though the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been piloting an internal market for high skilled labour since 2015, (OECD, 2015).

Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia (SEA Teacher) is a project providing opportunity for pre-service student teachers from universities in Southeast Asia to have teaching experiences (practicum) in schools in other countries in Southeast Asia. It was created by Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) to support the quality of education for ASEAN countries (The SEA Teacher Project, 2019). The teaching experience gives the pre-service teachers essential contribution in the real teaching as they practice from the latest theories they have already known (Ulla, 2016). For pre-service English teachers in Indonesia, this program also means a first step to give their contribution to enhance their students' English skills in other Southeast Asia nations.

Since English in some countries of Southeast Asia is considered as a second language and in some others as a foreign language with a wide range of language education policy and language teaching preferences, task- based language teaching is an approach which potentially enables student teachers to teach

English innovatively among those different status of English and curricula. More than a decade ago, task-based language teaching (TBLT) had earned its establishment in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Long and Crook (1992) argue that TBLT can be building blocks of any pedagogic activities. TBLT is often considered as an approach which synthesizes information processing theories, collaborative learning, and interactionist hypothesis (Skehan, 1998) and is often contrasted to more widely-practiced methods, such as: presentation-practice-production or P-P-P (Bruton, 2005; Carless, 2009; Harris, 2016; Klapper, 2003; Sato, 2010; Swan, 2005). Ellis (2009) argues that the criticism on TBLT reflect inability to perceive the existence of multiple versions of task-based teaching.

Several studies have been done to investigate the practice of TBLT (Adams & Newton, 2009; Carless, 2007; Harris, 2016; Skehan & Foster, 2005; Tang, 2004; Van den Branden, 2006). However, few studies have been done in Southeast Asia context (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol 2007; Wulandari, Candria, Wulandari, & Laksono, 2017), especially in relation to internship program at schools outside pre-service English teachers' home country.

To fill the void, this study aims to investigate pre-service English teachers' experiences in teaching on the perspective of TBLT during their internship in secondary schools across Southeast Asia. A guiding research questions were formulated: 1) How is pre-service English teachers' experience on task-based language teaching (TBLT) during their internship as student teachers of SEA Teacher Program in secondary schools in Thailand and the Philippines?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Task-based language teaching is a language teaching approach which is based on theories of language acquisition, which supports the use of meaningful target language and the use of learning opportunities in noticing how meaning is created through interaction in the target language (Long, 1996; Skehan, 1998). Ellis

(2009) highlights that TBLT also entails decision making on design (such as: task type, content, and sequence in a course) and methodology (lesson and participatory structure). Therefore, three phases of task and choices of task performance (whole class, pair work, group work, or individual work) can be implemented in a task-based lesson (Ellis, 2009). In a TBLT coursework, students are expected to listen, read, speak and write to complete a task challenge (Carless, 2009). There are different variations and options in TBLT (Ellis, 2003; Ellis, 2009; Long, 1985; Samuda & Baygate, 2008; Skehan, 1998). The definitions of task itself vary. Ellis (2003) argues that a language teaching activity is considered a task if it accomplishes these four criteria:

“1. The primary focus should be on ‘meaning’ (by which is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances). 2. There should be some kind of ‘gap’ (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning). 3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity. 4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right) (p.4-5).”

Meanwhile, Samuda and Baygate (2008) defines:

“A task is a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both (p. 69). “

Samuda & Baygate's (2008) definition on task is in line with Ellis' (2003) four criteria of a task. The four criteria open the possibility of different manifestation of TBLT. As a consequence, when it comes to classroom practice, TBLT can appear in weak or strong versions (Adams & Newton, 2009). On the level of English as a subject matter syllabus, weak versions appear when tasks are used for communicative practice while being combined to conventional grammar and functional syllabus or structural syllabus - which involves P-P-P and situational grammar exercises (Foster & Skehan, 2013). Ellis (2009) mentions this practice as task-supported language teaching. In contrast, a strong version of TBLT requires a syllabus that meets Ellis' (2003) criteria of task as a language teaching activity. The activity is designed to create opportunities for language learners to complete the task (Prabhu, 1987) while communicatively using the target language (Ellis, 2009; Najjari 2014). Ellis (2003) argues that the task is the central unit of curriculum and lesson plan in strong versions of TBLT. Furthermore, task should relate to meaningful real world activities, and the assessment should be designed based on the outcome of the task (Skehan (1996) cited in Harris (2016).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, the feasibility of TBLT in secondary education connects to the need of context-sensitive by compromising methodological principles and classroom dynamics which is called situated task-based language teaching (Carless, 2007). Task is implemented along with communicative practice - an evidence of a soft or weak version of TBLT (Carless, 2004; Tong, 2005). Carless (2007)'s study suggests that

“...features of a situated task-based approach could include the following: grammar

instruction in the pre-task stage of a task cycle; task-supported teaching along the lines of the PPP approach; tasks related to examination requirements; and alternatives to oral tasks, including highlighting reading and writing (p. 604)"

Different variations and options in TBLT enable student teachers of SEA Teacher program to be more flexible in their teaching practice during the internship. In teaching setting where their lingua franca (Bahasa Indonesia) can not be used in classroom language instruction due to different national language used in Thailand and the Philippines, the student teachers can only use English as both subject matter to be delivered and classroom language instruction. Therefore, TBLT can give benefits not only to their students but also to themselves as pre-service English teachers.

In Indonesia mainstream curriculum, English was established in 1989 Law (Chapter IX, Section 39, Verse 3) as first foreign language and instructed to be taught as a compulsory subject in mainstream curriculum at the secondary level. Furthermore, Government Regulation, Number 28, 1990 recommended English language teaching started from fourth grade of primary education. After that, along with the 1994 national curriculum, the government recommended ELT from primary through to tertiary education (Renandya, 2004). During competency-based language (CBL) curriculum, Indonesia has many problems with the implementation. English Language Teaching (ELT) researchers of Indonesia found that CBL in Indonesia is difficult to adapt by the teachers because they are not well prepared to implement this curriculum (Marcellino, 2015; Putra 2014). The students are difficult to finish the task given by the teacher because they did not get the clear point of instruction or hint to do the task (Marcellino, 2008). Moreover, the classroom management from the teacher is one of the issues because the teacher let the students freely do what they want in class, and only give them one chance to ask (Marcellino, 2015).

Similar to Indonesia, Thailand considers English as a foreign language. In Thailand schools' curricula, English is one of the primary learning contents (Ministry of Education, 2008), which aims to develop students' skill especially in four English skills such as reading, speaking, listening, and writing (Kam, 1998). English become one of the significant contributors in improving the education through collaboration with information technology as stated in the Ministry of University Affairs policy on English language (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2002). On the other hand, Deerajviset (2014) points out that English language teaching in Thailand still needs to be upgraded by all of the collaborators in this country. It is because the teachers and students in Thailand have low proficiency in English (Deerajviset, 2014). Wongsothorn et al. (2002) suggest that the students in Thailand should learn English as wide as the culture from original English countries be adaptable with their own culture and also not in the same methodology. For the teacher, they have to make the student closely understand the differences in the area of linguistics (Deerajviset, 2014). Hence, there is a chance for Thailand to increase the level of competence in English.

In the Philippines where English has a place as a second language, bilingual education policy at all levels of schooling maintains the positioning of English as language of literacy and makes it a language of instruction for science and mathematics (Kam, 1998). Moving on from audio-lingual principles and methods, English is taught in more creative approach with a wide range of communicative activities (NIER, 1994), whole language approach and interactive language teaching (Castilo, 1998). The majority of language teaching approaches in Philippines are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Task-Based Language Teaching approach (TBLT) based on the fast survey, an instruction from DepEd Philippines, and handbill (Martin, 2014). Teachers are reported to be quite eclectic-combining different methods and techniques (Kam, 1998). Among ASEAN countries, Philippines is considered to have better English competence (Waterworth, 2016).

In short, the practice of English language teaching in Southeast Asia has some issues as a common ground in their diverse language policy and secondary education mainstream curriculum. The fact that the changes in English language teaching curriculum have been driven by the concepts of communicative competence, integration of skills, and appropriateness of teaching techniques in which English is not widely used beyond classroom settings, causes the need of an approach which can be used across the nations as best practice for Indonesian student teachers who teach English in Thailand and the Philippines. Furthermore, TBLT has the potential to fulfill this need.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a narrative inquiry method because narrative inquiry is an appropriate method to investigate teachers' experience on their teaching practice in particular context (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Johnson & Golombok, 2002) and may involve small numbers of participants (Riessman, 1993). Barkhuizen (2016) argues that:

“Experiences become narratives when we tell them to an audience and narratives become part of narrative inquiry when they are examined for research purposes or generated to report the findings of an inquiry. (p.4)”

Narrative inquiry has been suggested to have benefit to pre-service teacher participants (Barkhuizen, 2010) and teacher participants (e.g., Doecke, 2004; Golombok & Johnson, 2004) in many ways in the field of language education.

In this narrative inquiry, the four participants, 2 females and 2 males, are pre-service English teachers of SEA Teacher Program who have their pre-service teaching internship in secondary schools within Southeast Asia region - Archie and Dee in the Philippines, while Danny and Iris in Thailand. The participants accepted to sign the consent form to be interviewed for the data collection. The

Department of English Language Education in the university arranged one month placement for the student teachers to different secondary schools. They stayed in dormitory close to the schools at which they were assigned. They were supervised by the field supervisor (local teacher) who provided support for the student teachers. By the time of the internship, the secondary school in Thailand followed The Basic Education Core Curriculum 2001, while the secondary school in the Philippines followed K to 12 curriculum.

The students were considered to be of beginner to intermediate proficiency in English in their educational contexts. Thailand presented an EFL context where students have less opportunity to access authentic materials and to use English to communicate outside the classroom. Therefore, the majority of students were in their beginner level of English who need a lot of support in vocabulary learning, pronunciation, and grammar. Meanwhile the Philippines presented an ESL context where students had diverse first language backgrounds - the national language is Tagalog, with language varieties such as: Ilocano. English is a second language which enables students to communicate with their friends in their classroom and their English language teacher. It was expected that in both contexts during these international practicums, the student teachers consider their teaching context and setting in lesson planning as well as classroom management. By the end of the program, the student teachers needed to write a report about their experience.

In secondary schools in Thailand, English is taught four times a week - twice by local teachers for reading and writing skills and twice by international teachers for listening and speaking skills. Having internship in Thailand, Iris taught five to six times a week in Grade 10 and 11; while Danny eight to ten times a week in Grade 7,8 and 10. One class session was 50-60 minutes.

Meanwhile, student teachers who were in the Philippines (Dee and Archie) were assigned different topics. One class session was 60 minutes. Dee taught Media and Internet Literacy and

English for Academic Purposes while Archie taught English Literature in Grade 11.

The data were collected through semi-structured interview from purposive sample of student teachers assigned in secondary schools in Thailand and the Philippines to investigate their teaching practice on the perspective of situated version of TBLT (Carless, 2007). The interview elicits participants' stories on their teaching experience during the SEA Teacher Program. After that, the story is arranged on a narrative space. A narrative space consists of interconnected three dimensions which provides context for any particular story (Clandinin & Connnelly, 2000). These three dimensions are: time (a story's temporal connections to the history and the future), the participants in the story - their experiences and interactions with others, and the physical settings -places in which the story is located (Clandinin & Connnelly, 2000). On the side of researcher, Barkhuizen (2011) suggests that during the narrative research activities, the process of 'narrative knowledging' is happening, which means meaning making is happening progressively as researchers

“...(co)constructing narratives, analyzing narratives, reporting the findings, and reading/watching/listening to research report (p.395)”

Due to its reported suitability for various types of data (archival documents, interview segments, and life stories), a thematic narrative analysis was applied to datasets. According to Riessman (2008), “in thematic narrative analysis, emphasis is on “the told” the events and cognitions to which language refers (the content of speech)” (p. 58). A thematic approach focuses on the “whats” of the stories (rather than the structure), and seeks to identify common elements in order to theorize across cases (Riessman, 2008). Data analysis involved several steps following Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was familiarizing the data by reading the interview transcripts several times. After that,

theory-driven deductive coding was done while seeking to identify core narrative themes associated with the theory. Finally, the themes were interpreted through the lens of principles and core concepts of task-based language teaching.

Research credibility was enhanced through multiple data sources - which, in this reported study, include interview transcript, lesson plans, and student teachers' report. The limitation of this study was no additional insights from direct classroom observation of the researchers, on a belief that participants were carefully selected and had been proven to perform their best practice before their internship and thus, quite effective in addressing the research purpose.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

How is pre-service English teachers' experience on task-based language teaching (TBLT) during their internship as student teachers of SEA Teacher Program in secondary schools in Thailand and the Philippines? The findings were divided into three: perspectives on the reported implementation of TBLT; perspectives related to preferences and student teachers' understandings of situated TBLT and P-P-P; and the perception that strong form of task-based approach remained unproven in the SEA Teacher Program being studied.

Reported Implementation of TBLT

A common theme from participants' understanding of a task was that the task was closely associated to the stages of presentation-practice-production.

Iris (2): There were a variety of task given in the classroom, such as: question and answer, exercises from books, and group task. My mentor implemented PPP, therefore I did too. But sometimes, not all the stages of PPP could be done because some students did

not finish the task, so there should be flexibility.....In my opinion best practice for teaching is combining methods, materials, and media in accordance to the students' needs and learning objectives proven by summative assessment by the end of the lesson. For example, when I taught English on the topic of tourism for grade 10 students in Thailand, I used technology, authentic materials, and appropriate media for listening for details activity.

Iris' answer demonstrates that she applied her practice on presentation, practice, and production, however, she also had initiatives to bring her PPP approach by inserting a holistic activity that is by giving a task to create an advertisement .

Iris (2):I also combined communicative approach and collaborative learning. The task I assigned at that time was to create an advertisement poster about tourism places published on Instagram as a follow up activity based on the video they watched on production stage. Before that, they had been given explanation on presentation and practice stage. These stages of learning made the students feel enthusiastic to understand the materials and did their tasks in groups. The output of the lesson, the posters,was very interesting while at the same time, the learning objectives were also achieved.

Iris' initiative on creating poster as a task met Samuda and Bygate's (2008) definition of a task. It also agreed with Carless (2007)'s suggestion on the need to balance between oral and other types of task through group work in a situated TBLT approach .

Similar teaching practice which is closely associated with PPP is also found in Dee's teaching practice.

Dee (14): I usually gave tasks three times to ensure content mastery of the learning objectives. On the presentation stage I elicited their answers. On the practice stage, I elicited the answers in groups then individual students, from the easiest and gradually harder. I had to teach Media and Information Literacy at that time and the task I assigned was narrating The Philippines Heroes in Media. Other class I taught was Reading Academic Texts where I assigned Identifying Parts of Paragraph

Dee's approach on grading the complexity of the task from groups to individual work was done in order to meet the learning objectives. Repeated task in different complexity as what Dee practiced could facilitate students' greater accuracy both in terms of language they used in narration and their problem-solving process, therefore in line with Carless (2007)'s suggestion on situated TBLT which demands greater attention to individual task.

Student Teachers' Preference of Situated TBLT and PPP

From lesson plans attached in the report, it was inferred that the language syllabus in Thailand secondary schools was communicative approach which focuses on certain language skills as learning objectives in a session, while the Philippines secondary schools' learning objectives were more associated to the mastery of the content. It means in terms of the possibility to implement stronger forms of TBLT, the Philippines had greater opportunity. However, student teachers believe that PPP was easier to be adapted in the Philippines learning context. In Thailand, the student teachers' supervisor implemented PPP in teaching practice

so the student teachers also used PPP. In their teaching practice, however, PPP practice was proven to have its challenge in time management.

Iris (2): My mentor implemented PPP , therefore I did too. But sometimes, not all the stages of PPP could be done because some students did not finish the task, so there should be flexibility.

Archie (38): Yes, I used PPP. I always use it because it is an ideal and easy to manage. It is also applicable to use it, but the time provided is just one hour in the Philippines (in Indonesia usually 90 minutes). Sometimes it is not enough to cover the lesson. The time is shortened just for 1 hour to use all of the procedures. I thought if I did all stages of PPP the students would be in a rush.... I combined PPP with collaborative learning due to large number of students in one class - there were around 40 students. I also used worksheet for individual work during the learning process on the production sheet but due to limited time with large number of students individual work was not really effective. I taught an English short story - I taught parts of the story on the presentation stage and helped the students understood the plot on the practice stage.

Findings from Dee and Danny's teaching practice inferred a practice which was more on situated TBLT because they were more open in translating the stages of PPP. Danny and Dee's teaching context also gave evidence that schools with policy which

encourages the use of English in some subjects helped the students teacher to practice situated TBLT approach in their teaching.

Dee (13): I thought it was more like discovery learning, I organized it on PPP. In my school, some content subjects were taught in English, some in Tagalog - but English is quite compulsory as the language for medium of learning. It was more student-centered. The unique thing before PPP there was five-minute motivation session.

Danny (26): I thought in a private school. Some subjects were taught in English, some were taught in Thai. I preferred using games, authentic materials, quiz, poem, outdoor activities. There were no homework, task should be finished during classroom. It was a kind of PPP. One task I assigned, for example, when I taught the topic Living out There, I related to the students' holiday experience abroad and set the task on telling their trips abroad on holiday.

The Perception that Strong form of Task-based Approach Remained Unproven in the SEA Teacher Program being Studied

In this study, strong form of task-based approach remained unproven in the SEA student teachers' experiences during their internship. In a task-based learning, classroom activities were based around problem-solving tasks and the students should communicate meaning in English through functions, vocabulary, structures, and discourse. Moreover, English should be learned by using it, in which grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation may or may not be focused after the task was completed (Spratt, Pulverness, & Williams, 2012). Archie's and Dee's teaching context

had the potential to implement stronger form of task-based approach with more problem-solving features on the task and with discussion on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation set by the end of the lesson. However, ESL teaching context also did not guarantee that all students have good English proficiency to understand the instruction. In Dee's experience some students got used to communicate in their mother tongue.

Archie (45): I didn't teach grammar, it is integrated in the discussion task about the literature. A little bit different from my experience in teaching in Indonesia , here (in the Philippines), the students were encouraged to give their opinion on the literary work, expressing agreement or disagreement...well more functional language to solve problems in answering questions related to literary work. I tried to use simple language of instruction to make the students understand what they should accomplish in a task...In terms of pronunciation, they had their own unique accent- which sometimes I corrected if it was really necessary... problems also appear in some low frequency vocabulary on the content subject... I should try to define the meaning in easier language which is commonly used.

Dee (18): There was a student telling me , “ I understand English, but it was quite difficult for me to speak, I usually speak Ilokano (one of language varieties in the Philippines) with my friends”

Considering the struggle of the students to speak in English, Danny and Iris' teaching context still needs explicit grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to be the focus of the lesson, but the use of authentic materials and adopted tasks from English international publisher textbooks opened the opportunity to stronger task-based approach which included problem-solving activities.

Iris (6): The local teachers did not use full English in their classroom, a bit different from me who used full English. The interaction was quite smooth, but still lack of students' participation due to their limited English vocabulary and expression. However individual personality does matter. I have a student who was very low in English proficiency and his pronunciation was very hard to understand but willing to learn and participate actively in classroom tasks. They are very polite. Sometimes I adopted task from English textbooks from international publishers from the United States and the United Kingdom. I also used authentic materials such as advertisement on Wonderful Indonesia to set a classroom task, but I always make it in line with the topics in the compulsory textbooks.

Danny (28): I chose local textbook chapters as sequence of lesson, but sometimes I used authentic materials to support the exercises recommended in the book. I set extra pronunciation practices to help them to improve their English pronunciation. They had problems in pronouncing 'r' and 'l'

sound so I set a drilling practice for their fluency.

The above evidences support the discussion that grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation clarification were still important in the development of task-based teaching in EFL context.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Findings from this study revealed that soft or weak form of task-based language teaching (TBLT) was implemented, varying from those similar to traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) paradigm, to stronger forms, such as: task-supported language teaching. The implication for future pre-service English teachers for SEA Program include: the need to develop TBLT knowledge and pedagogy and the need to critically examine the teaching context (educational policy, curriculum, and lesson plan documents).

The researchers realize that there are some weaknesses related to the research: 1) The researchers' understanding regarding task-based were gradually formed during the data collection and data analysis process through interrupted narrative knowledging, 2) There was still a challenge to make the most of data collection process due to researchers' limited experience in dealing with different stylistic of the participants in narrating their experience. For further research, the researchers recommend that the student teachers are introduced to task-based language teaching approach in addition to a more familiar PPP approach in order to respond to the needs of teaching in Southeast Asia context. Meticulous attention on students' interaction during the learning process will also strengthen TBLT research for future research agenda.

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