Effects of Task-Based Language Teaching on Speaking Skills
(Kesan Pengajaran Berasaskan Tugasan Terhadap Kemahiran Bertutur)

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ABSTRACT

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been widely researched and used in the teaching of languages since the 1980s. The objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of TBLT in the teaching of speaking skills for primary school students in Singapore. Although this group of students are the native speakers of the Malay language, however, they are not only unable to speak the language fluently, but also have limited vocabulary. This study uses a quasi-experiment pre-post-test design for non-equivalent groups to determine whether there are any significant differences in the pre and post test scores for fluency, vocabulary, and language structure used among the treatment group. The score obtained is then compared with the control group which uses the conventional approach. The findings show that there are significant differences between the pre-test score and post-test score for the treatment group. There is no significant difference in the scores achieved by the control group. Hence, it is concluded that TBLT can be used to teach speaking skills to learners who need exposure to use the language. In general, the findings can be used by Malay teachers to add value to the teaching and learning of the Malay language in Singapore.

Key Word: Speaking skills; Task-based language teaching, Mother tongue; Fluency; Vocabulary; English language learning

ABSTRAK

Pengajaran dan pembelajaran berasaskan tugasan (PPBT) merupakan salah satu kaedah yang sering dikaji dan digunakan untuk mengajar kemahiran dan pengetahuan bahasa sejak 1980-an. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka keberkesanan kaedah ini untuk mengajar kemahiran bertutur bagi murid sekolah rendah yang mengambil bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa ibunda di Singapura. Murid-murid in adalah penutur natif bahasa Melayu, namun tidak fasih dan tidak mempunyai kosa kata yang mencukupi untuk bertutur bahasa Melayu. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kuasi eksperimen ujian pra-pasca bagi kumpulan tidak seimbang untuk melihat sama ada terdapat perbezaan signifikan antara skor ujian pra dan ujian pasca bagi kumpulan rawatan yang menggunakan PPBT jika dibandingkan dengan kumpulan kawalan yang menggunakan pendekatan konvensional. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan bagi kelancaran, penggunaan kosa kata dan struktur bahasa antara ujian pra dan ujian pasca dalam kalangan kumpulan rawatan. Manakala tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara skor ujian pra dan ujian pasca bagi aspek kelancaran, kosa kata dan bahasa yang digunakan oleh kumpulan kawalan. Secara kesimpulan, kaedah PPBT boleh digunakan untuk meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur bahasa Melayu dalam kalangan murid yang belajar sebagai bahasa ibunda mereka. Dapatan kajian ini boleh digunakan oleh guru-guru Bahasa Melayu untuk menambah nilai pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Melayu di Singapura.

Kata Kunci: Kemahiran bertutur, Pengajaran berasaskan tugasan, Bahasa ibunda; Kelancaran; Kosa kata; Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris

INTRODUCTION

Since 1980, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been widely researched and strongly advocated by world-leading linguists (Long 1985; Prabhu 1987; Nunan 1989; Willis 1996; Skehan 1998, and Ellis, 2001). Though there are contrasting views about the tasks relevant to this approach, nevertheless, the importance of interacting through tasks to help students acquire the language had been acknowledged. Additionally, in a '2010 Mother Tongue Languages Review Committee Report', the Singapore Ministry of Education proposed to adopt a task-based teaching and learning for mother tongue languages in schools. This

was made evident by the steady decline in the use of mother tongue languages among students entering primary one class since 1999, including the Malay language. This paper discusses the implementation of TBLT in the context of teaching and learning of the Malay language.

Bilingual education in the English and Mother Tongue languages is the cornerstone of Singapore's education system. According to the then Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, Singapore's approach is to remain cosmopolitan without sacrificing the essence, where English is and will remain the common working language. It is the language of global business, commerce, and technology. However, the mother tongue gives a crucial part of values, roots, and identity, as well as direct access to cultural heritage, and a world-view that complements the perspective of the English-speaking world (Lee 1999).

Hence, to survive in a globalised world, Singapore positioned the English language as an important subject in its educational system, promoting the teaching of English as an important educational initiative to make the country globally competitive. To counterbalance the effect of the westernisation of Singaporeans through the globalisation of undesirable values and practices, teaching and learning of the mother tongues (Chinese, Malay, and Tamil) as second languages were also made compulsory. This would ensure that Singaporeans remain rooted in their local cultures and histories and will not waver in their respect for Asian traditions and values. One of the objectives of learning a second language or a mother tongue language is to enable students to understand and build their own unique identity through a deep appreciation of their own culture, tradition, literature, and ethnic history. Furthermore, the Singaporean government wants to ensure that all mother-tongue languages remain as living languages and not only used just for examination purposes.

Bokhorst-Heng and Silver (2017) and Low and Pakir (2018) highlighted that Singapore's bilingual policy has been praised for its successful racial harmonisation and economic development, which has resulted in English being the main language used in schools, communities, and within the family. The high emphasis on English as a working language and its role as a language of globalisation have indeed made it a very important subject in schools. Consequently, an increasing number of primary school students are conversing more in English than in their own mother tongue. Today, 67 percent of Malay students entering primary one speak only English at home compared to 18 percent in 1999 (Department of Statistics 2019). As a result, many students have problems speaking, reading, and writing in Malay. Their vocabulary is very limited, thus making it difficult for them to speak fluently and accurately in the Malay Language. They

find it more comfortable to converse in English even when attending Malay Language classes.

In addition, it was also highlighted in the 2010 Mother Tongue Languages Review Committee Report that teachers had to use translation methods when teaching Malay to help the students understand what is being taught (Ministry of Education 2011). The students always code-switch to English while speaking, which has become a habit in the classroom, which is acceptable. If this scenario continues, the mastery of the Malay language by students will continue to decline and eventually lead to inter-language fossilisation. Moreover, the plight of Malay Language teachers had worsened because of the shorter time allocated to teach the mother tongue language compared to English, resulting in less exposure and usage of the language. Therefore, the Malay language takes a back seat when used to interact with friends, teachers, or society, while English dominates the communication front (Ministry of Education 2011). Ultimately, this has prompted parents and students to question the value of learning Malay in schools.

Moreover, classroom observations carried out by the Ministry of Education also revealed that many Malay language teachers still practice the direct instruction methods, where it is more teacher-centred rather than student-centred. Though not conflicting with approved teaching and learning principles, it is no longer suitable for use as it does not help in developing students' minds (Baki 2003; Brown 2000), especially to those who do not actively use the language outside the classroom (Ministry of Education 2005; 2010). In reality, more students enter school with limited or no basic knowledge or familiarity with the Malay language at all. Hence, it is deemed necessary to develop a language teaching model that can help teachers to teach speaking skills by highlighting students' active participation through exposure and tasks. In this way, it ensures that the Malay language is kept alive and used by students correctly and efficiently.

This paper attempts to illustrate that TBLT can be a feasible and effective approach to teach Malay language speaking skills as a mother tongue subject by answering the following research questions:

1. Does TBLT has any significant effect on students' language proficiency in terms of fluency?
2. Does TBLT has any significant effect on students' language proficiency in terms of vocabulary expansion?
3. Does TBLT has any significant effect on students' language proficiency in terms of language mastery?

TASKS IN TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)

Speaking is a vital language skill, which is used every day to communicate, express our feelings, opinions, and to identify ourselves. Almost 85 percent of the language used is through speech (Gilakjani 2016). Speaking skills also integrate other language skills, where speech, vocabulary, and grammar are built and enriched, which eventually help in improving the writing skills (Leong & Ahmadi 2017). Speaking is also considered as a critical skill in learning a second language by most learners and their success in learning a language is measured in terms of their oral communication competencies (Nunan 2010). According to Baralt & Gomez (2017), TBLT has achieved important pedagogical objectives, such as helping learners to negotiate and comprehend the meaning of language inputs through task instructions or other classmates' interaction with the same task, and to negotiate the form (Batstone 2016). Also, tasks provide a great opportunity for positive corrective feedback from teachers or task partners (Xu et al. 2019; Khezrlou 2019).

According to Willis (1996), 'task' is the keyword of the TBLT method as tasks can be real-life situations or have pedagogic purposes. In both cases, tasks should provide opportunities for students to exchange information with a focus on its meaning and relating it to real life, but do not need to have a specific form. Richards and Rodgers (2006) defined a task as an objectified activity performed using the language. Meanwhile, Nunan (2010) defined a task as a piece of classroom work, which involves students in understanding, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language focusing on the meaning rather than on the form.

There are two types of tasks in TBLT; focused tasks and non-focused tasks. Non-focused tasks are the types of tasks that do not have grammatical focus as learning objectives (Ellis 2015). Examples of non-focused tasks include asking students to talk in pairs about their shopping experiences, helping friends, and so on. Focused tasks, on the other hand, are tasks that have specific language skills and knowledge objectives. One of the principles of TBLT is the holistic interpretation and use of language, but students should also focus on language forms, namely grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse (Ellis 2015; Skehan 2007; Long 2015). According to Pienemann (2007), a person is said to have mastered a language only when he is able to use the appropriate form of language spontaneously in communication. Therefore, to develop competencies in speaking the Malay language, this study uses focused tasks for exposure to the language form and forms.

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) MODELS

The TBLT model introduced by Ellis (2003) focused on the meaning and activities that occur in the real world which are relevant to daily life. In this model, students are required to process and use the language according to the actual situation. Ellis used the input hypothesis theory in interactive hypotheses as the basis of his model. According to Ellis, students will be able to master a language if they are given enough time to complete certain tasks. The tasks given must be incidents that happen in the real world that students can understand and need them to interact with. This is important to inject motivation in students and encourage active involvement. Furthermore, Ellis's model is divided into three sequential stages to help students use the language correctly based on the given task, namely pre-task, during task, and post-task. At the pre-task stage, students are introduced to the tasks that need to be performed. The objectives and time allotted for completing the assigned tasks are explained to the students. In the second stage, that is, while performing the task, the teacher can provide the data or materials needed to complete the given task. Among them are vocabulary discussions and planning on how to present the task according to the time given. At the post-task stage, students can repeat the tasks or presentations and reflect on the value of experience while carrying out the task. Teachers focus on aspects of the language to be taught. The post-task phase ends with an assessment made by their peers about the performance in front of the class.

On the other hand, Willis (1996) in his model cited the stages differently; which are pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. At the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the topic and the required vocabulary. Next, the teacher will explain the tasks and objectives that students need to achieve. At the task cycle stage, students will perform tasks in pairs or groups. The teacher only observes, and the student is given the freedom to make mistakes and try again. This stage allows students to use the language skills or knowledge they have which will strengthen them further. This task is followed by preparing an oral or written report before reporting it to the entire class on how they performed the task. The teacher will be the chairperson who will provide feedback on the report presented. Finally, at the language focus stage, students will analyse the language in their reports. At this stage, the teacher will teach the morphological, syntactic, or semantic aspects, which are the objectives of the grammar lesson explicitly.

The TBLT method used in this study was adapted from both the Ellis Model and Willis Model. There are

four stages in this adapted model, namely i) before the task stage, ii) task preparation, iii) task presentation, and iv) instruction. Tasks given in this modified model are focused and broad-scope tasks, which comprise all kinds of activities relating to language learning. The tasks are focused because the students are native speakers of Malay who are learning Malay as their second language but have limited vocabulary and language knowledge. They need exposure to the language structure to use the language correctly. Besides, they are required to sit for a Malay Language examination paper, which tests the four language skills and grammatical aspects. Thus, the tasks planned for this study takes into account the grammatical aspect that needs to be covered under the Malay Language Syllabus (Ministry of Education 2015) for primary schools.

In the 'before task' stage, the teacher will explain the lesson objectives, the task that needs to be completed and show an example of the expected result of the task. Teachers use a variety of reading text, video, or audio texts to stimulate discussion, and vocabulary knowledge needed to carry out a given task. Teaching materials provided to carry out teaching and learning are important as intermediaries in language learning and provide social context to students (Vygotsky 1987). Also, the activities in the 'before task' stage are in line with the Singapore Teaching Practice (Ministry of Education 2020), which is to draw out existing knowledge, state the objectives of the lesson and gain the trust of students to participate in

their learning. Teachers as knowledgeable individuals need to support learning through intensive reading or in-depth video, or audio descriptions. Once they understand the content of the text, audio or video, they will start planning the task at the second stage, which is the task preparation stage.

The task preparation stage begins with task planning. Pupils plan how the task will be presented and the script needed for the presentation. This stage differs from the model by Ellis and Willis, because this group of students needs exposure, confidence, and practice before speaking in front of an audience. Therefore, at this stage, the student will begin to plan how the task will be presented followed by practicing the language to use. Once they have practiced and are ready to make a presentation, the teacher will prepare a student presentation schedule. At the performance stage, the students will present their tasks in front of an audience, that is, their classmates. At this stage, they will get feedbacks from teachers, peers, and lastly ending with self-assessment. They will also receive feedbacks on the errors and accuracy of the language used in the presentation. After going through the three levels, students will be taught the grammar aspect at the fourth level, which is the instruction stage. The teacher will identify the mistakes, highlight to students and the teacher will conduct language teaching explicitly because according to Willis (1996), teaching is one of the language learning. Figure 1 shows the Ellis model, Willis model, and the TBLT model used in this study.
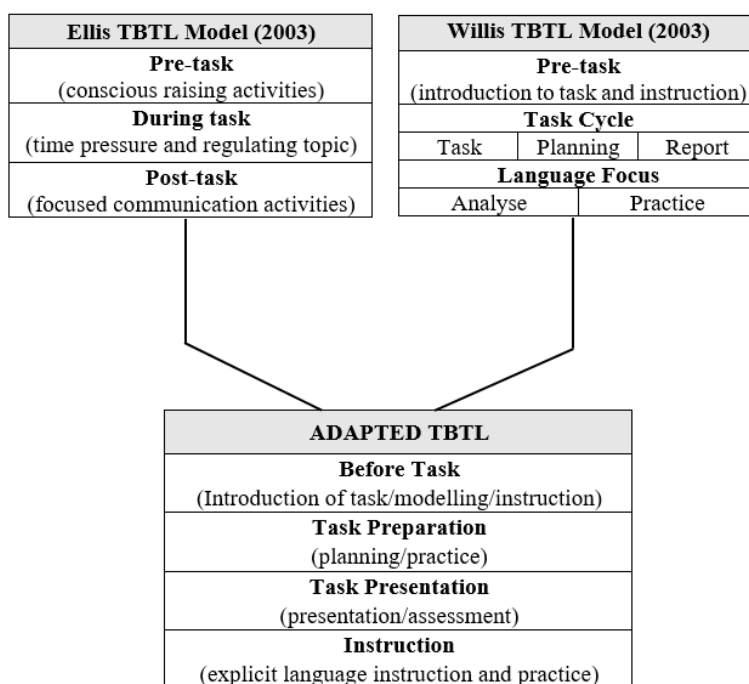
Ellis TBTL Model (2003)
Pre-task (conscious raising activities)
During task (time pressure and regulating topic)
Post-task (focused communication activities)

Willis TBTL Model (2003)		
Pre-task (introduction to task and instruction)		
Task Cycle		
Task	Planning	Report
Language Focus		
Analyse		Practice

ADAPTED TBTL
Before Task (Introduction of task/modelling/instruction)
Task Preparation (planning/practice)
Task Presentation (presentation/assessment)
Instruction (explicit language instruction and practice)

FIGURE 1. Ellis Model, Willis Model, and the Adapted Model

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

This study uses a quasi-experimental pre-post-test design for non-equivalent groups to measure the effectiveness of TBLT to teach speaking skills in the Malay language to the treatment group compared with the effects of the conventional approach to the control group. The quasi-experimental design was chosen because this study could not select the samples in the control group and the treatment group at random but was only able to use the pupils already determined by the school. Also, quasi-experimental is more appropriate in this study due to the difficulty in distributing pairs of respondents who have similar characteristics in the two groups. Furthermore, Chua (2011) stressed that there are various independent variables that cannot be manipulated, such as gender or level of cognitive ability. In this study, there were 30 students in the treatment group and 22 students in the control group. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), the quasi-experimental methodology requires at least 15 participants in the control and treatment group to make a comparison.

This study was conducted in two co-education schools in Singapore. The participants are from similar socio-economic and language competency backgrounds. A total of 30 students from the first school comprise the treatment group, while another 22 from the second school was selected to join the control group. Prior to the conduct of the study, permission and ethical approval was obtained from the Ministry of Education, as well as both schools, where the study was conducted. All teachers and students involved, as well as their parents have consented to the study.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHOD

The instruments used in this study are pre-test and post-test. The participants were individually tested in a classroom on dialog/discussion task in the presence of researchers. The responses of students to the questions asked, during pre-test and post-test, were evaluated and graded based on the speaking rubric which was adapted from the Singapore Examination & Assessment Branch. The score was based on their vocabulary, language structure, and fluency. The purpose of applying the post-test was to find out the effectiveness of the treatment on students' speaking skills and to obtain the results of the comparison between treatment and control groups' fluency, vocabulary, and language structures used. The pre-test and post-test were prepared by the researcher based on the coursebook content. Before administering the pre-test, the view of experts was sought and one of the TBLT lessons was conducted in a school for trial purposes.

Both the treatment and control groups sat for the pre-test. After the pre-test, a five-week of instruction using the four-stage TBLT was administered for the treatment group and conventional approach for the control group. The control group used the textbook and activity book developed by the Ministry of Education and was taught in a direct-instruction method. Subsequently, both groups underwent a post-test which was evaluated using the speaking rubric. The scores from the pre-test and post-test were analysed inferentially using Wilcoxon Signed and Mann-Whitney. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was also conducted to check for abnormality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test showed an abnormal data distribution (p<.05). Therefore, a non-parametric test was performed to determine the difference between pre-measurement and post-measurement for the three test elements. The following are the data analysis for fluency, vocabulary, and language used in the pre-test and post-test by the treatment and control groups.

EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON FLUENCY

Table 1 and Table 2 shows the analysis for pre-test and post-test results for fluency domain of language proficiency, for the treatment group. Meanwhile, Table 3 and Table 4 shows the analysis for pre-test and post-test results for fluency domain of language proficiency, for the control group.

Findings in Table 1 and Table 2 show a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores for the treatment group. The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test show a significant difference in the fluency aspect (Z=-4.075, p<.001). The fluency score (median=7.00) was higher after treatment than before treatment (median=5.00).

This significant difference shows that the tasks used in TBLT help students to speak fluently without stumbling, which are the ability to speak by using suitable intonation and to relate spoken ideas cohesively and coherently. This shows that the TBLT implemented have an effect on the fluency of the students after treatment. These findings are parallel with the study carried out by Nunan (2005), Ellis (2003), and Willis (1996) acknowledging that TBLT could help students learn a language efficiently. Besides, these findings support Mao's (2012) conclusion that an approach such as TBLT can give students the chance to interact by using the target language and that such an approach is necessary for achieving language skill objectives. Moreover, these findings are in line with the research by Torky (2006)

in Egypt, who found that TBLT can help students accept the challenge in performing the given tasks and speak fluently. Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) strengthened these study findings by stating that TBLT helps students in Iran to speak the English language fluently. Buriro and Hayat (2010), also succeeded in helping the students use the target language fluently in Pakistan using TBLT. This established that this group of students improved their speaking skills through the tasks given thus reflecting their learning in the TBLT approach.

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics for Fluency: Treatment Group

	N	Min	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentile		
						25th	50th (Median)	75th
Fluency (pre)	30	4.93	1.33	2.00	7.00	4.00	5.00	6.00
Fluency (post)	30	6.20	1.51	3.00	9.00	5.00	7.00	7.00

TABLE 2. Test Statistics for Fluency: Treatment Group

	Fluency (pre) – Fluency (post)
Z	-4.075
Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

TABLE 3: Descriptive Statistics for Fluency: Control Group

	N	Min	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentile		
						25th	50th (Median)	75th
Fluency (pre)	22	4.90	1.230	1.00	7.00	4.00	5.00	6.00
Fluency (post)	22	5.22	.921	3.00	7.00	5.00	5.00	6.00

TABLE 4: Test Statistics for Fluency: Control Group

	Fluency (post) – Fluency (pre)
Z	-.941
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.347

For the control group, the findings in Table 3 and Table 4 show no significant difference in fluency before treatment (median=5.00) and after treatment (median=5.00), (Z=-.941, p>.05). This proves that the conventional approach does not affect how the students speak. These findings are parallel with the opinion of Skehan (2010), that the effectiveness of a conventional approach such as production, practice, and production (PPP) is questionable in helping teach speaking skills because these skills require not only grammar exercises but also exposure to meaningful tasks. The findings from this study also strengthen the research by DeKeyser (2003), who stated that the conventional approach uses fewer tasks in teaching which may result in students' inability to communicate well in the target language even if they have been learning for years. Meanwhile, the findings are also consistent with those of the study done by Frost (2014). The study concluded that while conventional methods such as PPP can make students speak confidently in the classroom, but they cannot use the learned language or may find it difficult to do so while speaking after the learning session.

EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON VOCABULARY EXPANSION

Table 5 and Table 6 shows the analysis for pre-test and post-test results for vocabulary domain of language proficiency, for the treatment group. Meanwhile, Table 7 and Table 8 shows the analysis for pre-test and post-test results for vocabulary domain of language proficiency, for the control group.

Findings in Table 5 and Table 6 show a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores for the treatment group. The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test show a significant difference in the vocabulary aspect (Z=-4.108, p<.001). The fluency score (median=6.00) was higher after treatment than before treatment (median=5.00). This shows that the TBLT implemented on the treatment group have an effect on the improvement of the treatment group's vocabulary repertoire. This is because the tasks in TBLT provided opportunities for students to use the language while learning new vocabulary to exchange information with a focus on the words' meanings and relating it to

actions. The tasks also caused student to be involved in understanding, manipulating, producing, or interacting using the vocabularies by focusing on the meaning rather than on the form. This is supported by Richards and Rodgers (2006) and Nunan (2010). The tasks can

motivate students to make mistakes and learn from them by noticing them while interacting. Without exposure to such an environment, students will find it difficult to use the vocabularies target language.

TABLE 5. Descriptive Statistics for Vocabulary: Treatment Group

	N	Min	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentile		
						25th	50th (Median)	75th
Vocabulary (pre)	30	4.56	1.30	2.00	8.00	3.75	5.00	5.00
Vocabulary (post)	30	5.66	1.39	3.00	8.00	4.75	6.00	7.00

TABLE 6. Test Statistics for Vocabulary: Treatment Group

	Vocabulary (post) – Vocabulary (pre)
Z	-4.108
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

TABLE 7. Descriptive Statistics for Vocabulary: Control Group

	N	Min	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentile		
						25th	50th (Median)	75th
Vocabulary (pre)	22	5.09	1.50	1.00	8.00	4.00	5.00	6.00
Vocabulary (post)	22	5.36	1.00	3.00	7.00	5.00	5.50	6.00

TABLE 8. Test Statistics for Vocabulary: Control Group

	Vocabulary (post) – Vocabulary (pre)
Z	-.810
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.418

For the control group, the findings in Table 7 and Table 8 show no significant difference in vocabulary expansion before treatment (median=5.00) and after treatment (median=5.50), (Z=-.810, p>.05). Therefore, this shows that the conventional teaching method does not help in improving the vocabulary of the students. For the control group who was taught through a conventional approach, the teaching of speaking skills was more focused on text reading and answering comprehension questions based on video watching or audio listening. Subsequently, they had to recall the scene they watched or listened to. The students also needed to fill out a graphic arranger as a reference before speaking. These findings are similar to Scrivener's (1994) study, which stated that an approach that follows an organised routine can make students feel in control but can restrict their vocabulary learning and creative usage of the language. Language learning in the context of the conventional approach can provide declarative knowledge but does not guarantee procedural knowledge mastery. These findings are also consistent with the opinions of Anderson (2000) and DeKeyser (2003), who stated that students who master declarative knowledge fluently and clearly will forget

the declarative knowledge they mastered earlier. This is because they are not trained with certain activities and tasks.

EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON LANGUAGE MASTERY

Table 9 and Table 10 shows the analysis for pre-test and post-test results for language domain of language proficiency, for the treatment group. Meanwhile, Table 11 and Table 12 shows the analysis for pre-test and post-test results for language domain of language proficiency, for the control group.

Findings in Table 9 and Table 10 show a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores for the treatment group. The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test show a significant difference in the language mastery aspect (Z=-3.811, p<.001). The fluency score (median=6.00) was higher after treatment than before treatment (median=4.50). This shows that the TBLT implemented on the treatment group have an effect on the improvement of the treatment group's language. This is because the tasks in TBLT provided

opportunities to interact using the language and exposure to a meaningful environment that can help students to understand challenging language inputs in order to master the language knowledge, as also stated by Krashen (2003). Also, significant differences may be observed as the students have a chance to receive feedback when their mistakes are corrected, paraphrasing it to ensure the interlocutor understands the speech or the students may ask for certainty when completing the tasks. Swain (1985) though supported this view but argued that a positive environment for language learning will positively pressure the student to utter understandable inputs and directly expand their language mastery. Furthermore, the findings also agree with the views of Howart (1984), Bygate and Norris (2009) and, Van and Branden (2012), who stated that TBLT emphasises on fluency and precision of meaning to help students master vocabulary and language knowledge. Therefore, activities done in a given task will motivate students to try to use the language correctly, as much as they can, so that it can be clearly understood. According to Bruner (1999), language learning is only effective if students can participate

well and perform a task well. Additionally, the findings are in accordance with the research by Lopez (2004) in Brazil. The findings established that the group that adopted the TBLT approach, showed higher language abilities compared to the group that only used PPP. Collectively, this study showed that TBLT helps inject the element of linguistics awareness in students and can directly or indirectly increase their mastery of effective speaking skills.

For the control group, the findings in Table 11 and Table 12 show no significant difference in language mastery before treatment (median=5.00) and after treatment (median=6.00), (Z=-1.761, p>.05). Therefore, this shows that the conventional teaching method does not help in improving the language mastery of the students. For the control group who was taught through a conventional approach, the teaching of speaking skills was more focused on text reading and answering comprehension questions based on video watching or audio listening. The exposure that the students get from the teaching activities were not focused on the meaning, which was less efficient in improving the language mastery of the students.

TABLE 9. Descriptive Statistics for Language: Treatment Group

	N	Min	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentile		
						25th	50th (Median)	75th
Language (pre)	30	4.60	1.35	2.00	7.00	4.00	4.50	5.00
Language (post)	30	5.70	1.60	2.00	9.00	5.00	6.00	7.00

TABLE 10. Test Statistics for Language: Treatment Group

	Language (post) – Language (pre)
Z	-3.811
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

TABLE 11. Descriptive Statistics for Language: Control Group

	N	Min	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentile		
						25th	50th (Median)	75th
Language (pre)	22	5.09	1.50	1.00	8.00	4.00	5.00	6.00
Language (post)	22	5.72	.93	4.00	7.00	5.00	6.00	6.00

TABLE 12. Test Statistics for Language: Control Group

	Language (post) – Language (pre)
Z	-1.761
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.078

CONCLUSION

This study has tested the effects of TBLT on students' language proficiency, in terms of fluency, vocabulary expansion, as well as language mastery. Findings show

that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the treatment group for all aspects of fluency, vocabulary expansion, as well as language mastery. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean

scores of the control group for all aspects of fluency, vocabulary expansion, as well as language mastery. The findings implicate that TBLT is a feasible and effective approach to teach Malay language speaking skills as a mother tongue subject for primary school students in Singapore who have problem learning and using the Malay language. To date, the literature shows no study has been conducted to study the effectiveness of TBLT to teach Malay language as a mother tongue language in Singapore schools. The adapted model suggested in this study can be constituted by the Ministry of Education officers when they are developing instructional materials to be used extensively by primary school educators in Singapore. Hopefully, the adapted model may draw the material designers' attention to include task-based activities for the speaking sections in the coursebook. Given more opportunities for doing different kinds of task-based activities in the coursebooks, will lead to faster acceleration in the process of speaking the language and also in motivating students to be involved in the interactions to be more accurate learners. Also, the

National Institute of Education, an institution that provides pre-service training to teachers, could adopt the TBLT approach in their training modules. In this way, pre-service teachers can teach the Malay language using the TBLT approach upon graduation, consequently enhancing their teaching strategies. Furthermore, in the course of this study, many questions have risen some of which are included here with the hope that they will be pursued and examined. It is strongly recommended that for future research more participants should be included to provide more generalisation. Similar studies can also be conducted on other language skills, such as reading, writing, and grammar skills. In addition, the study can also include secondary and pre-university levels in order to assess the age and proficiency levels as in other variables. It would also be fruitful to pursue further research in which the immediate and delayed post-tests are conducted at different time intervals to show the effectiveness of using TBLT in a shorter and longer period.

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