Examining Task-Supported Language Teaching on Student Empowerment: A Case from Indonesian Context

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Abstract -- This research was an attempt to reveal the impacts of TSLT implementation on the student empowerment. Through a descriptive study, questionnaires and interview were used to collect the data involving 289 students. Frymier, Shulman, & Houser's (1996) psychological empowerment measurement scale was utilized as the instrument of the questionnaire containing three psychological dimensions: impact, meaningfulness, and competence. The results of the questionnaires show that impact had 51.92 % positively response; meaningfulness received 86.17 % responses; and competence perceived 77.55 % responses. The perceived score of the impact indicates students felt less degree to make difference in the classroom. The score of the meaningfulness means that students perceived their English learning is interesting and valuable. The score of the competence means students felt qualified and capable in performing their tasks. The findings of the interview suggest that students-teacher classroom interaction and small group tasks become interesting issues for promoting student empowerment. At the end of the part of the paper, instructional implications are also discussed.

Keywords-- competence, impact, meaningfulness, Student empowerment, Task-Supported Language Teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

For the last decade, the debate of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is still current and searching for its contexts. From the first time the TBLT was introduced, it is designed to fill the gab which language fluency is still ignored in traditional approach namely PPP (Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1996; Skehan, 2014). As the development of the Communicative Language Teaching (CTL) approach (Willis, 1996; Carless, 2004; Ellis, 2013), TBLT emphasizes the use of English in language learning (Nunan, 1989; Willis, 1996; van den Branden, 2006).

The suitability of the TBLT in Asian primary schools is often challenged against the class-size and instructional-cultural issues (see, e.g. Zhang & Hung, 2013; Hai-Yan, 2014). Yet, previous research mainly focused on the context of language skills such as speaking (see, e.g. Poorahmadi, 2012; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010; Alhomaidan, 2014; Tsang, 2016; Kozawa, 2017), and writing skill (Gilabert, Manchón, & Vasylets, 2016, p. 129). Yet, writing is less reported [17]. Instead of a number of experiments of TBLT, studies were mainly conducted in the area of higher education and advanced students (see, e.g. Sato, 2010; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010; Ahmed & Bidin, 2016; Poorahmadi, 2012). Even some suggestions to make adaption of the TBLT into more moderate version [20], research relating this issue is still insufficient.

Several research had already been conducted to indicate the suitability of TBLT in varieties of Indonesian schooling contexts such as in the context of Junior High School (see, e.g. Yuhardi & Restu, 2015; Anwar & Arifani, 2016), Senior High School (see, e.g. Irfan, 2017), higher education (see, e.g. Kumara, Patmadewi, & Suarnajaya, 2013; Purwanto, 2016; Thayyib, 2014; Yunus & Taslim, 2017). Yuhardi & Restu (2015), for example, successfully tested TBLT for improving their students' writing skills. Later, Irfan (2017) had also examined TBLT for its impact for students' reading comprehension. The results of the studies indicate both primary and secondary schools are relevant for TBLT implementation. However, this research suggest for conducting further investigations of TBLT, e.g. from the perspective of the student-centeredness.

The student-centeredness is relevant to the current and future agenda of the TEFL for yelling the importance of promoting student empowerment [28]. The attempts to investigate learner's empowerment is explicitly promoted in TBLT (Brown, 1991;Torres, 2014). To this, research is still scarce. Even student' empowerment was investigated in relation to task performance, student' empowerment was not exclusively identified and discussed. Research mostly took

higher education as the research setting (see, e.g. Alwasilah, 2001; Handoko, 2014; Widihartanti, 2014; Emilia, 2014; Marwan, 2015). Thus, this research will not only to fill the gab in the research on TBLT but also to give contribution to examine the TBLT version, i.e. TSLT against the student empowerment. [29]. In addition, this research is also as a response to Griffiths (2001), Larson (2014) & Musthafa (2001)'s demands of English learning in Indonesia.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How is the impact of Task-Supported Language Teaching on student psychological empowerment?
2. What issues are found from the implementation of Task-Supported Language Teaching viewed from the student psychological empowerment?

III. METHODS

This study took place in a State Madrasah (Public State High School under the Ministry of Religions) in Cirebon, West Java. This madrasah has not only implemented task-based instruction but it has also run project-based innovation in English language learning through its "show off" English program. The participants were taken randomly from both social and science classes involving 289 students. All participants returned the questionnaires. Frymier, Shulman, & Houser's (1996) psychological empowerment scale were employed in the questionnaire containing three dimensions: impact, meaningfulness, and competence. Impact has 16 items, meaningfulness has 10 items and competence has 9 items. The followings are the sample question/statement used in the questionnaire.

TABLE 1. Sample of statements

Dimension	Sample statement
Impact	My contribution to the class makes no difference
Meaningfulness	The tasks required in the course are a waste of my time*
Competence	I feel unable to do the work in the class

As shown in the table 1, the statements were constructed in both positive and negative statements (indicated by *). In the analysis, the score was given by negation for each negative statement. At the end of the questionnaire analysis, the conclusion was given using Arifin's (2012) descriptive percentage interpretation.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Impact of Task-Supported Language Teaching on Student Empowerment

a) Impact

The first indicator of being empowered is impact. The results of the questionnaire can be shown in following table 4.1.1.

TABLE 4.1.1 Impact of TSLT on impacts

Statement	Responses	%
I can influence the instructor	57	**2,37**
I have opportunities to make important decisions in the class	97	4,04
I make a difference in the learning that goes on in the class	100	4,16
I have freedom to choose among options in the class	106	4,41
I can make an impact on the way things are run in the class	107	4,46
I have the power to create a supportive learning environment in the class	113	4,71
I think my participation is important to the success of the class	126	5,25
I feel appreciated in the class	145	6,04
I have opportunities to contribute to the learning of others in the class	154	6,41
I can determine how tasks can be performed	160	6,66
I have power to make a different in how things are done in the class	165	6,87
I have no freedom to choose in the class*	183	7,62
Alternative approaches to learning are made to encourage in the class	193	8,04
I cannot influence what happens in the class*	218	9,08
I have a choice in the methods I can use to perform the work	235	9,79
My contribution to the class makes no difference*	242	10,08

Mean score=6.00

It was found that there were only 2.37 % responses who agreed that they can influence their English teachers. Students felt hard to be powerful against their teachers. This finding indicates students are voiceless in the English learning. This suggests that students might not be involved in decision makings related to their learning or classes. This is the worst feelings perceived by the students. There is no single student felt powerful against the teacher.

Most statements perceived positively by the respondents. As shown in the table 4.1.1, most statements reach more than the mean score (6.00). It means that there was an indication that students were empowered. This also suggests that the scores also as indication that students were potential to make class different.

b) Meaningfulness

The second dimension of student empowerment is meaningfulness. The results of the questionnaire tabulation were presented in the following table 4.1.2

TABLE 4.1.2 IMPACTS OF TSLT ON MEANINGFULNESS

Statement	Responses	%
This class is boring	225	9,00
This class is interesting	234	9,36
I look forward to going to this class	236	9,44

This course will help me achieve my future goals	236	9,44
This class is exciting	239	9,56
The tasks required of me in the class are personally meaningful	246	9,84
The tasks required of me in the class are valuable to me	259	10,36
The information in the class is useful	267	10,68
The class is not important to me	276	11,04
The tasks required in the course are a waste of my time	281	11,24

Mean = 10.00

Comparing the statement of "I can influence the instructor" which is perceived nil, "This class is boring" still better. It was found that 9 % of the respondents agreed that their class was not boring. It was also found that 9.36 % of the students stated their class was interesting. Therefore, this suggests that there is still small number of the students who felt their learning uninteresting. However, as shown in the table 4.1.2, most statements almost reach the mean score (10.00). In general, the scores indicated that most students felt their learning was meaningful.

c) Competence

The third indicator of being empowered learners is competence. The results of the questionnaire tabulation were shown in the following table 4.1.3

TABLE 4.1.3 IMPACTS OF TSLT ON COMPETENCE

Statement	Responses	%
I feel very competent in the class	172	8,50
I possess the necessary skills to perform successfully in the class	192	9,49
I have the qualification to succeed in the class	205	10,13
I feel intimidated by what is required of me in the class	215	10,62
I feel confident that I can adequately perform my duties	230	11,36
I lack of confidence in my ability to perform the tasks in the class	238	11,76
I believe that I am capable of achieving my goals in the class	251	12,40
I have faith in my ability to do well in the class	260	12,85
I feel unable to do the work in the class	261	12,90

Mean=11.11

The table shows that there were some students perceived they have no strong competence in task performance. Most statements perceived the statements positively. The perceived score is more than the mean score (11.11). It can be assumed students felt competent for performing the task. To Summarize, the overall impacts of TSLT on student psychological empowerment is presented in the following table.

TABLE 4.1.4 IMPACT OF TSLT ON STUDENT PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Dimension	n	Max score	Σ perceived score	Total score (%)	Mean	SD	CV
Impact	289	4624	2401	51.92	6	0.022	0.358
Meaningfulness	290	2900	2499	86.17	10	0.008	0.077
Competence	290	2610	2024	77.55	11.11	0.015	0.138

First of all, the results show that the total score of the impact is 2401 (51.92 %). Meaningfulness receives 2499 total scores (86.17 %), and competence gets 2024 scores (77.55 %). By using the criteria impacts adapted from Arifin (2012), it can be interpreted that (1) the implementation of TSLT has impact on the students' feeling of impact, (2) the implementation of TSLT has very strong impact on students' sense of meaningfulness, and (3) the implementation of TSLT has strong impact on students' feeling of being competent. It can be said that students mostly felt capable and qualified for the task completion.

Second, the finding suggests that impact dimension received the lowest perceived score among the dimensions. Relating to this, some arguments are presented. In the Asian EFL contexts, classroom cultural barriers, i.e. student-teacher relationships still matter [6,20,39,40]. In the context of Indonesian primary schools, Littlewood (2007, 2009, 2016) confirmed a similar situation. Because of the teacher-student distance in the classroom, constraints often occur in communicative events. In addition, Larson (2014) and Littlewood (2009) argued that both content and pedagogical skills of the Indonesian English teachers are still other issues.

The last, the findings revealed most students found their learning meaningful. This is to confirm that students also felt competent to perform the task. These imply that TSLT was able to promote student psychological empowerment. This finding is in line with the argument of Torres (2014).

B. Issues related to the TSLT viewed from the student psychological empowerment

The second research question deals with the issues found from the data collection. First of all, the statement "I can influence the instructor" which is mostly perceived negative by the students suggests that there is classroom socio-cultural barrier between the teacher and the students. In the Asian schooling context, classroom cultural barrier is often found for creating dynamic and communicative events between the student and the teacher (Adams, 2009; Carless, 2003, 2004, 2007). Students felt having no capability to interfere their teachers' decision, e.g. relating to the classroom instruction. They have no feeling of having capability to make penetration on their teachers' decision. In short, they are voiceless.

The implication of the top-down instructional design as implemented in this madrasah effects students' behaviors negatively, e.g. students feel powerless in expressing their voices. As the results, feelings of inability to influence their

teachers in particular classroom commonly occur. Ellia, for example, she expressed her feelings.

> ..Show off is a teamwork.. discussing to make a drama, for example, my ideas are often accepted to run... But, not to the teacher. I have a distance... Ellia, 27 January 2018)

The similar expression is also emerged in Febby's reflection.

> Even one student is quite close to the teacher, she still keeps a distance due to culturally respect (Febby, 27 January 2018)

To this, the English teacher had explained that it is uneasy work to be egalitarian as the impact of the cultural constraints. This is a common case in the Indonesian schooling contexts as stated by one of the English teachers.

> …as the member of the madrasah community, we are different from the secular schools. We have to follow the school culture (interview with the English teachers, 8 January 2018)

The system in the madrasah, the same as in pesantrens, "distance" between teachers and students is a tradition. As the results, students often feel hard to get in touch with the teachers in relating to the English instruction such commented by one of the students.

C. Small group and "Show off" as the powerful strategies for promoting student empowerment in TSLT

The issue of power-sharing between student-teacher is the central issue of impact dimension. Interestingly, TSLT was able to build a sense of empowerment among the students. Thus, they have successfully participated in a show off (monthly art-performance) as shown by the following excerpt.

> In my experience, what is different..Show off, it must be in a group to discuss and write something…writing a dialog script such as for the drama. My ideas are often accepted.

In this type of collaborative tasks, students often feel they contribute to the success of the class performance. They often feel their voices heard; their ideas and thought appreciated.

> Pr: Show off as
> Lk: As a translator
> Pr2: Yea, hahaha [giggling]
> Lk: As training as a translator
> Pr2: Instead of being a director in a role play. Sometimes, some worked as a scriptwriter and the other as the director-giving direction.
> Pr: Then, we have an idea, and write the story. So the rest will be plotting the actors, that all.

As discovered in the transcript, show off are realized in powerful activities. Students shared ideas and thought to be critically discussed in the group (peers). This is important. Students felt their contribution appreciated. Their voice is listened. This is empowering. It is important in the language acquisition process that students are naturally engaged in classroom interaction using target language [45,46]. In term of cognition development, students were also involved in the negotiation in the small group discussion. This is one of the other power of TSLT [47–49]. Having intrinsic motivation to participate and use target language confidently is the manifestation of cognitive development.

In conclusion, sense of empowerment develops as shown in the findings. Show off, pedagogical task performances provided a capture and exposure to the success of TSLT in the contexts of a large class. Using authentic learning materials, students perceived their learning fun and meaningful. Unconsciously, learning autonomy is promoted. Thus, students gradually found their English improved.

V. CONCLUSION, PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

First, TSLT is potential to build and enhance student psychological empowerment. However, different from the two dimensions of meaningfulness and competence, the impact may find it uneasy to change due to the Asian cultural barriers. There is, however, possibility as egalitarian likely occurs in the context of madrasah. Second, as an innovation of language teaching approach, TSLT can be a model to be implemented in the primary schools in Asian countries as it provides flexibilities rather than TBLT. Last, since this research limits only in general impact of task-supported language teaching on student psychological empowerment, the specific impact of task-supported language teaching on students and teachers power-relationships needs to be investigated further.

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