

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) IN ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF UZBEK EFL AND ESP LEARNERS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17301311>

1. Introduction

Modern language education requires approaches that not only develop linguistic proficiency but also foster critical thinking and communicative competence. In Uzbekistan, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students often face limitations with traditional grammar-focused and teacher-centered methods, which provide few opportunities for authentic communication.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a solution to this challenge. TBLT engages students in meaningful tasks that simulate real-life contexts, promoting problem-solving, decision-making, and reflective thinking. By integrating TBLT into higher education, Uzbek students can become linguistically competent, critically minded, and communicatively agile.

2. Theoretical Framework

TBLT is grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and constructivist theory. Scholars such as Prabhu (1987), Willis (1996), and Ellis (2003) define tasks as purposeful activities aimed at achieving real-world outcomes. Unlike exercises focusing solely on grammar, tasks prioritize meaning and communication.

Constructivist theory (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through experience and interaction. TBLT allows students to collaborate, make decisions, and reflect on outcomes, thus fostering cognitive development.

The sociocultural perspective (Lantolf, 2000) highlights the importance of interaction and collaboration in language learning. In Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), students can perform beyond their independent abilities with teacher or peer support, enhancing both language and cognitive skills.

3. TBLT and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information to make reasoned judgments (Facione, 1990; Brookfield, 2012). TBLT provides students with problem-solving, information-gap, and decision-making tasks that develop these skills.

Students are encouraged to reflect, question assumptions, provide evidence, and justify their reasoning. This dual focus on language and cognition strengthens both critical thinking and communicative performance, preparing students for academic and professional contexts.

4. TBLT and Communicative Competence

According to Hymes (1972) and Canale & Swain (1980), communicative competence consists of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components. TBLT helps learners practice these components through authentic tasks:

- Using accurate grammar in meaningful communication
- Adapting language to social and professional contexts
- Organizing ideas logically and coherently
- Applying strategies to overcome communication challenges

Uzbek ESP students can participate in professional simulations, report writing, and collaborative projects. These tasks enhance fluency, pragmatic awareness, and confidence, bridging academic learning with real-world applications.

5. Analysis, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The study concludes that TBLT is a highly effective approach for developing critical thinking and communicative competence among Uzbek EFL and ESP learners. By prioritizing authentic tasks, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective dialogue, TBLT fosters autonomous, intellectually engaged, and communicatively competent students.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate TBLT principles into national EFL and ESP curricula.
2. Provide teacher training on task design, scaffolding, and reflective assessment.
3. Reform evaluation systems to include communicative and problem-solving tasks.
4. Utilize digital tools and online platforms to support task-based learning.
5. Conduct empirical research to measure TBLT's effectiveness in Uzbekistan.

By implementing TBLT, Uzbek higher education can produce graduates who are prepared to meet global academic and professional challenges with linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and effective communication skills.

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