



## RESEARCH ARTICLE



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## IMPLEMENTING TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN AN ESP CLASSROOM: DESIGN AND IMPLICATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary global scenario, English is widely accepted as a link language, especially in the fields of business and marketing. Therefore, professionals in a business setting are expected to acquire the optimal level of linguistic competence that the workplace demands to perform effectively in their assigned job positions. In this context, the significance of Business English, a variety of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is immense in business correspondence and reporting. The research paper discusses the means of implementing the principles, techniques and praxis of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in teaching English as a second language in a Business English classroom. The study follows a descriptive methodology by reviewing literature related to the prior studies in TBLT and ESP. The study elaborates on a detailed lesson plan that had been validated and field tested with a group of business English learners at the undergraduate level in Kerala. The research paper provides insights regarding the implications of TBLT in an ESP classroom by elaborating on the scope and possible challenges. The researcher also makes a few recommendations and suggestions. The research concludes that incorporating TBLT as a part of one of the methodologies can immensely benefit students of English for specific purposes.



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## INTRODUCTION

Language as means of communication serves a crucial role in the educational development of a society. Being the global lingua franca, the English language has been accepted as the linking language in the business world. Hence, English language proficiency has become an imperative tool for survival in India's workplace environment, as adequate English language proficiency can provide immense employment opportunities and career advancements. Approaches in second language teaching have been developed over the years to address the specific needs of the target learners at their workplaces. Economic globalisation and privatisation, among other significant factors, have tremendously contributed to the great demand for the teaching of ESP.

## ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP)

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) caters to the specific English language needs of the target learners. ESP is a specialised approach oriented and focused on teaching a specific genre of English to learners with specific goals. ESP is one of the key areas of study in theoretical and applied linguistics. It is considered "a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends" (Hutchinson and Waters 6). As the content and aims of the ESP approach are oriented to the specific needs of the learners, the focus is on the language, skills, and genres appropriate to the specific activities the learners need to carry out in English. In the ESP classroom, learners explore how the subject matter is expressed in English. The instructor or language can help the target group learn English faster by making

the most of their knowledge of the subject matter. ESP provides an opportunity to learn in an accelerated, intensive context as it enhances learning speed, efficiency and effectiveness (Wright 5).

The specific linguistic needs of business correspondence and reporting are addressed through Business English, a variety of ESP. Business English shares several characteristics with General English. General English and Business English are different types of English language as forms of communication. However, it has to be specified that these two's approaches and objectives extensively differ. The approach for General English focuses more on the basic conversational daily use of words, whereas Business English is technical and complex. This kind of English is used specifically in workplaces or among colleagues for the purpose of effective business communication.

## BUSINESS ENGLISH: AN OVERVIEW

In a globally connected world, Business English is becoming progressively significant as multinational companies demand their staff to be multilingual with adequate proficiency in the English language. Moreover, numerous influencing factors such as the development of technology, new powerhouse economies, demanding markets, and developments in the financial sector have had an immense impact on the process of teaching and learning Business English. A linguistic branch within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Business English aids the learners of business to analyse their needs and effectively use the English language at the workplace.

Business English allows effective communication within a business environment.



Business English skills which business professionals need to perform well include writing e-mails and reports, making presentations, doing negotiations, using the telephone, attending and participating actively in meetings or telephone conferences, receiving visitors, etc. (Rao 1). Therefore, in a Business English classroom, aspects such as letters, resumes, business phrases, or terms will be frequently discussed. This approach intertwines the subject matter and English language teaching skills. The Business English instructor does not need to be an expert in any particular field of business. A qualified and skilled English teacher with access to authentic materials can help bring the real world into the classroom. The role of a teacher is, therefore, to adapt teaching skills and strategies for teaching Business English.

#### **TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)**

TBLT is a communicative approach in which the language trainer or teacher facilitates the use of tasks at the core of language teaching. In this approach, the learners do meaningful activities or tasks. Willis (1996) has defined the term task as those "activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome (28)". He further explains that "within the TBL framework, tasks and texts combine to give students a rich exposure to language and opportunities to use it themselves" (101). The tasks assigned can be daily routines, or in the context of ESP, tasks could be the activities the learners are required to perform at their workplace, such as writing an email or a report. TBLT often facilitates group activities where learners learn by interacting

and collaborating with their peers. The focus of a TBL is on process rather than product.

A task-based lesson "involves learners comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form" (Nunan 10). This approach puts tasks at the centre of one's methodological focus. It views the learning process as a set of communicative tasks directly linked to the curricular goals they serve, the purposes of which extend beyond the practice of language for its own sake (Brown 83). To attain the objectives of a TBL task, the task should have an appropriate level of complexity and difficulty. In an ESP context, a task should reflect what learners need to perform in real-life situations at the workplace. Moreover, tasks must be based on authentic materials.

#### **DESIGNING A TASK-BASED LESSON**

In an ESP context, the learners' primary goal is to be able to perform target language tasks for effective real-life communication at the workplace. Ellis cites numerous authors who discuss designs of frameworks; however, they all coincide in three principal stages: 'pre-task', 'during task' and 'post-task' (2). According to Ellis, the first phase in the framework is the 'pre-task' that includes the various activities that teachers and students can undertake before beginning the task. The second phase is the 'during task' phase. It deals with performing the task itself. Whereas the last stage is 'post-task'. It involves a quick follow-up on the task performance (2).

According to another framework by Willis, a TBL lesson has three main components: an



introduction to the task, task cycle and language focus. Introduction to the topic and the task is the preliminary stage, where the trainer or teacher introduces the learners to the topic. The teacher highlights useful words and phrases and helps learners understand task instructions. The task cycle consists of the task, planning and report. Learners do the task in pairs or groups while the teacher monitors from a distance and instils encouragement. During the planning stage, learners prepare to report to the whole class, and thereafter, the groups present their reports to the class, whereas the teacher comments on the content of the reports. The language focus includes both analysis and practice. Learners observe and discuss specific features of the text. The teacher conducts practice of new words, phrases, and patterns in the text, during or after the analysis.

The researcher has adapted the framework to suit the target learners' needs by incorporating it into an ESP lesson plan designed for undergraduate learners of Business English in Kerala. The lesson was administered to intermediate-level learners. They were a heterogeneous group of twenty-four learners of Indian origin. They belong to various linguistic and educational backgrounds with the same first language, Malayalam. They include both strong and weak eighteen-year-old students who are passionate about learning Business English for specific purposes. The length of the lesson was ninety minutes.

The main aim of the lesson was to facilitate the learners to develop their writing skills using the context of a business report. The assumption was that by the end of this lesson, the learners would be able to write a report with a real-life function, purpose and audience. The secondary aim was to

allow the learners to practice their reading skills. The assumption was that the detailed reading activity provided would help the learners understand the context and layout necessary for completing the task. Some personal aims were to attempt a task-based approach and also to achieve both the primary and the secondary aims to an optimal level within the time limit.

To arouse learners' interest and set the context, the researcher began the session with a five-minute lead-in, which also helped build rapport. Adequate student talk time was facilitated by setting up a context based on the idea of writing a business report, thereby proceeding to the task preparation stage that lasted for fifteen minutes. The learners, twenty-four in number, were divided into eight groups of three. A written report was provided to each of the groups of learners as a model of the task (report writing). The purpose was to give the learners a manageable task for detailed reading. Learners were given clear instructions, and a demo was done [*Read the text and think about suitable headings for paragraphs 1,3 and 4. The second paragraph is done for you.*]. Information check questions were asked to check comprehension and proper understanding. In groups, learners read the report and complete the detailed reading task. Subsequently, student-led whole-class feedback was also initiated.

The next ten minutes were used to input some useful language which would be useful for performing the task. Some basic aspects, such as the change of pronouns and the addition of 'by' while converting active voice to passive voice, were discussed. This was done by eliciting with the aid of meaningful and appropriate concept check questions.



The meaning, form and function were checked, and occasional drilling was done. The researcher also responded to the learner's requirements as and when needed.

During the planning stage, which lasted for twenty minutes, the learners were given the opportunity and time to marshal their ideas and to improve their ability to express these ideas in writing. Clear instructions were delivered and signposted [As a team, write a report in 150- 200 words. You are a member of the HR division of your company. Prepare a report to show the lack of proper infrastructure in the office campus, which is affecting the productivity of the employees]. The various stages, such as planning, writing a rough draft, and editing the final draft, were introduced before the learners started their planning. Instruction check questions were asked to check whether the instructions were understood. The learners were asked to take five minutes to plan the content as a team and to decide the following aspects: the possible title for the report, the sub-headings, relevant information to include under each sub-heading etc. The learners started planning, in groups, based on their understanding of the context and model layout. Brainstorming of useful information took place in the classroom. The learners were closely monitored as well. Individual language input was initiated to facilitate peer learning to a greater extent.

The next ten minutes were consumed for preparing the draft. The nominated member became the scribe of each group. Learners, as a team, wrote the rough draft. The researcher practised close monitoring. In case of a few on-the-spot error corrections, focus on meaning rather than spelling or

grammar. Subsequently, the task performance that lasted for twenty minutes provided the opportunity for the learners to write a report with a specific audience, objective and function. Learners performed the task of writing a report with the help of some on-the-spot error correction from the researcher. All the groups of learners prepared the final draft successfully, and the nominated member of each group read out the report.

The follow-up was done for the last ten minutes to give the learners a sense of conclusion to the lesson and also to focus on how successfully they completed the task and on further improvements to their future. All groups of learners were encouraged to ask questions and also comment on the other group's report. Learners chose the best report, and the team was rewarded. The researcher made efforts to encourage, appreciate and motivate the learners. Both the content and language feedback were provided. Homework was assigned to write another report which had to be submitted online via email. This was done to ensure the effective practice of writing an email which was an earlier lesson for the target group. Finally, the lesson was concluded with a few final clarifications and ending comments.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF TBLT IN AN ESP CLASSROOM**

The lesson was designed to help learners who aspire to develop business English competence. The learners were facilitated to understand and use the passive voice in English. The learners were provided with an opportunity set free from the traditional approaches of teaching and to write a business report using a more innovative methodology, the Task-based approach. The lesson was highly learner-centred. The group tasks ensured the learners'



communication and collaboration, facilitating peer learning. The role of the researcher (teacher) was that of the facilitator, who guided and monitored by providing motivation.

The lesson facilitated a pre-task, a while task and a post-task. The pre-task was to read the model provided and to suggest suitable sub-titles. While task was to plan and draft a report. The post-task included follow-up on content and language. Homework was also assigned individually. The lesson can be considered successful as the main objective of the lesson had been achieved to an optimal level since the learners had come up with the reports with the appropriate use of passive voice in English. It has been observed that the learners were active, enthusiastic and cheerful throughout the lesson.

#### ADVANTAGES AND SCOPE OF TBLT

TBLT has multifaceted advantages when implemented in an ESP classroom. Firstly, in contrast to the traditional prescriptive language teaching approaches, TBLT provides a meaningful context, a specific purpose and an audience. The tasks mimic real-life situations through which learners acquire a deeper understanding of the language. The focus is on process rather than product, and the learners perform meaningful tasks which are addressed to a specific audience. It is a communicative approach that involves pair and group activities through which the target group learn by interacting and building rapport with each other. Peer learning, feedback and reflective practices increase confidence and motivation. TBLT is undoubtedly a student-centred approach that facilitates a lot of student talk time, thereby making the lesson more interesting and less

monotonous. The feedback received from the students was positive and satisfactory.

#### CHALLENGES OBSERVED WHILE DELIVERING A TBLT

Despite the advantages, implementing the TBLT methodology in an ESP classroom is challenging for language teachers. One of the primary challenges is that the probability of failure of the lesson is high. The lesson might fail unless properly planned and suitably adapted as per the target group and the specific classroom environment. Therefore, this approach is highly time-consuming. It took much time for the researcher to plan an effective lesson plan. The language instructor or teacher must be capable enough to adapt to the lesson plan as and when required to manage the time constraints so that the lesson does not remain unfinished. The requirement of resources could also be a probable challenge as such a lesson requires resources beyond the textbooks and related materials usually found in language classrooms.

A few other challenges include unequal participation of learners and differences in enthusiasm among students. It has been observed that the learners tend to translate a lot of their L1 (first language) rather than the target language during the tasks. Hence the teacher has to be keen on facilitating the use of the target language in class through monitoring and encouraging guided discovery and peer feedback. The students are exposed to the limited acquisition of new grammar or vocabulary. There is also a risk for learners to achieve fluency at the expense of accuracy.



## RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

While planning to implement the TBLT approach in an ESP classroom, certain aspects must be taken care of. Select and plan tasks during the needs analysis stage to include pedagogical tasks that correlate with ESP learners' activities at their workplace. Efforts must be taken towards integrating different language skills within the TBL framework. Learners' motivation should be kept high. Delayed error corrections and feedbacks are mandatory. In the contemporary scenario, online teaching and learning could also be encouraged and practised.

The language teacher or instructor must be aware that the characteristics of a task-based approach are not similar to the traditional grammar-based, teacher-centred methodologies, even though they are included in communicative methods or approaches. In an ESP context, teachers should always take advantage of the knowledge and experience that students bring to class so that they generate their ideas. Hence the role of a teacher in a TBL is limited to that of a facilitator who promotes peer learning and guided discovery. Robust monitoring must be avoided; assistance can be provided if the situation demands it.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the ESP approach emphasises a specific field, facilitating the target group of learners to master the skills relevant to their professional and workplace requirements. The ability to propagate information accurately and communicate is one of the most vital and desirable skills sought out by employers in business settings. Through appropriate needs analysis, a planned business English curriculum

can provide ample opportunities for the learners to be equipped with the LSRW skill sets and basic grammar and vocabulary. This study has shed light on the effective incorporation of TBL in the ESP classroom and its role in enhancing learners' learning skills acquisition. The paper describes the framework of a validated and field-tested lesson plan implemented for a group of undergraduate students who pursue business English as one of the lessons among the many they have as part of their ESP course on Business English. It has been observed that the implementation of TBL with pair or group work generates a healthy and motivating teaching and learning environment. Moreover, it is an approach that increases learning interaction, responsibility, learner autonomy, critical thinking and collaboration. Nevertheless, several obstacles impede the implementation of this approach in language teaching and learning, namely disinterested learners, large size classes, insufficient time, lack of materials, facilities, and infrastructure, and learners' negative attitudes and behaviours. To conclude, considering the scope, challenges and other aspects discussed, TBLT can be implemented in an ESP classroom as one of the methodologies specified for the particular ESP course.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

LSRW: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing

TBA: Task-Based Approach

TBLT: Task-Based Language Teaching

TBL Task-Based Lesson

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