Exploring Mature Students' Perspectives on Task-Based Language Teaching in a Ghanaian Private University: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), a student-centered language teaching method, has emerged as an effective language teaching approach for improving the language competency levels of all students, including mature students. This study explored the perspectives of mature students who had undergone 12 weeks of TBLT at a private university. The objective was to examine the impact they had observed on their language proficiency resulting from the approach. This study was conducted to address the need for effective language instruction tailored to mature students in Ghana, where research addressing effective teaching methodologies for such groups is limited. Using a phenomenological research design, 15 participants were interviewed in-depth for the study, with five thematic areas emerging. All the students shared their language improvement experiences. Time constraints and non-participation by some students were setbacks to this approach. However, their overall impression was positive, especially regarding their lecturers and interactions during the preparatory phase. Based on the findings, it is recommended that language teachers explore the use of TBLT to improve students' language proficiency, especially the mature ones.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching approach, student-centered, mature students, language proficiency, private university, Ghana

Introduction

Post-secondary enrollment has risen to approximately 220 million students globally from 100 million in 2000 (World Bank, 2022). In Ghana, mature students, defined as those at least 25 years old upon admission, can constitute up to 25 percent of tertiary enrollment under Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) regulations. These applicants must also demonstrate relevant work experience and pass entrance exams in English, mathematics, and a general paper, typically based on the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Successful applicants undergo preparatory tutorials before admission into specific programs, ensuring they meet academic standards comparable to other admission routes.

English is currently used for teaching and learning at various educational levels in Ghana. This practice has existed for decades, and despite occasional educational reforms, English remains the predominant language of instruction. Most Ghanaians use English for official purposes and as a second language (Hartwell & Casely-Hayford, 2010). Students who desire to further their education are required to pass the English language before gaining admission to secondary and tertiary levels (Ansah & Agyeman, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2007). Researchers such as Racca and Lasaten (2016) and Martirosyan (2015) argue that there is a direct relationship between multilingualism and the critical thinking needed for academic success in subjects such as science and mathematics. The link between language proficiency and academic success emphasises the need for mature students to have English language proficiency to succeed academically, especially as they are known to be

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deficient (Adjei-Mensah, 2023; Romero et al., 2023yusif).

Problem Statement

Despite the need for mature students to acquire language proficiency, little research has been conducted on their teaching methods and their perceptions of these language teaching methods, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Further research in Ghana is significant, as it will directly impact educational outcomes and program effectiveness. In Ghana, mature students with unique linguistic and academic needs form a substantial part of higher education. Task-Based Language Teaching can potentially address these unique needs of mature students. However, due to limited research, there is no adequate understanding of how best to adapt TBLT for this group of learners. This limitation can potentially limit effective ways of improving language proficiency, which is vital to academic success. Without significant research, it may be difficult for educational institutions to apply the appropriate TBLT methodology tailored to the specific needs of mature students. This gap could lead to an underdeveloped curriculum that fails to support these needs. In Ghana, considering that the English language is the official language for teaching and learning, the research gap has the potential to affect mature students' achievements and opportunities for academic and professional growth. Expanding research will enable educators and policymakers to identify best practices in TBLT that are tailored to mature Ghanaian learners for better language learning outcomes.

Purpose Statement

This paper aims to examine mature students' perspectives on the impact of 12 weeks of TBLT lessons at a private university on their language proficiency. In the following sections, the relevant literature is reviewed, followed by the theoretical framework and research questions. The methodology used in the study is presented, followed by the results and discussion.

Conclusions are then drawn from the results and recommendations made.

Literature review

This section discusses language proficiency challenges faced by mature students in higher education. It further assesses TBLT as a solution to these challenges, with an emphasis on the importance of language proficiency and academic success.

Mature Students' Low Language Proficiency

According to Boston (2017) and Burnell (2016), the main difficulty faced by older or mature students, particularly those without secondary education, is adjusting to university-level coursework and the need to use English for reading and writing. As English is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at all levels of Education in Ghana, language proficiency is required to help students attain educational attainment. However, quite a number of these mature students struggle with academic language and their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) level is low (Adu-Yeboah & Forde, 2011; Yusif & Ofori-Abebrese, 2017). Leherr (2009) also acknowledged that they have difficulty speaking the language.

The challenges these students face are explained as the supposed gap between their basic education and university and the fact that they have been out of school for some time (Burnell, 2016). Due to the supposed gap, they find it challenging to use the language for academic purposes when they return to school. The comprehension of academic materials becomes a challenge, and students are unable to write satisfactorily. A study by Kantanis (2002) found that older students in Australian universities struggle with coherent speaking and writing. Likewise, Fragoso et al. (2013) observed that older learners transitioning to higher education encounter difficulties with academic language. Additionally, Williams (2021) highlights that proficiency in language and academic writing serves as a barrier

to success and engagement for older students at a university in Western Cape, South Africa.

Tones et al. (2009, p. 507) contend that mature students can succeed in their studies if they have pertinent and effective assistance. They lament that "research on support services to assist and promote retention has not yet been done." According to O'Carroll et al. (2017), colleges should reevaluate their teaching and learning practices to improve older students' learning experiences in higher education. They continue by saying that a more appropriate method, a student-centered learning strategy (like TBLT) that fosters a collaborative and interactive environment, rather than a teacher-centered traditional language teaching strategy, will be beneficial.

Task-Based Language Teaching as a Method to Increase Students' Language Proficiency

The methods used to teach language vary across various levels of education. Some of these methods, such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual, are described as traditional. Communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), which are considered modern (Richards & Theodore, 2014). Due to students' needs and changes in educational trends, new theories have emerged to address contemporary learning challenges, while older ones have become obsolete (Celce-Murcia, 2001). The continuous change in teaching methodologies reflects how methods revolve around adapting to students' needs to achieve effective learning outcomes.

Each method has its strengths and weaknesses, and, as a result, many language teachers advocate a combination of methods rather than adopting one as the best approach. Traditional methods, such as grammar translation, community language learning, and audiolingualism, are teacher-centered and have long influenced language instruction. In contrast, task-based language teaching (TBLT) and communicative language instruction are categorized as modern methods (Celce-Murcia,

2001; Richards & Theodore, 2014; Schunk, 2012).

According to Mozhgan (2016), task-based language teaching is a student-centered approach believed to be superior outcome-based language education methodology to traditional methods. In pairs or groups, students engage in a variety of activities to acquire knowledge (Mozhgan, 2016; Purna, 2013; Willis & Willis, 2011). Students are then required to submit a report after their tasks, either oral or written, and can also be both. Based on the feedback received, students revise their work and redo the presentation. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) state that language learners benefit from the opportunity to converse with their peers during Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) activities, as it facilitates language acquisition and improves language proficiency. Skehan (2002) argues that students better comprehend difficult learning topics when they debate them with their classmates. According to Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011), the TBLT approach gives students a natural environment in which to grow as communicators and idea sharers, thereby improving their comprehension and language learning abilities. McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) add that learning occurs through participation in relevant tasks and that language is learned through its use.

The instructional model utilized in this study is a modified version of Ellis's (2006) three-phase task-based learning technique, which includes a fourth phase (preparation phase) in addition to the pre-task, task, and post-task phases. The measures of effective teaching (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010), Curran's non-defensive learning (1972), Kolb's experiential learning (1984, 2014), and Wicking's (2010) strategies formed the basis for each phase of the language teaching methodology. The intervention included various teaching and learning techniques. These include polling, think-pair-share, task completion, jigsaw puzzles, problem-solving exercises, and opinion-sharing.

In this tailored TBLT approach, the preparatory phase involves informal interaction

between the lecturer and students before classes, aiming to make students comfortable and assess their needs. The pre-task phase introduces tasks, provides the necessary materials, and outlines task requirements. During the task phase, students collaborate in groups or pairs to plan and present their work. The post-task phase focuses on providing feedback, addressing language needs, and allowing students to revise or resubmit tasks to correct identified errors.

The numerous tasks are a strength of TBLT because they allow students to utilize the language while performing tasks. Zuniga (2016) also explained the effectiveness of TBLT by claiming that it enhances the receptive and productive aspects of language. According to Skehan (2002), students may negotiate meaning via their interactions with one another using a TBLT method, which is beneficial for their language acquisition, especially for their reading (perception) and writing (production) of language. An appropriate method for enhancing students' language learning abilities appears to allow them to utilise language to engage in task activities, which is vital in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

Furthermore, Various studies (Al Muhaimeed, 2013; Mao, 2012; Murad, 2000; Prasetyaningrum, 2018; Purna, 2013; Shabani & Ghasemi, 2014; Zuniga, 2016) have affirmed that TBLT enhances all aspects of students' language skills. Prasetyaningrum (2018) found that TBLT is beneficial for improving reading comprehension, whereas Murad (2000) noted its effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills among EFL students in Israel. Purna documented improved writing skills among senior high school students in Nepal through TBLT, and Mao (2012) emphasized its success in teaching English reading to school-age pupils.

Mozhgan (2016) found that TBLT significantly improved reading comprehension skills in first-year medical students in Iran. Al Muhaimeed (2013) compared TBLT with traditional methods, highlighting its superior impact on reading comprehension over 10 weeks. Chen

and Wang (2019) further demonstrated TBLT's benefits in an intensive reading course, enhancing intrinsic motivation, self-improvement, interactive communication, and self-determination among students. These studies underscore TBLT's effectiveness in education.

Most TBLT research has been conducted with regular students and in contexts in which English is not a native language. What motivated this research is the uncertainty about how efficiently TBLT can be used to improve the language proficiency of mature students who use English as their second language.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the constructivist theory relying on key contributors such as John Dewey (1859–1952), Jean Piaget (1896–1980), Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896–1943), and Jerome Seymour Bruner (1915–2016). The theory was chosen because it emphasizes that knowledge is built through interactions with one's environment or surroundings, as supported by Bada (2015) and Bruning et al. (2004). Constructivism postulates that learning involves building on existing knowledge to incorporate new ideas. This theory is relevant for mature students who come to the classroom with valuable experience from work, previous education, and life in general. They can connect new concepts with their previous knowledge. By applying constructivist principles, this study investigates how mature students apply their existing knowledge to improve their language proficiency through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), providing insights into how their unique learning needs can be addressed through effective strategies. A 12-week TBLT instructional model for mature students was developed with this theoretical framework and TBLT technique using appropriate teaching and learning activities. The research questions that guided the study were as follows.

Research Questions

1. Before the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) intervention, were mature

students familiar with this teaching methodology?

2. What benefits have mature students observed from the TBLT intervention program?

3. What challenges have mature students observed with the application of TBLT?

4. What are the impressions of mature students about their overall experience with TBLT?

5. What do mature students think about the roles of lecturers and students in the application of the TBLT approach?

Methodology

Design

A phenomenological research design was employed to explore the perceptions and opinions of mature students on TBLT. Phenomenology is based on the work of Husserl and Heidegger, who focus on understanding participants' experiences through detailed narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). This approach involves examining the backgrounds and learning experiences of mature students. Phenomenology is particularly suited for this study, as it explores mature students' perspectives and experiences with TBLT. The research reveals their diverse opinions and educational outcomes (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Michael et al., 2019). By focusing on individual perceptions and experiences, this design offers deeper insight into how mature students engage with TBLT and its impact on their language proficiency. It is important to highlight that this paper is part of a larger research project that employed a mixed methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data methodologies.

Setting

The Setting, according to Ranjit (2019), is a description of the community, company, and department where the study will be conducted. This study was conducted at a private university in Ghana. The university is chartered, which means that it has the credentials to run and award its diplomas and degrees. Twelve weeks of teaching and learning (intervention) took place in the lecture room. The interviews were conducted on the university campus at the researcher's office.

Data collection

In-person data collection occurred at the researcher after the twelve-week intervention for mature students. The interviews were conducted one-on-one. The sessions were completed in two weeks. Students who were unable to attend in-person interviews were allowed to participate by phone. The interview questions were semi-structured, allowing follow-up questions to be posed as needed during the interviews.

Population

The study population consisted of 21 mature first-year students enrolled at a private university in Ghana, all of whom were required to take an academic writing course. These students received instruction through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The participants in this study were selected from this cohort.

Sampling

The study employed a heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling method, in which students with different backgrounds (levels of performance and sex) who had undergone the intervention were purposely selected. A total of 15 students were interviewed. Five were selected from those who performed highly after the intervention. Five were from those who performed at an average level and five were from those who performed poorly. The reason for the selection was to have a balanced view of the three categories of students and gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.

Data analysis

The interview sessions were audio-recorded while the researcher took notes. The recorded data were then transcribed for analysis. Through thematic coding, patterns were identified and

analyzed from the interviews in line with the research questions. Questions that guided the interviews related to prior knowledge, the benefits and challenges the students had observed with the approach, how they think those challenges could be addressed, their impression of the lecturer and their peers' role, and their overall thoughts about TBLT, among others.

Various strategies have been employed to guarantee the trustworthiness of this study. Participants were allowed to confirm the correctness of the shared interpretations to verify the accuracy of their perspectives. Because of the 12 weeks of teaching, there were prolonged engagements to build trust and openness. Second, a detailed description of the context (procedures, settings, participants, methodology) was provided to address transferability. Third, dependability was ensured by retaining detailed data collection records to allow others to understand how the study was conducted. Discussions with colleagues in the language field were conducted to review the interview questions and the analysis. Finally, to ensure confirmability, a researcher's log was maintained to record decisions, thoughts, and possible biases that could affect the findings. The responses from the participants were compared to validate the themes within the interview data. The validation helped check consistency across perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

This study is part of a PhD research project at the University of Pretoria, approved by the University's Ethics Committee (Reference No. 18203800 HUM20190104). The research adhered strictly to ethical guidelines and policies. Permission was obtained from the participating institution and students. Informed consent letters were provided detailing the research and voluntary participation, with the option to withdraw at any time. The participants consented to sign these letters. To ensure confidentiality, anonymity was ensured through pseudonyms.

Results and Discussions

Based on the research questions and interviews conducted, five themes emerged, which were categorized into the students' knowledge before the intervention, the advantages observed, the disadvantages observed, the overall impression, and the role of the teacher and students. The names assigned to the interviewees are pseudonyms, together with their gender male (M), female (F), and level of performance [high (H), average (A), and low (L)].

Theme 1: Prior knowledge before intervention

None of the 15 participants was familiar with the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach before the intervention. Although they recognized the existence of several language teaching methods, TBLT was completely unknown to them. This lack of awareness among learners is a prevalent phenomenon; Ellis (2003) discussed the challenges of introducing TBLT due to its unfamiliarity with both learners and educators. Similarly, Jeon and Hahn (2006) noted limited familiarity with TBLT among educators, emphasizing its novelty in educational settings. Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasized the difficulties in implementing new approaches, such as TBLT, particularly when learners are accustomed to traditional teaching methods. Littlewood (2007) also highlighted the prevalence of TBLT's lack of awareness across different educational contexts where conventional methods are more commonly used. It is not surprising that the students who were interviewed had no prior knowledge of TBLT.

Theme 2: Benefits observed with the approach

Although initially unfamiliar with TBLT, 15 respondents reported positive outcomes after 12 weeks. They reported improvements in their language skills, critical thinking, and writing, with gains noted in essay writing, punctuation, and grammar. High achievers also enhance their research and communication abilities. Despite initial anxiety, all students had positive expe-

riences, with low performers noting better writing and critical thinking and average performers benefiting from peer learning. The following are some positive responses:

"It was difficult for me to express myself in the other classes, but TBLT has helped me to express myself and it has also helped me to do more research. I now know how to effectively answer questions." (Boateng MH)

"I like the fact that I was able to express myself without being afraid of making mistakes. I was able to get other views from my fellow students. This was very helpful." (Alhassan MA)

"The series of assignments we did weekly were helpful. They made me think critically." (Kokuvi MH)

"I can see that I have improved in my writing. I have also improved the way l use punctuation marks and in my essay writing. (Akorfa FH)

"I can see an improvement in my writing and speaking" (Addai ML)

Although the three levels of participants shared different opinions, they all appreciated that the TBLT approach was helpful in their language development. In answering research question two, which aimed to determine the benefits students perceived in the TBLT intervention program, the findings imply that the cohort of mature students was pleased with the intervention. Their responses confirmed researchers such as Dragobuzhda (2020) and Yildiz and Senel (2017), who pointed out that TBLT Learning activities produce results that are more meaningful than what would have been possible in a typical classroom. The reason is that when students learn by relating to real-world activities, as done in TBLT, they develop language structures quickly. They use language in context and build the structures that are needed in their daily activities, such as seeking permission from work or school, planning a retreat for the family or work, and guiding fellow students on how to go through their registration process among other things. The responses were also in congruent with Zuniga (2016), Mozhgan (2016), Mao (2012), Malmir et al. (2011) and Al Muhaimeed (2013) among other researchers who confirm that the TBLT approach improves the language skills of students who are instructed through that method.

Theme 3: Disadvantages of the approach

Participants from all performance levels (High, Average, Low) identified time constraints as a significant drawback of TBLT. Akorfa FH, a high performer, mentioned the difficulty of balancing work and school, which made it difficult to attend all lectures. Low-performing students noted more challenges than their peers, such as difficulty in assignments and getting fellow students to participate in group tasks.

"The weekly tasks were too many and some were tough." (Pokuaa FL)

Not every member participated in the tasks assigned to us. (Yao ML)

We needed more time to complete the assigned tasks but we didn't have enough time. It would have been more interesting to have had more time (Addai ML)

"If you are the type who doesn't like reading. It will be difficult (Ofosu MA)

We had a lot of things to discuss during tasks, but we could not do so because of time difficulties. (Alhassan MA)

It was difficult to get a suitable time for take-home assignments. Combining work, school and other family responsibilities was difficult (Akorfa FH)

As evident from the responses, one major challenge shared by most respondents was time allocation, which they felt was inadequate for the tasks. They also bemoaned about the lack of participation from some of their peers, and poor performers lamented the challenges they had combined with other courses. The characteristic of TBLT is the prevalence of tasks, and students typically face time constraints on their completion of tasks. These assignments exposed the students to the language and helped them become more proficient because they were based on real-world events. While TBLT's reliance on real-world tasks is effective in improving language proficiency, it can also result in time constraints and increased demands on students, as seen in various educational settings (Hasnain & Halder, 2023;

Hima et al., 2021; Lam et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, the overall perception of TBLT was positive, with respondents acknowledging significant improvements in their language skills and expressing a desire for future sessions using this approach, similar to other studies (Jackson, 2022; Lam et al., 2021).

Theme 4: Overall impression of the TBLT method of teaching

All respondents (low, average, and high) provided positive feedback on the intervention, hoping for future use. They reported improved language skills through frequent tasks and appreciated the instructor's simple language. Several students valued group and pair work for their language growth. The following are some of their comments:

> *"We were under more pressure to perform, and because you treated us like beginners, you used simple English to ease our comprehension." (Addai ML)*

> *"it is a good teaching and learning method because it increased my confidence." (Mawena FA)*

> *"The fact that there was somebody to always discuss with was inspiring. There was no fear to come to class which was really good." (Ebo MH)*

> *"When I signed up for the English course, I was a little anxious, but working with my other classmates made it simple for me. It should be like that in all classrooms." (Elorm MA)*

The responses indicate that students viewed Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) favorably because of several key aspects of the approach. Firstly, the students appreciated the emphasis on active participation as it engaged them in the learning process through various tasks and assignments. This aligns with Ellis's (2019) observation that tasks can immerse learners in language use and promote practical and meaningful learning experiences. East (2017) also highlighted that TBLT's focus on real-world tasks enhances students' engagement and language proficiency. Students valued the use of simplified language when necessary, accommodating their varying proficiency levels and helping to mitigate potential comprehension difficulties. This characteristic of TBLT ensures that students can quickly learn and focus on their language acquisition with a simplified language rather than struggling with a complex language (Ellis, 2000).

Secondly, the students positively commended the frequent task activities of TBLT. They indicated that the numerous tasks enabled them to use the English language extensively in task-completing activities and learn how to use it in context. This assertion is supported by AhmAdiAn, (2016) and Kim et al. (2017), who observed that their perceptions improve over time as students become more familiar with the TBLT approach. This task-oriented approach enables learners to use language in real-life situations, thereby improving their interactions and proficiency. Additionally, these classroom engagements facilitated by TBLT build student confidence. A conducive and collaborative learning environment encourages students to actively participate in activities without anxiety, which is consistent with the findings of Swan (2005) and further supported by Kim et al. (2017). They observed that students appreciated the collaborative nature of TBLT. Overall, these essential elements of TBLT created a positive learning environment, increased confidence in the English Language, and improved language proficiency among mature students, thus emphasizing the effectiveness of TBLT.

Theme 5: Opinions on the role of lecturers and students in the application of the TBLT approach?

All 15 participants admired the lecturer's performance during the twelve-week intervention. They appreciated frequent encouragement, patient explanations, and the recognition of their academic and personal challenges. Some valued preparatory interactions and effective handling of inquiries, while one average-performing participant was grateful for being motivated to work harder.

> *"You were giving us pressure for results, and l loved it. Your*

encouragements and dead-lines also kept us on our toes which was good." (Alhassan MA)

Other examples are shared below:

"you were very patient with us and you took your time to answer our question. I am forever grateful." (Akorfa FH)

"...the bit about coming to class early and having those informal communications made it easy for some of us to always wish to be in class" (Allotey ML)

"You really had time for us. Even though you are aware of how many questions we adult learners sometimes have, you still managed to keep up." (Nakki FH)

"you gave us frequent feedback and that was very helpful. Your encouragement guided us to meet our deadlines without much difficulty "(Ofosu MA)

Perspectives on student engagement varied: two high achievers noted some peers' lack of participation in group tasks, while five students (two high, two average, and one low) felt that their peers were fully engaged. One low-performing student mentioned learning from peers.

"My fellow students were very much involved. There were more interactions during our task assignments" (Ofosu MA)

"I was able to acquire a lot of ideas from my colleagues during discussions, which reduced my tension, and I also gained a lot of vocabulary from my pals. (Allotey ML)

"Particularly with the take-home assignments, not all of my friends were always eager to participate. Sometimes, it took numerous calls before they responded." (Ebo MH)

My colleagues helped me greatly. They were ready to help you understand a concept if you had any challenge" (Elorm MA)

On their perception of their teacher's role, participants responded that they were impressed. According to them, the lecturer put pressure on them to complete their tasks, an impression shared by both average and low performers. Both groups stated that this kept them on their

toes and was ultimately beneficial. The teachers' commitment to spending time answering questions and providing quick responses also received good marks from both groups. Timely feedback is crucial for adult learning, providing immediate insights that enhance understanding and drive significant improvements in learning outcomes (Hodgson et al., 2020). It helps adults adjust their learning strategies and stay motivated by promptly addressing errors and promoting self-regulation (Sachdeva, 1996).

Similarly, Sogunro (2015) attests that timely feedback promotes adult learning, and this focused TBLT for mature students was created by using feedback as a key element of the post-task phase. The low performers also mentioned the lecturer's concern for their welfare and academic advancement. Most of the interactions between the teacher and students took place during the preparatory phase, the additional phase introduced in this tailored TBLT. The focus of these interactions was the lecturer's efforts to pinpoint the needs and inclinations of the students so that they could be led in the right direction for improved outcomes. According to Baharudin et al. (2013), these interactions also help lower the anxiety that mature students often experience.

The high performers expressed concerns about some peers' lack of participation in tasks, contrasting with average and low performers, who found most classmates actively engaged and beneficial for mutual learning. Collaborative tasks in TBLT foster a supportive environment in which students work together towards shared goals, thus enhancing confidence and enthusiasm (Motlagh et al., 2014; Singh & Agrawal, 2011). Researchers have emphasized that cooperative learning is vital for problem-solving skills and subject learning, which are needed in modern education (Alkhannani, 2021; Häkkinen et al., 2017; Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Conclusions

This paper examined the views and experiences of mature students about the Task-Based

Language Teaching (TBLT) method. The research identifies insights from the interview responses, addresses challenges observed with the approach, and provides recommendations for improving TBLT implementation to enhance language learning outcomes. Based on the key findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. **Lesson Timeline for TBLT:** For an effective learning experience that will lead to improved language proficiency, adequate time is needed to implement TBLT (Ellis, 2019). Sufficient time is required for each phase of the task cycle, especially for mature students. Adequate time allocation facilitates deeper engagement with tasks and allows mature students to improve their language skills progressively. Therefore, extending the duration of TBLT lessons is beneficial in contexts where learners, such as adult students, require additional time to improve their language proficiency.

2. **Significance of informal engagements and student participation:** Engaging students informally in the preparatory phase before the lesson begins promotes learner engagement and improves overall learning outcomes, especially for mature students. These engagements build trust and comfort, which are needed for adult learners who may combine education with other responsibilities. In the context of this tailored TBLT, informal engagements transition students into task activities with ease, fostering collaboration and participation. As a result, mature students gain confidence, which improves their language proficiency and academic success (Adjei-Mensah, 2022; Häkkinen et al., 2017; Hmelo-Silver, 2004). This insight emphasises the need for such informal engagement.

3. **Timely Feedback**: Students can correct their errors when timely feedback is provided on tasks that improve language skills (Hodgson et al., 2020; Sachdeva, 1996). This approach is essential for mature students who require specialized assistance to adjust to their academic needs. Prompt and regular feedback is, therefore, vital in bridging knowledge gaps that promote learning.

4. **Building on Prior Experience**: Identifying and building on mature students' previous knowledge improves engagement, which leads to deeper understanding and con-

tributes to language learning (Alkhannani, 2021). Recognizing the unique experiences and prior knowledge of mature students, as emphasized in this paper, creates a student-centered learning environment that can foster a deeper understanding.

5. **Importance of Motivation**: Identifying the individual needs of mature students and addressing them is essential for academic success, as it improves their participation, which is needed for enhanced language proficiency. (Fareed et al., 2016). Adopting a personalized approach to motivation, as highlighted in the paper, influences mature students' self-efficacy and confidence, and improves their engagement to achieve their full potential.

Limitations of the Study

In conducting this research, it is important to note the limitations encountered in the study.

First, the participants may have provided responses that they perceived as desirable rather than candid.

There is also a contextual limitation. Since the study was conducted in a Ghanaian educational context, the findings may not apply directly to regions with different educational systems.

Another limitation could be the limited focus on a specific language. The focus of the study was on language proficiency in general and may have overlooked the investigation of specific language skills, such as speaking, reading, and listening.

Despite these limitations, the results remain valid and provide valuable insight into the perceptions of mature students regarding the application of TBLT, contributing meaningfully to the existing literature.

Recommendations

First, owing to the extensive task activities and lesson phases, time allocation was discovered from the interviews to be a major challenge in the implementation of TBLT. Flexible time allocation is therefore recommended, particularly for language courses that use TBLT to enhance their

effectiveness. Research by Ozowuba (2018), Racca and Lasaten (2016), and Martirosyan (2015) underscores the link between language proficiency and academic success, emphasizing the importance of enhancing language skills for all students, particularly freshers.

Second, from the interview, it was clear that the students appreciated the informal interactions that took place before the lessons began and thus the preparatory phase. It has been demonstrated that the preparatory stage, which was presented in this study, is essential for instruction. This is the stage in which the lecturer and students are engaged in informal interactions to set the stage for the start of academic work. Consequently, lecturers are advised to incorporate the preparation phase into their lesson plans. Even though lecturers constantly interact with students, including the phase in the lesson plan, this will enable appropriate planning and execution, creating a more productive learning environment. Third, it is recommended that language teachers explain to their students the need for engagement and active classroom participation as they perform their tasks. Students must know how assignments help them learn and improve their language skills. During the interview session, the students mentioned that although the weekly tasks were tough, with the lecturer's support and collaborative support from their peers, they were successful. Despite their challenges, mature students have many experiences and learning from one another is a good way to acquire language proficiency.

Fourth, prompt feedback is necessary for language development. Language instructors should regularly provide learners with timely feedback. The participants noted that timely and frequent feedback helped them improve their language skills. When lecturers give feedback, students can work on their errors and make the necessary corrections. With this, errors are reduced to the minimum to improve proficiency.

Again, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers should be aware that older students, in particular, bring life experiences to the classroom

and are not "empty" in terms of their L2. Thus, teachers should provide exercises that encourage these skills in their students' language proficiency.

Researchers have also demonstrated the significance of motivation in academic success (Fareed et al., 2016; Harris, 2018; Herraiz-Martnez, 2018). The findings showed that the achievement of mature students was significantly influenced by motivation. Therefore, it is recommended that language teachers, especially those who work with mature students, encourage them. The needs and difficulties of the students should be identified by lecturers, who should then address such issues. This greatly aids adult learners in staying motivated to complete their academic tasks.

For further research, it is recommended that investigations into the long-term effects of TBLT on mature students be conducted. Further research into the application of TBLT to other students, apart from mature ones, could be investigated. It would be interesting to understand the impact on younger students in Ghana. A comparative study between TBLT and other instructional methods can be conducted to determine whether TBLT will outperform other methods. An investigation into the impact of the TBLT approach at various levels of education, such as basic, junior high, and senior high will be worth researching. Finally, future research could focus on teachers' perceptions, experiences, and challenges in implementing TBLT.

Conflicts of Interest: None

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