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THE EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING ON GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL ACHIEVEMENTS AMONG STUDENT TEACHERS



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ANWAR BIN ZAKARIA

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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STUDENT TEACHERS

ANWAR BIN ZAKARIA

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (TESL)

FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2012



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Date

Anwar Bin Zakaria
M20091000780





APPRECIATION

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. Alhamdulillah. Thanks to Allah for giving me the strength to plod on this academic journey despite all the difficulties in front of me.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance and the help of several individuals who have contributed their valuable guidance and assistance in the completion of this study.

First and foremost, my utmost gratitude to YM Dr. Raja Nor Safinas Raja Harun, the supervisor of the study whose her guidance, commitment, sincerity and encouragement I will never ever forget. She has been my inspiration as I hurdle all the obstacles in the completion this research work.

Not forgetting Prof. Dato' Dr. Tengku Mohani Tunku Mohtar, Dr. Maizatulliza Mohd. Saufi, Dr Hj Abdul Ghani Hj Abu and Dr Hashimah who have given their worthful opinion during the proposal presentations and the pre-viva session. To Dr Goh Hock Seng, the research methodology lecturer, for his valuable insights on the methodology of the study. To Dr. Mohd Nasir Bistaman, for his unselfish and unfailing support on the experimental research design. To Assoc. Professor Dr. Nor Azmi Mostafa, the Dean of Faculty of Language and Communication, for the moral support. To the staffs of the Faculty of Languages and Communication, especially Pn. Zuniza and Pn Maishida as well as to the staffs of the Institute of Graduate Studies especially Pn Suhaila for being accommodating to all my queries.

To all of my comrades, especially Mr Chandra Mohan, Miss Amreet Kaur, Mr Sasigaran, Mr Aimran, Mr Malik, Mr Mazlan, Pn Liala, Pn. Nik Aida and all of the group members of UKP 6013 and UKP 6023, thank you so much for your accompaniment. To my delightful buddies and housemates especially Mr Shahariman, Mr Azhar and Mr Khairudin. Thank you for 'making' my days in UPSI and Tanjung Malim.

To Y.H. Dato' Mazlan Bin Mohamad, the former director of Institut Pendidikan Guru (IPG) Kampus Tengku Ampuan Afzan, K. Lipis, Pahang. Your undivided support means a lot to me. To my colleagues in the English studies department Pn Hjh. Norliza as the Head of Department, En Muralitharan, En Hisyamudin, Y.M. Cik Raja Norita, Pn Mimi Ikhwan, Miss Goh Meng Hong, Pn Nurul Amilin and Pn Yong Rofidah. Thank you for your moral supports and encouragements. Not forgetting to En Abu Bakar Bin Hashim, a senior lecturer of the English language department, your full commitments and cooperation during the research is extremely appreciated. To all of my cheerful student teachers, thank you so much.

To all of the staffs in Bahagian Tajaan, KPM especially En Shahrman as the head of the Bahagian and Pn Nik Muneranim, your support and cooperation during the studies are really appreciated. To all of the staff in Education Policy and Research





Department (EPRD) Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (KPM). Thank you so much for everything. I will never forget your kindness and cooperation.

To my parents, Tuan Hj Zakaria Bin Idris and Pn Hjh Fadzilah Binti Yahaya for their steadfast and encouragement to complete this study. Last but not the least, my beloved wife Pn. Nazirah Binti Che Ismail and my two sweet daughters Alia Nabilah and Alisha Nabilah, they have been very patience and supportive during the studies. I love you all and Thank you so much.





ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of task-based language learning (TBLL) on the grammatical and lexical achievements among student teachers. A series of TBLL lessons were used as the treatment while a series of presentation-practice-production (PPP) lessons were used as the control. The TBLL lessons were conducted using two different types of collaborative tasks namely, the dictogloss task and jigsaw task. The research employs a quasi-experimental with a three-group pre-test post-test design. The samples of the study consist of 63 student teachers from one of the Malaysian teacher education institutes or *Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia (IPGM)*. They comprise of two treatment groups and one controlled groups. The instruments of the study consist of pre-test, post-test, questionnaires and interview questions. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA test in the statistical software for social sciences (SPSS) version 17. Interviews were analysed qualitatively. The findings revealed that both of the treatments groups had achieved significantly higher scores in the grammatical- and lexical-achievements mean scores as compared to the controlled group. In terms of the comparison between the groups exposed to the dictogloss tasks and the jigsaw tasks, the results have shown that descriptively the group exposed to the dictogloss tasks achieved higher grammatical-achievements mean score as compared to the group exposed to the jigsaw tasks. Meanwhile, the group exposed to the jigsaw tasks achieved higher lexical-achievements mean score as compared to the group exposed to dictogloss tasks. In addition, the participants were strongly satisfied with the TBLL lessons in terms of learning grammar, learning lexis and the overall activities in the lessons. The research concluded that the TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw were able to enhance the student teachers' grammatical and lexical achievements relatively to the PPP lessons. In terms of the comparison between the dictogloss task and jigsaw task, the dictogloss task was able to enhance the student teachers' grammatical achievements higher than the jigsaw task. Meanwhile, the jigsaw task was able to enhance the student teachers' lexis higher than the dictogloss task. Furthermore, the majority of the participants have positive perceptions towards the use of TBLL lessons. The research implicates that teacher educators as well as other English as second language (ESL) teaching practitioners should implement the TBLL approach in their context as it has a lot of potential for improving students' English language achievements.





ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesan-kesan pembelajaran secara tugas atau *task-based language learning (TBLL)* terhadap pencapaian tatabahasa dan kosakata bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan guru-guru pelatih. Beberapa siri pembelajaran secara tugas telah digunakan sebagai intervensi, manakala beberapa siri pembelajaran secara tradisional atau *presentation-practice-production (PPP)* telah digunakan sebagai kawalan. Pembelajaran secara tugas telah dijalankan melalui dua jenis tugas secara kolaborasi iaitu *dictogloss* dan *jigsaw*. Kajian ini menggunakan rekabentuk eksperimental-kuasi melibatkan ujian pra dan pos untuk tiga kumpulan. Instrumen kajian terdiri daripada ujian pra, ujian pos, soal selidik dan temuduga. Data kajian ini telah dianalisa menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan ujian ANOVA sehala di dalam *statistical software for social sciences (SPSS)* versi 17. Data temuduga telah dianalisa secara kualitatif. Dapatan menunjukkan kedua-dua kumpulan rawatan telah mencapai keputusan yang tinggi secara signifikan dalam purata pencapaian tatabahasa dan purata pencapaian kosa kata berbanding kumpulan kawalan. Perbandingan diantara kumpulan yang didedahkan dengan tugas *dictogloss* dan *jigsaw* pula menunjukkan bahawa secara deskriptif kumpulan yang telah didedahkan kepada tugas *dictogloss* telah mencapai pencapaian yang tinggi dalam purata pencapaian ujian tatabahasa berbanding kumpulan yang didedahkan dengan tugas *jigsaw*. Sebaliknya, kumpulan yang didedahkan kepada tugas *jigsaw* telah mencapai pencapaian yang tinggi dalam purata pencapaian ujian kosa kata berbanding kumpulan yang didedahkan dengan tugas *dictogloss*. Peserta kajian juga amat berpuas hati terhadap pembelajaran *TBLL* khususnya dalam pembelajaran tatabahasa dan pembelajaran kosa kata bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini telah membuat kesimpulan bahawa kaedah pembelajaran secara tugas melibatkan tugas kolaboratif *dictogloss* dan *jigsaw* dapat meningkatkan tatabahasa dan kosa kata bahasa Inggeris guru pelatih berbanding kaedah tradisional *PPP*. Perbandingan di antara tugas *dictogloss* dan *jigsaw* pula menunjukkan tugas *dictogloss* mampu meningkatkan pencapaian tatabahasa guru-guru pelatih lebih tinggi berbanding tugas *jigsaw*. Manakala, tugas *jigsaw* mampu meningkatkan pencapaian kosakata guru pelatih lebih tinggi berbanding tugas *dictogloss*. Majoriti peserta dalam kajian ini juga mempunyai persepsi yang positif terhadap pembelajaran *TBLL* dalam pembelajaran tatabahasa, pembelajaran kosa kata dan keseluruhan aktiviti dalam pembelajaran tersebut. Kajian ini memberikan implikasi bahawa para pendidik guru termasuklah guru-guru bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua seharusnya melaksanakan kaedah pembelajaran *TBLL* dalam bilik darjah mereka kerana kaedah ini berpotensi tinggi untuk meningkatkan pencapaian bahasa Inggeris pelajar.





TABLE OF CONTENT

	Page
DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vi
CONTENT	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF ACCRONYMS	xvi



CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Background Of The Study	1
1.2	The Statement Of The Problem	5
1.3	Rationale Of The Study	7
1.4	Objectives Of The Study	9
1.5	Research Questions	10
1.6	Research Hypotheses	11
1.7	Significance Of The Study	12
1.8	Operational Definition Of The Terms	13
1.9	Summary	15





CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0	Introduction	16
2.1	Part I: The Theoretical Framework	16
2.2	Part II: The Literature Reviews	21
2.3	Introduction	21
2.4	Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL)	21
2.5	The Definition Of 'Task' In TBLL	24
2.6	The Task-Based Learning (TBL) Framework	27
2.7	The Research Perspectives In Task-Based Language Teaching	
	And Learning	31
2.7.1	The Psycholinguistic Perspective	31
2.7.2	The Socio-Cultural Perspectives	33
2.8	The Socio-Cultural Theory Of Mind (SCTM)	34
2.9	Collaborative Dialogues	36
2.10	Collaborative Dialogues And Second Language (L2) Learning	37
2.11	Collaborative Dialogues, Dictogloss Task, Jigsaw Task, And	
	Grammatical And Lexical Achievements	39
2.12	Summary	40



CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0	Introduction	41
3.1	Research Design	41
3.2	Research Variables	44
3.3	The Targeted Population	45
3.4	The Sample Size and The Sampling Techniques	45
3.4.1	The Background Of The Samples	46
3.4.2	The Demographic Details Of The Samples	47
3.4.3	Lecturer Participant	48
3.5	The Instruments	49
3.5.1	Pre-test	49
3.5.2	Post-test	50
3.5.3	Questionnaires	50
3.5.4	Interview Questions	52
3.6	The Research Procedures	52
3.7	The Tasks	53
3.8	Reliability And Validity	54
3.9	The Data Analysis	56
3.10	Pilot Test	58
3.11	The Ethical Considerations	60
3.12	The limitations of the study	60
3.13	Summary	60



CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

- 4.0 Introduction 62
- 4.1 Research Question One: What are the effects of TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in comparison with the PPP lessons on the grammatical-achievements mean scores ? 62
- 4.1.1 Hypothesis One: There are no significant differences between TBLL-dictogloss group, TBLL jigsaw group and PPP group in the grammatical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test. 63
- 4.1.2 Hypothesis Two: There are significant differences between the TBLL-dictogloss group, the TBLL-jigsaw group and the PPP group in the grammatical-achievements mean scores in the post-test. 64
- 4.2 Research Question Two: Are there significant differences between the effects of TBLL lessons using dictogloss tasks and jigsaw tasks on the grammatical-achievements mean scores among student teachers? 67
- 4.2.1 Hypothesis Three: The TBLL-dictogloss group achieves significantly higher grammatical-achievements mean scores as compared to the TBLL-jigsaw group in the post-test. 67





- 4.3 Research Questions Three: What are the effects of TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw as compared to the PPP lessons on the lexical-achievements mean scores ? 68
- 4.3.1 Hypothesis Four: There are no significant differences between TBLL-dictogloss group, TBLL-jigsaw group and PPP group in the lexical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test. 68
- 4.3.2 Hypothesis Five: There are significant differences between the TBLL-dictogloss group, the TBLL-jigsaw group and the PPP group in the lexical-achievements mean scores in the post-test. 70
- 4.4 Research Question Four: Are there significant differences between the effects of TBLL lessons using dictogloss tasks and TBLL lessons using jigsaw tasks on the grammatical-achievements mean scores? 72
- 4.4.1 Hypothesis Six: The TBLL-jigsaw group achieves significantly higher lexical-achievements mean scores as compared to the TBLL-dictogloss group in the post-test. 72
- 4.5 Research Question Five: What are the perceptions of student teachers participated in this study on the TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in terms of learning grammar, learning lexis and the overall activities in the lessons ? 73
- 4.5.1 The Participants' Perceptions On Learning Grammar Through The TBLL Lessons 75



4.5.2	The Participants' Perception On The Learning Lexis Through The TBLL Lessons	79
4.5.3	The Participants' Perception On The Overall Activities In The TBLL Lessons	84
4.6	The Summary Of The Findings	87
4.7	Summary	94

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0	Introduction	95
5.1	Discussions And Conclusions	95
5.2	Pedagogical Implications	104
5.3	Recommendations For Future Research	107
5.4	The Contribution Of The Study	109
	References	110
	Appendices	121

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Title	Page
1.1.	The suggested tasks in English Language Proficiency (ELP) course in <i>Program Persediaan Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan (PPISMP)</i>	4
2.5.	The differences between 'task' in TBLL and exercises	27
2.6.	Framework for designing task-based lessons	28
3.4.2	The distribution of the gender and ethnics of the samples.	48
3.9.	The data analysis techniques	57
4.1.1.	The grammatical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test scores	63
4.1.1(2).	The ANOVA test results on the grammatical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test	64
4.1.2.	The grammatical-achievements mean scores in the post-test scores	65
4.1.2(2).	The ANOVA test results on grammatical-achievements mean scores in post-test	65
4.1.2(3).	The Tukey HSD analysis on the grammatical-achievements mean scores between all groups in post-test	66
4.3.1.	The lexical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test	69
4.3.1(2).	The ANOVA test results on lexical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test.	69
4.3.2.	The lexical-achievements mean scores in the post-test	70
4.3.2(2).	The ANOVA test results on lexical-achievements mean scores in post-test	71



4.3.2(3)	The Tukey HSD analysis on the lexical-achievement mean scores between all groups in the post-test	71
4.5.	The mean scores scales and its interpretation levels	74
4.5.1.	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions on learning grammar in the TBLL-dictogloss group.	76
4.5.1(2).	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions on the grammatical learning in the TBLL-jigsaw group	78
4.5.2.	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions on the learning lexis in the TBLL-dictogloss group	80
4.5.2(2).	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions on learning lexis in the TBLL-dictogloss group	83
4.5.3.	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions on the overall lessons in the TBLL-dictogloss group.	85
4.5.3(2).	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions on the overall lessons in the TBLL-jigsaw group.	87



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Title	Page
2.1.	The theoretical framework of the study	18
2.6.	The TBL framework (Willis, 1996)	29
2.6 (2).	The comparison between TBL and PPP lesson (Willis, 1996)	30
3.1.	The Research Design	44
3.3.	The samples identification process of the research	46
3.6.	The research procedures	55
4.6.2.	The grammatical-achievements mean	89
	scores in pre-test and post-test	89
4.6.4.2	The lexical-achievements mean	91
	scores in pre-test and post-test	91
4.6.5.	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions	92
	on learning grammar	92
4.6.5(2).	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions	93
	on learning lexis.	93
4.6.5(3).	The mean scores of the participants' perceptions on	93
	the overall activities in TBLL the lessons	93
5.1.	The comparison of the grammatical-achievements mean scores in	
	the pre-test and post-test	98
5.1(2)	The comparison of the lexical-achievements mean scores in pre-	
	test and post-test.	101

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	:	Analysis Of Variance.
CDC	:	Curriculum Development Centre
EFL	:	English As a Foreign Language
ELP	:	English Language Proficiency.
EPRD	:	Education Planning and Research Development Unit
ESL	:	English as A Second Language.
IPGM	:	Malaysia Teacher Education Institutes (<i>Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia</i>)
KPM	:	Ministry Of Education (<i>Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia</i>)
L2	:	Second Language.
MSLQ	:	Motivated Strategies For Learning Questionnaires
MUET	:	Malaysian University Examination Test
MyUniNet	:	The Malaysian Universities Libraries & National Library Network.
PPISMP	:	Preparation Program for Bachelor Degree in Teachership (<i>Program Persediaan Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan</i>)
PPP	:	Presentation-Practice-Production



SCTM	:	Socio-cultural Theory Of Mind.
SLA	:	Second Language Acquisition.
SPM	:	Certificate Of Malaysian Education (<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i>)
SPSS	:	Statistical Software For Social Science.
SVA	:	Subject-Verb Agreement.
TBL	:	Task-based Learning.
TBLL	:	Task-based Language Learning.
TBLL-dictogloss	:	Task-based Language Learning Lessons Using Dictogloss task
TBLL-jigsaw	:	Task-based Language Learning Using Jigsaw Task
TBLT	:	Task-based Language Teaching.





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the objectives of the research, the research questions, the research hypotheses and the operational definitions of the terms used.

1.1 Background Of The Study

According to Larsen Freeman (2000) a study on methods of teaching is invaluable in teacher education. This is because the knowledge of teaching is part of the knowledge





base for teaching. In addition, according to Carless (2003), teachers are frequently required to implement new teaching method developed by external agents who may or may not be familiar with the teachers' viewpoints or the specific classroom context in which the method is to be implemented. Therefore, a study on method of teaching by taking into consideration teachers perspectives would allow for a deeper understanding on the method.

To date, the methodology of English language teaching has actually evolved throughout the years. Thus, various approaches and methods of English language teaching have been introduced so far. According to Clancy (2004), English language teaching has started with a teaching of grammar rules in late 1700s. It was followed by the incorporation of meaning which includes the communication activities in 1970s. In addition, Skehan (2003) has also mentioned that during the 1970s there were a considerable move by teachers and researchers within language teaching to embrace the communicative approach.

Following such moves, there was a proposal for the use of task-based language learning and teaching in 1980s. To date, the task-based language learning and teaching has gained a lot of attentions by teachers and researchers especially in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). According to Tavakoli and Foster (2008), an enormous growth of interest in task-based language learning and teaching can be seen in the rapidly expansion of authored books and edited collections on task-based language teaching (TBLT) such as Willis, (1996); Bygate, Skehan & Swain, (2001); Ellis, (2003); Nunan,





(2004); Van den Branden, (2004); Willis & Willis, (2007). Such growth of interest can also be seen in the organization of biannual task-based language teaching (TBLT) conference in 2005, 2007 and 2009 dedicated to furthering studies specifically on task-based learning.

Another important attention on task-based language learning and teaching has been motivated by the second language acquisition (SLA) theory which suggests that language is best learnt through interaction. Through interaction learners engage in exchanging information to resolve linguistic problem faced by each other. This exchange of linguistic information or “the negotiation of meaning” forms the best input for second language (L2) learning (Long, 1981;1983).



Basically, the task-based learning covers two aspects, language teaching and language learning. This study however focuses on the task-based language learning (TBLL) aspect. TBLL has several important characteristics. Among the characteristics are meaning-oriented, real-world relationship, interactive use of language, learner-centredness, learner-autonomy and collaborative learning (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Van Den Branden, 2004).

In Malaysia, task-based language learning and teaching has been accepted as the main strategy in the national English language syllabus and curriculum for primary and secondary schools (Zarina, 2005). In addition, a review of the English language national syllabus for primary and secondary school documents (KBSR and KBSM) has shown that





various tasks have been suggested as the activities to achieve learning outcomes. Moreover, task-based language teaching has also been applied as the main strategy in the English language syllabus in Malaysian teacher education context. This is the context in which this study is primarily concerned on. Such application can be seen in an intensive use of tasks in the English language proficiency course in the teachership degree preparatory programme or *Program Persediaan Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan (PPISMP)*. Table 1.1 below listed the tasks suggested in the PPISMP program at the Malaysian Teacher Education Institute or the *Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia (IPGM)* that form the focus of this study.

Table 1.1. The suggested tasks in English Language Proficiency (ELP) course in *Program Persediaan Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan (PPISMP)*



No.	Semester	Main Learning outcomes	Suggested Tasks
1	Semester 1	I. listen and infer meaning for a variety of purposes. II. Speak with correct pronunciation, enunciation, stress and intonation. III. Develop dictionary skills. IV. Improve learners' grammatical competence V. Build learners' repertoire of English words. VI. Write sentences to form coherent paragraphs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogues • Short plays / Drama • Commentaries • Note-taking • Oral presentation • Giving instruction and advice • Spontaneous responses • Word/vocabulary games • Writing journals / logs / diaries / reports.
2	Semester 2	I. listen and infer meaning for a variety of purposes. II. Analyse and evaluate information. III. Express opinions and take part in discussions. IV. Improve learners' grammatical competence V. Acquire reading comprehension skills and critical reading skills. VI. Write sentences to form coherent paragraphs. VII. Write sentences to form coherent paragraphs. VIII. Write summaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulation • Interactive discussion • Phone conversation • Brainstorming • Commentaries • Text analysis • Make predictions • Make inferences / judgments / decisions. • Writing journals / logs / diaries / reports.





3	Semester 3	I. listen and infer meaning for a variety of purposes II. Analyse and evaluate information III. Express opinions and take part in discussions IV. Improve grammatical competence V. Write summaries VI. Write sentences to form coherent paragraphs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars • Forums • Talks • Interactive discussion • Role-play / simulation • Public speaking • Generalise ideas • Compare and contrast • Interest talks • Make inferences / judgments / decisions. • Writing journals / logs / diaries / reports.
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Source: Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, (2006)

1.2 The Statement Of The Problem



Students entering the tertiary level of education are expected to have high English language competence in order to perform in their daily academic activities (Malek, 2000; Naginder, Nor Hayati, and Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan, 2008; Siti Hamin and Mohd Mustafa, 2010). However, research have shown that majority of student teachers in teacher education institutes are still having problems with their English language particularly in the grammatical and lexical attainments. For example, according to Siti Hamin and Mohd Mustafa (2010), the majority of post-graduate student teachers commit errors in writing especially in the subject-verb-agreement (SVA). In addition, according to Tan (2005), feedback from lecturers of the Bachelor of Education in teaching English as a second language (TESL) in overseas link program have showed that some student teachers are quite weak in grammar especially in the SVA. Not only among student



teachers in teacher education institutes, the grammatical problems have also been found one of the major problems among the majority of Malaysian universities students as found by Surina and Kamaruzaman (2009). Their findings have revealed that the majority of universities students were still having grammatical problems in their writing especially in the SVA despite of several years of learning.

In addition, low lexical attainments are also another major problem among Malaysian students at the tertiary level. This problem may affect their studies negatively. For example, research by Naginder, Nor Hayati and Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan (2008) among university students has revealed that low lexical attainment has been found as one of the major contributors to students' inability to cope with their academic courses. This finding was also supported by various studies conducted at other institutions of higher learning including secondary schools (Syed Aziz Baftim, 2005; Lourdunathan and Menon, 2005; Ramachandran and Abdul Rahim, 2004; Pillai, 2004; Abdullah, 2004; Malek, 2000). Similarly, these problems have also been found among student teachers in the Malaysian teacher education institutes.

Realising such situation, literature reviews have shown that the TBLL approach is effective in improving students' second language (L2) including the grammatical accuracy and language complexity (Skehan and Foster, 1997; Lynch and Maclean, 2000; Wang, 2008; Tavakoli and Foster, 2008; Ellis, 2009). However, there are lacks of evidences to show its effectiveness in the Malaysian teacher education context, the

context where TBLL has actually been applied as one of the English as second language (ESL) teaching approach as shown in table 1.1.

In addition, a search through the MyUniNet portal (The Malaysian Universities Libraries & National Library Network) dated 6th August 2010 with the strings 'task-based language teaching' and 'task-based language learning' has yielded barely zero result (the MyUniNet portal consists of Malaysian theses and Malaysian repositories collection from all public universities and several private universities). Moreover, a search in the Asian Journal of English as a Foreign Language (Asian EFL Journal) website with the strings 'task-based language learning and teaching' has resulted 17 articles from March 2005 until March 2007, mostly were conducted in the Asian countries. However, none was conducted in the Malaysian context. Therefore, beside tackling the problems in the grammatical and lexical attainments among Malaysian students there is also a need to study the effectiveness of the TBLL among the local students in order to fill the vacuum in this area.

1.3 Rationale Of The Study

The rationale of the study is firstly to search for effective methods which can improve the grammatical and lexical achievements among the local students particularly the student teachers in the Malaysian teacher education institutes or *Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia (IPGM)*. As mentioned earlier, the grammatical and lexical attainments have



been found as one of the major problems among student teachers. If this is left without attention it may form a huge barrier for them to cope with their studies. This study is intended to overcome such problems.

Secondly, TBLL have been applied as one of the English language teaching and learning strategy in the Malaysian teacher education context, as revealed in table 1.1. However, as explained earlier there is lack of empirical evidences on its effectiveness. Thus, there is vital need to conduct research on the effectiveness of TBLL approach in order to identify its strengths as well as to further improve its implementation.

Thirdly, research on the TBLL approach among student teachers will also allow teacher educators to identify its strengths and constraints in the particular context. This is because according to Adams and Newton (2009), despite the emerging findings on the success implementation of the TBLL strategy in South East Asia countries it has several constraints which need to be properly addressed. The example of the constraints as mentioned in the research are examination orientation, large class sizes and mix proficiency classes.





1.4 Objectives Of The Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To identify the effects of task-based language learning (TBLL) lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in comparison with the presentation-practice-production (PPP) lessons on the grammatical achievements among student teachers.
- 2) To determine the differences between the effects of TBLL lessons using different types of collaborative tasks (dictogloss tasks and jigsaw) on the grammatical achievements among student teachers.
- 3) To ascertain the effects of TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in comparison with PPP lessons on the lexical achievements among student teachers.
- 4) To find out the differences between the effects of TBLL lessons using different types of collaborative tasks (dictogloss tasks and jigsaw) on the lexical achievements among student teachers.



- 5) To discover the perceptions of student teachers participated in this study on the TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in terms of learning grammar, learning lexis and overall activities in the lessons.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1) What are the effects of TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in comparison with the PPP lessons on the grammatical-achievements mean scores among student teachers?
- 2) Are there significant differences between the effects of TBLL lessons using different types of collaborative task such as dictogloss and jigsaw, on the grammatical-achievements mean scores among student teachers?
- 3) What are the effects of TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in comparison with the PPP lessons on the lexical achievements mean scores among student teachers?
- 4) Are there significant differences between the effects of TBLL lessons using different types of collaborative tasks such as dictogloss and jigsaw on the lexical-achievements mean scores among student teachers?

- 5) What are the perceptions of student teachers' participated in this study on the TBLL lessons using collaborative tasks, dictogloss and jigsaw in terms of learning grammar, learning lexis and overall activities in the lessons?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

- 1) There are no significant differences between the TBLL-dictogloss, the TBLL-jigsaw and the PPP groups in the grammatical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test¹.
- 2) There are significant differences between the TBLL-dictogloss, the TBLL-jigsaw and the PPP groups in the grammatical-achievements mean scores in the post-test.
- 3) The TBLL-dictogloss group achieves significantly higher grammatical achievement mean scores in the post test as compared to the TBLL-jigsaw group.
- 4) There are no significant differences between TBLL-dictogloss, TBLL-jigsaw and PPP groups in the lexical-achievements mean scores in the pre-test.

¹ TBLL-dictogloss group refers to the group which has been exposed to the TBLL lessons using dictogloss tasks. TBLL-jigsaw group refers to the group which has been exposed to the TBLL lessons using jigsaw tasks. Both of the TBLL groups were considered as the treatment groups. The PPP group refers to the group which have been exposed to the PPP lessons. This PPP group was considered as the control group



- 5) There are significant differences between the TBLL-dictogloss, the TBLL-jigsaw and the PPP groups in the lexical-achievements mean scores in the post-test.
- 6) The TBLL-jigsaw group achieves significantly higher lexical-achievement mean scores in the post test as compared to the TBLL-dictogloss group.

1.7 Significance Of The Study



The study is significant to the relevant parties such as student teachers, teacher educators as well as other English language teaching practitioners.

First, student teachers will be able to improve their grammatical and lexical attainments in English language. This is because the research findings have shown that learning grammar and lexis using TBLL approach particularly using collaborative tasks such as dictogloss and jigsaw are effective in promoting the grammatical and lexical achievements among student teachers.

Secondly, teacher educators will be able to get empirical evidences on the effectiveness of TBLL approach on the grammatical and lexical achievements among student teachers. The information will serve as the basis for teacher educators to give





emphasis on the use of TBLL especially using collaborative tasks such as dictogloss and jigsaw in teaching and learning English as a second language (ESL).

Thirdly, other English language teaching practitioners will also benefit from this study from the practical information on the implementation of the TBLL strategy in the local context. The practical information will serve as the guidelines for the language teaching practitioners to implement in their context. In the TBLL, there are various types of tasks that can be used. This research however focuses on the use of collaborative tasks such as dictogloss and jigsaw.



1.8 Operational Definition Of The Terms



The followings are the operational definitions of terms used in this study.

- 1) Task-based language learning (TBLL) refers to the method of English language learning that is based on tasks. The study employed communicative tasks which also involve some collaborative works among student teachers. The chosen collaborative tasks are the dictogloss task and jigsaw task.
- 2) Dictogloss task is a type of communicative and collaborative tasks that requires student teachers to reconstruct a text in pairs after listening to a text being read twice by a lecturer. The procedures of the tasks were as follows. Firstly, the pairs





had to listen to the text and take notes. Secondly, they had to collaborate with each other in order to reconstruct the text based their notes. They also needed to recall on the use the correct language structures in the text they had listened earlier. The ultimate goal of the dictogloss tasks was to promote the grammar competence.

- 3) Jigsaw task is a type of communicative and collaborative tasks that requires student teachers to reconstruct a text in pairs from a series of notes distributed equally among the pairs. The task procedures were as follows. Firstly, a series of notes were distributed among the pairs. Each pairs received different types of notes. Secondly, based on the notes the pairs were required to share and collaborate in order to reconstruct a complete text. The ultimate goal of the jigsaw tasks was to promote the lexis competence.



- 4) TBLL-dictogloss is a term used to refer to one of the treatments in this experimental research. It refers to the TBLL lessons using several dictogloss tasks based on different topics.
- 5) TBLL-jigsaw is a term used to refer to one of the treatments in this experimental research. It refers to the TBLL lessons using several jigsaw tasks based on different topics.
- 6) The PPP method refers to the method of ESL learning that is guided by three steps, presentation, practice and production. In this study, the individual writing



task is used in the production stage. This method of learning is considered as the control method.

- 7) The grammatical achievements refers to an achievement in the grammar component test particularly on the subject-verb agreement (SVA) topic.
- 8) The lexical achievements refers to an achievement in vocabulary test particularly involving the vocabulary in the general knowledge theme.

1.9 Summary

This chapter explains the main introduction of the study including the background of the study followed by the statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the research hypotheses and research questions, the significance of the study and the operational definitions of the terms used. The next chapter presents the literature review of the study.