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Task-Based Instruction in Vocational ESP: A Qualitative Inquiry into Lecturers' Experiences at UKI Toraja

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Abstract
This research explores lecturers' experiences with implementing Task Based Instruction (TBI) in teaching English to Mechanical Engineering students at UKI Toraja. Despite growing research on TBI, limited studies have explored lecturers lived experiences in Indonesian vocational ESP contexts. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through semi structured interviews with English lecturers involved in the Engineering program. Thematic analysis revealed four major findings. First, lecturers expressed positive perceptions toward TBI, noting that task-based activities promoted active learning and made English more relevant to students' vocational needs. Second, TBI was implemented through authentic, engineering related tasks such as describing machine parts, explaining work procedures, and presenting technical solutions, although lecturers noted that designing such tasks required additional preparation. Third, challenges emerged in applying TBI, including students' low English proficiency, limited resources, large class sizes, and time constraints. Finally, lecturers reported that students generally responded positively to TBI, showing higher motivation and engagement when tasks were concrete, visual, and connected to real engineering contexts. Despite existing obstacles, the study concludes that TBI has strong potential to enhance English learning in vocational settings. Recommendations include improving institutional support, enriching teaching resources, and strengthening collaboration between English and Engineering lecturers to optimize TBI implementation at UKI Toraja.

Keywords: *Task based instruction; Lecturers' experiences; English for Specific Purposes; Mechanical Engineering; Student.*

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1. Introduction

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), often referred to as Task Based Instruction (TBI), is one of the most influential approaches within the communicative language teaching tradition. The approach is grounded in the idea that language learning occurs most effectively when learners use the target language to accomplish meaningful communicative tasks rather than simply practice isolated linguistic forms (Ellis et al., 2019; Long, 2015). Through tasks that involve interaction, problem solving, and negotiation of meaning, learners engage in processes similar to natural language acquisition, such as producing comprehensible output and interpreting meaning in context (Adams & Newton, 2020; Newton & Bui, 2021).

Despite its strong theoretical foundation and widespread promotion in English language teaching, implementing TBI effectively in classroom practice remains challenging. Previous studies indicate a persistent gap between the theoretical principles of task based pedagogy and the realities of classroom implementation. Teachers and lecturers often recognize the communicative benefits of tasks, yet they encounter practical constraints such as limited instructional time, large class sizes, institutional curriculum requirements, and insufficient training or resources (Choi & Nunan, 2023; Zheng, 2024). Consequently, the effectiveness of TBI largely depends on how educators interpret and apply its principles within their specific teaching contexts (East, 2021).

Although TBI has been widely studied in general English language teaching, research focusing on lecturers' experiences in vocational English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts remains limited, particularly in Indonesian higher education. This gap is important because vocational ESP classrooms often require the integration of language instruction with discipline specific communication skills, which may present additional pedagogical challenges.

In technical programs such as Mechanical Engineering, English functions not only as a subject but also as a tool for accessing professional knowledge and communicating technical information. Students may need to describe machine parts, explain work procedures, interpret technical manuals, and present engineering solutions in English. Task based learning has the potential to support these needs because it situates language use within authentic and goal oriented activities related to students' professional fields (Bygate, 2016; Hyland, 2019). However, designing such tasks often requires lecturers to balance language pedagogy with an understanding of technical content, which is not always straightforward for language instructors (Basturkmen, 2010).

At UKI Toraja, English courses in the Mechanical Engineering program aim to help students access technical resources and communicate basic engineering concepts in English. However, many students enter the program with limited English proficiency, low confidence, and minimal exposure to authentic English communication. These conditions create challenges for lecturers who must adopt pedagogical approaches that are both engaging and effective. Task Based Instruction is therefore often viewed as a promising approach because it shifts the focus from memorization and translation toward communicative activities embedded in engineering contexts.

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Nevertheless, little is known about how lecturers at UKI Toraja actually experience the implementation of TBI in their classrooms. Previous research suggests that teachers may value the communicative benefits of tasks but still encounter difficulties adapting task based approaches to local classroom realities, particularly in EFL environments where students' proficiency levels and institutional expectations vary (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2014). Understanding lecturers' experiences is therefore important for identifying the opportunities and challenges associated with applying TBI in vocational higher education.

Therefore, the main problem addressed in this study is the limited understanding of how English lecturers experience the implementation of Task Based Instruction in vocational ESP classrooms, particularly in the Mechanical Engineering program at UKI Toraja. This study aims to explore English lecturers' experiences with Task Based Instruction (TBI) in teaching English to Mechanical Engineering students at UKI Toraja. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research question: "How do English lecturers at UKI Toraja experience the implementation of Task Based Instruction (TBI) in teaching English to Mechanical Engineering students?"

This study contributes to the growing body of research on Task Based Instruction by providing empirical insights into lecturers' experiences in a vocational ESP context, particularly within a Mechanical Engineering program in Indonesia. While previous studies have mainly examined TBI in general English language teaching environments, this research highlights how the approach is interpreted, implemented, and experienced by lecturers working with vocational students who have specific technical learning needs. By documenting lecturers' perceptions, instructional practices, and contextual challenges, the study offers practical insights that may inform curriculum development, teacher training, and the design of task based learning activities in vocational higher education.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore lecturers' experiences with Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in English teaching at UKI Toraja. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain deep, naturalistic insights into participants' perceptions, classroom practices, and challenges. Qualitative descriptive studies are commonly used when the goal is to provide a clear and straightforward description of a phenomenon based on participants' own perspectives (Sandelowski, 2000). This design is appropriate for understanding lecturers' firsthand experiences without manipulating or controlling variables.

The research was conducted in the Mechanical Engineering Program at UKI Toraja, a private higher education institution in Indonesia. English is a compulsory subject in the program, where lecturers are encouraged to integrate communicative and field-related tasks to support students' technical and professional needs. The setting was selected because the institution has promoted student-centered approaches, including task-based instruction, yet limited research has documented how lecturers implement this approach in vocational classrooms.

Participants consisted of three English lecturers who teach English courses in the Mechanical Engineering program. They were selected through purposive sampling, which

DOI: https://doi.org/v9i1.6150

is commonly used in qualitative studies where participants must have relevant knowledge and experience related to the research focus. The inclusion criteria were: (1) actively teaching English in the Mechanical Engineering program, (2) having experience implementing task-based instruction, and (3) willingness to participate in an in-depth interview. The lecturers had teaching experience ranging from three to twelve years and varying levels of familiarity with communicative and task-based approaches.

The primary instrument used in this research was a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument was selected because it provides flexibility to explore emerging insights while ensuring that all key topics are addressed. The interview questions focused on: (1) lecturers' understanding and perceptions of TBI, (2) the types of tasks they design, (3) their experiences implementing TBI in engineering classrooms, (4) challenges encountered during implementation, and (5) perceived student responses to TBI. Follow-up questions were used to clarify and deepen participants' responses.

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted either face to face on campus or via online video calls, depending on the lecturers' availability. Each interview lasted approximately 35–45 minutes. The data collection procedure included several steps: participants were first contacted and provided with information about the study; interviews were then scheduled at convenient times; informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews; interviews were conducted in Indonesian or English according to participants' preferences; and all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues, tone of voice, and initial reflections during the interviews.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts; (2) generating initial codes by identifying meaningful segments of data; (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes; (4) reviewing themes to ensure they accurately represent the data; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the final report by presenting themes supported by participant quotations. This analytical approach enabled a systematic process for identifying patterns within the qualitative data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were implemented based on the qualitative research criteria proposed by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data and careful transcription of interviews to ensure that participants' perspectives were accurately represented. In addition, direct quotations from participants were used in the findings to support the interpretation of the data.

Dependability was addressed by maintaining a clear and systematic research procedure, including detailed documentation of data collection and analysis processes. The use of a structured thematic analysis framework also helped ensure that the analytical process was consistent and transparent.

Confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail that documented the coding process, theme development, and analytical decisions throughout the study. Field notes

DOI: https://doi.org/v9i1.6150

and interview transcripts were also reviewed repeatedly to minimize researcher bias and ensure that interpretations were grounded in the data rather than the researcher's assumptions. Through these procedures, the study aimed to ensure that the findings were credible, transparent, and grounded in participants' experiences.

3. Results and Discussions

All participating lecturers expressed strongly positive perceptions of task based instruction (TBI), considering it an effective approach for teaching English in vocational education. They believed that TBI aligns well with the learning characteristics of Mechanical Engineering students, who typically prefer practical and experiential learning activities rather than abstract language instruction. This perception supports the theoretical argument proposed by Rod Ellis that task based language teaching promotes meaningful language use by engaging learners in goal-oriented activities rather than isolated grammar practice.

Lecturers reported that student engagement increased when tasks reflected real engineering contexts. One lecturer explained:

> *"Mechanical Engineering students become more active when tasks relate to machines, tools, or safety procedures. They feel the English is useful."*

This finding suggests that contextual relevance is a key motivational factor in vocational language learning. When students perceive a direct connection between English learning and their future professional activities, they become more willing to participate actively. Similar patterns have been reported in previous ESP studies, which emphasize the importance of authentic and discipline related tasks in increasing learner motivation and engagement.

Another lecturer highlighted that TBI encourages communicative interaction even when students' grammatical competence remains limited:

> *"TBI makes the class more communicative. Students talk more, even if their grammar is not perfect."*

This perspective reflects a central principle of task-based learning, where fluency and meaning negotiation are prioritized during communication. According to Michael H. Long, language development occurs through interaction in which learners attempt to express meaning and resolve communication difficulties. The lecturers' emphasis on communication rather than grammatical accuracy indicates a shift from traditional form-focused teaching toward a more communicative orientation.

Lecturers also described a range of engineering-related tasks designed to simulate real workplace communication. These tasks included describing machine components, explaining safety procedures, presenting solutions to technical problems, and writing simple maintenance reports. One lecturer described a typical activity:

> *"I ask students to complete tasks such as explaining how a welding machine works. They work in groups and present the steps."*

DOI: https://doi.org/v9i1.6150

Such activities encourage students to integrate technical vocabulary with functional language in meaningful communication. Collaborative group work also allows learners to negotiate meaning and share knowledge with peers. This classroom practice closely reflects the task cycle model proposed by Jane Willis, which involves task performance, planning, and reporting stages to promote authentic language use.

However, lecturers also acknowledged that designing technically relevant tasks requires substantial preparation and interdisciplinary knowledge. One lecturer admitted:

> *"Sometimes I need to learn the technical process first, otherwise I cannot design the task properly."*

This finding highlights a distinctive challenge in ESP teaching. Unlike general English instruction, ESP requires lecturers to integrate linguistic objectives with domain specific knowledge. As noted by David Nunan, effective task design must reflect real communicative situations that learners are likely to encounter outside the classroom. In vocational contexts, this requirement means that language teachers often need to familiarize themselves with technical procedures and industry terminology.

Despite their positive perceptions, lecturers reported several challenges when implementing TBI. The most frequently mentioned issue was students' low English proficiency, which limited their confidence in participating in communicative tasks. One lecturer noted:

> *"Many students are shy or silent because they feel their English is very weak."*

Low proficiency often resulted in hesitation during activities such as explaining technical procedures or presenting group work. This situation reflects a common tension in communicative language teaching: while interaction is necessary for language development, learners with limited proficiency may feel anxious about speaking. Previous research in vocational education has similarly found that language anxiety and lack of confidence can reduce participation in communicative tasks.

Another major challenge was the time required to conduct task-based activities. Lecturers explained that meaningful tasks involve several stages, including preparation, group discussion, presentation, and feedback. As a result, completing all instructional goals within limited class time can be difficult. While task-based learning promotes deeper engagement, it often requires more classroom time than traditional lecture-based instruction.

Resource limitations were also identified as an important constraint. Some tasks required visual media, technical diagrams, or equipment demonstrations to help students understand engineering processes. However, these resources were not always available. One lecturer explained:

DOI: https://doi.org/v9i1.6150

"We need more tools or media. Some tasks are hard to do without videos or real equipment."

The lack of instructional resources sometimes reduced the authenticity of task-based activities. Without appropriate visual or technical support, lecturers often had to simplify tasks or rely on verbal explanations. This limitation may reduce the extent to which classroom activities can simulate real workplace communication.

Large class sizes also posed difficulties for implementing TBI effectively. When multiple groups work simultaneously, lecturers may find it challenging to monitor each group's interaction and ensure balanced participation. Some students may contribute less during group work, while others dominate the discussion. Similar challenges have been reported in previous studies of communicative language teaching in higher education contexts.

Despite these constraints, lecturers observed generally positive student responses to task-based learning. Students appeared more motivated when tasks were directly connected to engineering practices and workplace situations. One lecturer stated:

"When the task is connected to their field, they enjoy it. They say English becomes easier to understand."

This response suggests that contextualized learning enhances both motivation and comprehension in vocational education. When English is presented as a tool for professional communication rather than as an abstract academic subject, students tend to perceive the learning process as more meaningful.

However, lecturers also noted that students with weaker English proficiency sometimes preferred teacher centered instruction, as it required less active participation. This indicates that while TBI is generally beneficial, it may need to be adapted to accommodate varying levels of learner confidence and proficiency.

Thus, the findings demonstrate that lecturers strongly support the use of task-based instruction in vocational English education. TBI was perceived as particularly suitable for Mechanical Engineering students because it connects language learning with practical workplace communication. At the same time, the study reveals that the successful implementation of TBI depends on several contextual factors, including student proficiency, classroom resources, class size, and lecturers' interdisciplinary knowledge.

These findings contribute to the growing body of ESP research by highlighting how task based instruction functions within a vocational engineering program in an Indonesian university context. While previous studies have emphasized the effectiveness of TBI in promoting communicative competence, this study demonstrates that its implementation in vocational settings requires institutional support, adequate resources, and ongoing lecturer development. When these conditions are met, TBI has strong potential to enhance both language learning and professional preparation for vocational students.

DOI: https://doi.org/v9i1.6150

4. Conclusion

This study examined lecturers' experiences in implementing Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in English teaching for Mechanical Engineering students at UKI Toraja. The findings indicate that lecturers generally perceive TBI as a suitable and effective pedagogical approach for vocational English learning. By integrating tasks related to engineering practices, lecturers were able to encourage meaningful communication, increase student participation, and make English learning more relevant to students' future professional contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of research on task-based language teaching by demonstrating how the principles proposed by Rod Ellis and Michael H. Long can be applied within vocational English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts. The findings highlight that task-based learning becomes particularly meaningful when tasks are closely connected to students' disciplinary knowledge and professional practices. This study therefore extends previous research by emphasizing the importance of contextualizing TBI within technical and vocational education environments.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the results suggest that English lecturers in vocational programs should design tasks that reflect authentic workplace communication, such as explaining technical procedures, describing machinery, or presenting solutions to engineering problems. However, the successful implementation of TBI requires adequate instructional resources, manageable class sizes, and sufficient preparation time. Professional development programs that support lecturers in integrating language instruction with technical knowledge may further enhance the effectiveness of task-based learning in ESP settings.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted within a single Mechanical Engineering program at one university, and the number of participating lecturers was relatively limited. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of lecturers in other vocational institutions or academic disciplines.

Future research could expand this line of inquiry by involving a larger number of institutions and examining the perspectives of both lecturers and students. Quantitative or mixed method studies may also provide deeper insight into how task-based instruction influences students' communicative competence and professional language development in vocational education contexts.

The findings suggest that task-based instruction holds strong potential for improving English learning in vocational education. When appropriately adapted to local teaching conditions and supported by institutional resources, TBI can serve as an effective approach for preparing vocational students to communicate in real world professional settings.

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Conflicts Of Interest

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest. Additionally, the funders played no role in the design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, preparation of the article, or the publication process.

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