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Integrating Task-Based Language Teaching Model with Deep Learning Principles in Developing EFL Learners' Metalinguistic Competences

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and deep learning principles in developing EFL learners' metalinguistic competence in senior high school contexts. Grounded in communicative language teaching and cognitive learning perspectives, the study explores how task-based deep learning environments influence learners' awareness, monitoring, and regulation of language use. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews involving 35 EFL learners and 5 English teachers from senior high schools in Central Lombok. The findings reveal that the integration of meaningful communicative tasks with reflective and inquiry-based learning promotes learners' ability to notice linguistic patterns, evaluate grammatical choices, and regulate language production during interaction. The results indicate that learners moved beyond surface-level language performance toward deeper cognitive engagement, demonstrating increased autonomy and analytical understanding of language structures. Moreover, the study shows that combining deep learning principles with TBLT helps address common implementation challenges in exam-oriented EFL settings by fostering learner-centered participation and efficient classroom interaction. The novelty of this research lies in proposing an integrated pedagogical framework that connects communicative task performance with metacognitive and reflective learning processes to achieve sustainable language development. The study contributes to EFL pedagogy by highlighting the importance of aligning communicative instruction with deep learning practices to enhance both communicative competence and metalinguistic development.

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INTRODUCTION

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as one of the most influential pedagogical approaches in contemporary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education due to its emphasis on meaningful communication and learner engagement through authentic tasks rather than isolated linguistic drills (Kordia, 2020; Nurmayanti, 2025; Bhandari, 2024). Rooted in communicative language teaching traditions, TBLT positions language as a tool for achieving real-world purposes, encouraging learners to negotiate meaning, collaborate, and solve problems using the target language. This orientation

responds to longstanding criticisms of traditional grammar-based instruction, which often produces learners with substantial declarative knowledge but limited communicative competence. Despite its strong theoretical foundation and demonstrated pedagogical potential, the implementation of TBLT across diverse EFL contexts continues to reveal a persistent gap between theoretical expectations and classroom realities.

Studies consistently report structural and pedagogical constraints such as examination-oriented curricula, limited instructional time, large class sizes, insufficient institutional support, and inadequate teacher preparation, all of which complicate the transition from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered task-based environments (Nghia & Nguyen, 2021; Kordia, 2020; Nurmayanti, 2025; Bhandari, 2024). Consequently, many classrooms adopt only partial versions of TBLT, where communicative activities are incorporated superficially without fully realizing the task cycle involving pre-task preparation, task performance, and reflective post-task analysis (Maulana, 2021; Zou, 2025).

A central challenge within TBLT implementation concerns the design of pedagogically meaningful tasks capable of balancing communicative interaction with linguistic development. Without principled design, tasks risk becoming mechanical exercises or entertainment-oriented speaking activities that fail to promote sustained language learning (Li, 2023; Mudinillah et al., 2024; Kessler et al., 2020). Research highlights that authenticity, assessment alignment, and curricular integration remain unresolved issues, particularly in contexts dominated by standardized testing systems (Chellam, 2023; Kessler et al., 2020). Teachers frequently struggle to operationalize TBLT principles due to limited professional development opportunities and the absence of accessible task banks or instructional models (Bhandari, 2020; Maulana, 2021; Zou, 2025). Time limitations and overcrowded classrooms further restrict opportunities for iterative interaction, individualized feedback, and reflective learning processes essential to effective task-based instruction (Lu et al., 2023; Nurmayanti, 2025).

Moreover, misunderstandings of TBLT as merely speaking practice or general classroom interaction demonstrate a conceptual gap between theoretical understanding and practical application ("Reading Tasks as a Pathway for Embracing TBLT in Asia: A Response to Ellis," 2024; Xiang, 2025). Nevertheless, when supported through contextual adaptation, teacher training, and technology integration, TBLT has been shown to enhance learner motivation, interactional competence, and communicative confidence across higher education and secondary learning environments (Milon et al., 2023; Intizor & Gulsanam, 2025; Triyogo & Hamdan, 2024; Dineshika & Manathunga, 2024).

Parallel to developments in communicative pedagogy, the concept of deep learning has gained increasing attention in educational research as a framework emphasizing meaningful knowledge construction, critical thinking, reflection, and transferability of learning outcomes beyond immediate instructional settings (Lian & Sihes, 2023; Samadi et al., 2024). In contrast to surface learning, which relies heavily on memorization and procedural reproduction, deep learning involves cognitive and metacognitive engagement that enables learners to analyze, evaluate, and apply knowledge in novel contexts. However, achieving deep learning outcomes in EFL education remains challenging. Examination-driven learning cultures often prioritize linguistic accuracy and discrete knowledge acquisition over inquiry, reflection, and collaborative meaning-making (Alnajjar et al., 2023; Pang, 2022).

The growing convergence between TBLT and deep learning perspectives provides a promising avenue for addressing these limitations, particularly in developing learners' metalinguistic competence. Metalinguistic competence refers to learners' ability to consciously analyze, monitor, and regulate linguistic forms during communication,

enabling them not only to use language but also to understand how language functions across contexts. Theoretically, TBLT's emphasis on authentic communication aligns closely with deep learning's focus on cognitive engagement and reflective inquiry, creating opportunities for learners to notice linguistic patterns, compare structures, and evaluate their own language production (Li, 2023; Kim & Namkung, 2024). Empirical studies indicate that inquiry-driven and technology-supported task environments can enhance learners' grammatical awareness, autonomy, and long-term language retention by embedding reflection within communicative activity (Fang et al., 2020; Almefleh et al., 2023; Xu & Baralt, 2025; Guan, 2023).

Despite increasing recognition of this pedagogical synergy, existing studies tend to examine TBLT implementation or deep learning outcomes separately, leaving limited empirical exploration of how their systematic integration contributes specifically to metalinguistic development in EFL contexts. Furthermore, research conducted across Asian and global settings highlights ongoing tensions between communicative pedagogy and examination-oriented educational systems, suggesting the need for integrative frameworks capable of reconciling communicative fluency, cognitive depth, and linguistic accuracy within realistic classroom constraints (Bryfonski, 2021; Birrina & Emaliana, 2022; Guan, 2023). Addressing this gap is particularly important in contemporary EFL education, where learners are expected not only to communicate effectively but also to develop analytical language awareness and transferable cognitive skills necessary for lifelong learning.

Accordingly, this study investigates the effectiveness of integrating Task-Based Language Teaching with deep learning principles in developing EFL learners' metalinguistic competence. The study seeks to examine how task design incorporating inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and technology-mediated feedback can facilitate deeper linguistic awareness while maintaining communicative authenticity. The objectives of this research are: (1) to analyze the pedagogical integration of TBLT and deep learning principles in EFL instruction, and (2) to evaluate its effectiveness in enhancing learners' metalinguistic competence. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions: How does the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching and deep learning principles influence EFL learners' metalinguistic competence? What pedagogical mechanisms within task-based deep learning environments contribute to learners' metalinguistic awareness and language regulation?

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative perspective that moves beyond examining TBLT or deep learning independently by proposing a unified pedagogical framework that explicitly links communicative task performance with metacognitive and metalinguistic development. By situating metalinguistic competence as the intersection between communicative practice and deep cognitive engagement, this research contributes a conceptual and empirical model for sustainable language learning that responds to contemporary challenges in EFL education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how the integration of TBLT and deep learning principles contributes to the development of EFL learners' metalinguistic competence. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of classroom practices, teacher–learner interactions, and participants' perceptions rather than to measure learning outcomes quantitatively. The research questions focus on how pedagogical integration occurs and what mechanisms support metalinguistic awareness; therefore, capturing participants'

experiences, reflections, and instructional processes required rich descriptive data derived from natural classroom settings.

Qualitative inquiry enables the researcher to examine instructional phenomena holistically, particularly the complex relationship between task implementation, cognitive engagement, and reflective language use within authentic learning environments. Since metalinguistic competence involves internal cognitive and metacognitive processes that cannot be adequately represented through standardized testing alone, classroom observation and interviews were selected to reveal learners' reasoning, awareness of linguistic forms, and teachers' pedagogical decision-making. This design also allowed the researcher to investigate contextual factors influencing TBLT implementation in Indonesian senior high schools, including institutional constraints, classroom culture, and teacher beliefs.

Despite its strengths, qualitative research is subject to several limitations. First, findings may not be statistically generalizable due to the relatively small sample size and context-specific nature of the study. Second, researcher subjectivity may influence interpretation during observation and analysis. Third, participants' responses in interviews may reflect social desirability bias. To mitigate these limitations, several strategies were employed. Data triangulation was conducted by combining classroom observations with teacher and learner interviews to cross-check emerging findings. Prolonged engagement in the research setting enhanced contextual understanding and reduced misinterpretation. Member checking was also applied by allowing participants to confirm interview summaries, ensuring interpretive accuracy. In addition, systematic coding procedures and transparent documentation of analytical decisions were maintained to enhance credibility and dependability.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 35 EFL learners and 5 EFL teachers drawn from several senior high schools in Central Lombok, Indonesia, where Task-Based Language Teaching had been implemented in English instruction. The selection of participants followed purposive sampling, as the study required individuals who had direct experience with TBLT-based classroom practices. The student participants were eleventh-grade learners aged approximately 16–17 years, representing intermediate-level English proficiency based on school placement standards. These learners were selected because they had participated in English classes structured around communicative tasks such as problem-solving discussions, collaborative projects, and inquiry-based activities aligned with TBLT principles. The sample size of 35 students was considered sufficient to provide diverse perspectives while maintaining depth of qualitative exploration.

The teacher participants consisted of five English teachers with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 18 years. All teachers had previously received professional development or institutional training related to communicative or task-based instruction and had actively incorporated TBLT in their classroom practices for at least one academic year. Demographically, participants represented both male and female educators working in public senior high schools within urban and semi-rural areas of Central Lombok. Participation was voluntary, and ethical considerations—including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality—were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Research Instruments

Two primary instruments were employed in this study: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers and selected student participants to explore perceptions, experiences, and reflections related to TBLT implementation and deep learning engagement. Interview protocols were developed

based on theoretical constructs of TBLT, deep learning, and metalinguistic competence identified in prior literature. Teacher interviews focused on task design, instructional strategies, challenges, and perceived learner development, whereas student interviews examined learning experiences, awareness of language use, reflection processes, and collaborative engagement during tasks. The interview guide underwent expert review by two applied linguistics scholars to ensure content validity and alignment with research objectives. Pilot interviews were conducted with non-participant students and teachers to refine question clarity and sequencing. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve data accuracy.

Classroom observation was conducted to document authentic teaching–learning processes during TBLT implementation. An observation checklist and field-note protocol were developed to capture key indicators such as task phases (pre-task, task, post-task), learner interaction patterns, reflective activities, attention to linguistic forms, and evidence of metalinguistic engagement. Observations were conducted across multiple instructional sessions to enhance reliability through repeated exposure. To strengthen trustworthiness, observational data were supplemented with reflective memos and compared with interview findings for triangulation. The observation framework was adapted from established TBLT classroom implementation models to ensure theoretical consistency.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed qualitative analytical procedures adapted from interactive models of qualitative analysis involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from interview transcripts and observation notes. The researcher conducted initial open coding to identify meaningful units related to task implementation, deep learning engagement, and metalinguistic awareness. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories such as collaborative inquiry, reflective learning, language noticing, and instructional challenges. This process enabled the reduction of large volumes of qualitative data while preserving essential meanings relevant to the research objectives.

Following condensation, organized data were presented through thematic matrices, narrative descriptions, and categorized tables to facilitate interpretation. Data displays allowed patterns and relationships among themes to become visible, particularly connections between classroom practices and learners' metalinguistic development. Comparative displays were also used to examine consistencies and differences between teacher perspectives and learner experiences.

The final stage involved interpreting patterns and constructing conclusions based on recurring themes across data sources. Conclusions were continuously verified through triangulation between interviews and observations, member checking with participants, and iterative comparison of emerging interpretations with raw data. This cyclical analytical process ensured that findings were grounded in empirical evidence rather than researcher assumptions. Through these procedures, the analysis generated a comprehensive understanding of how TBLT integrated with deep learning principles operates within authentic EFL classrooms and how such integration contributes to learners' metalinguistic competence development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

How does the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching and deep learning principles influence EFL learners' metalinguistic competence?

Findings derived from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews indicate that the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with deep learning principles

significantly enhanced learners' metalinguistic competence, particularly in terms of language awareness, reflective thinking, and self-regulated language use. The qualitative data revealed that learners did not merely complete communicative tasks but increasingly demonstrated the ability to notice linguistic patterns, evaluate grammatical choices, and consciously adjust their language during interaction.

Observation data showed that during task cycles—especially problem-solving discussions and collaborative projects—students frequently paused to negotiate meaning and discuss appropriate vocabulary or grammatical structures. Such interaction encouraged learners to shift from spontaneous communication toward analytical reflection on language use. Interview responses confirmed that learners became more aware of *why* certain linguistic forms were used rather than simply memorizing rules. Many participants reported that reflective post-task discussions helped them recognize recurring errors and compare English structures with their first language.

Furthermore, deep learning principles embedded in TBLT activities promoted metacognitive engagement. Learners developed strategies such as monitoring sentence construction, revising utterances during communication, and evaluating peer language production. Teachers also observed improved learner autonomy, as students increasingly corrected themselves without direct teacher intervention. These findings suggest that integrating communicative task performance with reflection and inquiry transforms language learning from procedural practice into conscious linguistic understanding.

Overall, the qualitative evidence indicates that TBLT integrated with deep learning fosters metalinguistic competence through sustained interaction, reflection, and knowledge transfer across communicative contexts. Learners demonstrated greater ability to apply linguistic knowledge flexibly in new situations, reflecting deeper and more sustainable language acquisition. The following Figure 1 summarizes dominant themes emerging from participant responses and classroom observations.

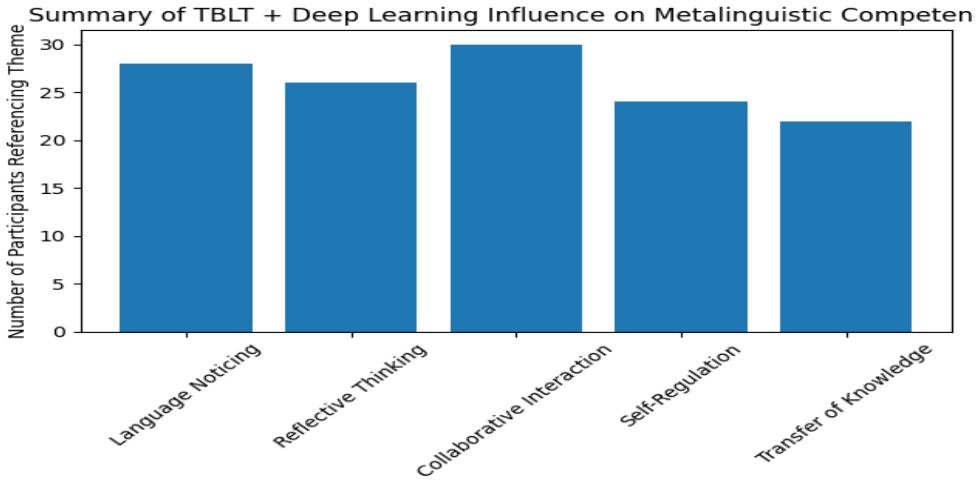


Figure 1. Summary of TBLT + Deep Learning Influence on Metalinguistic Competence

Figure 1 illustrates that collaborative interaction and language noticing emerged as the most dominant factors contributing to the development of learners' metalinguistic competence within the observed task-based deep learning environment. Collaborative interaction enabled learners to actively negotiate meaning, exchange linguistic ideas, and jointly solve communicative problems, creating opportunities for learners to verbalize and refine their understanding of grammatical structures and language use. Through peer discussion and group-based tasks, learners became more aware of language forms as they

compared expressions, corrected errors, and justified linguistic choices. Closely related to this process, language noticing occurred when learners consciously recognized gaps between their intended meaning and actual language production, prompting deeper reflection on vocabulary, syntax, and discourse patterns. Reflective thinking and self-regulation processes were also consistently observed, although slightly less frequent. Learners engaged in reflection during post-task discussions, evaluating their communicative performance and identifying strategies for improvement. These reflective practices supported self-monitoring and encouraged learners to take responsibility for regulating their learning processes. Meanwhile, knowledge transfer appeared comparatively less frequent but remained evident as learners applied previously learned linguistic concepts to new communicative contexts. This indicates that task-based deep learning activities not only supported immediate language awareness but also facilitated the gradual internalization and application of linguistic knowledge across varied learning situations.

What pedagogical mechanisms within task-based deep learning environments contribute to learners' metalinguistic awareness and language regulation?

Analysis of observational and interview data identified several pedagogical mechanisms that supported learners' metalinguistic awareness within task-based deep learning environments. The most prominent mechanism was the implementation of inquiry-based tasks, where learners were required to analyze authentic materials, solve communicative problems, or construct meaning collaboratively. These tasks encouraged learners to formulate hypotheses about language use and test them through interaction, thereby strengthening analytical awareness of linguistic structures.

A second mechanism involved collaborative problem-solving, which functioned as a form of social metacognition. During group activities, learners negotiated grammatical accuracy, clarified meanings, and justified linguistic choices. Such interaction enabled learners to externalize thinking processes, making implicit linguistic knowledge explicit. Teachers reported that peer discussion often led to deeper understanding than teacher explanation alone. Another significant mechanism was reflective debriefing, conducted during post-task stages. Teachers guided learners to evaluate task performance, identify communication breakdowns, and reflect on successful language strategies. Reflection journals and oral feedback sessions encouraged learners to regulate future language production, demonstrating emerging self-monitoring skills.

Additionally, teacher scaffolding emerged as a crucial mediating factor in facilitating learners' metalinguistic development throughout task-based learning activities. Instead of relying on direct correction or explicit explanation, teachers employed guiding questions, clarification requests, and indirect feedback strategies that encouraged learners to independently recognize linguistic inaccuracies and reconsider their language choices. This approach maintained the natural flow of communication while simultaneously drawing learners' attention to grammatical form, vocabulary usage, and discourse organization. Such scaffolding enabled learners to actively engage in hypothesis testing about language use, thereby strengthening both linguistic awareness and learner autonomy. Classroom observations indicated that learners became increasingly capable of self-correction and peer-supported revision as teachers gradually reduced instructional intervention.

Furthermore, technology-enhanced feedback significantly supported this learning process. Digital presentations, online dictionaries, learning platforms, and multimedia resources provided learners with opportunities to revisit task outcomes, compare language models, and refine accuracy beyond immediate classroom interaction. These technological tools promoted independent learning by allowing students to review linguistic input

repeatedly and monitor their own progress. As a result, feedback extended beyond teacher-led evaluation toward learner-driven reflection and improvement.

Collectively, these pedagogical mechanisms demonstrate that metalinguistic awareness develops most effectively within structured communicative environments rather than through isolated grammar instruction. Reflection, collaboration, guided feedback, and technological mediation functioned synergistically to support deeper cognitive engagement with language. The integration of deep learning principles ensured that task performance fostered analytical thinking and metacognitive regulation, transforming classroom activities into meaningful learning experiences. Figure 2 therefore summarizes the pedagogical mechanisms most frequently identified across the qualitative data sources analyzed in this study.

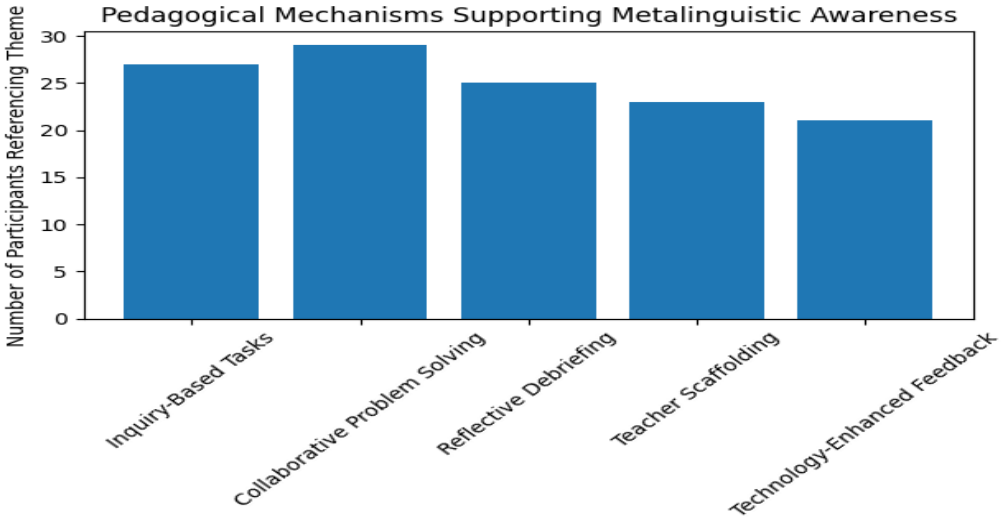


Figure 2. pedagogical mechanisms Supporting Metalinguistic Awareness

Figure 2 demonstrates that collaborative problem solving and inquiry-based tasks functioned as the most influential pedagogical mechanisms in supporting learners' language regulation within task-based deep learning environments. Collaborative problem solving encouraged learners to negotiate meaning, discuss alternative linguistic expressions, and jointly resolve communicative challenges, thereby promoting conscious monitoring of language use. Through interaction, learners were required not only to produce language but also to evaluate its appropriateness and accuracy, which strengthened their ability to regulate grammatical and lexical choices during communication. Similarly, inquiry-based tasks stimulated learners' analytical engagement by prompting them to explore language patterns, formulate hypotheses, and test linguistic assumptions in authentic contexts.

Reflective debriefing and teacher scaffolding also played significant roles in reinforcing language regulation processes. Post-task reflection allowed learners to reassess performance, identify recurring errors, and develop strategies for future communication, fostering greater self-awareness and metacognitive control. Teacher scaffolding complemented this process by providing strategic guidance that directed learners' attention toward linguistic improvement without limiting communicative interaction. Meanwhile, technology-enhanced feedback emerged as an increasingly meaningful support factor. Although less dominant, digital tools enabled learners to revisit task outputs, access corrective models, and independently refine language accuracy. Collectively, these mechanisms highlight how

structured interaction, reflection, and guided support contribute to sustainable development of learners' self-regulated language use.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with deep learning principles plays a significant role in fostering EFL learners' metalinguistic competence through reflective engagement, collaborative interaction, and self-regulated language use. The qualitative evidence obtained from classroom observations and interviews indicates that learners moved beyond procedural language performance toward conscious awareness of linguistic structures and communicative choices. These results reinforce and extend existing research emphasizing the pedagogical effectiveness of TBLT when combined with cognitively engaging learning environments.

First, the present findings confirm earlier studies suggesting that TBLT promotes meaningful interaction that facilitates language awareness development. Previous research has consistently shown that communicative tasks encourage learners to negotiate meaning and attend to linguistic form during interaction (Li, 2023; Intizor & Gulsanam, 2025). In this study, learners frequently paused during task performance to discuss grammar, vocabulary selection, and sentence construction, indicating active metalinguistic processing. This supports findings by Fang et al. (2020), who reported that task-based interaction enhances learners' conversational engagement and linguistic noticing through authentic communication. However, the current study extends these conclusions by demonstrating that such noticing becomes more systematic when deep learning principles—particularly reflection and inquiry—are embedded within task cycles. Thus, the integration of deep learning transforms TBLT from communicative practice into a mechanism for cognitive and metacognitive development.

The enhancement of learners' reflective thinking observed in this study also aligns with deep learning theory, which emphasizes knowledge construction rather than memorization (Lian & Sihes, 2023; Samadi et al., 2024). Learners' ability to evaluate their own language production and compare English structures with their first language indicates the emergence of higher-order thinking processes. Similar outcomes were reported by Alnajjar et al. (2023), who found that technology-supported learning environments strengthen metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy in EFL contexts. Nevertheless, while earlier studies often examined deep learning outcomes independently from communicative pedagogy, the present research provides empirical evidence that reflective cognition can naturally emerge within communicative task performance when instructional design intentionally integrates inquiry and post-task reflection.

Another important finding concerns the role of collaborative interaction as a pedagogical mechanism supporting metalinguistic awareness. Classroom observations revealed that peer discussion functioned as a form of social cognition in which learners articulated reasoning, justified grammatical decisions, and negotiated meaning collectively. This finding corroborates studies highlighting collaborative learning as a catalyst for deeper language processing (Alzubi et al., 2024; Jiang, 2022). Collaborative tasks enabled learners to externalize implicit linguistic knowledge, making language rules explicit through dialogue. Such interaction reflects Vygotskian perspectives on socially mediated learning, where cognitive development occurs through shared problem-solving activities. Compared with traditional teacher-centered grammar instruction, learners in this study demonstrated stronger self-correction and peer regulation abilities, supporting Kumar et al. (2023), who argue that peer interaction enhances language monitoring and evaluative skills.

Furthermore, the study highlights reflective post-task activities as a critical component linking TBLT and deep learning outcomes. Previous research has emphasized the importance of task cycles consisting of pre-task, task performance, and post-task reflection (Ellis, as discussed in Xu & Baralt, 2025). The findings show that reflective debriefing sessions enabled learners to analyze communication breakdowns and identify linguistic improvement strategies, thereby strengthening language regulation. This result extends the work of Huang et al. (2024), who demonstrated that inquiry-based reflection enhances learner engagement and analytical thinking in EFL instruction. Unlike surface-level communicative activities criticized in earlier TBLT implementation studies (Maulana, 2021; Kessler et al., 2020), the classrooms observed in this research successfully operationalized reflection as an integral learning process rather than an optional follow-up activity.

Teacher scaffolding emerged as another influential mechanism supporting metalinguistic competence. Instead of direct correction, teachers employed prompting questions and guided feedback to draw learners' attention to linguistic form while maintaining communicative flow. This finding is consistent with Guan (2023), who noted that effective TBLT implementation depends heavily on teachers' pedagogical mediation and beliefs about learner autonomy. The results further support Bryfonski (2021), emphasizing that task-based instruction becomes effective when teachers shift from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of cognitive engagement. Importantly, the present study shows that scaffolding contributes not only to communicative fluency but also to learners' capacity for self-monitoring and independent language regulation.

The contribution of technology-enhanced feedback observed in this study also aligns with recent literature highlighting digital tools as facilitators of deep learning. Technology allowed learners to revisit language output, refine accuracy, and reflect independently on linguistic performance. Similar findings were reported by Barad (2024) and Mohammed (2024), who identified technology integration as a means of supporting meaningful engagement and learner autonomy in language classrooms. However, unlike studies focusing primarily on technological innovation, this research demonstrates that technology functions most effectively when embedded within pedagogically structured task environments rather than used as an isolated instructional tool.

Interestingly, the findings partially challenge concerns raised in previous research regarding the difficulty of implementing TBLT in examination-oriented educational systems (Nghia & Nguyen, 2021; Nurmayanti, 2025). Although contextual constraints such as limited time and curriculum demands were acknowledged by participating teachers, the integration of deep learning principles appeared to mitigate these challenges by promoting efficiency through collaborative inquiry and learner autonomy. This suggests that pedagogical integration, rather than methodological replacement, may provide a practical solution for reconciling communicative teaching with institutional expectations. The study therefore extends existing scholarship by proposing that deep learning principles strengthen the sustainability of TBLT implementation in real classroom contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the understanding of metalinguistic competence as an intersection between communicative interaction and cognitive reflection. While earlier TBLT research primarily emphasized communicative competence (Intizor & Gulsanam, 2025; Milon et al., 2023), this study demonstrates that communicative tasks can simultaneously foster analytical language awareness when supported by inquiry-based learning processes. Consequently, metalinguistic competence should be viewed not as a separate outcome of explicit grammar instruction but as an emergent property of meaningful communication combined with reflective cognition.

Practically, the study suggests several pedagogical implications for EFL instruction. Teachers should design tasks that require learners to analyze language use, justify choices, and reflect on performance outcomes. Incorporating structured reflection and collaborative inquiry into task cycles may enhance long-term language retention and learner autonomy. Professional development programs should also emphasize strategies for integrating deep learning principles into communicative pedagogy, enabling teachers to move beyond activity-based instruction toward cognitively meaningful learning experiences.

Despite these contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. The qualitative nature of the study limits generalizability beyond the specific context of senior high schools in Central Lombok. Additionally, variations in teacher expertise and institutional support may influence implementation outcomes. Future research may employ mixed-method or longitudinal designs to examine how integrated TBLT–deep learning approaches influence metalinguistic development over extended learning periods.

This study confirms, enriches, and extends previous research by demonstrating that the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching and deep learning principles creates pedagogical conditions conducive to developing EFL learners' metalinguistic competence. Through collaborative interaction, inquiry-based tasks, reflective learning, scaffolding, and technology-supported feedback, learners develop not only communicative ability but also conscious control over language use. These findings highlight the importance of integrating communicative pedagogy with cognitive depth to achieve sustainable and meaningful language learning in contemporary EFL education.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and deep learning principles constitutes an effective pedagogical framework for fostering EFL learners' metalinguistic competence in senior high school contexts. The qualitative evidence demonstrates that learners developed increased awareness of linguistic forms, improved ability to monitor and regulate their language production, and greater confidence in analyzing language use within authentic communicative situations. Rather than acquiring language through memorization or isolated grammar instruction, learners engaged in meaningful tasks that required reflection, inquiry, and collaborative problem-solving. This learning environment enabled students to consciously connect language form, meaning, and function, thereby transforming communicative practice into deeper cognitive engagement. The study confirms that when task cycles incorporate reflective and inquiry-oriented processes, learners move beyond surface-level participation toward sustained metacognitive development, supporting more transferable and autonomous language learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the study concludes that specific pedagogical mechanisms embedded within task-based deep learning environments—such as collaborative interaction, teacher scaffolding, reflective post-task discussions, and technology-supported feedback—serve as critical drivers of metalinguistic awareness and language regulation. These mechanisms allow learners to notice linguistic patterns, evaluate communicative effectiveness, and refine their language choices through both social interaction and self-reflection. Importantly, the findings suggest that integrating deep learning principles helps address long-standing challenges in TBLT implementation, particularly in exam-oriented educational systems, by promoting learner autonomy and maximizing classroom interaction efficiency. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating how TBLT and deep learning operate synergistically rather than independently, offering an integrated instructional model that simultaneously enhances communicative competence and analytical language awareness. Consequently, this research contributes to contemporary EFL pedagogy by proposing that sustainable

language development can be achieved when communicative language teaching is systematically aligned with cognitive and metacognitive learning processes.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist in language refinement, organization of ideas, and improvement of academic clarity during the preparation of this manuscript. The use of AI did not replace the authors' intellectual contribution, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or scholarly judgment. All content, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this study remain the full responsibility of the authors, and the manuscript has been carefully reviewed to ensure its accuracy, originality, and academic integrity.

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