ELite Journal : International Journal of Education, Language, and Literature
Volume 5 (4) 2025
ISSN: 2621-8127 (online)
https://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/elite

Implementing Task-Based Learning in Higher Education German Speaking Instruction for Beginners, Including Supporting Factors and Challenges

Audrey Gabriella Titaley[a,*]

[ab] *Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia*
*Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* audreyttitaley@unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Speaking is among the most demanding skills for beginning learners of German, who find it difficult to use their linguistic knowledge in communication. This study aimed to describe the implementation of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in a German speaking course and to identify the factors that supported it and the challenges that arose. A descriptive qualitative design was used in one *Thematisches Sprechen* class of 30 A1 students from the 2025 cohort at an Indonesian university. The learning material came from Chapter 7 of *Netzwerk neu A1* on *Arbeitsalltag* and was taught in three meetings of 110 minutes each. Data were collected through classroom observation recorded in field notes and through course documents, and were analysed descriptively according to the stages of TBL. The findings showed that TBL was implemented in three stages. In the pre-task stage, students received scaffolding through vocabulary, *Redemittel*, language structures, and sentence models. In the task cycle, they prepared and rehearsed an *Arbeitsanweisung* in pairs or groups. In the post-task stage, they performed the task orally, received feedback, and reflected on their language use. Supporting factors included contextual materials, linguistic support, situation cards, and peer interaction. The challenges were chaining steps with sequence markers and maintaining fluency, accompanied by limited vocabulary and reliance on examples. The study concludes that TBL at the A1 level requires structured tasks, adequate scaffolding, and lecturer support adjusted to beginners, with additional support for sequence markers.

Keywords: German Language, Higher Education, Scaffolding, Speaking Skills, Task-Based Learning

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is often treated as the most direct indicator of whether learners can use a foreign language functionally, yet it is also among the skills that learners find hardest to develop. In university settings, many students acquire grammatical structures and vocabulary through instruction but remain unable to use this knowledge in spontaneous oral interaction. The problem is visible in German language teaching in Indonesia. In a classroom action study with senior high school students, 72% of the learners had not reached the required threshold before the intervention and only 28% had done so, whereas 86% reached the target after task-based learning cycles (Asiah et al., 2021). These figures indicate that the methods used before the

intervention were insufficient for developing speaking skills and that alternative designs deserve systematic attention.

Task-based learning (TBL) is one such alternative. The approach places learners in situations that resemble real communication, in which speaking becomes necessary for completing a specified task (Ardiyani, 2021). Lessons are organised around the task itself, and attention to linguistic form supports the exchange of meaning instead of replacing it. Nunan's principles for task-based teaching provide a framework for designing such lessons. These principles are scaffolding, task dependency, recycling, active learning, integration, reproduction, and reflection (Nunan, 2004, as cited in Awwal et al., 2022).

The evidence for the effectiveness of TBL is considerable but contested. A meta-analysis of 52 studies reported a strong overall positive effect of task-based programmes on language learning outcomes ($d = 0.93$), and this effect was moderated by programme region, institution type, needs analysis, and cycles of implementation (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019). Later commentary treated this estimate with caution. Boers and Faez (2023) questioned the eligibility of some included studies, noted that a subsequent meta-analysis produced a smaller effect ($g = 0.61$), and concluded that research in the field was not yet ready for a dependable meta-analytic comparison of programmes. Taken together, these syntheses support the potential of task-based programmes while showing that the size of their benefits depends on how studies are selected and how programmes are implemented.

Whether such benefits extend to beginning learners depends largely on the support that tasks provide. Bourgoin and Le Bouthillier (2021) worked with Grade 1 French immersion teachers and found that adapting task-based principles to small-group work helped young beginning learners produce more extended language, interact with peers, and use the language spontaneously. Their participants were children working at literacy stations, so the findings cannot be transferred directly to adult learners of German. The study does show, however, that tasks can be adjusted to learners with very limited proficiency. Implementation also depends on teachers. Research on Indonesian teachers' perceptions has identified both benefits of task-based lessons and difficulties in designing them (Hima et al., 2021).

Research on TBL in German remains comparatively limited. Ardiyani (2021) examined TBL combined with the *Rückwärtsplanung* model, a backward planning approach that starts from the target task, through an e-workshop attended by 30 German teachers from across Indonesia. Brandl (2022) demonstrated how task-based principles, including goal orientation and language use for authentic communicative purposes, can be applied in advanced German classes that work with a literary text. Neither study focused on speaking tasks for beginning university learners of German. As a result, little is known about how TBL operates in a German speaking course at the A1 level in Indonesian higher education, what forms of support enable beginners to complete a communicative task, and which difficulties persist.

This study addresses that gap by describing how TBL was implemented in the *Thematisches Sprechen* course for A1 learners and by identifying the factors that supported implementation and the challenges that arose. The findings are expected to inform speaking pedagogy in German as a foreign language and to give lecturers a documented example of structured, scaffolded task design for beginning learners.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative design to describe how Task-Based Learning (TBL) was implemented in a German speaking course and to identify the factors that supported and

challenged its implementation. A qualitative approach suits studies that aim to explore and describe a phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The research was conducted in the *Thematisches Sprechen* course at an Indonesian university. The participants were one class of 30 students from the 2025 cohort, whose proficiency was at the A1 level. Because the study involved a single class, the findings describe a specific instructional context.

The learning materials were taken from Chapter 7 of *Netzwerk neu A1*, which addresses the theme *Arbeitsalltag* (everyday work routines). Instruction took place in three meetings of 110 minutes each, giving a total of 330 minutes, and followed a learning worksheet (*LKPD*) designed around the theme. TBL was applied through three stages. In the first meeting, the pre-task stage, the lecturer introduced the theme, vocabulary, and *Redemittel* (functional phrases) that students needed. In the second meeting, the task cycle, students completed communicative tasks in pairs or groups and prepared to present their results orally. In the third meeting, the post-task stage, students performed the task orally, the lecturer gave feedback on language use, and students reflected on and improved their performance.

Data were collected through classroom observation and documentation, both of which are established sources of qualitative data in educational research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Observation covered all three meetings and was recorded in field notes. Documentation consisted of the course files and the tasks produced by the students.

The data were analysed descriptively and organised according to the three TBL stages, in line with the practice of sorting qualitative data into meaningful categories before describing them (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For each stage, the analysis described the activities of the lecturer, the activities of the students, and the form of the communicative task used in *Thematisches Sprechen*. The observation and documentation data were then examined to identify the factors that supported implementation and the challenges that students encountered.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents how Task-Based Learning (TBL) was implemented in the *Thematisches Sprechen* course and discusses the factors that supported implementation and the challenges that emerged.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TBL IN *THEMATISCHES SPRECHEN*

TBL was implemented through three stages, namely pre-task, task cycle, and post-task, following the *LKPD* for the theme *Arbeitsalltag*. The three meetings lasted 110 minutes each, so the implementation took 330 minutes with a class of 30 students. The first meeting covered the pre-task stage and the provision of input, the second covered task performance, and the third covered the post-task stage and assessment. Table 1 summarises the stages.

Table 1 Implementation of TBL in Thematisches Sprechen

Stage	Lecturer activities	Student activities	Main activities
Pre-task (110 minutes)	Introduced the theme, vocabulary, and Redemittel	Observed, grasped the context, and prepared the language	A mind map on Mein Arbeitsalltag, matching of professions with work activities (bedienen, kochen, verkaufen, untersuchen, reparieren), input on the du and Sie imperatives, ordering of sequence markers (zuerst/zunächst, dann/danach/als nächstes, am Ende/zuletzt/zum Schluss), and completion of a

Stage	Lecturer activities	Student activities	Main activities
Task cycle (110 minutes)	Assigned and facilitated communicative tasks	Spoke in pairs or groups and completed the tasks	Redemittel bank covering opening, introducing steps, formulating instructions, and closing Text work on Der erste Tag im Büro, group production of an Arbeitsanweisung of six to eight steps for a randomly assigned situation (coffee machine, photocopier, document printing, microwave), and a rehearsal (Probedurchlauf) of about two minutes in which a partner checked step order, imperative accuracy, completeness of sequence markers, and timing
Post-task (110 minutes)	Gave feedback	Corrected and reflected on their language use	A monologue Arbeitsanweisung of about two minutes without reading, assessment with a three-level rubric, peer feedback, reflection on sequence markers not yet mastered, and transfer to other parts of the examination

PRE-TASK STAGE

In the first meeting, vocabulary was activated through a mind map on *Mein Arbeitsalltag* and a matching task that paired professions with work activities. Structural input covered the *du* and *Sie* imperatives. The *du* imperative was formed from the verb stem without the ending *-en* or *-n*, with the separable verb element placed at the end of the sentence, whereas the *Sie* imperative was formed from the infinitive followed by *Sie*. A sequencing exercise then introduced the markers that order the steps of an instruction, from *zuerst* and *zunächst*, through *dann*, *danach*, and *als nächstes*, to *am Ende*, *zuletzt*, and *zum Schluss*. Linguistic support was provided in full through a *Redemittel* bank covering the opening (*Eröffnung*), the introduction of work steps (*Arbeitsschritte einleiten*), the formulation of instructions (*Instruktionen formulieren*), and the closing (*Abschluss*), together with example sentences for each marker and each imperative form.

Support of this kind functions as temporary scaffolding. The pre-task phase is where TBL builds such support, for example through explicit pre-teaching of language (East, 2021). Comparable speaking frames have been associated with fewer hesitations and repetitions and with better structured monologues among university students (Saienko, 2021). In this course, the mind map, the matching task, and the *Redemittel* bank allowed A1 students to prepare the language needed for the speaking task before it began.

TASK CYCLE STAGE

The second meeting began with text work on *Der erste Tag im Büro*, a text that contained the markers *zuerst*, *dann*, *danach*, and *als nächstes*. Students then worked in groups to compose an *Arbeitsanweisung* of six to eight steps, with the obligation to use the imperative and all the markers they had studied. Each group received a situation card at random, so the topic was not chosen by the students. The stage ended with a rehearsal of about two minutes, during which a partner checked four criteria, namely the order of the steps, the accuracy of the imperatives, the completeness of the markers, and the timing.

Pair and group work gave students more opportunities to speak actively. Output and interaction are central foundations of task-based pedagogy (East, 2021), and peer interaction in this course also had the potential to supply language support without direct intervention by the lecturer.

POST-TASK STAGE

In the third meeting, students delivered the culminating task, which consisted of a self-introduction (*sich vorstellen*) and an *Arbeitsanweisung*, as a free monologue of about two minutes without reading. Performance was assessed with a three-level rubric. Completeness and order of steps were rated *sehr gut* for six to eight steps, *gut* for four to five steps, and *ausreichend* for fewer than four steps. The rubric also covered the accuracy of the imperatives, the completeness of the markers (all, three to four, or one to two), and the degree of freedom in delivery. Peer feedback and a reflection on the markers that students had not yet mastered followed the performances. The lecturer guide also provided differentiation. Weaker learners were limited to four or five steps with the markers *zuerst*, *dann*, and *am Ende*, whereas stronger learners were directed to use all markers and to deliver the instruction freely without notes.

SUPPORTING FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

Observation also showed several factors that supported implementation and several challenges. Table 2 summarises them.

Table 2 Supporting factors and challenges in implementing TBL

Aspect	Finding	Description
Supporting factor	Materials from Netzwerk neu A1, Chapter 7	Provided a theme and a context of office communication that could be developed into Arbeitsanweisung tasks
Supporting factor	Redemittel and vocabulary	Provided in full before the task, covering opening, introducing steps, formulating instructions, and closing, with model sentences for each sequence marker
Supporting factor	Situation cards	Offered concrete work situations (coffee machine, photocopier, document printing, microwave) that were distributed at random, so every student had a clear context for speaking
Supporting factor	Pair and group work	Gave opportunities to speak and allowed partners to check step order, imperative accuracy, completeness of markers, and timing
Challenge	Chaining steps with dann, danach, and als nächstes	Only a small proportion of students produced the Arbeitsanweisung fluently, and most still found it hard to build sentences with these markers
Challenge	Hesitation and fluency	Some students hesitated when presenting the steps and needed a long time to complete the Arbeitsanweisung
Minor difficulty	Self-introduction (Teil 1)	Almost all students delivered the introduction fluently, and errors appeared only when they named leisure activities

One supporting factor was the availability of the theme, vocabulary, and communicative models in Chapter 7 of *Netzwerk neu A1*, which formed the basis for the communicative tasks. Pair and group work gave students more opportunity to use German actively, and interaction among peers created space for scaffolding in which language could be co-constructed without lecturer intervention.

The observations also showed that the pre-task support did not remove every difficulty. Students already knew the vocabulary of office equipment, and the *Redemittel*, sentence structures, and situation cards had been provided in full before the task. The difficulty was concentrated in chaining the steps of an instruction through *dann*, *danach*, and *als nächstes*. Many students also relied on examples, used Indonesian, paused while speaking, or asked the lecturer for help, which points to limited vocabulary and sentence structures at this level.

These patterns show that scaffolding supported vocabulary activation and the provision of input but did not by itself ensure that students could use the markers in coherent speech.

Beginners may therefore need support at the point of production as well as before the task. Ellis (2020), writing about beginner-level young learners, argued that input-based tasks give beginners a way into processing the language before they are asked to speak. Saienko (2021) reported that speaking frames reduced hesitations, false starts, and pauses and made monologues more continuous. Taken together, these findings suggest that frames which model the whole chain of markers, combined with further input-based practice on *dann*, *danach*, and *als nächstes*, may help A1 students reach a coherent oral instruction. This interpretation remains tentative because the present data were not designed to test such support. The hesitation observed may also reflect limited linguistic resources, affective factors, or both, but affective factors were not examined in this study.

The lecturer's pedagogical decisions also shaped how well the speaking tasks worked. In task-based teaching the lecturer acts as a facilitator who motivates students to use German and guides them through the structured task at each stage. Taking on this role is not automatic. Ariatna and Ellis (2021) reported that an Indonesian secondary school teacher who had adopted the facilitator role still sometimes dominated interaction through display questions and nominated students. They also listed the appropriate use of the first language and the use of input-based tasks with low-proficiency learners among the insights for teacher development in Indonesia. In *Thematisches Sprechen*, the students' use of Indonesian and their requests for help suggest that lecturers may need clear routines for supporting beginners without taking over the task.

Overall, the implementation shows that speaking instruction at the A1 level can move from language practice toward language use in communicative tasks. Although students' proficiency was limited, structured tasks, adequate scaffolding, and pair or group work enabled them to use German at a level that matched their ability.

This study has three limitations. First, it was conducted in one *Thematisches Sprechen* class, so the findings describe a specific learning context. Second, it focused on the implementation process and did not measure improvement in students' speaking skills through a pre-test and a post-test. Third, the data came mainly from observation and documentation, so students' perceptions of TBL were not examined in depth. Future studies could involve more classes and examine both speaking development and students' perceptions of task-based learning.

CONCLUSION

This study described the implementation of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in the *Thematisches Sprechen* course with 30 A1 students from the 2025 cohort, using Chapter 7 of *Netzwerk neu A1* as the learning material. Data from observation of three meetings and from course documents showed that TBL was implemented through three stages. In the pre-task stage, the lecturer provided scaffolding through vocabulary, *Redemittel*, example sentences, and sentence models. In the task cycle, students used German in communicative tasks in pairs or groups. In the post-task stage, they performed the task orally, received feedback from the lecturer and their peers, and reflected on their language use. The implementation was therefore structured and adjusted to the proficiency of beginning learners.

Four factors supported implementation. These were the themes, vocabulary, and communicative models in *Netzwerk neu A1*, the *Redemittel* provided before the task, the situation cards, and pair and group work, which widened students' opportunities to speak. The main challenge was chaining the steps of an instruction with *dann*, *danach*, and *als nächstes*,

and some students also hesitated and took a long time to complete the *Arbeitsanweisung*. Many students relied on examples, used Indonesian, or asked for the lecturer's help, which pointed to limited vocabulary and sentence structures. These findings suggest that scaffolding before the task is necessary but may not be sufficient for beginners, and that the lecturer's role as task designer and facilitator remains important. Lecturers are advised to keep providing adequate scaffolding while gradually introducing more open and independent tasks, and to consider additional support for the use of sequence markers during speaking.

The study was limited to one class and three meetings and relied on observation and documentation, so its findings are specific to this context and should not be generalised to all German language learning in higher education. Future research could involve more classes and meetings, add interviews or student reflections to capture learners' perceptions, and use pre-tests and post-tests to measure changes in speaking skills.

REFERENCES

Ardiyani, D. K. (2021). Implementing task-based learning (TBL) for learning German in Indonesia. *KnE Social Sciences, 5*(3), 105–116. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v5i3.8532

Ariatna, & Ellis, R. (2021). A case study of one teacher's introduction to task-based language teaching: Insights for the development of a professional development programme. *Language Teaching for Young Learners, 3*(1), 137–158. https://doi.org/10.1075/ltyl.00020.ell

Asiah, N., Rahmat, A., & Lustyantie, N. (2021). The implementation of task-based learning method to improve German language speaking skills. *Bahtera: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra, 20*(2), 157–182. https://doi.org/10.21009/bahtera.202.04

Awwal, T. K., Meiristiani, N., & Rofiudin, R. (2022). The implementation of task-based language teaching principles in speaking class. *Cakrawala: Jurnal Pendidikan, 16*(2), 99–108. https://doi.org/10.24905/cakrawala.v16i2.294

Boers, F., & Faez, F. (2023). Meta-analysis to estimate the relative effectiveness of TBLT programs: Are we there yet? *Language Teaching Research*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231167573

Bourgoin, R., & Le Bouthillier, J. (2021). Task-based language learning and beginning language learners: Examining classroom-based small group learning in Grade 1 French immersion. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 24*(2), 70–98. https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2021.31378

Brandl, K. K. (2022). A task-based approach to teaching literary texts in advanced language classes. *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German, 55*(1), 59–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/tger.12195

Bryfonski, L., & McKay, T. H. (2019). TBLT implementation and evaluation: A meta-analysis. *Language Teaching Research, 23*(5), 603–632. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817744389

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.

East, M. (2021). *Foundational principles of task-based language teaching*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003039709

Ellis, R. (2020). Task-based language teaching for beginner-level young learners. *Language Teaching for Young Learners, 2*(1), 4–27. https://doi.org/10.1075/ltyl.19005.ell

Hima, A. N., Saputro, T. H., & Farah, R. R. (2021). Benefits and challenges of doing task-based language teaching in Indonesia: Teachers' perception. *Kembara: Jurnal Keilmuan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya, 7*(1), 131–142. https://doi.org/10.22219/kembara.v7i1.15805

Saienko, N. (2021). Using speaking frames as scaffolding tools to teach university students to speak in ESP. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 20*(4), 99–115. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.4.6