

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH TASK-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20228239>

Abstract: This article discusses the role of task-based language teaching in developing communicative competence among university students learning English as a foreign language. In many EFL classrooms, students often gain knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but still experience difficulties when they need to use English in real communication. For this reason, language teaching should provide learners with purposeful activities that reflect authentic communication rather than focusing only on mechanical practice. The article explores how task-based instruction, supported by appropriate digital tools and authentic materials, can help students improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in an integrated way. It also considers the importance of lesson stages, learner motivation, classroom context, and teacher guidance. The article argues that when tasks are carefully designed, they encourage students to use English more confidently, develop fluency and accuracy, and become more active participants in the learning process.

Keywords: *communicative competence, task-based learning, English language teaching, EFL learners, higher education, authentic materials, digital tools, learner autonomy.*

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching in higher education has changed significantly in recent years. Today, students are expected not only to understand grammar rules or memorize vocabulary, but also to use English for academic, professional, and social communication. In the context of Uzbekistan, English is becoming increasingly important for students who plan to continue their studies, work with international sources, participate in global communication, or build careers in fields connected with technology, business, education, and research. Therefore, English instruction at university level should prepare learners for practical and meaningful language use.

One of the main challenges in EFL classrooms is the gap between language knowledge and language performance. Many students can complete written grammar exercises successfully, but they may hesitate when they need to express their own ideas in speech or writing. This happens because traditional instruction often gives more attention to forms of language than to the use of language in real situations. As a result, learners may know English theoretically, but they do not always feel confident enough to communicate.

Task-based language teaching offers a useful way to address this problem. In this approach, students learn language by completing meaningful tasks. A task may involve solving a problem, discussing a situation, preparing a short presentation, conducting an interview, comparing opinions, writing a message, or working together on a small project. The main purpose is not simply to practise a grammar rule, but to use English as a tool for communication. According to Nunan, effective classroom tasks should involve learners in understanding, producing, and interacting in the target language while focusing mainly on meaning [4]. This

makes task-based learning especially valuable in EFL settings, where students may have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom.

A task-based lesson can be organized through three main stages: pre-task, while-task, and post-task. In the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the topic, activates students' previous knowledge, presents useful vocabulary, and prepares learners for the main activity. For example, before a lesson on job interviews, students may discuss common interview questions, watch a short video, or brainstorm useful phrases. This stage is important because it gives students the language support they need and helps them participate more confidently.

The while-task stage is the central part of the lesson. At this point, students work individually, in pairs, or in groups to complete a communicative activity. They may exchange information, make decisions, ask and answer questions, or prepare a final product. During this stage, the teacher's role is to guide, observe, and support students rather than dominate the lesson. Learners are encouraged to communicate as naturally as possible, even if their language is not perfect. This creates a more realistic learning environment, where students can develop fluency through actual use of English.

The post-task stage gives the teacher and students an opportunity to reflect on the activity. Students may present their results, discuss what they found difficult, correct common mistakes, or improve their original responses. This stage is also useful for focusing on accuracy. Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation can be discussed after the communicative task, when students already understand why these language points are useful. Ellis notes that task-based instruction can support both fluency and accuracy when communication is followed by appropriate language focus [2].

Another important element of effective task-based teaching is the use of authentic materials. Authentic materials include real articles, videos, podcasts, websites, emails, advertisements, interviews, and other texts created for real communication rather than only for classroom use. These materials expose students to natural language and help them understand how English is used in real contexts. For instance, students can analyze a university website, listen to a short interview, compare product reviews, or write a reply to a real-life email. Such activities make learning more relevant and help students connect classroom English with the outside world.

Digital technology can also support task-based English lessons. Online videos, collaborative documents, interactive quizzes, digital presentations, learning platforms, and language applications can make lessons more engaging and flexible. However, technology should be used with a clear pedagogical purpose. It should not replace the teacher or become the main focus of the lesson. Instead, it should help students interact, create, research, present, and receive feedback. Warschauer emphasizes that technology can give language learners access to authentic communication and new forms of literacy [6]. In this sense, digital tools can extend learning beyond the classroom and help students become more independent learners.

At the same time, teachers should be careful when selecting digital tools and materials. Not every online resource is suitable for every group of learners. The teacher needs to consider students' language level, interests, needs, classroom conditions, and available resources. Richards states that effective materials development depends on teacher factors, learner factors, and contextual factors [5]. This means that lesson materials should be adapted to the

real classroom situation. A well-designed low-tech speaking activity may sometimes be more effective than a complicated digital task if it better serves the lesson objective.

In task-based teaching, learner motivation plays a central role. Students are more likely to participate when they see a clear purpose in the activity. Tasks connected with students' lives, studies, future careers, and personal interests can increase engagement. For example, university students may be asked to prepare a short academic presentation, discuss social media habits, simulate a workplace meeting, write a professional email, or solve a problem related to student life. These kinds of tasks make English more meaningful because learners can see how the language may be useful outside the classroom.

Teacher guidance is also essential. A task-based classroom does not mean that students are left alone to speak without support. The teacher carefully plans the task, provides language input, monitors students' performance, gives feedback, and creates a positive classroom atmosphere. Students should feel that making mistakes is a natural part of learning. If the classroom environment is supportive, learners are more willing to take risks, express opinions, and develop confidence.

Overall, task-based English language teaching can make university EFL lessons more communicative, practical, and learner-centered. When combined with authentic materials and appropriate technology, it helps students develop integrated language skills and prepares them for real communication. This approach is particularly relevant in higher education, where students need English not only as a subject, but also as a tool for academic and professional development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, communicative competence should be one of the main goals of English language teaching in higher education. Students need opportunities to use English meaningfully, not only to study language rules in isolation. Task-based language teaching provides such opportunities by placing communication at the centre of the learning process.

A well-planned task-based lesson helps students move from preparation to active communication and then to reflection and improvement. The use of authentic materials and suitable digital tools can make this process more effective and relevant to learners' real needs. However, technology should be used thoughtfully and should always support the learning objective.

For university students in Uzbekistan, especially in modern educational institutions such as Cyber University, English is closely connected with academic success, digital literacy, and future professional growth. Therefore, English instructors should design lessons that help students become confident, active, and independent users of the language. Task-based teaching, when applied carefully, can improve students' fluency, accuracy, motivation, and ability to communicate in real-life situations.

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