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# Text-Based Language Teaching in the New-Normal Era to Achieve Communicative Competence: Challenges for EFL Teachers (A Reflection)

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#### Abstract

#### Background:

To live in this communicative era, people need to have communicative competence. The main aim of ELT is to enable the students to communicate or to produce a text. Thus, EFL teaching needs to facilitate them to achieve communicative competence so that they can participate actively in their communities. EFL teachers can utilize text-based teaching to realize this. Text-based teaching involves the use of texts, which are context bases for achieving communicative competence. This paper is a reflection, describing the teachers' common problems in implementing text-based teaching, especially under the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Methodology:

This study is qualitative survey research to gain in-depth information about the topic of the study. The goal of this study is to describe the teachers' perception of Text-Based Approach in ELT and to describe their challenges to implement text-based online teaching. Open-ended survey questions were delivered to 15 research participants. To get a comprehensive understanding of the research participants' opinions, the researchers followed up their answers with an interview via a telephone call.

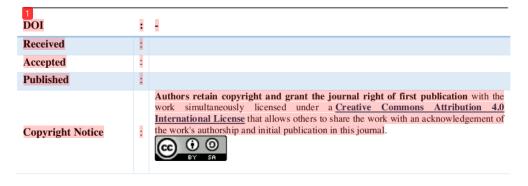
#### Findings:

The questionnaire, interview, and teachers' self-written reflection revealed the teachers' common problems in implementing text-based teaching, i.e. in selecting texts, in adapting or in modifying texts, in designing tasks, in overcoming students' boredom, besides the problems of online teaching.

#### Conclusion:

The main root of the problems is the teachers' lack of knowledge of text-based approach. Thus, updating the teachers' knowledge can be one of the solutions to the problems.

Keywords: Text-based teaching; communicative competence; online teaching



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

We live in the world of texts, surrounded with texts everywhere, spoken, written, offline, online. It is language in the form of texts that people produce for communication in their real life, not as isolated sentences (Thornbury, 2005). In communicating, communicators exchange meaning. When people communicate with each other meaningfully, they create a text together. And when people write meaningfully for others, they also create a text (Agustien, 2020).

The statements above imply that as EFL teachers we should expose our students to English texts and facilitate them to engage with English texts because the language in the form of texts that actually happens for communication. We call this strategy as text-based teaching. Yet, in practice, the implementation of text-based teaching in Indonesia has raised various problems (Triastuti, 2011). The problems are getting bigger since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers' knowledge of what and how to implement it can minimize the problems.

The implementation of text-based teaching has started since the implementation of a competence-based curriculum in 2004. This is the current trend in EFL teaching and learning (Arimbawa, 2012). As EFL teachers, we need to apply linguistics to language education. The current linguistics is systemic functional linguistics. Text-based teaching derives from systemic functional linguistics. It emphasizes teaching and learning at the text level because communication happens at the discourse level, at the text level. It is discourse or text competence the ultimate goal of language teaching and learning.

De Jager affirms the importance of communicative competence for language learners. He suggests that besides developing the four language skills, language users need to go further to gain communicative competence, i.e. linguistic and pragmatic competence referring to use language effectively in any given context (De Jager, 2012). Communicative competence not only involves grammatical competence but also contextual or sociolinguistic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Communicative competence includes the knowledge of the language and the ability to understand and use the language appropriately for communication purposes (Mart, 2018). It refers to the capability of making correct utterances and utilizing them appropriately (Mart, 2018). Thus, communicative competence refers to the ability to know when, how, and what to say to whom.

Celce-Murcia proposes a model of communicative competence consisting of six types of competence: discourse competence, linguistic competence, formulaic competence, interactional competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence (Celce-

Murcia, 2008). By mastering different types of texts, EFL learners will develop their communicative competence because to communicate means to be able to use various kinds of spoken and written texts in the specific context of their use (Arimbawa, 2012).

The term text-based teaching used in this paper refers to teaching using genre/ text-based approach. Genre-based approach (GBA) derives from Halliday's theory of language as social semiotic, i.e. language as a resource for making meaning (Hasan, 2014). The genre theorists opine that teachers are responsible to intervene in the learning process and they should teach how genres are typically constructed (Emilia, 2005).

GBA has pedagogical and political aims. It is a pedagogical project motivated by a political project, i.e. to teach and facilitate someone to have skills and knowledge enabling him/ her to participate effectively in a literate, technologically developed society, to be successful in school, and beyond (Kress, 1993) (B. M. Derewianka, 2015). It encourages reading and writing various text types or genres (Feez & Joyce, 1998)

Scholars offer models of GBA stages such as models of Callaghan, Knapp, and Noble, Callaghan and Rothery, Derewianka, Disadvantaged School Program, Feez and Joyce, Gibbons. Here, the five-stage model by Feez & Joyce is figured out.

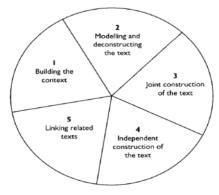


Figure 1: Text-based teaching cycle (Feez & Joyce, 1998)

This paper is a reflective paper based on teachers' belief in text-based teaching to achieve communicative competence and teachers' problems and challenges in implementing text-based teaching, especially in this COVID-19 pandemic. This paper clarified the following problems: (1) How do the teachers perceive text-based language teaching to enhance students' communicative competence? 2) What are the common problems faced by the teachers in implementing text-based teaching? (3) What are the common problems faced by the teachers in implementing text-based online teaching? Thus, this current study aims at knowing the teachers' perceptions and their problems in implementing text-based teaching.

This paper is significant to open our horizon concerning text-based teaching and to give contribution for the better implementation.

Researchers have carried out studies on the implementation of text-based teaching. Here are some previous studies. A study conducted at Post Graduate Program of State Islamic Institute of Tulungagung revealed that text-based learning proved to stimulate a joyful learning environment, to activate the students' participation, and to improve the students' language skills as their expectation (Iftanti, 2017).

An experimental study at Chinese University compared the effectiveness of text-based approach and dictionary-based approach to teach vocabulary. The research showed that text-based approach was more effective than dictionary-based approach in improving the learners' mastery of new words and in retaining the time duration in the learners' memory (Qian, 2011).

Mohlabi-Tlaka conducted a mix-method study of text-based approach in South Africa. The research results revealed that text-based approach was suitable and advantageous for English education in South Africa, yet, it failed to develop learners' communicative competence. The problem was that the English teachers implemented the text-based approach without in-depth knowledge and consciousness (Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016).

The previous studies above indicate the effectiveness of text-based teaching. Yet, the implementation needs the teachers who have sufficient knowledge about it and have the awareness to implement it.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative survey research to gain in-depth information about the topic of the study. The goal of this study is to describe the teachers' perception of Text-Based Approach (TBA) in ELT and to describe their challenges to implement text-based online teaching. The research problems of this study are as follows:

- 1. How do the teachers perceive text-based language teaching to enhance students' communicative competence?
- 2. What are the common problems faced by the teachers in implementing text-based teaching?
- 3. What are the common problems faced by the teachers in implementing text-based online teaching?

To gain the answers to the research questions, open-ended survey questions are delivered to 15 research participants. The following are the open-ended survey questions:

- 1. Do you apply TBA in your ELT?
- 2. Do you believe that text-based teaching can develop the students' communication skills/ can develop the students' communicative competence?
- 3. What is your opinion about text-based teaching?
- 4. How can text-based teaching facilitate your students to develop their communication skills?
- 5. What are your students' activities in your text-based class?
- 6. What are your challenges and problems in implementing text-based teaching?
- Share your experience in implementing text-based online teaching in this COVID-19 pandemic.

Fifteen teachers became respondents of this study, 8 university teachers, 4 senior-high-school teachers, and 3 junior-high-school teachers. The researchers sent the survey questions to the research participants via email. Then, they also sent their answers via email. To get a comprehensive understanding of the research participants' opinions, the researchers followed up their answers with an interview via a telephone call. Having got sufficient data, the researchers analyzed the data qualitatively, supported with TBA theory.

#### 3. FINDINGS

The questionnaire, interview, and teachers' self-written reflection revealed the following findings:

### 3.1 The teachers' perception toward text-based language teaching.

All of the respondents have a positive attitude toward text-based teaching. Their answers to the following three survey questions revealed their belief and attitude toward TBA.

- 1. Do you apply TBA in your ELT?
- 2. Do you believe that text-based teaching can develop the students' communication skills/ can develop the students' communicative competence?
- 3. What is your opinion about text-based teaching?

All of the 15 participants answered 'yes' to the first and second survey questions. The research participants' answers to the third survey question revealed that the teachers had a good opinion, positive attitudes toward text-based teaching, and supported the implementation of text-based teaching.

### 3.2 Common problems faced by EFL teachers in implementing text-based teaching

The respondents mentioned various problems in implementing text-based teaching which can be summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Problems in implementing text-based teaching				
No	Problems			
1	In selecting texts			
2	In adapting, modifying texts			
3	In designing the tasks			
4	In overcoming the students' boredom			

### 3.3 EFL teachers' challenges to implementing text-based online teaching

To reveal the teachers' challenges to implementing text-based online teaching in this COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers asked them to share their experiences by writing self-written reflections. The data showed that all of them have conducted synchronous and asynchronous learning modes. The synchronous learning mode was carried out via virtual classrooms, chatbox, instant messaging. The asynchronous learning mode was carried out by (1) asking the students to learn the learning materials uploaded by the teachers, e.g. ppt., videos, (2) asking the students to do assignments, (3) asking the students to enrich their understanding by browsing from other sources.

The respondents mentioned various problems in implementing online text-based teaching which can be summarized in table 2.

Table 2. l	Problems	in	implementing	online	text-based	teaching

No	Problems
1	Students' low motivation
2	Technical problems
3	Internet connection
4	ICT literacy
5	Interaction
6	Students' lack of autonomy

### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings above will be discussed in the following sections, by interpreting and relating them with the empirical contexts, TBA theory, and the previous studies.

### 4.1 The teachers' perception toward text-based language teaching.

The teachers' positive opinion toward text-based teaching was supported by their arguments, showed by their answers to survey question 4: How can text-based teaching

facilitate your students to develop their communication skills? Here are some examples of the arguments put forward by some respondents.

#### Respondent 5:

"By only acquiring vocabulary and grammar of English, the students will not be able to communicate in English effectively. Learning English texts will make the students able to communicate in English more effectively."

### Respondent 8:

"Indonesian and English texts have a different convention. To be familiar with English text types, the students need to learn the English text types in depth. Thus, text-based teaching is suitable."

### Respondent 13:

"Teaching English genres make the students aware that there is a rule in texts. It makes them aware that the kind of text that they produce depends on the communicative purpose. Text-based teaching provides examples and conventions of text types."

The teachers' positive attitude toward text-based teaching is in line with the rationale underlying the implementation of text-based teaching: the goal of ELT, the learning outcome of text-based teaching. The main goal of ELT is to enable learners to communicate in English, both in spoken and written forms. Communicating is making meaning; it is creating a text. And it is language to make meaning that underlies text-based teaching (Eisenring, 2019).

Text-based teaching utilizes texts allowing EFL students to explore and interact with the text to comprehend the texts (Eisenring, 2019). The main goal of text-based teaching is to provide sufficient comprehensible input for the students that can facilitate them to use oral and written English (Rahman, 2013). This can help learners to build up confidence as language users.

Texts are central in text-based teaching since texts are central in the community practices (Mickan, 2017). In our daily life, we initiate and encounter various texts. Initiating and encountering texts are social acts that connect us to members of the community. We vary our texts depending on the purpose and on the situation where our texts occur (B. Derewianka, 2003).

From birth to old, people experience with text to make meaning. The separation of language elements from texts, from contexts, makes them less meaningful. This makes the EFL learner know the meaning of the individual language element, yet; when we unite them into a text, the students do not know the meaning of the overall text. Mickan confirms that the reasons underlying the implementation of text-based teaching are that it trains the students to

1) be familiar with texts, 2) make sense of texts from the beginning, 3) use language for real purpose in lessons, 4) tailor texts to class communities, 5) make meanings (Mickan, 2017).

GBA has pedagogical and political aims. It is a pedagogical project motivated by a political project, i.e. to teach and facilitate someone to have skills and knowledge enabling him/ her to participate effectively in a literate, technologically developed society, to be successful in school, and beyond (Kress, 1993) (B. M. Derewianka, 2015). Thus, literacy becomes one aspect of genre-based pedagogy.

In short, the learning outcomes of text-based teaching are: (1) students learn the language to communicate, to interact with others, to participate in social activities, (2) students learn through language, i.e. with the language they interpret the reality, (3) students learn about language, namely how the language works (Feez and Joyce, 1998) as cited in (Emilia, 2005). The learning outcome can be achieved with the proper class activities.

### 4.1.1 The class activities or tasks to achieve communicative competence

In the classroom, the students will work with texts, i.e. the lesson comprises text-rich activities. They will have experience with various texts. Mickan states that the students' activities in text-based classroom are observing texts, responding to texts, analyzing texts, composing texts (Mickan, 2017). The students' learning activities are directed to develop their language knowledge and language skills (Agustien, 2020).

The classroom activities mentioned above are done in the stages of Building the context, Modeling and deconstructing the text, Joint construction of the text, Independent construction of the text, Linking related text. All of them will bring the students to achieve communicative competence.

Exposing EFL learners to a variety type of spoken and written texts within an appropriate situation will develop their communicative competence since the achievement of communicative competence involves the mastery of different kinds of texts (Mumba & Mkandawire, 2019). Thus, EFL learners should meet with various materials for effective learning to occur. To communicate means to use different kinds of texts in a given context of use.

The alternative tasks that the EFL teacher can assign to the students are among others: unlocking texts, text analysis, finding the context of a text, producing a text based on the context provided. Unlocking difficult texts can develop EFL students' strategic competence in which they utilize a variety of text-attack strategies

(Thornbury, 2005). To learn production strategy, they can summarize or reconstruct the text with their own words.

Mickan explains that in text-based teaching there is a language-awareness activity, i.e. written/ spoken text analysis activity. Here, the students analyze the vocabulary, grammar, text properties such as cohesion, coherence, features of spoken and written texts. The teacher teaches language resources through text analysis (Mickan, 2011). This activity develops students' linguistic, formulaic, interactional, and discourse competencies.

Finding the context of a text is an important task because context influences text production and interpretation. Given a text, the students can find the context of situation, i.e. the field, tenor, mode. Given the context, the students can produce the text appropriate to the context (Thornbury, 2005). These practices of finding a context in a text, and producing a text-based on context will develop the students' sociocultural competence, used to achieve the appropriateness.

To know the learning activities the teachers implemented in their class, a survey question was asked: "What are your students' activities in your text-based class?" The teachers' answers revealed that most of the activities mentioned above have been done in their class, e.g. learning the grammar, learning the text structure and linguistic features, reading the written text model, listening to the spoken text model, constructing a text collaboratively, constructing a text independently, observe many kinds of texts, answering questions. However, only three participants asked the students to analyze the texts, to find context in a text. Their reason is that the teaching time allotment is limited.

## 4.2 Common problems faced by EFL teachers in implementing text-based teaching

All of the teachers believed that text-based teaching could facilitate their students to achieve communicative competence if the teachers implemented it properly. Mostly they opined that the EFL students' exposure and experience with text regularly would make them familiar with various English texts. The various classroom activities matched with the learning outcome facilitated the students to achieve communicative competence. However, they were aware that they sometimes even often found difficulties to realize the learning outcome into classroom activities, thus; they were unsure whether the students would achieve the learning outcome or not. The other common problems that most teachers faced were in selecting texts, in adapting or in modifying texts, in designing tasks, in overcoming students'

boredom. This finding is similar to what Mohlabi-Tlaka found in his research that the problem in implementing text-based approach was the English teacher's lacking in-depth knowledge and consciousness (Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016). The common problems faced by most teachers are clarified as follows.

### 4.2.1 In selecting texts

The main objective of teaching English is to facilitate the students to experience and reflect the richness of the English texts. This demands the teacher to select and sequence the texts for the sake of his teaching (Mickan, 2011). This means that the teacher should be creative to find relevant texts for use, to have a stock of texts. In selecting texts, the teacher should consider the learners' interests and the level of difficulty. Yet, most teachers who were interviewed felt that it was not an easy job in selecting texts. They stated that sometimes they were confused concerning which texts attracted the students, whether the texts selected were appropriate for the student's level. They were also confused about what authentic texts mean. This finding is similar to Triastuti's finding revealing three common problems, i.e. the selected texts that did not comply with the learning outcome, the misjudgment of the text complexity level, the text authenticity (Triastuti, 2011).

The learning outcome of an English lesson can be the language features, e.g. grammar, vocabulary, language comprehension, language production. Related to these learning outcomes, we have three acronyms: TALO, TAVI, TASP (text-as-linguistic-objects, text-as-vehicles-of-information, text-as-a-stimulus-for-production). TALO texts could be authentic texts 'adapted' to contain or highlight certain features of the language, TAVI and TASP texts emphasize authenticity, to offer the best training for real-life text processing (Thornbury, 2005) (Marina & Marmienė, 2006). Texts coming from genuine sources have many advantages since they will capture the learners' interest. Then, to reduce the text difficulty, a teacher needs to have text-adaptation strategies (Thornbury, 2005).

The teacher should expose the students to a variety of text types. Richards (2006) recommends sources of texts that the teacher can utilize, e.g. procedures in carrying out a task, explaining how and why things occur, reviews, arguments, debates, magazine articles, biographies, autobiographies, stories, fables, dialogs, formal/informal letters, postcards, e-mail, notices (Richards, 2005).

### 4.2.2 In adapting, modifying the texts

The explanation in the previous section indicates that the learners meet with various texts for various purposes, TALO, TAVI, and TASP. They will also meet with texts with various levels of authenticity, simplified, semi-authentic, and authentic texts. And the teacher should have text-adaptation strategies. Based on the data, adapting or modifying texts is also problematic for EFL teachers.

Adaptation strategies are to reduce the difficulty or complexity level, to match the texts with our learning objectives. The strategies are among others: shortening, segmenting, simplifying, co-textualizing, glossing (Thornbury, 2005).

# 4.2.3 In designing the tasks

Tasks are students' activities to develop their skills to achieve communicative competence. Teachers' problems in designing tasks can hamper communicative competence achievement. Here are some tasks designing that may inspire the teacher. As introductory activities in the stage of building the context, the teacher can raise the students' awareness of the wordings, the grammar, text types that they will later meet in the lesson.

The presentation of model texts in the modeling stage is principally to make the students observe, experience, and process the texts. By asking the students to read or to listen to several examples of a text type, the teacher can help them familiar with the texts.

A text selected for text-based instruction is to stimulate the students to participate actively in the classroom by responding to the texts. Together, the teacher and students analyze the texts for building students' discourse or language resources. They can analyze the lexicogrammar, schematic structure, communicative purpose of the texts, etc. Then, the teacher can follow this text analysis by explicit teaching in which he/she can introduce and explain the technical terms, the grammar, etc.

The communicative goal of text-based teaching is to apply the language resources to express meanings in conversations or compositions, with different text types. The production tasks the teacher can assign to the students are among others doing a role play, discussing issues raised by the texts, having a debate about the points of view presented in the text, writing a similar text, writing a response to the text (Marina & Marmienė, 2006).

### 4.2.4 Students' boredom with routine

Some teachers, 3 out of 15, who were interviewed said that the application of the five-phase cycle for teaching all English language skills sometimes made the students bored. This is similar to Marina and Marmiene's finding (2019) stating that the application of a five-phase cycle repeatedly may prove boring for second language learners. Yet, they remind us that the merits of the five-phase cycle outweigh the demerits, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages (Marina & Marmienė, 2006). To avoid boredom, teachers need to do creative and innovative actions.

### 4.3 EFL teachers' challenges to implementing text-based online teaching

All of the research participants stated that regardless of the various problems they faced, they had a positive attitude toward e-learning. This is in line with Fatimah's and Santiana's study revealing that technologies promoted the students' attitude toward learning and the teachers' professional development (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017).

The challenges of text-based online teaching are the challenges to overcome the students' low motivation, technical problems, internet connection, ICT literacy, interaction, students' lack of autonomy. The students' low motivation was seen from the students' reluctance to participate in the class.

Very often, the teachers and the students had problems with audio-visual quality; the audio-visual was not clear. Poor internet connection also frequently became the main reason to leave the class or even unable to join the class at all.

Some students, even some teachers felt that they lacked ICT literacy. This reduced their self-confidence and they often felt anxious because of this. Text-based teaching, especially in the 'Joint construction of the text' stage, demands the students' collaboration or interaction to produce a text. However, most participants stated: "Creating collaboration among students is very difficult", "Interaction is limited", "Interaction between teacher and students is limited". This of course will hamper the students' collaboration. In the 'Independent construction of a text' stage, especially in online learning, requires more students' autonomy. However, many students failed to be self-regulated learners. Some participants stated that they needed to repeatedly remind their students to submit their tasks.

### 5. CONCLUSION

Text-based teaching utilizes texts for achieving the learning outcome. Teachers choose the relevant texts that attract the learners' interest, i.e. the texts that happen in their communities because the learners will learn well when they learn what is applicable in their

life. Choosing, modifying texts, and implementing text-based teaching demand the teachers' innovative thinking and creativity, especially in this covid-19 pandemic.

Text-based teaching expands the students' ability to express meaning appropriately, to communicate in their real life. In other words, text-based teaching enhances their communicative competence. This approach helps learners build up their confidence as language users. Yet, problems arise in the implementation of this approach (especially in this covid-19 pandemic) such as in selecting texts, in adapting or in modifying texts, in designing tasks, in overcoming students' boredom, in technical and internet connection problems, in ICT literacy problem. The teachers' in-depth knowledge of what and how to implement it can minimize the problems.

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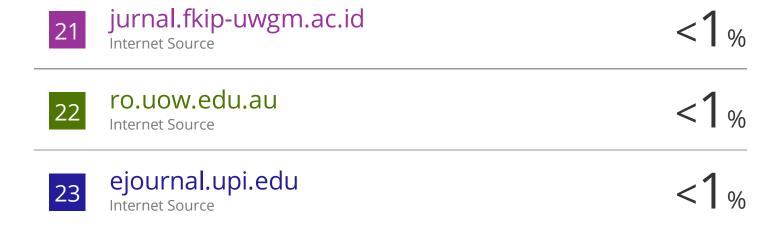
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