



Integrating Task-Based Language Teaching in ESP to Enhance Professional Speaking Competence

Yuriatson^{1*}, Nurul Amaliah², Anwar Taufiq³, Nurliah⁴, Asdar⁵

¹Politeknik Sandi Karsa Makassar, Indonesia

Email: jubhariyuriatson@gmail.com

²Universitas Islam DDI A.G.H Abdurrahman Ambo Dalle Polewali Mandar, Indonesia

Email: Nurulamaliah@ddipolman.ac.id

³Institut Ilmu Kèsehatan Pelamonia Makassar, (IIK Pelamonia Makassar), Indonesia

E-mail: taufiqpopubismi@gmail.com

⁴Universitas Islam DDI A.G.H Abdurrahman Ambo Dalle Polewali Mandar, Indonesia

Email: nurliahmandharese@gmail.com

⁵Universitas Bosowa, Makassar, Indonesia

Email: asdar@universitasbosowa.ac.id

Corresponding Author* Email: jubhariyuriatson@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to enhance students' professional speaking competence. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study involved seven third-semester nursing students who participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their learning experiences, perceived improvements, and challenges. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights related to the implementation of TBLT in ESP contexts. The findings reveal that TBLT significantly contributes to the improvement of students' speaking competence, particularly in terms of fluency, vocabulary development, interactional ability, and self-confidence. The use of authentic tasks, such as role plays, simulations, and group discussions, enables students to practice language in meaningful and context-relevant situations, thereby enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in professional settings. Additionally, the interactive and student-centered nature of TBLT fosters greater engagement and motivation among learners. However, the study also identified several challenges, including limited vocabulary, difficulties in spontaneous sentence construction, and initial anxiety in speaking. These challenges indicate the need for adequate instructional support, such as scaffolding strategies, vocabulary enrichment, and constructive feedback. Despite these limitations, students generally expressed positive perceptions of TBLT, highlighting its relevance to their future professional needs. In conclusion, the integration of TBLT in ESP is an effective pedagogical approach for developing professional speaking competence. It not only improves linguistic performance but also enhances learners' confidence and readiness for real-world communication. Therefore, TBLT is recommended as a strategic approach in ESP instruction to better prepare students for the demands of professional communication in global contexts.

Keywords: Competence, ESP, Professional, Speaking, TBLT



INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, English has become the primary medium of communication in various professional, academic, and social contexts (Widiastuti & Syamsi, 2023). The demand for effective communication skills in English is increasing, particularly in the workplace, which demands specific, contextual, and professional communication skills (Yuan, 2022). A paradigm shift in English language learning has occurred, from a focus solely on mastering linguistic structures to developing comprehensive communicative competence. Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered both the most important and the most challenging for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Jubhari et al., 2024).

This challenge becomes even more complex in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where learners are required not only to be able to speak generally but also to use English appropriately in specific professional situations (Jubhari et al., 2022). Speaking competence in ESP includes the ability to use specialized terminology, understand professional discourse patterns, and apply pragmatic norms appropriate to the context of a specific field. Therefore, learning to speak in ESP requires a more contextual and authentic approach than learning general English (Lohing & Ibrahim, 2022).

ESP is a learning approach oriented towards the specific needs of learners according to their field of study or profession. This approach emphasizes the relevance of learning materials to real-world situations that learners will encounter in the workplace (Sujarwo et al., 2024). However, in practice, ESP learning in various educational institutions still often uses conventional, lecture-centered methods, such as lectures, textbook-based exercises, and controlled activities. This approach tends to provide fewer opportunities for students to engage in meaningful and contextual communication, resulting in less than optimal development of professional speaking skills (Sevarakhon, 2025).

One of the main problems in learning speaking in the ESP context is the gap between classroom learning practices and real-world communication demands. Students often struggle to express ideas fluently, use appropriate vocabulary, maintain interactions, and adapt language use to specific professional contexts (Liberali, 2017). Furthermore, many students also experience a lack of confidence and anxiety when speaking in English, especially in formal or professional situations (Amaliah et al., 2023). This indicates that the learning approach used is not fully capable of accommodating complex and dynamic communication needs.

To address these issues, an innovative and communicative learning approach is needed that can encourage active student engagement and provide authentic language experiences. One approach considered effective is Task-Based Language Teaching

(TBLT). TBLT is a language learning approach that emphasizes the use of language through meaningful, goal-oriented tasks (Azmy & Nanda, 2024). In TBLT, learning focuses not only on language form but also on its function and use in real-life contexts. In the ESP context, the application of TBLT has enormous potential to improve students' professional speaking competence. Through tasks designed based on real-life professional situations, such as presentations, discussions, negotiations, and problem-solving, students can practice using English contextually and relevantly to their field (Albino, 2017). These activities not only improve fluency and accuracy in speaking, but also develop students' interaction skills, communication strategies, and pragmatic awareness.

Although TBLT offers various theoretical advantages, its implementation in the ESP context, particularly in developing professional speaking skills, remains relatively limited. Most previous research has focused on general English contexts or examined only specific aspects of speaking skills without integrating the demands of professional communication comprehensively. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence specifically examining the effectiveness of TBLT integration in ESP learning to improve professional speaking competence (Azmy & Nanda, 2024).

Another aspect worth noting is the multidimensional nature of professional speaking competence. This competence encompasses not only linguistic aspects such as grammar and vocabulary, but also the ability to manage discourse, maintain interactions, and apply social and cultural norms in communication. Therefore, the learning approach used must be able to accommodate these various dimensions in an integrated manner. TBLT, with its characteristics based on authentic tasks and communication outcomes, has the potential to support the holistic development of these competencies.

The student perceptions of the learning approach are also a crucial factor influencing the success of the learning process. Positive perceptions of the use of TBLT can increase student motivation, engagement, and confidence in communication. Conversely, negative perceptions can hinder the learning process. Therefore, it is important to explore how students view the implementation of TBLT in the ESP context to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the approach's effectiveness.

Furthermore, the integration of TBLT in ESP aligns with 21st-century educational trends that emphasize student-centered learning, experiential learning, and the development of critical and collaborative thinking skills. In an increasingly competitive and dynamic workplace, students are required not only to master English structurally but also to communicate effectively in a variety of complex professional situations (Mulyadi et al., 2021). Therefore, a learning approach is needed that bridges theory and practice and prepares students to face real-world communication challenges.

While previous investigations have addressed the obstacles of ESP learning and the advantages of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), the majority of research has concentrated on general English contexts rather than professional speaking within ESP environments. Few studies have specifically investigated how Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) enhances professional speaking competence via authentic communication tasks, especially from the viewpoint of students in occupational settings. Moreover, limited qualitative research has investigated students' authentic experiences concerning fluency, confidence, interaction, and preparedness for business communication. This study examines the effect of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving professional speaking competence within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education.

Therefore, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of ESP studies and language pedagogy, as well as practical contributions for lecturers, curriculum developers, and education practitioners in designing speaking lessons that are more effective, contextual, and relevant to the needs of the workplace. Ultimately, the integration of TBLT into ESP is expected to be a strategic solution for improving students' professional communication competence, so they are better prepared to face future global demands.

Based on this description, this study aims to examine the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) into ESP learning as an effort to improve students' professional speaking competence. Specifically, this study will analyze the effectiveness of TBLT in improving students' speaking performance, including fluency, accuracy, and interaction, and explore students' perceptions of the implementation of this approach.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with an exploratory descriptive design (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D, 2017), to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences and perceptions of the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning, particularly in developing professional speaking competencies. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on the participants' subjective meanings, interpretations, and experiences within an authentic learning context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Participants and Research Context

Participants in this study were seven undergraduate Nursing students at Sandi Karsa Polytechnic Makassar currently in their third semester. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the following criteria: (1) students who had taken ESP courses, (2) had experience in task-based learning activities, and (3) were willing to

participate voluntarily. The relatively small number of participants was considered appropriate for qualitative research, which emphasizes data depth over generalizations.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences in a flexible yet focused manner (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and the theoretical framework of TBLT and communicative competence. Questions covered several key aspects, including: (1) students' experiences participating in task-based learning, (2) perceptions of the effectiveness of TBLT in improving speaking skills, (3) challenges faced during the learning process, and (4) the impact of the learning on self-confidence and professional communication readiness. Interviews were conducted in person and lasted 20–30 minutes for each participant. The entire interview process was audio-recorded with the participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim for data analysis purposes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which refer to the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the interview transcripts, (2) initial coding to identify relevant units of meaning, (3) grouping codes into potential themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, and (5) naming and interpreting themes comprehensively (Elliott, 2018). To increase data credibility, the researchers employed member checking, confirming the transcripts and initial interpretations with the participants. In addition, researchers also conducted peer debriefings with colleagues to minimize subjective bias in the analysis process.

Research Instrument

This study utilised a semi-structured interview guide to investigate students' experiences and perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education. The interview protocol comprised open-ended questions addressing several critical aspects, including students' learning experiences, perceived enhancement in speaking competence, challenges faced during task-based activities, confidence in utilising English, and the applicability of classroom tasks to professional communication requirements. The semi-structured method enabled the researcher to ensure uniformity across participants while also allowing for in-depth exploration of their responses. To guarantee the instrument's validity, the interview questions were scrutinised and enhanced in accordance with pertinent literature on ESP, TBLT, and speaking competence prior to data collection.

Data Validity

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through several strategies: (1) credibility through member checking and triangulation of data sources, (2)

transferability by providing a detailed description of the research context, (3) dependability through systematic documentation of the research process, and (4) confirmability by maintaining transparency in the data analysis process (Leavy, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Semi-structured interviews with seven students showed that the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in ESP learning provided a more active and meaningful learning experience. Most respondents emphasized significant changes in their engagement during the learning process. As one participant expressed, "I feel more active because we get a lot of hands-on practice, not just listening to the lecturer's explanations" (R1). Another respondent echoed this sentiment, stating that "learning is more interactive and less boring because there's a lot of speaking" (R6).

Researcher Comments:

These findings demonstrate that TBLT successfully creates an active learning environment that encourages more intensive student participation. This aligns with the fundamental principle of TBLT, which places the learner at the center of learning activities through the direct use of language in communication contexts.

Furthermore, all respondents acknowledged improvements in their speaking skills after participating in task-based learning. *One student stated, "I speak more fluently and don't think too long before answering" (R5), while another respondent noted that "my vocabulary has increased, especially in the nursing context" (R2). Furthermore, increased self-confidence was also a consistent finding, as stated by respondents, "I am now more confident in speaking, even though I still make mistakes" (R3).*

Improvements in fluency, vocabulary, and confidence indicate that TBLT contributes significantly to the development of multidimensional speaking competencies. Task-based activities provide students with space to repeatedly practice language in meaningful contexts, thus accelerating the process of language internalization.

Regarding the types of activities, respondents highlighted that authentic tasks such as role-plays and clinical simulations were the most helpful part of their learning. One participant stated, *"Role-plays with patients are very helpful because they resemble real-life situations in a hospital" (R1), while another added, "Simulations teach me how to speak with patients professionally" (R4).*

This confirms that a key characteristic of TBLT, the use of authentic tasks, bridges the gap between classroom learning and workplace practice. Activities such as simulations and role-plays enable students to develop communicative competencies relevant to their professional contexts.

However, this study also identified several challenges faced by students. Several respondents expressed limited vocabulary and difficulty constructing sentences

spontaneously. One respondent stated, *"I sometimes struggle because I don't know medical vocabulary in English"* (R1), while another said, *"I'm still afraid of making mistakes and often feel nervous when speaking"* (R2).

These findings indicate that linguistic and psychological factors remain barriers to speaking learning. Therefore, TBLT implementation needs to be supported by scaffolding strategies, such as providing vocabulary lists, sample dialogues, and gradual practice to reduce student anxiety.

Furthermore, all respondents stated that task-based learning increased their confidence in speaking. One respondent emphasized, *"I'm more confident because I often practice speaking in class"* (R5), and another respondent stated, *"Now I'm less afraid of making mistakes because I'm used to speaking"* (R7).

This increase in confidence is an important indicator of successful language learning, particularly in an EFL context. TBLT provides a safe and supportive environment for students to experiment with the language without undue pressure.

In terms of relevance, respondents consistently stated that the assignments were highly aligned with their needs as nursing students. One respondent stated, *"The material is very relevant to the world of nursing, especially during simulations with patients"* (R3), while another added, *"This is very helpful in preparing for hospital practice"* (R6).

This relevance demonstrates that the integration of TBLT into ESP successfully creates contextual and applicable learning. This is crucial for increasing student motivation to learn, as they can directly see the benefits of the learning for their professional needs.

Finally, respondents also provided several suggestions for future learning development. Some of these included *"increasing medical vocabulary before practice"* (R1), *"more time for speaking practice"* (R5), and *"using technology such as videos or apps"* (R6).

These suggestions indicate a need for strengthening aspects of material, practice time, and technology integration. This can form the basis for developing more effective and innovative TBLT-based ESP learning designs in the future.

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning significantly contributes to improving students' professional speaking competence. This improvement is evident in fluency, vocabulary mastery, confidence, and interaction skills in more authentic communication contexts. These results reinforce the assumption that language learning oriented toward real-world use is more effective than traditional approaches that focus solely on linguistic form.

Specifically, the increase in students' speaking fluency indicates that the use of communicative tasks in TBLT provides them with opportunities to repeatedly use language in meaningful contexts. This aligns with the view that language practice that focuses on meaning can accelerate language internalization and reduce reliance on

mental translation processes. Furthermore, the increase in vocabulary, particularly related to professional contexts, demonstrates that task-based learning can enrich students' linguistic input contextually (Nurhadi et al., 2024).

From an affective perspective, the increase in students' self-confidence was one of the most prominent findings. Students who previously felt anxious and afraid of making mistakes showed a change in attitude, becoming more confident and confident in speaking. This suggests that the interactive and supportive learning environment in TBLT can reduce psychological barriers to language learning. By frequently engaging in communication activities, students become more accustomed to using English spontaneously, gradually reducing anxiety.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also emphasize the importance of using authentic tasks in ESP learning. Activities such as role-playing, simulations, and case-based discussions are effective in developing speaking skills relevant to professional contexts (Azmy & Nanda, 2024). These tasks not only train linguistic abilities but also develop pragmatic and social interaction skills, which are crucial for the workplace. Thus, TBLT can bridge the gap between classroom learning and the communication needs of a professional environment.

However, this study also identified several challenges faced by students, such as limited vocabulary, difficulty constructing sentences spontaneously, and nervousness when speaking. These findings indicate that although TBLT is effective in improving speaking skills (Albino, 2017), its implementation still requires adequate support. Strategies such as scaffolding, introducing vocabulary before assignments, and constructive feedback from lecturers are important factors in supporting successful learning.

Furthermore, the relevance of the learning material to the professional context has been shown to be a factor that increases students' motivation to learn. When students perceive that the assignments align with their needs in the workplace, they become more motivated to actively engage in learning. This demonstrates that the integration of ESP and TBLT is a strategic combination in creating meaningful, needs-oriented learning (Prianty et al., 2022).

Overall, the results of this study indicate that TBLT is an effective approach in ESP learning, particularly in developing professional speaking competencies. This approach not only improves students' linguistic abilities but also develops the affective and pragmatic aspects, which are crucial for professional communication. Therefore, the application of TBLT in ESP learning can be recommended as an innovative and relevant pedagogical strategy to meet the demands of 21st-century education (Saleh, 2019).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning effectively improves students' professional speaking competence, as reflected in increased fluency, vocabulary mastery, interaction skills, and communication confidence. The use of authentic tasks relevant to professional contexts has been proven to create more meaningful, interactive, and applicable learning, thus bridging the gap between classroom learning and communication needs in the workplace. However, several challenges, such as limited vocabulary and psychological barriers, are still encountered, so support in the form of scaffolding, constructive feedback, and material enrichment is needed. Overall, TBLT can be recommended as an innovative and effective pedagogical approach in ESP learning to prepare students to face the demands of professional communication in the global era.

It is recommended that educators systematically integrate Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) into ESP learning with scaffolding support, specific vocabulary enrichment, and the use of technology to optimize the development of students' professional speaking competencies.

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