# Text-based learning in EFL classrooms: Problems and strategies viewed from the sociocultural approach

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*Abstract*—**Text-based Learning (TBL) has been extensively employed in EFL classrooms in Indonesia. The 2013 curriculum requires teachers to exploit the structure of various texts for communicative purposes. Similarly, in tertiary level, lecturers do the same thing for teaching reading, speaking, writing, and even listening. It is true that some literature offer the merits of using text-based learning [4 ] and [10]. However, we also need to listen to EFL teachers' real practice, so when implementing it in our own classroom, we, teachers, can anticipate the problem and implement the text-based learning well. This paper is aimed at presenting EFL pre-service teachers' problems and strategies in their first-time teaching English using Text-based learning viewed from the sociocultural approach. This study involved 10 student-teachers from Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana who were taking their microteaching class. The sources of data used were reflective journal, post-observation reflective writing, and critical-friends-group (CFG) reflective writing. Those sources are sociocultural mediational tools that facilitate student-respondents to discuss with their peers and teacher and then to reflect their problems and strategies used for better text-based learning. By so doing, the problems and strategies are not only individually developed but also socially developed through social interaction or what so-called the sociocultural approach. This study is useful for secondary school teachers, lecturers, student-teachers, and policymakers in planning and implementing text-based learning.**

*Keywords: Text-based learning, Sociocultural Approach, reflective practice*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The use of text-based learning (TBL) is believed in offering benefits for teaching and learning. First, It requires an explicit explanation on the structure of the text and why it is written. The characteristics can help students understand how the structural and language features of texts can contribute to meaning-making [10]. Secondly, it can help teachers match the social purpose of the text to learners' needs. By so doing, teaching materials are not based on teachers' general intuition but on the ways language is actually used in particular context (in this case learners' context). For example, making a reservation for a room in a hotel) that are valued in English speaking communities [4].

It is true that TBL brings about good sides that can help teachers teach systematically and help learners make meaning better in communication. However, we also need to listen to EFL (especially pre-service or novice) teachers' challenges in implementing TBL. There are several ways that can be used to get to know the teachers' problems and strategies. First is from their individual reflection and second is not only from their own reflection but also from their interaction with other (more) capable being such as colleagues and senior teachers or what so-called sociocultural approach.

This paper is aimed at answering the following three research questions. First, what are the EFL pre-service teachers' problems in their first time applying TBL as revealed by the sociocultural mediational tools? Second, what are their strategies in coping with the problems as revealed by the sociocultural mediational tools? How the problems and strategies constructed from the mediational tools reflect the sociocultural theory?
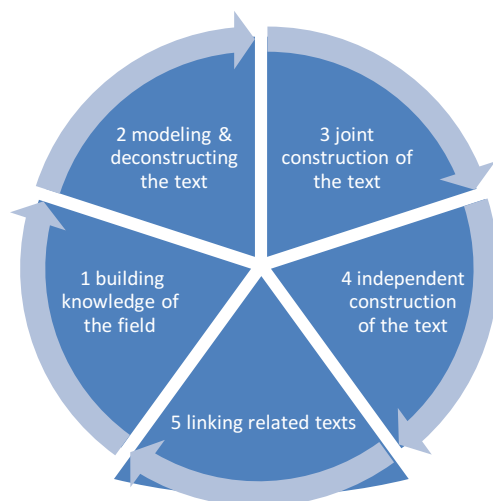
## II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

There two theoretical bases used for this study. First is the text-based cycle and second is the sociocultural key concepts.

### A. Text-based Cycle

Text-based Cycle uses the teaching and learning cycle proposed by [5].

*Figure 1 Text-based teaching Cycle*



**Source:** [5]

*Building knowledge of the field (BKOF)* is aimed at building learners' knowledge on the general context of the topic. *Modelling of the text (MOTT)* is aimed at discussing the social function of the text and the purpose meant by the reader/writer. Besides, it is aimed at analyzing the text structure and grammatical patterns in the text. *Joint construction of the text (JCOT)* is the time for teachers and learners work together to construct the whole examples of the genre. *Independent construction of the text (ICOT)* allows students to write independently but still under the teacher's monitor and assistance [3]. As for *Linking to related text (LTRT),* it links what learners have learnt in the teaching and learning cycle to other texts in the same or similar contexts [6].

### B. Sociocultural Theory

The sociocultural theory emerged from the work of the Russian psychologists Lev Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria based on the idea that learning is social in nature and driven through other people, tools and activities. From that view, teachers' learning to teach takes place when there are social practices and social interactions of teaching and learning in specific classroom and situations. By so doing, what teachers know, think, and understand will be developed [8].

There are several key concepts in the sociocultural theory. First, *zone proximal development (ZPD)*. It is "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" [14]. Second, *mediation*. It is a kind of scaffolding used to help learners move from their actual to potential development, from lower-level to higher-level of thinking, or what Smidt called 'qualitative changes' in thinking. It usually uses mediational tools like cultural artifacts and activities, concepts, and our social relations with others [9]. Third, *Internalization*. In order one's cognition to be developed from the social-shared activities, the learner or (pre-service) teachers process what they

have learned from the social activities within the inside of their individual thought. The external-to-internal self-thought will lead to constructing knowledge about teaching and learning. Four, *self-regulation*. Vygotsky believed that children, as an individual who learns through social interactions with peers and more experienced beings, will step by step acquire conscious control and individuality [14].

### III. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

The wide use of text types in EFL classrooms has raised ELT educators' interest to explore it. For instance, Wu and Dong [15] provided a teacher's practical guide for using written texts (genre-based approach) in English witing classes. In addition, Payaprom [12] investigated the impact of genre-based approach on english language teaching in a university level. From this study, it is revealed that it has a positive impact on students' literacy development. Furhermore, Lee [10] investigated teachers' and students' evaluation on the use of Genre-based in writing classes. Those three studies discuss the role of written texts in EFL classrooms and for EFL students. To complete those studies, Mickan [11] provided a practical guide for teaching not only written texts, but also spoken texts (i.e. text-based teaching). Similar to the studies on the written texts (Genre-based) above, text-based teaching in EFL classrooms also needs to be evaluated for better teaching. This study attempts to evaluate how the text-based teaching works in the EFL classroom context in a secondary school level.

### IV. THE STUDY

#### A. Participants

This study involved 10 student-teachers from Satya Wacana Christian University who were taking their micro teaching class. In this class, they were required to teach their own classmates. In pairs, they taught three sessions. During the three-session teaching, they were given one topic consisting of three subtopics (three communicative purposes).

#### B. Sources of data

The sources of data used are reflective journal, critical-friends-group (CFG) reflective writing, and post-observation reflective writing.

#### C. Data collection and analysis procedures

The first step of data collection is writing a reflective journal. It was written soon after the participants finished teaching. The second step is writing a post-observation reflective writing. It was done after a post-observation discussion with their peer observers and mentor teachers. The third step is writing a critical friends group (CFG) reflective writing. It was done after a ctitical friends group (CFG) discussion with their observation peers. The data in this study were analyzed using grounded theory [2].

There are several steps of analyzing data using grounded theory. First, the data exemplifying the participants' problems and strategies about the implementation of TBL were disassembled into sentences and chucks of words. Second, the

chuncks of words about problems were categorized into the three classifications of problems: problems on the part of the teacher, problems on the part of the students, and problem on the part of teaching and learning. Third, the chuncks of words about strategies were also categorized into the same classification. The aim is to develop an emerging theme.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion section here attempts to answer the three research questions: teacher-participants' views of the problems, of strategies in implementing the TBL cycle and the illustration of how such a problem and strategy reflects the sociocultural theory.
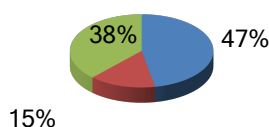
*A. Teacher-participants' views of the problems in implementing TBL*

The following finding demonstrates the finding of teachers' problems in implementing the text-based cycle from the three teaching sessions:

*Figure 2: Findings of problems in implementing TBL*

**Problems in implementing TBI**

- problems on the part of teacher
- problems on on the part of students
- problems with teaching and learning

38% 47% 15%

The findings indicate that the pre-service teachers' concerns are mostly with their problems as teachers in implementing TBL. Secondly, they concern with the problems in teaching and learning process using TBL and lastly with the students' problems in following TBL.

While the pie chart above demonstrates the numerical findings of teacher-participants' views on their problems in implementing TBL, the following part illustrates their views qualitatively. Their views are derived from their socially constructed-thought. i.e. from their own reflection and their discussion with their peer observers and mentor teacher.

*1) Teacher-participants' views on their problems (as teachers) in implementing TBL.*

In this area, the teacher-participants deal with five problems. The first problem is on their inability to manage time.

I had difficulty to manage time for all the stages (participant 1)

I explained the text (MOTT) longer then it should be, consequently, I omitted ICOT and gave them homework for LTRT (Participant 2).

As stated, their problem is in managing time in each stage of TBL. For example, spending too much time explaining texts (MOTT). As a result, they do not have time for students to present their work (ICOT), and for applying the last stage (LTRT).

The second problem is to decide what activities appropriate to each stage of TBL.

I am confused about the suitable activities for this (JCOT) stage (participant 3).

I am confused to decide what activities appropriate for each stage (Participant 4).

From the discussion with my friends, I realized that my activity for Joint construction of the text stage was more appropriate for independent construction (Participant 4).

The excerpts clearly illustrate that the participants still get confused in deciding what activities are appropriate to each stage. Even participant four finds her activities for JCOT are more appropriately used for ICOT.

The third problem deals with their inability/difficulty in choosing authentic materials, especially videos and (story) texts.

It is difficult to find a story which met my criteria: not too long, familiar, clear text structure to be analyzed (Participant 1 & 6).

I have difficulties in finding a story with an appropriate length and clear part (orientation, complication, resolution, reorientation) and right moral values as we need (Participant 7).

The problem here is to find video-stories with the appropriate length, clear text-structure, and the ones that are appropriate to students' proficiency level, and that have the same moral values as required.

The fourth problem, opposite to the problem number four, is their ignorance of fun activities. The underlying reason is because they get difficulty in creating fun activities and because they want to keep the stages on the right track (meaningful).

I was lack of fun activities... this made my teaching boring (Participant 5)

I found my teaching very serious because I did not use any games. If I used games, I am afraid my classroom activities not appropriate with the principle of each stage (participant 8).

The problem is getting confused with the use of a graphic organizer.

I am confused to give examples of how to fill the blank table first (Participant 2).

I am not sure to determine points/elements that I should focus on the table organizer till this the last teaching (In translating the theory if text structure into points) (Participant 2).

In this case, participant 2 wants the students to identify the text structure (name of an object, and the object's characteristics)

and language features (Adjectives and The Simple Present Tense). Accordingly, he provides four columns in the graphic organizers (name of a person, his/her characteristics, Adjectives, and The Simple present tense). His confusion is to explain and to give example on how the column of "Adjective" is different from the column of "characteristics."

The last problem is the emotional reaction. For example, Participant 8 and 9 feel overwhelmed since they give to many activities. For BKOF, they gave activities that were supposedly given in MOTT. Besides, they provided a different narrative story in MOTT that made them redo BKOF.

I seemed to redo the BKOF while I was introducing the second story (Participant 7 and Participant 6)

I was overwhelmed in doing the activities (Mousedeer and Crocodile and the wolf and the sheep clothing) (Participant 6).

2) *Teacher-participants' views on their students' problems in following TBL*

The first problem in this area is about videos used in their teaching. They found their students not able to get the idea from the videos. As perceived by teacher-participant 3,"Students could not get the ideas from the 2 videos and the videos made them confused."

The second problem is related to the graphic organizer. In line with the teacher's confusion on what to focus on and how to state the instructional language in the organizer, they see that their students also get difficulties in understanding and/or in filling the graphic organizer.

The students cannot complete the table well (Participant 3).

The students were confused to complete the column of "adjective" and "characteristics of an object" in the table organizer (Participant 2).

The students get confused with the task in MOTT (completing table organizer since they have to listen and at the same time completing/identifying all vocabularies, text structure &language expressions (participant 9).

as illustrated, participant 2 also gets confused to fill in the table because of unclear instructional languages "adjective" and "characteristics of object." Besides, participant 9 finds her students confused in completing the table organizer while they are listening recording or watching videos.

The third problem that the teacher-participants see to be their students' problem is students' confusion with the text structure. As conveyed by participant 6, "The students were confused with the story of the little red hen which has more than 3 complications."

The last emotional reaction from the students that the teacher-participants see is, "My students felt bored to do the same thing which was completing the graphic organizer " (participant 3). During the three teaching sessions, the teacher-participants use TBL which implement the five stages of TBL. It is very possible that they use similar tasks in order to maintain the appropriateness of the stages. For example, to maintain the

appropriateness of MOTT, the teacher applies graphic organizer all the time. As a result, the students can get bored.

3) *Teacher-participants' views on the Problems in TBL teaching and learning process*

The first problem in teaching and learning process deals with authentic materials such as video and the texts (story). The teacher participants find that the video is too childish for the students' age (participant 8) and too fast (participant 3). As for the texts (story), they found the text trascribed from the video is too long (participant 2) , and the text structure (of the story of *The Little Red Hen)* is unclear (participant 6).

The second problem deals with their stages in TBL which are somehow problematic.

I found that JCOT and ICOT are not synchronized (Participant 2)

I got to know from my friend-observers that my JCOT and ICOT were similar and did not have any differences (participant 8).

the teacher-participants find their JCOT and ICOT stages unsynchronized. In the JCOT stage, participant 2 asks the student to arrange the jumbled text about asking and giving information about things inside one's bag. In the ICOT stage, she does not discuss about the same communicative purpose as done in the JCOT, but asked the students to describe things inside one's bag. Another case is that JCOT and ICOT are similar in the way that bothe of them are group work in nature.

The third problem concerns with the use of graphic organizer. As conveyed by participant 8, "I found my table organizer is a bit complicated to complete and time consuming."From the excerpt above, the teacher-participant finds the use of graphic organizer confusing or even complicated to complete. More to that, it can be time-consuming.

The last problem is too many activities either in BKOF or in MOTT. It makes the participants run out of time. For example, participant 2 stated,"There are too many aspects to teach that I forgot to explain deeper....and the effect is I was not able to do LTRT due to running out of time."

B. *Discussion*

The findings above are classified into three areas of problems. i.e, teachers' views of their problems as teachers in implementing TBL, teachers' views of students' problems in following TBL, and teachers' views of the TBL teaching and learning process. Such a division is done to obtain more comprehensive findings from the three different angles. For example, the teacher-participants gets difficulty in choosing authentic materials such as videos and stories that suit the materials being taught and that suit the students' proficiency level. Such difficulties can be seen from the teaching and learning process in which the video is too fast, too childish for junior high school students, the text transcribed from the video is too long, and the text structure taken from the video is ambiguous. Subsequently, they find the students get confused in understanding the expressions used in the text, the text

structure and, accordingly, the content. The problems viewed from those three angels confirm Richards' observation that the use of authentic materials can be problematic since they often contain difficult language, unnecessary vocabulary, and complex language structures. Besides, they are not easy to be used for lower-level classes    [13].

The next example is about graphic/table organizer. Some teachers get confused with translating the key features of particular text into an instructional language in the table organizer. Accordingly, from their observation, the students also get confused to understand the instructional language and to complete the table, and the activity of completing the table organizer becomes complicated and time-consuming. The problems seen from these two angels correspond to the studies conducted by Chang, Sung & Chen [1] and Jiang and Grabe [7]. They agree that graphic organizer construction for instructional purposes becomes one of major concerns and needs an instructional training.

*C. Teacher-participants' views of Strategies to cope with the problems.*

Similar to the teacher-participants' views of problems in implementing TBL, their views of strategies to cope with the problems are derived from their socially constructed-thought. i.e. from their own reflection and their discussion with their peer observers and mentor teacher. Below are the strategies to cope with the problems stated in point A.

First, TBL can create a difficulty/confusion in determining what activities appropriate for each stage. To solve the problem, they believe that reframing the substance of each stage is necessary. For example, BKOF should not be too detailed. MOTT is for the details and for the explanation. JCOT and ICOT can be similar activities but the former is done together between teachers and students and ICOT is done individually. LTRT relates the text to another text or changes the mode of one text into another mode.

Second, TBL can be too much fun activities which sometimes violate the substance of the TBL stages. In another case, it can be a lack of fun activities. The strategy to cope with the problems is to integrate fun and meaningful learning. The TBL cycle should be fun but remain to keep the stages on the right track.

Third, TBL can raise confusion from learners in completing a table organizer. To cope with this problem, the teacher-participants believe that teachers need to formulate a clear instruction and provide the example of how to complete the organizer. Besides, teachers should not ask the students to complete all parts of the table at the same time they are listening to the videos or audios.

Fourth, the five stages of TBL can cause difficulties for the teacher-participats in managing time due to too many activities. The strategy to cope with the problem is to focus on one communicative purpose. Besides, the language expressions and grammatical aspects can be reduced so that it can be intensively focused on the communicative purpose.

*D. The sociocultural theory as reflected in a  participant's problems and strategies in implementing TBL*

This part is to illustrate how a participant's problem and strategy in implementing the TBL cycle is seen from the sociocultural theory. The illustration is taken from participant 4's data. Her problem is time management. She was not able to finish the whole  stages of the TBL cycle. Based on the concept of Sociocultural approach, in this case, she is at the level of 'object regulation' where she was controlled by daily practice, by the time and materials. Through the CFG discussion and post-observation discussion with peers and a mentor teacher, she got input to divide the lessons into two sessions and to reduce the number of text and activities in each stage especially in the building knowledge of the text (BKOF) stage and in the modelling of the text (MOTT) stage. In this step, she was at the level of 'other regulation'  where she was regulated by others. This is also where scaffolding is working in this social activity. Toward this object regulation, she internalized the input to their own teaching situation. She found the input to make the lesson into two sessions is good but  she could not make it since, in the next session, she has to cover the next teaching materials.  Then she thought about another input that is to make BKOF and MOTT shorter and to give more time for JCOT and ICOT. She found this more doable and effective for her teaching context and agreed with this. At the end of the internalization process, she finally decided to make BKOF and MOTT shorter and to give more time for JCOT and ICOT. This is what we call 'self-regulation'. Along with the self-regulation, she is at the level of ZPD. She is at the potential level of getting to know, to believe that she or teachers should not finish the stages quickly but can make the first two stages (BKOF and MOTT) shorter and provide more time for the last three stages.Further, she got to know that she has to manage not only the time but also the materials very well.

## VI.    CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

There are two important points highlighted from the finding and discussion. First, the sociocultural mediational tools help the EFL (pre-service) teachers to be aware, to be critical, and to be autonomous in deciding what to do to make the teaching better. By so doing, they can develop their pedagogical skill as well as their profession as a teacher. Second, in terms of their pedagogical skill in implementing text-based learning, their ability is also increased as characterized by their ability to find better strategies for implementing text-based learning.

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