TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AS A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. This article explores task-based language teaching (TBLT) as a pedagogical framework for developing English speaking competence in higher education. Drawing on established scholarship in second-language acquisition and communicative language teaching, it examines the relation between meaningful task performance, interaction, feedback and form-focused reflection. A three-stage instructional model is proposed for university English courses: pre-task orientation, collaborative task performance and post-task analysis. The paper demonstrates the model through constructed classroom scenarios involving information gaps, decision-making and academic discussion. It also considers assessment criteria, teacher mediation and constraints of large multilingual classrooms. The contribution is conceptual and pedagogical; no classroom experiment, participant sample or measured learning gains are reported.

Keywords: English language teaching, task-based language teaching, speaking competence, higher education, classroom interaction, formative assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The development of spoken English is a central objective of university language education, particularly where students are expected to take part in seminars, presentations, collaborative projects and professional exchanges. Yet successful performance in controlled grammar exercises does not necessarily translate into the ability to negotiate meaning in unpredictable conversations. Learners may possess lexical and grammatical knowledge while experiencing difficulty initiating turns, requesting clarification, expressing disagreement or reformulating a contribution after a misunderstanding.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) offers a pedagogical response by organizing instruction around meaningful activities with communicative purposes. The defining feature of a task is not the absence of attention to grammar, but the requirement that learners use available linguistic resources to accomplish an outcome. Such an orientation can connect classroom language practice with the discourse demands of higher education without reducing instruction to unstructured conversation.

The aim of this paper is to formulate a practical, theoretically informed model for using tasks to develop English speaking competence in university settings. The guiding question is how task design, structured interaction and post-task reflection can be integrated so that opportunities for spontaneous communication are complemented by targeted language support. The discussion is intended as a methodological proposal rather than as a report of empirical effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative language teaching reoriented language instruction towards learners' capacity to use language appropriately in social contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Within this broader tradition, task-based approaches prioritize purposeful work such as exchanging missing information, choosing between alternatives or solving a shared problem. Ellis (2003) distinguishes tasks from exercises primarily concerned with practising specified linguistic forms: in a task, meaning is central and completion is assessed through a communicative outcome.

Willis (1996) describes a sequence in which a pre-task phase prepares learners, the task cycle enables meaning-focused language use, and subsequent language focus supports analysis and practice. Long (2015) emphasizes the value

of aligning pedagogical tasks with needs and with forms of communication that learners are likely to encounter beyond the classroom. These perspectives are compatible insofar as they treat task performance as purposeful while allowing instructional attention to linguistic accuracy.

Interaction provides a further rationale. Long (1996) argues that negotiation of meaning can connect input, attention and learner output. Swain (2005) identifies a complementary role for production: attempts to express meaning can reveal gaps in linguistic resources and stimulate reflection. However, participation alone does not ensure progress. Tasks may distribute speaking opportunities unevenly, and students may rely on familiar language unless complexity and feedback are thoughtfully managed.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) explicitly recognizes interaction and mediation as dimensions of communicative activity. For higher education, this suggests that speaking competence should include not only fluency and accuracy but also turn management, collaborative meaning-making and the ability to clarify or synthesize another speaker's contribution.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The study uses conceptual synthesis and pedagogical task analysis. Its material consists of published theoretical frameworks and three deliberately constructed university classroom scenarios. The scenarios are analytical illustrations, not records of observed lessons. They are assessed against four design questions: (1) whether a task specifies a meaningful outcome; (2) whether it requires reciprocal communication; (3) whether participation can be supported without scripting every utterance; and (4) whether the outcome makes formative feedback possible.

A lesson-level model is proposed with three connected stages. In pre-task orientation, the instructor introduces the purpose, clarifies relevant situational constraints and activates useful vocabulary without supplying a complete dialogue. During task performance, students communicate in pairs or small groups to achieve a specific outcome, while the teacher monitors participation and records recurring language needs. In post-task analysis, students compare solutions, examine selected expressions and revise short segments of their oral performance.

The model is not intended as a fixed sequence for every class. Time allocation, task complexity, support materials and grouping require adaptation to students' language proficiency and disciplinary backgrounds. Claims about its effectiveness would require subsequent classroom investigation using transparent measures and ethically collected evidence.

RESULTS AND PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS

1. Information-gap task: explaining an academic timetable. Two students receive complementary parts of a weekly programme containing room changes, seminar deadlines and office hours. Each must ask questions to assemble a complete schedule. The communicative outcome is a jointly verified timetable. The information gap creates a reason to request repetition, check dates and resolve conflicting interpretations. The teacher may later draw attention to clarification moves such as "Do you mean the Thursday session?" and "Could you repeat the room number?"

2. Decision-making task: selecting a campus initiative. Small groups are given three hypothetical proposals for improving student learning spaces, each with different costs, access restrictions and expected benefits. Their task is to select one proposal and explain the decision to another group. Because several answers are defensible, learners must justify preferences, qualify claims and respond to objections. A brief role allocation—chair, evidence presenter and summarizer—can support equitable participation without determining the language of each contribution.

3. Academic mediation task: synthesizing sources. Pairs read different short summaries of an educational issue, such as the balance between online and face-to-face feedback. They explain their respective texts and jointly prepare a one-minute oral synthesis that identifies a common point and one disagreement. Success depends on accurately conveying another text's meaning rather than merely expressing a personal opinion. This task links spoken interaction with academic literacy and the mediation perspective represented in the CEFR Companion Volume.

Taken together, the scenarios illustrate three different routes to meaningful spoken production: exchanging missing information, negotiating a shared decision and mediating written information. They are not a frequency distribution of teaching practices, nor do they provide evidence that any task produces a specific numerical improvement. Their value lies in making task-design principles explicit and open to evaluation.

Formative assessment should correspond to the communicative demands of the task. A feasible analytic rubric may distinguish task completion, intelligibility, interactional responsiveness, linguistic range and accuracy. For example, task completion concerns whether a decision was justified or a timetable reconstructed; interactional responsiveness concerns clarification requests, uptake and turn sharing. Scores should be interpreted alongside teacher observations and, where feasible, brief student self-assessments. A single global speaking score would obscure these different dimensions.

Task sequencing also matters. Beginning with a narrowly structured information gap can reduce cognitive demands, while subsequent decision-making and synthesis tasks introduce more extended argumentation and mediation. This progression does not imply that every learner follows the same developmental trajectory. Rather, it gives teachers a reasoned basis for revisiting communicative functions under changing conditions, including different interlocutors and time constraints.

DISCUSSION

One pedagogical strength of TBLT is its capacity to create a genuine reason to speak. When the outcome cannot be achieved by one student alone, interaction becomes a resource for completing the task rather than a performance staged solely for teacher evaluation. Nevertheless, task authenticity must be understood in relation to students' actual academic needs; an elaborate scenario is not educationally valuable merely because it resembles real life.

Implementation in large multilingual university classes presents practical challenges. Uneven proficiency may cause confident learners to dominate while quieter students withdraw. Teachers can address this through rotating roles, clear completion criteria, preparatory notes and short reporting rounds. These procedures protect participation while retaining flexibility in how students express ideas. Strategic first-language use may help clarify task instructions, provided that the central communicative work remains in English.

A second challenge concerns the balance of fluency and accuracy. Excessive interruption during a task can disrupt communication, whereas the absence of feedback may leave persistent problems unnoticed. A delayed-feedback approach allows the instructor to record recurrent difficulties during interaction and select a manageable number for subsequent analysis. Students may then reformulate statements, compare alternative expressions and repeat a segment of the task with an explicit improvement goal.

Digital platforms can extend task interaction through breakout discussions, shared documents and audio reflections. Such technologies should, however, be selected because they enable collaboration or preserve evidence for feedback, not simply because they are available. Accessibility, connectivity and students' familiarity with the platform remain part of pedagogical design. In this sense, TBLT is best understood as a flexible framework for planning communicative opportunities rather than as a technology-dependent teaching method.

The principal limitation of this paper is methodological. Constructed scenarios cannot demonstrate learner progress, causal mechanisms or comparative advantages over other methods. Future research could examine implementation through a clearly specified teaching intervention, pre-defined oral performance descriptors, recordings collected with informed consent, and independent scoring. Qualitative evidence from learner reflections would also help identify how task demands are experienced by students at different proficiency levels.

CONCLUSION

Task-based language teaching provides a coherent framework for connecting English speaking practice with the communicative expectations of higher education. Its potential lies in combining purposeful outcomes with opportunities for negotiation, collaboration and reflection on language form. The proposed three-stage model brings together pre-task

preparation, meaning-focused performance and post-task feedback, while the illustrative scenarios show how information exchange, decision-making and academic mediation can be translated into classroom activities.

The central pedagogical implication is that effective speaking instruction should assess what learners accomplish with language as well as how accurately they produce it. Task design, equitable participation and explicit formative criteria are therefore integral components of instruction. The model presented here is a conceptual resource for teachers and a starting point for empirical inquiry; its impact on language development remains to be tested.

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