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ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF TECHNICAL SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH TASK-BASED AND DIGITAL LEARNING APPROACHES

Murodullayeva Marjona Alimjon kizi
Senior English Teacher, Jizzakh Technical School №1
Email: abdumannonovamarjona15@gmail.com
Samatova Gulnora Muxtor kizi
Head of the International Education Coordination Department,
Jizzakh Technical School №1
gulnoraniginafarangiz@gmail.com

Abstract

In modern technical education, English language competence plays a crucial role in preparing students for participation in the global professional environment. Technical school students require not only general language skills but also the ability to communicate effectively in professional contexts related to technology and engineering. This study investigates the effectiveness of task-based language teaching (TBLT) combined with digital learning tools in improving English proficiency among technical school students. The research involved 60 second-year students divided into experimental and control groups. Over a 12-week period, the experimental group received instruction based on task-oriented activities supported by digital platforms, while the control group followed traditional textbook-based instruction. Pre-test and post-test results indicate significant improvement in speaking, vocabulary acquisition, and professional communication skills among students exposed to task-based and digital methods. The findings suggest that integrating communicative tasks and educational technologies enhances student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes in vocational English education.

Keywords

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), technical education, task-based learning, digital learning tools, communicative competence, vocational education.

Introduction

The rapid development of science and technology has increased the importance of English as a global language of communication, research, and professional exchange. In technical and vocational education institutions, English is not merely an academic subject but a practical tool that enables students to access international resources, understand technical documentation, and communicate with foreign partners [1].

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a significant approach in vocational education, focusing on learners' professional needs rather than general language knowledge [2]. Research shows that students in technical fields benefit from instruction that integrates subject-related vocabulary and real-life communication tasks [3]. However, traditional grammar-translation methods remain common in many technical schools, limiting students' ability to use English effectively in professional situations [4].

Modern pedagogical approaches emphasize communicative competence, defined by Hymes as the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts [5]. Canale and Swain further expanded this concept by identifying grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence as essential components [6]. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

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aligns with these principles by engaging learners in meaningful tasks that reflect real-world language use [7].

Additionally, digital technologies have transformed language learning environments. Online platforms, interactive applications, and multimedia resources provide opportunities for authentic communication and independent practice [8]. Studies demonstrate that digital tools increase learner motivation and facilitate vocabulary retention [9]. The integration of ICT in vocational education also enhances students' readiness for the digital workplace [10].

Despite growing research in this area, there remains a need to explore effective strategies for teaching English in technical schools, particularly in developing contexts. This study aims to examine how task-based instruction supported by digital learning tools influences English language competence among technical school students.

Literature Review

ESP theory emphasizes the importance of tailoring instruction to learners' professional needs [2]. Hutchinson and Waters argue that language teaching should be based on learners' purposes rather than purely linguistic content [3]. In technical education, this includes terminology related to engineering, information technology, and industrial processes.

Task-Based Language Teaching has gained recognition as an effective method for developing communicative competence. According to Ellis, tasks should require learners to use language for meaningful communication rather than mechanical practice [7]. Willis proposes a framework consisting of pre-task, task cycle, and language focus stages, which encourage interaction and reflection [11]. Empirical studies confirm that TBLT improves speaking fluency and confidence [12].

Digital learning tools further support communicative approaches. Research by Chapelle highlights the pedagogical benefits of technology-enhanced language learning environments [8]. Mobile applications and online collaboration platforms allow learners to practice language skills beyond the classroom [9]. Moreover, blended learning models combining face-to-face and online instruction have shown positive outcomes in vocational education settings [13].

Motivation is another critical factor in language acquisition. Dörnyei emphasizes that interactive and meaningful tasks increase learner engagement [14]. In technical schools, where students often prioritize practical subjects, innovative English teaching methods can improve attitudes toward language learning [15].

Overall, the literature suggests that combining ESP principles, task-based learning, and digital technologies may create an effective model for teaching English in technical schools.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effectiveness of task-based and digital learning approaches in improving English language competence among technical school students. The research was conducted at a technical school during one academic semester and involved 60 second-year students specializing in information technology and electrical engineering. The participants were divided into two groups of equal size: an experimental group and a control group. Both groups had comparable levels of English proficiency at the beginning of the study, as determined by a standardized placement test.

The experimental group received instruction based on task-based language teaching integrated with digital tools. Lessons were structured around real-life professional tasks such as

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preparing technical presentations, simulating workplace dialogues, analyzing technical manuals, and writing emails related to engineering projects. Digital resources, including online dictionaries, interactive vocabulary applications, video conferencing tools, and collaborative platforms, were incorporated to enhance engagement and provide authentic learning experiences. Students worked individually and in small groups, encouraging communication and peer learning.

The control group was taught using traditional textbook-based methods focusing primarily on grammar explanations, reading passages, and written exercises. Speaking activities were limited, and digital tools were not systematically integrated into the lessons. Both groups studied the same thematic content and were allocated equal instructional time of four academic hours per week over a 12-week period.

Data collection included pre-tests and post-tests assessing vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, writing ability, and speaking performance. Speaking skills were evaluated using a rubric measuring fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and professional vocabulary usage. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative feedback was gathered through student questionnaires to assess motivation and attitudes toward the learning process. The collected data were analyzed using comparative statistical methods to determine differences between the two groups and to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented teaching approach.

Results

The findings of the study demonstrate that the integration of task-based learning and digital tools had a significant positive impact on students' English language competence. At the beginning of the experiment, both the experimental and control groups showed similar average scores on the pre-test, indicating comparable levels of language proficiency. However, after 12 weeks of instruction, notable differences were observed in the post-test results.

Students in the experimental group demonstrated a marked improvement in professional vocabulary acquisition. Their ability to use technical terminology accurately in both written and spoken tasks increased considerably compared to the control group. Vocabulary test scores in the experimental group improved by approximately 25%, while the control group showed an average increase of 10%. This suggests that contextualized tasks and digital vocabulary applications enhanced retention and practical usage of new terms.

In terms of speaking performance, the experimental group exhibited greater fluency and confidence. Students were more capable of participating in simulated workplace dialogues and delivering short technical presentations. Their average speaking scores increased significantly, particularly in the areas of fluency and strategic competence. By contrast, the control group showed only moderate improvement, mainly in grammatical accuracy rather than communicative effectiveness.

Reading comprehension skills also improved in both groups; however, the experimental group performed better in tasks requiring interpretation of authentic technical materials. Exposure to real-world documents and multimedia resources enabled students to develop better comprehension strategies. Writing skills improved in both groups, though students exposed to task-based instruction produced more coherent and professionally structured texts, such as formal emails and project summaries.

Qualitative feedback revealed that students in the experimental group reported higher motivation and greater satisfaction with the learning process. Many indicated that digital tools made lessons more interactive and relevant to their future careers. They also expressed increased

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confidence in using English outside the classroom. In contrast, some students in the control group described lessons as repetitive and less engaging.

Overall, the results confirm that combining task-based pedagogy with digital resources not only improves measurable language outcomes but also positively influences learner motivation and engagement, which are essential factors for sustainable language development in technical education contexts.

Discussion

The results of this study align with previous research emphasizing the effectiveness of task-based instruction in developing communicative competence. The significant improvement observed in speaking fluency and professional vocabulary usage among the experimental group supports Ellis's assertion that meaningful tasks promote authentic language use and deeper learning. The findings also confirm that when learners engage in realistic professional simulations, they are more likely to internalize language structures and terminology relevant to their future careers.

The integration of digital tools played a complementary role in enhancing the effectiveness of task-based instruction. Interactive applications and online collaboration platforms created opportunities for extended practice beyond classroom hours. This supports Chapelle's view that technology-mediated environments can expand exposure to authentic input and increase learner autonomy. In the context of technical education, where students are already familiar with digital environments, technology-based instruction appears particularly suitable and motivating.

An important observation from the study is the difference in the type of improvement between the two groups. While the control group showed some progress in grammatical accuracy, their communicative competence developed more slowly. This suggests that traditional approaches may support knowledge acquisition but do not sufficiently develop practical language skills required in professional contexts. The experimental group, on the other hand, demonstrated balanced progress across vocabulary, speaking, reading, and writing skills, indicating that integrated approaches may produce more comprehensive language development.

The motivational aspect should also be highlighted. Students in vocational institutions often prioritize technical subjects and may perceive English as secondary. However, when English instruction is directly connected to their professional field and supported by engaging digital tools, their attitudes become more positive. Increased motivation likely contributed to the stronger performance of the experimental group.

These findings suggest that curriculum designers and educators in technical schools should consider incorporating structured task-based activities and digital resources into English language programs. Such integration can bridge the gap between language learning and professional application, ultimately preparing students more effectively for participation in the global workforce.

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of task-based language teaching combined with digital learning tools on the English language competence of technical school students. The findings clearly indicate that students exposed to communicative tasks and technology-enhanced instruction achieved higher improvements in vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, and professional communication skills compared to those taught through traditional methods.

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The results highlight the importance of aligning English instruction with students' vocational needs and incorporating modern educational technologies to create meaningful learning experiences. By engaging students in realistic professional scenarios and utilizing digital platforms, teachers can foster greater motivation, confidence, and practical language competence.

While the study was limited to one institution and a relatively small sample size, its outcomes provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers in vocational education. Future research may explore long-term effects of blended learning models and investigate additional digital strategies for enhancing ESP instruction.

In conclusion, integrating task-based pedagogy with digital learning approaches represents an effective and practical model for improving English language education in technical schools and preparing students for success in an increasingly interconnected professional world.

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