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## Team-Based Learning: Its Concept, Implementation and Challenges

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### Abstract

Team-based learning is one of the teaching approaches that encourage the students to work in team. They are together to achieve the same goal in learning through several stages: pre-class preparation, individual readiness assurance test (IRAT), team readiness assurance test (TRAT), immediate feedback/clarification, clinical problem-solving activities and close. This approach has been widely used in teaching with all its advantages and limitations. Related to English teaching, TBL can be adapted and modified by teachers according to students' level and needs. Therefore, this paper discusses the concept, implementation and challenges of Team-based learning (TBL) to enrich the knowledge in teaching.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching, Team-Based Learning (TBL), Individual Readiness Assurance Test (IRAT), Team Readiness Assurance Test (TRAT)

### Introduction

Learning new teaching methods is an essential part of any teacher's curriculum. Until now, various methods have been implemented to improve the quality of education especially in learning English from traditional teaching method to modern teaching method. The traditional teaching methods are like spoon-feeding because the students just receive knowledge from their teacher as a knowledge dispenser (Kareem, 2021). Traditional teaching methods promote teacher-centered rather than student-centered. Consequently, the students do not feel eager to learn so that they are lack of understanding and retention of knowledge.

To be active during learning process is not an easy task. Some students cannot do it individually. They need to be helped by their partner or their team. The benefit working in team is students can learn to inquire, share ideas, clarify differences, problem-solve, and construct new understandings (Hammar Chiriatic, 2014). There are working together in learning and celebrate their achievement together (Marzano, 2001). Therefore, working in team is considered as the best way to stimulate student-centred especially in English language teaching. In fact, the students prefer to do all these activities in group rather than individually. They gain knowledge step by step by collaborating and co-operating each other within a group.

The current approaches that boost students to work in team are Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Task-Based Learning (TBL), Flipped Learning and Team-Based Learning (TBL). In TBL, most of the class time is used for group work. The lesson material is provided by the teacher and discussed by the students personally before they come to the classroom and involved in group. The students' readiness is going to be evaluated individually and in team. In this approach, teachers still play an important role, in which they act as facilitators and also advisors.

This paper consists of three main parts. First is the concept of TBL including definitions, stages, and principles of TBL. Second is the implementation of TBL in teaching English. The last part is the challenges of TBL and conclusions to help the readers understand the significance of the study after they have finished reading the paper.

## What is Team-Based Learning (TBL)?

Team-Based Learning (TBL) was originally designed by Professor Larry Michaelsen during the 1980s, in the United States of America, for use in business schools. Michaelsen developed TBL in response to increasing class sizes, and his concern about the effectiveness of learning from lectures to large groups. Later, this approach has been widely used to university students especially in medical education. TBL has gained popularity in medical and healthcare education as a resource efficient, student-centred teaching pedagogy, sometimes introduced as an alternative to Problem-Based Learning (PBL) (Burgess et al., 2020). This approach is recommended for the the large classes without requiring a large number of instructors.

There are many definitions provided by the experts related to Team-Based Learning (TBL) as follow:

- TBL as “a pedagogical approach that promotes collaborative learning and student interaction and engagement with each other and with the content of the course”. (Kareem, 2021)
- TBL is “a highly structured collaborative learning strategy that retains the educational powers of PBL in a more resource-friendly way”. (Nawabi et al., 2021)
- TBL is “an active form of learning that not only encourages individual effort but also team involvement to learn in an academic setting”. (Bengü, 2019)
- TBL is “a form of collaborative learning that consists of strategically formed permanent teams, readiness assurance tests (RATs), application activities and peer evaluations”. (Zulkifli et al., 2019)

From the definitions above, it can be summarized that Team-based Learning is collaborative learning teaching strategy designed around units of instruction, known as “modules,” that are taught in a three-step cycle: preparation, in-class readiness assurance testing, and application-focused exercise.

## Stages of TBL

The structured format of TBL provides opportunities to apply and build on conceptual knowledge through a series of steps involving preparation, readiness assurance testing, feedback and the application of knowledge through clinical problem solving activities. TBL is conducted through the specific steps, including pre-class preparation, readiness assurance testing, problem-solving activities, and immediate feedback (Burgess et al., 2020). Like other concepts, the TBL methodology also requires tutors/teachers and students to follow steps that are relevant to the learning process.

There are three main stages of TBL (Bengü, 2019):

### 1. Pre-TBL session

- Grouping

The teacher has to make sure the learning happened within diversity team. Therefore, the heterogeneous groups are important by considering the students' ability. They are coached by the teacher. Also, the group is the same for every week.

- Assigned reading

The students are provided by material and assignment related to the topic a week before come to the classroom. The purpose is to help students become acquainted with the learning objectives and key concepts. Understanding the material is very important to ensure all the team members becomes responsible with their group . Of course, the material must be suitable with the students' level. That is teacher's role to encourage the accountability of the students.

### 2. TBL session

- Individual readiness assurance test (IRAT)

The test related to the prior material is expected to be answered before they involve in team. Student's accountability is evaluated in the IRAT tests (Kareem, 2021). Usually,

the form of the test is simple in multiple choice setting. Some teachers conduct the test via online, others use paper-based. Fifteen minutes are enough to make sure the students fulfill the answers.

- Team readiness assurance test (TRAT)  
Within the group, they discuss the best answer for each question. Sometimes, they might have different arguments. In that case, it is teacher's role to make their students reach the same agreement. After that, one scratch-able answer sheet is distributed for each group to know whether the answer is correct or not. Usually, the option consists of a mark or star to indicate the true answer.
- Written appeals  
Any questions that are on the test or that were missed can be appealed by students.
- Feedback  
The oral feedback is given by the teacher to the team. He checks the group answers one by one, and gives immediate feedback for the incorrect answer. The aim is to make sure the students have the same view about the topic. The option card marked A, B, C or D can be used to get the answers simultaneously from each group because it is easy for everyone to see.

### 3. TBL application session

- Teamwork in the classroom  
The same assignment or case study is delivered to each group to be solved. The students involve in group discussion. The task must be connected to the students' critical thinking.
- Reporting  
The students make the report in team. Later, the group presents the result of the discussion sequentially or simultaneously. If possible, the teacher can give immediate feedback or send it via email.
- Peer evaluation  
The teams are encouraged to evaluate the teammates' performance at the end of the session.

## Key Components of TBL

The four components of team-based learning are very important to make the process of learning happened. (Burgess et al., 2020):

- Carefully formed and managed teams  
Teacher should be carefully to form and manage the members of each team so that each group has diverse mix students. They stay and work together in the group as long as possible to increase group dynamics, trust and diversity of resources within the group, continuity of learning and cohesiveness of teams.
- Frequent and timely feedback  
The immediate feedback is given by the teacher to the students after completing IRAT and TRAT phase. Teacher clarifies the incorrect answer so that the same view and concept of the topic can be established. Teacher recognizes the areas where students need further instruction, pushes them with follow-up inquiries, and encourages critical thinking. Knowledge acquisition, retention, and team development all depend on feedback.
- Problem solving  
The 4S' of problem-based learning should always be applied in TBL (1) activities involve a **significant problem** that is meaningful and relevant to students, (2) all teams work on the **same problem**, (3) students solve the problem by making a **specific choice**, and (4) teams **simultaneously report** their choices (Lewis & Estis, 2020).
- Student peer evaluation

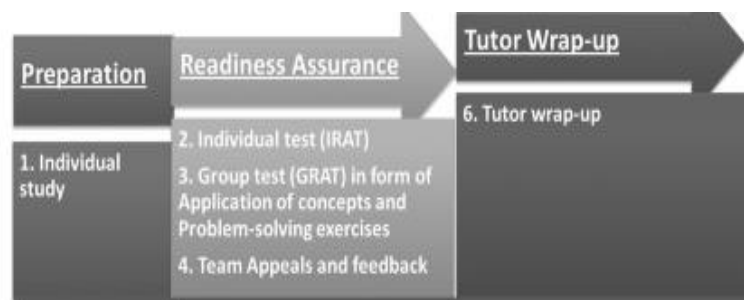
Peer evaluation is one part of TBL that is significant to improve students' professionalism. Other students can be evaluated in quantitative and qualitative way. It should be noted that peer evaluation may not be suitable as a means of summative assessment, but may provide a useful means of formative feedback to students. It also encourages students' accountability.

### Implementation of TBL in Teaching English

The demand of the English curriculum today is to make students gain their own knowledge within teacher's guidance. They must be active and participate in the process of learning through several approaches and strategies. The students involve in the small group discussion and peers. In educational settings, the main objective of group work is to encourage learning (Hammar Chiriatic, 2014). Team-based learning is really helpful to make students work in team in acquiring their own knowledge.

Since TBL has been widely used outside of English field, it is possible to be applied in teaching English. Like other concepts, Team-based learning requires tutors/teachers and students to implement the main steps of TBL even though it can be adapted and modified depend on students' ability and needs. Also, it can be combined with other pedagogical approach like Problem-based learning (PBL) and Project-based learning (PjBL). Yet, the main concept of TBL in which learning team in TBL must be permanent cannot be eliminated because they are working together for an entire semester (Samad et al., 2014). This concept distinguishes TBL from other popular educational approach.

The implement of modified TBL strategy (Figure 1) in teaching English can be described as follow (Inuwa et al., 2012):



**Figure 1. The Implementation of Modified TBL Strategy**

- **Preparation**  
In this step, students must have the necessary preparation for the subject before forming groups. The necessary material must be provided by English teachers in the form of assignments that may be completed both in and outside of the classroom. The contents can be movies, TV shows, books, podcasts, songs, blog posts, academic articles and any other form of assimilation of English teaching that is relevant to the students' context. The materials must be eye-catching and interesting so that the students are curious about learning the materials thoroughly. Students have responsibility to prepare and understand the material well because then they are being evaluated in readiness assurance test: individual and team. Teacher has to make sure the students do well in preparation the material outside the classroom.
- **Readiness assurance**  
There are two kinds of tests that being delivered to the students: IRAT and TRAT. The same test is done twice in different time; individual and group. The tests are usually in multiple-choice test with ten questions related to the material that they learn in the prior stages. Teacher must design the interactive and innovative tests to build student's eagerness in finishing the test seriously.
- **Tutor wrap up**  
The third stage is the most important in TBL. This is the application exercises and assignments related to the knowledge they have learned in previous stages. They involve in group discussion

and work together to solve the problem. Teacher must consider the principle of 4S's in TBL. Later, teacher and all members in group discussion evaluate and discuss the questions together. Finally, tutor wrap up can be used to encourage students to reflect on the material they have learned during the class period. This is also useful for the teacher; even if the students aren't graded, it allows the teacher to check for understanding.

### Challenges of TBL

So far, TBL approach has been widely used to the upper-level like university students in various discipline of knowledge. It is rarely applied to the lower-level such as primary, junior high school and even senior high school especially in teaching English because its' complicated processes. The following lists are some of the challenges that are summarized by the author based on the previous studies that used Team-based Learning (Samad et al., 2014), (Bengü, 2019), (Nawabi et al., 2021):

- Teacher will have to develop a greater sense of accountability among students in order for TBL to succeed. This may seem an additional burden for the teacher.
- Some students just staying without doing anything; some students rely on others and do not work hard for team. As a result, the grade for the session does not represent the effort made by individual student
- Teacher must properly plans the pre-readings, case scenarios and activities. Of course, it spends a lot of time in planning a good preparation
- Teacher has to provide timely and active feedback to students
- Students are not familiar with evaluating each other's performance and they tend to give the same grade to their peers

### Conclusion

Based on the findings, there are several conclusions that can be drawn from the previous studies about team-based learning. First, team-based learning is linked to the learner-centered. The students contribute in learning whether individual or group discussion that requires them to be active in learning. Second, team-based learning is believed as the powerful approach to help learners in learning. Teachers must consider their students' abilities to apply TBL in the classroom. It seems this approach is quite difficult to engage the students through some phases of TBL especially for beginner level. It can be implemented if TBL is modified by the teacher.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Prof. Dr. M. Zaim, M. Hum and Prof. Dr. Hermawati Syarif, M. Hum, my academic lecturers in Applied Linguistics, for their patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and useful knowledge of this project work. My grateful thanks are also extended to my friends pursuing their Master Degree of English at Universitas Negeri Padang. Finally, I wish to thank my parents, my siblings, my husband, Ahmadoni, M.A and my beloved sons, Muhammad Yazid Alfaruq and Fawwas Abil Syathibi for their support and encouragement throughout my study.

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