

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Chapter I introduces the foundation of this research, which investigates university EFL students' perceptions of how Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) contributes to the development of their analytical exposition writing skills within the context of Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia. The chapter outlines the background and rationale for the study, emphasizing ongoing challenges in academic writing among EFL learners and the potential of TBLT to address them. It then presents the research question, objectives, and significance of the study from theoretical, pedagogical, and policy perspectives. Additionally, it defines key terms central to the research, explains the scope and limitations, and concludes with a description of the organization of the thesis to guide readers through the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background of the study

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education worldwide faces the persistent challenge of developing learners' comprehensive language proficiency, particularly in productive skills such as writing (Ali et al., 2023; Ahmed & Bidin, 2016). Writing, a complex cognitive and linguistic process, requires learners to weave together grammatical accuracy, lexical richness, rhetorical coherence, and logical argumentation to convey meaning effectively (Asgarikia, 2014; Ong & Zhang, 2010; Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2005; Ferretti & Graham, 2019). In academic contexts, the ability to produce coherent and compelling exposition texts is paramount, as it underpins success in various scholarly pursuits and professional communication (Liu & Yao, 2019a; Mahdi, 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2014; Boeriswati et al., 2024; Gómez Burgos, 2017). However, many EFL learners, particularly at the university level, encounter significant hurdles in mastering academic writing conventions, often struggling with organizing ideas, developing arguments, and maintaining an appropriate academic tone (Alzoubi, 2023; Kafipour et al., 2018a; Yundayani & Ardiasih, 2021; Afifah & Sarudin, 2020). This challenge is further compounded by pedagogical approaches that may not adequately prepare students for the demands of real-world writing tasks, often emphasizing isolated linguistic features over integrated communicative competence (Ellis, 2015a; de la Fuente, 2006; Littlewood, 1981; Richards, 2006; Brown, 2006). Thus, there is a continuous global imperative to refine and implement effective pedagogical strategies that can genuinely foster EFL learners' writing skills, moving beyond rote memorization towards authentic language use and meaningful communication (Bryfonski, 2020; Bygate, 2016a; Long, 2015a; Shehadeh & Coombe, 2012; Applebee & Langer, 2013; Boylan et al., 2023). This ongoing need for enhanced pedagogical solutions forms the global backdrop against which localized studies, such

as the present one in Kepulauan Riau, become crucially relevant, offering nuanced insights into specific learning environments and their unique challenges.

The context of English language teaching in Indonesia, including regions like Kepulauan Riau, presents a unique set of circumstances that necessitate a thorough examination of existing pedagogical practices and their efficacy. Indonesian EFL learners, despite years of formal English education, often exhibit varying levels of English proficiency, with writing frequently identified as a particularly challenging area (Ahmed & Bidin, 2016; Sari et al., 2023). Traditional teaching methods, which sometimes prioritize grammar translation or discrete-point exercises, may inadvertently limit opportunities for students to engage in authentic writing practice and develop the strategic competencies required for producing extended texts (Ellis, 2015b; Richards & Rodgers, 2001, 1986). Consequently, many university EFL students struggle to transition from controlled writing exercises to producing sophisticated academic genres like exposition texts, which demand higher-order thinking skills, critical analysis, and persuasive argumentation (Liu & Yao, 2019a; Mahdi, 2020; Marashi & Mirghafari, 2019a; Tusino et al., 2020; Elsayi et al., 2016; Akbari et al., 2018). The local educational landscape, characterized by specific curricular frameworks, teacher training backgrounds, and student learning preferences, further shapes the effectiveness of any given teaching approach (East, 2012; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Thi & Dao, 2022; Djeghoubbi & Saad, 2024; Fuentealba, 2011). Therefore, understanding how innovative methodologies are perceived and implemented within this distinct socio-educational environment is crucial for informing localized curriculum development and instructional design, ultimately aiming to bridge the gap between current student writing proficiencies and the expected academic standards (Salam & El-Koumy, 2019; Emilia et al., 2018a).

One prominent pedagogical approach gaining increasing traction in second language acquisition (SLA) literature and practice is task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Prabhu, 1987; Long, 2015b; Sanchez, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996; Willis & Willis, 2007; Krashen, 1981, 1982). TBLT posits that language learning is most effective when learners are meaningfully engaged in tasks that require them to use language to achieve a non-linguistic outcome, thereby fostering natural language acquisition through communicative interaction and problem-solving (Ellis, 2017; Long, 2016; Long & Crookes, 1992). This approach shifts the focus from linguistic forms to communicative functions, encouraging learners to deploy their existing linguistic resources creatively while simultaneously pushing them to notice gaps in their interlanguage and acquire new forms (Ellis, 2016; Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Skehan, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d). Research has consistently demonstrated the efficacy of TBLT in enhancing various aspects of language proficiency, including speaking, listening, and vocabulary acquisition, by providing authentic contexts for language use (Ali et al., 2023; de la Fuente, 2006; Ruso, 2007).

Moreover, the inherent problem-solving nature of tasks is believed to stimulate higher-order thinking skills, a critical component often lacking in traditional language classrooms (Liu & Yao, 2019a; Mahdi, 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2014; Rannikmäe et al., 2020; Oo et al., 2024; Bean & Melzer, 2021). While the theoretical underpinnings of TBLT are robust and its positive impacts on overall language acquisition well-documented (Ellis, 2018; Long, 2015b; Sholeh et al., 2020a; Skehan, 2003e), its specific contributions to the intricate skill of academic exposition text writing, particularly from the perspective of learners themselves, warrants further in-depth investigation.

The principles embedded within TBLT offer a compelling framework for addressing the challenges EFL students face in writing exposition texts (Ellis et al., 2020; Nunan, 2010; Sundari et al., 2018). By simulating real-world communication scenarios, TBLT allows learners to engage in writing tasks that have a clear purpose and audience beyond simply demonstrating linguistic knowledge (Bryfonski, 2020; Moore & Lorenzo, 2015; Durán, 2017; García, 2025). For exposition text writing, this could involve tasks such as writing a persuasive letter to a newspaper, drafting an argumentative essay for a peer review, or preparing a report summarizing research findings (Muleneh, 2018; Kafipour et al., 2018a; Afifah & Sarudin, 2020). Such tasks inherently necessitate the development of logical structure, coherent argumentation, and appropriate linguistic expression—all vital components of effective exposition (Asgarikia, 2014; Ong & Zhang, 2010; Yundayani & Ardiasih, 2021). TBLT encourages learners to plan, execute, and reflect on their writing, mirroring the iterative process that expert writers undertake (Ellis, 2005; Tabari et al., 2024). Furthermore, the collaborative nature often inherent in TBLT tasks provides opportunities for peer interaction, feedback, and mutual learning, fostering a supportive environment for writing development (Alzoubi, 2023; Liu & Yao, 2019b; Marginson et al., 2017; Xu & Fan, 2021; Akoto, 2021; Deveci, 2018; Chigbu et al., 2023; Garcia et al., 2021). This collaboration can help students brainstorm ideas, refine arguments, and identify linguistic errors, thereby improving the overall quality of their written output (Prasansaph, 2024; Rannikmäe et al., 2020). Therefore, TBLT holds significant promise as a pedagogical solution for improving exposition text writing skills by providing holistic, authentic, and interactive learning experiences.

The effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing writing skills has been substantiated by various studies across different contexts. For instance, Ahmed and Bidin (2016) investigated the impact of task-based language teaching on the writing skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Malaysia. Their findings indicate that engaging learners in meaningful tasks can significantly improve writing proficiency, suggesting a positive correlation between TBLT and enhanced writing outcomes. Similarly, Ali et al. (2023) provided empirical evidence from their study on the effectiveness of task-based teaching in improving language proficiency among second

language learners, demonstrating that task-based approaches significantly improve learners' language skills, which implicitly includes writing as a core component of overall proficiency. Sari et al. (2023), in an Indonesian university context, further corroborated these findings, indicating a positive correlation between task-based language teaching and improvements in students' writing abilities. Other researchers have focused on specific aspects of TBLT that contribute to writing development. Alzoubi (2023), for example, examined the impact of collaborative pre-task planning on the writing quality of intermediate EFL learners within a TBLT framework, highlighting how such planning can enhance writing quality through fostered interaction and idea exchange. Asgarikia (2014) also found that structured planning within tasks significantly influenced writing performance, further underscoring the importance of carefully designed task components (Robinson, 2012). These studies collectively confirm that TBLT, through its emphasis on meaningful engagement, strategic planning, and collaborative opportunities, offers a robust framework for improving various facets of language learners' writing abilities.

Building upon these foundational studies, academic discourse around TBLT has further highlighted its multifaceted benefits. Asma (2018) highlighted the positive influence of TBLT on EFL learners' attitudes and motivation (Marlinton et al., 2023; Oo et al., 2024), suggesting that engaging tasks can foster a supportive learning environment, which is indirectly beneficial for complex skills like writing. Bui, Skehan, and Wang (2018) analyzed how different task conditions influence advanced-level foreign language performance, providing insights into optimizing task design to enhance language acquisition, including productive skills. Bygate (2016a, 2016b) provided comprehensive overviews of the sources, developments, and future directions of task-based language teaching, reinforcing its significance and calling for continued exploration in diverse educational contexts. Moreover, Bryfonski (2020) explored current trends and new developments in TBLT, emphasizing its effectiveness in promoting language proficiency and learner engagement. Ellis (2015a, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021) consistently advocated for TBLT, discussing its theoretical underpinnings, the importance of focus on form within communicative language teaching, and proposing directions for future research and practice, often in collaboration with scholars such as Shintani (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Ellis et al., 2019; Ellis et al., 2020). Long (2015a, 2015b, 2016) has also extensively contributed to the theoretical understanding and defense of TBLT, solidifying its place in second language acquisition pedagogy. Furthermore, its application extends to assessment (Mislevy et al., 2002; Norris, 2016) and materials development (Nunan, 2010). Despite this extensive body of literature establishing the general effectiveness of TBLT and its various contributing factors, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific perceptions of university EFL students regarding how TBLT contributes to their exposition text writing skills, especially within unique regional contexts like

Kepulauan Riau. While research often focuses on observable outcomes or teacher perspectives (Erlam, 2016a; East, 2012; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Thi & Dao, 2022), student perceptions offer critical insights into the subjective learning experience, challenges faced, and perceived utility of a pedagogical approach, which are essential for its successful implementation and adaptation. This lacuna in the literature represents a significant gap that the current research seeks to address.

Given the established importance of writing proficiency in academic and professional domains, alongside the documented benefits of TBLT in language acquisition, a crucial area for further investigation lies in understanding the learner's perspective on this pedagogical approach for specific writing genres. The current study aims to address this identified research gap by exploring and describing in detail university EFL students' perceptions regarding the mechanisms and specific ways in which task-based language teaching (TBLT) influences and contributes to the development of their exposition text writing skills in the context of Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia. This qualitative inquiry anticipates uncovering nuanced insights into how students themselves perceive the utility, challenges, and benefits of TBLT tasks in enhancing their ability to produce coherent, well-structured, and argumentative exposition texts. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on student perceptions within this specific regional context, adding a learner-centered dimension to the existing TBLT literature and providing localized understanding. By elucidating these perceptions, this research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of TBLT's practical implications for academic writing instruction, offering valuable data for educators and curriculum developers seeking to optimize EFL writing pedagogy in Kepulauan Riau and potentially other similar contexts.

1.3 Research questions

The research is intended to answer the following question:

How do university EFL students perceive that task-based language teaching contributes to their exposition text writing skills in Kepulauan Riau?

1.4 Purposes of the study

The main aims of this study are to explore and describe in detail university EFL students' perceptions of how task-based language teaching (TBLT) influences and contributes to the development of their exposition text writing skills in the context of Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study's significance is clarified through three interrelated perspectives: theoretical, practical, and policy-oriented, each emphasizing the essential role of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in improving educational outcomes and training students to write exposition texts for the complexities of contemporary society.

1.5.1 Theoretical perspectives

The foundational contribution of this research lies in enriching the existing body of constructivist literature on task-based language teaching (TBLT). While TBLT has been extensively explored for its general impact on language acquisition (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015b; Skehan, 1996), its specific application to the nuanced demands of academic exposition text writing, particularly from the learners' perspective, remains underexplored (Sari et al., 2023; Afifah & Sarudin, 2020). This study explicitly links the distinct phases of TBLT—pre-task, during-task, and post-task—to the development of critical exposition competencies, such as robust thesis formulation, effective evidence integration, and coherent textual cohesion (Kafipour et al., 2018a; Yundayani & Sri Ardiasih, 2021; Muleneh, 2018; Ferretti & Graham, 2019; Boeriswati et al., 2024). By focusing on how students themselves perceive the contribution of TBLT to these genre-specific features, the research foregrounds learner agency and offers a deeper understanding of the cognitive and interactional processes involved. This approach refines our understanding of how task design can be systematically engineered to cultivate the rhetorical and structural features characteristic of effective academic exposition, filling a notable theoretical gap regarding TBLT's direct impact on such a specific and high-stakes writing genre.

1.5.2 Practical perspectives

For university instructors in the Kepulauan Riau region, this study offers a concrete, evidence-based instructional model that demonstrates how TBLT can be effectively merged with explicit genre modeling and iterative feedback cycles to enhance students' exposition text writing skills (Kafipour et al., 2018a; Yundayani & Sri Ardiasih, 2021). The qualitative insights garnered from student perceptions will provide actionable recommendations, detailing not only what works but also how students navigate meaning construction, negotiate genre conventions, and develop disciplinary literacy within their multilingual and often resource-constrained educational environment (Muleneh, 2018; Akoto, 2021; Deveci, 2018; Sari et al., 2023). These findings can directly inform lesson-planning, the design of authentic assessment tasks aligned with TBLT principles (Norris, 2016; Mislevy et al., 2002), and the strategic professional development for teachers seeking to implement more effective and engaging writing pedagogies. Ultimately, by providing a localized, student-centered understanding, the study can facilitate a more tailored and impactful approach to TBLT for academic writing instruction in the region.

1.5.3 Policy perspectives

At the institutional and national levels, the study's results underscore the necessity of integrating TBLT-based writing curricula that are acutely attuned to regional linguistic realities and academic genre expectations (Yundayani & Sri Ardiasih, 2021; Salam & El-Koumy, 2019; Thi & Dao, 2022). The empirical evidence that scaffolded, task-centric approaches, informed by student perceptions,

meaningfully improve exposition-writing proficiency supports calls for fundamental policy reforms. Such reforms should advocate for allocating resources towards comprehensive teacher training programs in TBLT, the development of localized curricular materials that leverage inherent task-based design, and the implementation of assessment tools that align with constructivist pedagogical tenets (Kafipour et al., 2018a; East, 2012). By demonstrating the transferability and efficacy of TBLT in a specific Indonesian context, the research informs policymakers about the scalability of well-designed task-based writing interventions and their potential to raise the overall quality of academic English education across diverse regions within Indonesia and potentially other similar foreign language contexts (Shehadeh & Coombe, 2012).

1.6 Scope of the study

The present research is delimited to university students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs at public institutions located specifically within the Kepulauan Riau archipelago. These institutions were strategically selected due to the region's notable linguistic diversity and the documented challenges faced by students in achieving proficiency in academic English (Yundayani & Sri Ardiasih, 2021). Consequently, the study aims to provide highly specific insights directly applicable to similar peripheral Indonesian settings where intersecting factors of linguistic variability and potentially limited instructional resources constrain students' exposure to and mastery of standardized academic writing conventions (Muleneh, 2018; Sari et al., 2023).

The investigation adopts a qualitative, interpretivist case-study design, focusing on in-depth understanding rather than statistical generalization. Data collection methods will combine direct classroom observation of TBLT implementation, semi-structured interviews with both student participants and their instructors, and meticulous artifact analysis of student-produced exposition manuscripts. This data will be collected over a single academic semester, spanning approximately 10 teaching meetings over a four-week intervention period. This timeframe is designed to capture the immediate perceptions and effects of a task-based language teaching (TBLT) intervention that deliberately embeds explicit genre scaffolding within its three core phases: pre-task, during-task, and post-task activities (Ellis, 2003; Kafipour et al., 2018a; Skehan, 1996). Consistent with a qualitative case-study approach, no pre-to-post quantitative assessment of writing proficiency or the use of a control group is included. Instead, the emphasis is placed exclusively on achieving a deep, nuanced understanding of how the TBLT approach influences the acquisition of key exposition writing skills, such as effective thesis formulation, coherent evidence integration, and textual cohesion, from the learners' perspective (Muleneh, 2018; Yundayani & Sri Ardiasih, 2021).

The study's primary objective is to intricately examine the perceived alignment between the structured design of TBLT task cycles and the specific demands of

academic exposition text writing. Secondary objectives include systematically documenting instructors' pedagogical adjustments in response to TBLT implementation, capturing students' subjective perceptions of task relevance and utility, and identifying contextual mediators—such as local resource availability, teacher expertise, and explicit recognition of students' diverse linguistic backgrounds—that might affect the perceived efficacy of the intervention (Yundayani & Sri Ardiasih, 2021; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). To maintain a highly focused and rigorous contribution to the literature, the scope explicitly excludes the exploration of alternative language-learning strategies, other academic genres (e.g., narrative essays, scientific reports, argumentative essays), cross-regional comparisons with different educational contexts, and longitudinal tracking of student development beyond the specified one-semester period. By establishing these precise conceptual and methodological boundaries, the study aims to deliver a concentrated and valuable contribution to the understanding of TBLT-driven exposition writing development in resource-constrained, culturally diverse university contexts.

1.7 Definition of the key terms

Before beginning research, it is necessary to define the study's main phrases to understand its subject matter. Thus, the essential terms relevant to this research will be given their precise definitions. They are as follows:

- 1) Task-based language teaching (TBLT): A pedagogical approach in language education where the primary focus is on the use of authentic, meaningful tasks as the central unit of exposition writing instruction. Learners engage in activities that require them to use language to achieve a non-linguistic outcome, fostering natural language acquisition through communicative interaction and problem-solving, rather than focusing solely on linguistic forms in isolation. TBLT typically involves distinct phases: pre-task (introduction and planning), during-task (task execution), and post-task (analysis, reflection, and language focus) (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996).
- 2) Exposition Text Writing: A broad genre of academic writing focused on explaining, informing, or presenting an argument in a clear, logical, and objective manner. It typically involves a clear thesis statement, supporting evidence, logical organization, and cohesive development of ideas, aiming to convey information or persuade the reader through rational appeal (Ferretti & Graham, 2019; Emilia, 2005). The present study specifically investigates students' abilities in an argumentative sub-genre of exposition, further detailed below.
- 3) Analytical Exposition Writing: A sub-genre of exposition text writing that aims to present one side of an issue or argument, convince the reader of the writer's perspective, and persuade them through logical reasoning and supporting evidence. It typically features a thesis statement (often called a 'standpoint'),

arguments supported by facts and elaboration, and a reiteration or conclusion that strengthens the main point. This form of writing demands critical thinking, persuasive language, and a clear, structured presentation of ideas (Afifah & Sarudin, 2020; Akbari et al., 2018; Elsawi et al., 2016). This specific sub-genre is the focus of writing skill development in this research.

- 4) University EFL Students: English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners pursuing higher education in universities located within the Kepulauan Riau region of Indonesia. These students learn English in an environment where English is not the primary language of communication in the broader community.
- 5) Perceptions: The processes by which individuals interpret, understand, and make sense of their experiences, observations, or a particular phenomenon. In the context of this study, it specifically refers to university EFL students' subjective interpretations, beliefs, attitudes, and understandings regarding how TBLT influences and contributes to their analytical exposition text writing skills (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Deveci, 2018).
- 6) Kepulauan Riau: A province in Indonesia, an archipelago located off the east coast of Sumatra. This region serves as the specific geographical and socio-educational context for this study.

1.8 Concluding remarks of chapter one

Organization of the thesis encompasses five chapters: chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, chapter four, and chapter five. Each chapter has topic and sub-topics and describes them completely below.

Chapter one discusses about introduction, background of the study, research question, purposes of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, definition of the key terms, and concluding remarks of chapter one.

Chapter two covers review of the related literature, introduction, task-based language teaching, definition, historical theory of task-based language teaching, principles and notions of the task-based language teaching, basic principles of task-based language teaching, notions of task-based language teaching, stages of task-based language teaching, exposition writing, historical and theoretical foundation of exposition writing, what is exposition writing? aim of exposition writing, elements of exposition writing, linguistic features of exposition writing, critical thinking, definition, historical theory of critical thinking, elements of critical thinking, relationship between critical thinking and argumentative writing, relationship between critical thinking and task-based approach, relationship between argumentative writing and task-based approach, review of relevant studies, conceptual framework, and concluding remarks of chapter two.

Chapter three describes about research methodology, introduction, research design, site and participants, procedures of a teaching program: pre-task phase, during-

task phase, and post-task phase; data collection techniques writing test and interviews; data analysis techniques: writing test and interviews; and concluding remarks of chapter three.

Chapter four involves findings and discussion: a teaching program, interview analysis, and students' text analysis. In addition, chapter five includes conclusions, implications, and suggestions.