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IMPLEMENTING TASK-BASED LEARNING TO IMPROVE ESL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN A PRIMARY DLP SCIENCE CLASSROOM

NUR FARHANA BINTI TAUFIK

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (TESL)
(MASTER BY MIXED MODE)

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Alhamdulillah to the Most Graceful and the Most Merciful Allah s.w.t., all praises to Him for the strength given to me in completing this thesis. A special appreciation goes to my respected and beloved supervisor, Prof. Madya Dr. Napisah Kepol, who has been a great advisor to me with all the guidance and support given throughout the supervision. Her constructive comments on my work and her faith in my capability have motivated me to keep doing my best until the end. I would also like to express my appreciation to the schools and teachers who participated in the research for their invaluable co-operation and contribution towards the success of the study. My acknowledgement also goes to the Faculty of Languages and Communication UPSI and the Institute of Graduate Studies UPSI for facilitating me in my postgraduate matters. Sincere thanks to all of my friends and acquaintances for moral support and kindness throughout my master's degree study. Last but not least, my deepest gratitude to my dearest mother Nik Zanariah for the endless prayer, love and support throughout my master's degree journey. To my younger sisters and brother, thank you for always being there for your eldest sister. Finally, to Allahyarham Taufik Yahya, my beloved late father, this is for you. I would not be who I am today without you and mother. Thank you very much.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the implementation of the task-based learning approach (TBL) in improving ESL students' speaking skills in a primary Dual Language Programme (DLP) Science classroom. This study also intended to obtain the DLP Science teacher's views regarding the implementation of the task-based learning approach for teaching Science in the English language. The mixed-methods approach combining the quasi-experimental design and semi-structured interview was used. 65 Year Three students from two schools in Kuala Lumpur were chosen using the purposive sampling method. 35 participants from one school were chosen as the experimental group, and 30 participants from another school were chosen as the control group. Two Science teachers and two English teachers teaching in the DLP programmes in the two schools also participated in the study. Three methods were employed to collect the data which were the pre- and post-test, classroom observation, and semi-structured interview. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, while the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed a significant difference in the speaking test scores between the experimental group (M = 20.31, SD = 4.44) and the control group (M = 16.30, SD = 4.11). The results also showed an increment in the number of students' responses and utterances in the experimental group over the course of the treatment period. The experimental group teacher also perceived the TBL approach as helpful to students in becoming more confident to speak in the classroom. In conclusion, the TBL approach has an effect in improving the students' speaking skills in the DLP Science classroom. This approach has the potential as a viable teaching approach for the teaching of content subjects in the English language in schools implementing the DLP programme.

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PELAKSANAAN PEMBELAJARAN BERASASKAN TUGASAN BAGI MENAMBAH BAIK KEMAHIRAN BERTUTUR PELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DALAM KELAS DLP SAINS DI SEKOLAH RENDAH

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pelaksanaan pendekatan pembelajaran berasaskan tugasan atau *task-based learning* (TBL) dalam menambah baik kemahiran bertutur pelajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua dalam kelas Sains di bawah Program Dwibahasa atau *Dual Language Programme* (DLP). Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk meninjau pandangan guru DLP Sains mengenai pelaksanaan pendekatan pembelajaran berasaskan tugasan untuk mengajar Sains dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Pendekatan kaedah campuran yang menggabungkan reka bentuk kuasi-eksperimen dan temu bual separa berstruktur telah digunakan. 65 orang pelajar Tahun Tiga dari dua buah sekolah di Kuala Lumpur telah dipilih menggunakan kaedah persampelan bertujuan sebagai peserta kajian. 35 orang peserta dari satu sekolah dipilih sebagai kumpulan eksperimen, dan 30 orang peserta dari satu sekolah yang lain dipilih sebagai kumpulan kawalan. Dua orang guru Sains dan dua orang guru Bahasa Inggeris yang mengajar dalam program DLP di dua sekolah tersebut turut mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Tiga kaedah penyelidikan digunakan untuk mengumpul data yang merupakan ujian pra dan pasca, pemerhatian bilik darjah, dan temu bual separa berstruktur. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan analisis deskriptif, manakala data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor ujian bertutur di antara kumpulan ekperimen (M = 20.31, SD = 4.44) dan kumpulan kawalan (M = 16.30, SD = 4.11). Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan kenaikan bilangan tindak balas dan ucapan pelajar dalam kumpulan eksperimen sepanjang tempoh rawatan. Guru daripada kumpulan eksperimen juga berpendapat bahawa pendekatan TBL dapat membantu pelajar menjadi lebih yakin untuk bertutur di dalam kelas. Kesimpulannya, pendekatan TBL memberi kesan kepada peningkatan kemahiran bertutur pelajar di dalam kelas DLP Sains. Pendekatan ini berpotensi sebagai pendekatan pengajaran yang sesuai untuk pengajaran mata pelajaran kandungan dalam Bahasa Inggeris di sekolah yang melaksanakan program DLP.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBA	Classroom-based Assessment
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
DLP	Dual Language Programme
DSKP	Standard Document for Curriculum and Assessment
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETeMS	English for the Teaching of Mathematics and Science
INTV	Interview
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MBMMBI	Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuhkan Penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris (To Uphold the Malay Language Strengthen the English Language)
MEB	Malaysian Education Blueprint
MOE	Ministry of Education
OBS	Observation
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TBL	Task-based learning
TBLT	Task-based learning and teaching

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Introduction

This study investigated the implementation of task-based learning to improve speaking skills among Year Three ESL students in a Dual Language Programme (DLP) Science classroom. This chapter presents the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the rationale of the study, as well as the research purpose and questions. It is then followed by the significance and the limitations of this study, research ethics and the definition of terms.

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1.2 Background of the Study

Speaking is considered to be one of the most difficult skills to develop in learning English as a second language (ESL) (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) and researchers, as well as language teachers, are actively finding ways to facilitate second language (L2) learners to communicate proficiently and effectively for real-life situations. In 2016, the Malaysian Ministry of Education introduced a new policy for Science and Mathematics as well as the English language called the Dual Language Programme (DLP) as an initiative to improve students' learning of the Science and Mathematics subjects in the English language. This programme also intends to enhance student's exposure time to the English language which indirectly reinforces their English language proficiency (Ministry of Education, 2015).

In November 2015, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) announced that 300 selected national primary and secondary schools in the country will be given the consent to implement the Dual Language Programme (DLP) in 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2015). Under this programme, the schools are given the option to teach the Science & Mathematics subjects in English to Year One and Year Four for primary school students, as well as to Form One students in secondary school. The DLP is expected to improve government school students' English proficiency which offers the enhancement of students' future employability opportunities (Ministry of Education, 2018).

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The government's effort to introduce DLP, which is parallel to the aim of improving students' Malay and English language proficiency through the MBMMBI (To Uphold the Malay language and Strengthen the English Language) policy in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2015-2025, is a big step towards producing a skillful 21st century generation. Although the DLP programme is not a new element in the Malaysian education system due to the implementation of the English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) policy or popularly known among Malaysians by its Malay acronym, PPSMI, its implementation in schools is still at the early stage.

Previously, the ETeMS policy was introduced to Malaysian schools in 2003, where the language of instruction for the Mathematics and Science subjects was changed to English. The subjects were formerly taught in the Malay language, which is Malaysia's national language. The ETeMS policy was introduced to promote students learning in science and mathematics, which allowed students to access the updated mathematics and science content that were mostly in the English language, as well as to improve their English language proficiency (Hui, 2009). The implementation of the policy pioneered with the Year 1 pupils in primary school and Form 1 and Lower 6 students in secondary school. Despite being implemented for eight years, in 2012 the government announced that the ETeMS policy would be abolished, and the teaching of the Science and Mathematics subjects would revert to the Malay language as the medium of instruction. The abolishment of the ETeMS policy was influenced by the endless debate and arguments regarding its implementations from the general public, parents, political parties and even teachers (Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi & Mahendran Maniam, 2018).

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Nevertheless, the awareness in the importance of learning the Science and Mathematics subjects in the English language has increased among Malaysians lately, especially the parents of school-going children (Ashairi Suliman, Mohamed Yusoff Mohd Nor & Melor Md Yunus, 2017). Even though ETeMS had been abolished since 2012, there are still demands for schools to teach the Science and Mathematics subjects in English. Hence, the Ministry of Education implemented the MBMMBI policy where its objective is to uphold the Malay language and to strengthen the English language among Malaysian students; hence, the DLP programme was introduced. Ashairi Suliman et al. (2017) explained that even though the DLP programme resembles ETeMS, it differs in terms of the several aspects of its implementation. Through the DLP programme, flexibility is given to the schools, teachers, students and parents to choose their preferred language of instruction for the Science and Mathematics subjects, compared to the ETeMS policy, which is compulsory for all students.

A thorough library search revealed that there was a lack of literature on DLP as the programme is still recent; hence many sources come from newspapers. A survey by the government in 2015 revealed that more than 90 per cent of about 190,000 respondents wanted English standards to be improved in local schools (“Malaysians Need The Dual”, 2016). Despite the abolition of ETeMS, in a press conference in 2015 the then former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad urged that Mathematics and Science should be taught in English as these subjects “are a different kind of subject, because changes in the information and findings in science especially, happens every day.” (Yiswaree Palansamy, 2015).

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The Ministry of Education (2013) stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint that boosting all students' proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and English will be the most immediate priority. This shows that the Malaysian government is truly concerned about improving the English language proficiency among the students even though it is a second language. The Chairman of Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia (PAGE), Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim stated that the need for students to learn Science and Mathematics in English is essential as students would be more analytical when they are proficient in the core subjects and tend to have a better chance in securing a job in the future ("Malaysians Need The Dual", 2016). Several surveys and researches (Nair et al., 2012; Yuen, 2015; Ting et al., 2017) have shown that a lot of employers have complained regarding the poor quality of English Malaysian graduates, whereby the employees cannot interact with people especially for those who work with foreign affairs.

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Moreover, in terms of tertiary level education, it is also known that most Science- and Mathematics-related subjects in Malaysian universities and colleges are taught in the English language with many reference books in the mentioned language. Thus, the demands to teach these subjects in English are still relevant as learning Science and Mathematics will facilitate students in learning and comprehending those subjects successfully, at the same time acquiring the English language during the process. Yu (2004) stated that English language learners or second language (L2) learners, would be able to master content more easily when teaching practices for content subjects integrate strategies for language learning.

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It was also reported that parents generally received DLP positively as in wanting the programme to be continued in schools to ensure that their children would not lose out on learning English ("Parents Urge Govt Not To", 2018). Some of the parents pointed out that they could see the improvement in the English language skills of their children. This was proven through the statistics from the Ministry of Education whereby 18% and 95% of students over 1200 primary and secondary schools improved their grades in the English language subject (Chin & Rebecca Rajaendram, 2017). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education (2018) also announced the approval of another eighty-eight new schools in the country that would implement the DLP in 2018 and this gave a total of 1303 schools that implement the DLP in Malaysia (Farhana Syed Nokman & Aina Nasa, 2018).

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The DLP is seen as a good and beneficial movement by the government (Ashairi Suliman et al., 2017). According to Hill and Flynn (2007), most people believe that only ESL teachers would take care of English language learning yet teaching English language skills to English language learners (ELL) is now the responsibility of all school staff, including content subject teachers. In the DLP, the Science and Mathematics teachers are responsible to teach the subjects in English. Even though the DLP suggested dual language usage, almost all teaching and learning of the Science subject take place using English as the medium of instruction. One of the important characteristics of science is the richness of the words and terms it uses (Wellington & Osborne, 2001) and this would be an opportunity for students to improve their English while learning Science. L2 students who learn science will have to learn content-specific vocabulary and adapting everyday vocabulary and language structure to be

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used when engaged in asking questions, formulating hypotheses and making inferences (Bresser & Fargason, 2013).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Learning English as a second language (ESL) has been a great interest all around the world, yet a majority of ESL learners in Malaysia who graduated from school are still not proficient to communicate in English, a language they have been learning for eleven years of primary and secondary schools (Ramiza Darmin & Albion, 2013; Harjander Kaur, 2014). This problem will be carried forward to their tertiary education years if not addressed early. One of the greatest challenges that ESL learners experience in learning the language is that English is not used daily and authentically within the real-life context (Akbulut, 2014). Students need to be trained to speak English daily even for a short period because it is through practice that students will be able to be fluent in speaking (Sharma, 2018; Rao, 2019). Not having enough exposure to the target language, or opportunities to use the target language in authentic interactions are also some of the factors why ESL learners face difficulties in mastering the language (Akbulut, 2014). According to Baker and Westrup (2003), the teaching of speaking skills is deserted in many classrooms due to more attention being given to the teaching of writing skills, grammar and vocabulary because the examinations will always test on these elements. Even though some students are excellent in their English language writing ability, students might not be able to speak the language well due to the lack of

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speaking technique practice done by teachers in the classroom, thus resulting in the students' lack of proficiency to speak fluently and confidently (Nur Ilianis Adnan, 2014). Furthermore, the lack of speaking practice will cause unfamiliarity of the spoken language to the students; hence, they will be afraid of making mistakes whenever they speak (Nur Illianis Adnan, 2014; Hendra Heriansyah, 2012). This will hamper their attempts to communicate with others in English.

Additionally, the implementation of DLP in selected schools requires students to learn the Science subject in the English language, and learning scientific concepts and processes in the classroom requires a lot of explanations and inquiry. Bresser and Fargason (2013) explained that the use of language promotes the understanding of science concepts as it is a powerful learning tool when inquiry takes place. Despite that, a science classroom is often a frustrating place for L2 learners since science has a complex vocabulary that is difficult even for native English speakers to learn (Herr, 2007). This is because students who learn science in the second language can experience challenges that may create roadblocks to learning as they might not comprehend the processes or terms used in English (Bresser & Fargason, 2013). Besides, L2 learners might also find that the language of science can be confusing because many everyday life words that have different meanings are used (Larsson & Jakobsson, 2019). Furthermore, DLP Science subject teachers are seeking for methods or techniques to help the students to be confident and fluent in conversing about the Science subject in the English language to ensure their teaching will be understood and meaningful to their students. The teachers also want the students to feel comfortable and not intimidated to speak English when learning Science while developing the

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students' speaking skills at the same time (Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasir, Sarah Mohamad Yunus & Sharifah Intan Sharina, 2018).

In brief, the DLP programme provides good opportunities for students to learn the English language outside the English classroom as they are given more exposure to practice speaking with the language. However, with the challenges mentioned, such as students' lack of comprehension in learning science in the English language, an approach was needed to facilitate the students to improve their speaking skills while learning the Science subject. Thus, this study proposed the task-based learning (TBL) approach to help students improve their English speaking skills in the DLP Science class. With the help of the proposed learning approach, the study conducted would benefit the DLP students by helping them to enhance their English language through the learning of Science, as well as to provide opportunities for the DLP teachers to utilize the TBL approach in teaching their DLP classes.

1.4 Rationale of the Study

The communication skill is vital to the development of children. Therefore, students need to be coached in the communication proficiency as early as in primary school for it will assist them in their tertiary education and the working sector in the future (Baker & Westrup, 2003). The implementation of the DLP for the Science and Mathematics subjects is a great opportunity for students to enhance their English language skills.

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This is because students are given more time and opportunities to practice their English speaking skills as well as other language skills in those subjects apart from learning the language in the English language classroom (Ashairi Suliman, 2018).

On the other hand, it was found that providing students more time to learn and practice their English speaking skills in schools does not guarantee a wholesome success without the appropriate approaches implemented by teachers to teach the students proper and authentic English language conversation (Aleksandrazk, 2011). Thus, this research intended to investigate a learning approach to improve students' English speaking skills in order to communicate and comprehend the Science subject better and to facilitate DLP Science teachers to teach Science in the English language more efficiently. In this study, the task-based learning (TBL) approach was proposed.

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Even though the TBL approach has been introduced to the education world for many years, a thorough library search revealed that there was a lack of literature on the implementation of the TBL approach in primary schools, especially in Malaysia. This is due to the reason that the Malaysian education curriculum mainly implements the Presentation Practice Production (PPP) approach in classrooms (Idek & Lee, 2015). Some teachers might have used the TBL approach in their lesson but did not recognize the specific name of the approach (Willis, 1996). In addition, researches on the implementation of the TBL approach in Malaysian classrooms were mostly applied in the secondary and tertiary level of education and has been proven to be helpful and effective in improving students' English language skills (Mechraoui, Mechraoui, &

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Quadri, 2014; Mohammad Mohammadipour & Sabariah Md Rashid, 2015; Hazleena Baharun et al., 2016).

The DLP programme has been implemented in Malaysia since 2016. Yet, to date, there is a lack of studies conducted concerning the implementation of the TBL approach to help students to improve English speaking skills in a DLP Science classroom. Therefore, this study intended to explore the implementation of the TBL approach in facilitating students' enhancement of speaking skills in a Science class. It is hoped that this study would provide new insights on teaching for both the DLP Science teachers and the English language teachers who have been tasked with helping students to improve their English speaking skills for the betterment of their future in terms of communicative proficiency and employability. It is also hoped that the findings of this study would help the education planners to obtain a picture of the situation on the ground which would be useful for planning the DLP curriculum.

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to investigate the implementation of the TBL approach in improving students' speaking skills in a DLP Science classroom and to survey the DLP Science teacher's views regarding the task-based learning approach for teaching Science in the English language. Therefore, the following were the objectives of the study:

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1. To determine the extent of the task-based learning approach in improving students' speaking skills.
2. To investigate the DLP Science teacher's views regarding the task-based learning approach for teaching Science in the English language.

1.6 Research Questions

The following questions guided the researcher in conducting the study:

1. To what extent does the task-based learning approach improve students' English speaking skills?
2. What are the DLP Science teacher's views regarding the task-based learning approach for the teaching of Science in the English language?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study investigated the implementation of task-based learning to improve ESL learners' speaking skills in a Science classroom. Although task-based learning has been investigated in ESL classrooms, not much research has been conducted in a DLP classroom that teaches a content subject in the English language at a primary school level in Malaysia. Thus, it may contribute in-depth information for curriculum

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developers at the Ministry of Education when designing and revising the DLP curriculum as well as to provide DLP and English language teachers with additional tools and courses that prepare them to teach the English and Science subjects effectively, hence improving the students' speaking skill as a result.

In addition, this study may provide a general overview to the DLP and English language teachers regarding the implementation of task-based learning in a classroom as well as encouraging them to practice this approach in their teaching. A teacher's experience in the task-based learning approach provided by this study may assist other teachers in designing and modifying more focused tasks on the specific needs of their students. In addition, this study may assist English teachers to guide or to support their Science teacher colleagues who are teaching the Science subject in the English language. Not all Science teachers in Malaysia have the proficiency to teach a content subject in English (Napisah Kepol, 2017; Siti Nur Diyana Mahmud, Nurfaradilla Mohd Nasri, Mohd Ali Samsudin, & Lilia Halim, 2018) and the English teachers may help their colleagues on how to teach the Science subject in English. Moreover, this study may also benefit teacher educators in colleges and universities in training students to implement task-based learning in their teaching when the students become teacher trainees.

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1.8 Ethics of a Research

In order to conduct this study, several ethical principles were considered. The quality and integrity of this study were ensured by avoiding deceptive practices. Informed consent from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) (Appendix A) and the State Education Department (Appendix B) from the Ministry of Education, the Headmistresses of the schools (Appendix C), and the teacher participants of the study were sought (Appendices D and E). The confidentiality and anonymity of the study's research participants were also respected. The voluntary willingness of the participants to participate in this study was also ensured. In addition, the consents of the parents of the participants who were the school children were also obtained (Appendix F).

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1.9 Definition of Terms

Tasks: Activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome (Willis, 1996), and expressing meaning through language is the main intention rather than to manipulate form (Nunan, 2004).

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Task-based learning: An approach that is viewed as a branch of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of accounting meaningful and communication tasks as the central role in language learning rather than only focusing on the accurate use of the grammatical forms (Willis, 1996).

Speaking skills: The skills that give speakers the ability to communicate and to convey his message in a target language effectively. There are four elements of the speaking skill which are fluency, appropriateness, accuracy and range (Nunan, 2004).

Dual Language Programme (DLP): Dual language education is a form of bilingual education in which students are taught literacy and content in two languages. In the Malaysian context, DLP is a programme implemented in selected primary and secondary schools starting 2016 whereby the Science and, Mathematics subjects are taught in the English language, while other subjects are taught in the Malay language.

Traditional method: A traditional method of teaching refers to the lessons being teacher-centred; hence, emphasizing a teacher-dominated interaction in the classroom. In the context of a traditional Science classroom for this study, the class focuses on the learning and teaching of the science content and does not purposely develop language skills and proficiency.

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1.10 Summary

In this chapter, the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, and the definition of terms have been presented and discussed. In the next chapter, the concept and framework of task-based learning and speaking pedagogy, as well as the relevant literature on task-based learning and speaking skills for primary school students are reviewed.

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