

The Implementation of Task-based Approach in ESP Instruction: Teachers and Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

Task based approach is increasingly gaining ground in the field of language teaching and learning, ESP in particular. This study investigates teaching English for Specific Purposes within the paradigm of task-based approach. To that end, data were collected using a mixed method design. First, questionnaires were designed to capture learners' viewpoints of the assigned tasks on their learning processes, language development and skills' acquisition. Additionally, this study attempted to examine teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of task-based approach in ESP classroom; for this reason, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The findings revealed that teachers and learners alike positively perceived task-based teaching and learning (TBTL). They believed that the incorporation of this approach in language instruction, ESP in particular, creates a favorable teaching and learning conditions as it involves learners in tasks relevant to their academic and professional needs, fosters their learning autonomy and motivation in various ways, allows them to explore their understanding of the issue in question, develop their interpersonal abilities and communication skills, and develop their creative and critical thinking deemed necessary for their future careers.

Keywords: Task-based Language teaching and learning (TBLTL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Learning Autonomy, collaboration, motivation

1. Introduction

Improving effectiveness in learning is the primary goal of any teaching process. Today, one of the most challenging questions facing educators and professionals in the field is how to make learning a fruitful, enjoyable, and motivating experience for learners. In an attempt to answer the aforementioned question, in the last decade, research has been increasingly concerned with theoretical, practical, and technical instructional conceptions, emphasizing both content and pedagogy. Language education, English in particular, has been one of the major education issues in the 21st century. With English becoming the global and most dominant language worldwide in addition to the political, economic, and cultural changes, English language teaching and learning needed to be reconsidered. English language education has been gradually shifting from its classical applications such as EFL (English as a foreign language) or ESL (English as a second language) toward new paradigms like English for science and technology (EST), English for business and economics (EBE), and English for academic purposes (EAP).

The field of ESP has undergone some important changes during the last decades because of the technological and economic revolution as well as the new pedagogical trends that have affected the English language education. Hewings (2002), co- editor of the journal English for Specific Purposes, stated in one of his articles that ESP has witnessed a growing recognition worldwide and several studies have been conducted, investigating different areas in ESP as one of the most prominent and dynamic research disciplines.

The ESP instruction is differentiated from any other English language education as it focuses on creating a content that aims to provide learners with specific skills to study, conduct research, enhance communicative needs, and exploit their professional proficiencies. Therefore, ESP instruction requires a rigorous research at the level of curriculum design, teaching methods, and material selection. In this regards, several teaching approaches and methods have come to the ground, each suggesting its own vision of the learning process for the purpose of improving the instruction of ESP in specialized institutions and preparing competent and well-equipped professionals to successfully operate in the target work fields using high language proficiency.

Thus, this study attempts to shed lights on the incorporation of one of the new teaching methods and innovative approaches in ESP instruction, which is the task-based approach (TBA). Task-based approach is undoubtedly gaining in popularity among researchers and practitioners as it supports an efficient and holistic exposure and use of language. This pedagogical model enhances target language fluency as it focuses on creating a real and authentic context for language use. In this context, Richards and Rodgers (2004) assert that

incorporating TBA by engaging learners' in task work is highly activating their learning process and cultivating their language fluency. That is, TBA emphasizes using goal-oriented activities and tasks which are mainly addressed to facilitate learners' understanding and participation in meaning creation, as well as to develop their communication skills and oral fluency. Besides, the literature confirms that TBA is regarded as one of the fundamental means to foster learner-autonomy. It encourages students to get autonomy in language learning and use by working on real situations and more meaningful experiences. The TBA creates a learning environment that promotes communication, cooperation, critical thinking, motivation, among other aspects.

This research is, therefore, aims to investigate the effective role of task-based approach on enhancing university students' learning achievement and skills' acquisition within ESP classroom. This research adopted a mixed method design, a combination of quantitative and qualitative components, namely questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Specifically, this work seeks answer to the following research questions:

- 1- What are students' opinions and attitudes towards the activities and tasks assigned in their ESP classroom?
- 2- Do students believe that implementing tasks and activities for ESP help them develop their learning and skills' acquisition?
- 3- To what extent are ESP teachers aware of the efficient role of task-based approach in developing their students' learning and skills' acquisition?

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 ESP Definitions

ESP is one of the subsets of ELT (English language teaching) or ELE (English language education), and one of the areas of study in theoretical and applied linguistics. It is considered as "a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 6). ESP as a field emerged in the mid-sixties following the Second World War and a series of massive transitions that affected the scientific, technical, and economic sectors (Basturkmen, 2010, Garcia Mayo 2000).

Knapp and Seidlhofer (2009) asserted that while discussing Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), in the majority of cases we refer to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is "the area of inquiry and practice in the development of language programs for people who need a language to meet a predictable range of communicative needs" (Swales, 1992). It is a field of linguistics that attempts to meet the specific language needs of learners and develop their knowledge required in a certain professional or academic context. Besides, Basturkmen

(2003) explained that ESP is relevant to the language use requirements that learners encounter in their specific work or study-related situation.

In its beginnings, the teaching of English for specific purposes was mainly targeting learners' needs to communicate in the areas of technology and commerce (Benesch, 2001). Later, other fields have emerged, such as English for academic purposes (EAP), English for business purposes (EBP), English for occupational purposes (EOP), English for vocational purposes (EVP), English for medical purposes (EMP), English for legal purposes (ELP), and English for sociocultural purposes (ESCP) (Belcher 2009). Hence, ESP instruction focuses on creating specific content that aims to provide learners with specific skills to study, conduct research, enhance communicative needs, and exploit their professional proficiencies. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) said that "a critical step in designing the ESP curriculum is accepting that the methodologies and approaches valid in any other area of ESL are not necessarily the most appropriate for ESP" (177). That is to say, ESP teaching is founded upon a flexible and creative framework that acknowledges the use of specific pedagogies and tools with their adaptation to each learning situation.

2.2 Task-Based Approach

Defining what a task-based approach is starts with defining its core conception, which is a "task". The latter has received more than a single definition drawn from both research and pedagogical literature. For instance, Richards, Platt and Weber (1985) considered task as any activity that requires language use.

Nunan (1989) further explained that it is "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form" (p. 10). Prabhu (1987) claimed that a task is any language activity that engages learners in displaying their prior knowledge to achieve a learning outcome. Moreover, Willis (1996) confirmed that including tasks in teaching and learning is a communicative and meaning-based process whereby learners are engaged in expressing their thoughts without essentially using an accurate language. Similarly, Lee (2000) defined a task as a classroom activity that emphasizes interaction among learners focusing on meaning exchange.

Overall, all the previously given definitions share the idea that a task is a meaning-centered and goal-oriented approach in an environment that offers opportunities for communication, sharing, and exchange of real and meaningful experiences.

Task-based approach dates back to the 80s; it emerged from the communicative framework of language education (Nunan, 2001; Ellis, 2006). Research at that time argued that language teaching should aim at stimulating the development of language through use, focusing on meaning rather than form. The TBA came to engage learners in different task works that provide them with a better context and better opportunities for the activation of their learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2004). It takes place within an authentic non-grammatical environment where the ultimate purpose is to involve students in understanding, manipulating, producing, and interpreting in the target language to convey a meaning (Nunan, 1989; 2001).

TBA consists of three main stages: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. The pre-task phase, according to Willis (1996), is when the teacher introduces the topic to the class aiming at providing students with an adequate listening (such as recording) or reading (such as text) input to facilitate their understanding and prepare them to effectively perform the task. The second phase, cycle stage, is the most important phase in TBA framework because it is where most of the learning takes place. The cycle stage contains three main components. The first one is task, it is when learners, in pairs or in groups, are introduced to the task and encouraged to fulfill it using whatever language they master under their teacher's guidance and support. The second element is planning; in this stage students plan their reports, oral or written, on how they accomplished the task and what they learnt from it. The teacher plays the role of an advisor, providing feedback and helping students correct their language and organize their work (Richards & Rodgers, 2004). The third and last element in the stage cycle phase is report; it is when students present their work to their classmates and get their feedback. Finally, post-task phase or language focus when the teacher in this phase highlights some parts from students' text or recording to be analyzed, focusing on language areas that need more practice (Occhipinti, 2008).

Candlin and Murphy (1987) claimed that a successful incorporation of TBA in language instruction implies six elements. These elements are: 1) goal, which refers to the general aim of the task, 2) input, it represents the materials that learners can manipulate, 3) setting, where the task takes place, 4) activities that learners will get engaged in, 5) feedback and task evaluation, and finally, 6) teachers and learners roles. The latter is a very important component in TBA as it presents teaching and learning as a collaborative process between the two parts, namely teacher and student. As for the teacher, he/she acts as a mentor and facilitator rather than a lecturer and examiner. They work on addressing their students' needs and help them overcome the different problems they encounter. Willis and Willis (2007) pointed out that teachers, in a task-based learning context, work on improving their students' language use within real-life situations. They are selectors and sequencers of tasks, source of information on demand, organizers of discussions, managers of teamwork, and motivators. On the other hand, in TBA, learners are the ones taking the leading role in their learning process. They autonomously negotiate their course content and reinterpret its framework to achieve an outcome. More than that, learners in a TBA classroom construct their own knowledge through social interaction, such as pair work and group work (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning autonomy and collaborative learning will be explored in the next section of this article.

Overall, TBA represents a new and innovative direction in language education, and thought to be highly effective in field of languages for specific purposes. TBA, for instance, engages

learners in different real-world tasks and experiences, which improves their proficiency in the target language and allows them to successfully compete to live up to the expectations and requirements of a globalized and demanding professional world.

3. Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effective role of task-based approach on fostering university students' learning achievement and skills' acquisition in the ESP classroom. More specifically, this research attempted to examine students and teachers' opinions and perceptions about the incorporation of task-based approach in the EFL classroom and its impact on fostering learning autonomy. To address this issue, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1- What are students' opinions and attitudes towards the activities and tasks assigned in their ESP classroom?
- 2- Do students believe that implementing tasks and activities for ESP help them develop their learning and skills' acquisition?
- 3- To what extent are ESP teachers aware of the efficient role of task-based approach in developing their students' learning and skills' acquisition?

3.1 Participants and Setting

This study was conducted with first year students from the National School of Commerce and Management of Fes. The total sample of participants consisted of 65 students. As presented in table 1, this sample counted 47 (72%) and 18 males (28%). Additionally, this research aimed to examine teachers' level of awareness, understanding, and perceptions of the implementation of task-based approach in ESP instruction. Therefore 14 ESP university professors were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. These respondents, (7 males and 7 females, as shown in table 1) work in different universities, namely the Higher School of Technology of Fes, The Polydisciplinary Faculty of El Jadida, The National School of Commerce and Management of Fes, The Private University of Fes, and The National School of Applied Sciences of Fes.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male Students	18	28%
Female Students	47	72%
Male Teachers	07	50%
Female Teachers	07	50%

Table 1. Respondents' Gender Distribution

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

This study employed a mixed method design to explore the relationship between task-based approach and learning autonomy in ESP classroom. This research was conducted using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The former were employed to examine students' opinions about task-based teaching and its impact on enhancing their ESP learning and classroom achievement. The questionnaire was designed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" with values 1-5 assigned to each alternative. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 ESP university professors to shed light on their level of awareness, understanding, and different opinions regarding the use of task-based approach in ESP education.

4. Findings

4.1 Students' Survey Findings

This section presents the results of the survey conducted with first year students from the National School of Commerce and Management. At the end of the first semester, respondents were asked to answer a survey, which aimed at garnering information about their attitudes and perceptions on the use of task-based approach and its impact on their language learning and skills' acquisition. Sixty-five students responded to the survey.

4.1.1 Students' Attitudes about their English Language Study and Learning

To start with, the survey sought to investigate the extent to which students generally perceive their English language study and learning. As mentioned earlier, the survey was designed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" with values 1-5 assigned to each alternative. In this section, students were given a set of statements and were asked to answer using the Likert scale. The first statement aimed to shed light on students' awareness and belief on their ability to learn English well. Table 2 shows that 59% strongly agree on the fact of having the ability and skills to learn English well, while 6% strongly disagree. Besides, 46% strongly agree on the second statement which says "I know my strengths and weaknesses in my English study"; that is, the majority of students confirmed that they are aware enough of their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to studying and learning English. The third statement within this section highlights students' use of free time in English study and learning; 35% stated that they do not know if they really well exploit their free time in studying and learning English, 22% do not try to learn English in their free time, while 19% confirmed that they do. That is to say, the majority of students do not tend to study and learn English in their free time. However, in statement four "I attend out-class activities to practice and learn English", as presented in table 2, 30% of the informants responded with "strongly agree" and 22% with "strongly disagree". The last statement within this section asked if students do a review before class; 24% answered with "agree" and 23% with "disagree".

Statement	Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
I believe I have the ability to learn English well	59%	15%	14%	06%	06%
I know my strengths and weaknesses in my English study	46%	28%	17%	06%	03%
I make good use of my free time in English study.	19%	17%	35%	22%	07%
I attend out-class activities to practice and learn the language	30%	14%	11%	23%	22%
I preview (revise) before class	17%	24%	19%	23%	17%

Table 2: Students' Attitudes about their English Language Study and Learning

4.1.2 Students' Attitudes on the Use of Task-based Approach in their ESP Class

The second section of the survey attempted to examine students' attitudes and perceptions about the use of task-based approach and its influence on their ESP learning. That is to say, respondents were asked to give their opinions on the specific tasks and activities used in their ESP classroom and how these activities can shape their language learning, learning autonomy, learning motivation, collaboration, among other factors.

As it is manifested in table 3, the majority of students take part in classroom activities and tasks; 53% answered with *totally agree* and 21% with *agree*. Moreover, they confirmed that these tasks and assignments are interesting and motivating (58% *totally agree*; 25% *agree*); also, they are relevant to respond to their needs as Business students (56% *totally agree*; 24% *agree*). In addition, respondents were asked to evaluate their ESP teacher's instructions; 61% *totally agree* on the fact that these instructions are clear and helpful to guide them accomplish the task. Besides, 53% *totally agree* that their teacher's feedback help me improve study skills related to the course content.

As far as learning-autonomy is concerned, 50% of the students *totally agree* and 25% *agree* on the statement saying that "the tasks and assignments given by the teacher allow me to discover my strengths and weaknesses in English study". Besides, the survey sought to examine if the tasks and activities assigned by the teacher allow students to develop certain skills, deemed necessary in ESP learning, such as understanding, decision making, critical thinking, communication, writing, and time management. As presented in table 3, the majority of respondents have positive attitudes about the fruitfulness of the tasks incorporated in their ESP classroom; for instance, 45% *totally agree* and 28% *agree* about the importance of tasks and assignment in developing their understanding of the course material, 30% *totally agree* and 26% *agree* about the importance of tasks and assignments in improving their decision making; on the other hand, 30% *neither agree nor disagree*. As for critical thinking, 43% *totally agree* and 25% *agree* about the role of the assigned tasks in enhancing their critical thinking. Additionally, 69% *totally agree* about the statement saying that "the tasks and assignments given by the teacher help me improve my speaking and communication skills", and 36% *agree* about the statement saying that "the tasks and assignments given by the teacher help me improve my writing skills". More than that, 35% *totally agree* about the fact that tasks and assignments given by the teacher allow them to manage and organize their working time and respect the deadline.

Finally, the survey aimed at highlighting the usefulness of the tasks and assignments given by the teacher in encouraging team work and cooperative learning. As it is shown in table 3, 66% *totally agree* about that statement; furthermore, 43% *totally agree* about the fact that while working in a team, each student takes an active role to complete his/her task.

Statement	Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
In class, I take part in tasks and activities	53%	21%	12%	09%	05%
I find the tasks and assignments given by the teacher interesting and motivating	58%	25%	06%	05%	06%
I find the tasks and assignments given by the teacher relevant to respond to my needs as a Business student	56%	24%	12%	04%	04%

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The teacher's instructions are clear and helpful to guide me accomplish the task	61%	16%	14%	06%	03%
The teacher's feedback helped me improve study skills related to the course content	53%	24%	13%	04%	06%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher allow me to discover my strengths and weaknesses in English study	50%	25%	14%	08%	03%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher allow me to develop a deeper understanding of the course material	45%	28%	19%	03%	05%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher allow me to take decisions about my learning	30%	26%	30%	07%	07%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher help me improve my critical thinking	43%	25%	22%	06%	04%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher help me improve my speaking and communication skills	69%	16%	06%	03%	06%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher help me improve my writing skills	35%	36%	17%	07%	05%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher allow me to manage and organize my working time and respect the deadline	35%	22%	25%	12%	06%
The tasks and assignments given by the teacher encourage team work and cooperative learning	66%	19%	05%	04%	06%
When my classmates and I are working on an assignment each one of us takes an active role to complete his/her task	43%	24%	17%	08%	08%

Table 3: Students' Attitudes on the Use of Task-based Approach in English Language Study and its Impact on their Skills' Development

4.2 Teachers' Interview Findings

In addition to the survey conducted with students to investigate their attitudes and perceptions about the use of task-based approach in ESP classroom and its impact on their learning achievement and skills' development, this study attempted to understand teachers' awareness of TBLT principles, and their views on its implementation in the ESP instruction. For this reason, 14ESP university professors were randomly assigned to respond to a semi-structured interview.

The interviewed teachers confirmed their use of task-based approach in their classroom because, according to them, it creates a massive communicative interaction among students and enhances their engagement and involvement in the classroom. Other teachers explained that the use of TBLT approach boosts students' self-confidence and encourages their participation especially those who feel shy and avoid talking. As a matter of fact, task-based instruction with the use of authentic materials helps students progress in their learning, express themselves, and operate in real-world circumstances with a rational level of fluency and proficiency. Another teacher highlighted the effective role of TBLT in creating a motivating teaching and learning environment; he said "most students feel motivated while performing a task and this provides an amazing atmosphere in the classroom". TBA, in fact,

makes learning more interesting for students as it presents authentic contexts and contents that do not only endow them with the linguistic competence but also with functional abilities and skills needed in the target workplaces.

Besides, teachers claimed the importance of task-based approach in stimulating their students' learning autonomy. They stated that integrating effective tasks and activities in the teaching-learning process helps students build their own ways of learning, discover their strengths and weaknesses, and hone their skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving. More than that, and as explained by some interviewees, learners are not the only ones who benefit from TB incorporation but also teachers. The use of task-based approach allows teachers to easily track their students' learning progress and performance in the classroom.

After shedding light on their level of understanding and awareness of the integration task-based model in language teaching and learning, ESP in particular, respondents were asked about the types of activities used in their classrooms. As stated earlier, the interviewed teachers work in different universities, namely the Higher School of Technology of Fes, The Polydisciplinary Faculty of El Jadida, The National School of Commerce and Management of Fes, The Private University of Fes, and The National School of Applied Sciences of Fes. Therefore, they were teaching different branches of ESP namely English for science and technology (EST), English for business purposes (EBP), and English for legal purposes (ELP), using a wide range of tasks and activities. For instance, presentations, case studies, and classroom projects are assigned by the majority of respondents. Other teachers stated that they use gap-fill and match sentence halves exercises especially in grammar classes. Besides, another respondent confirmed that he integrates some tasks aimed at fostering his students' critical thinking skills as well as their speaking fluency such as opinion-gap, reasoning-gap, and information-gap tasks. Another teacher stated that she constantly tries to assign tasks and activities where students are asked to integrate their four skills at the same time like role plays. She further explained that this type of activities is suitable for use with large or small classes and with students with different learning styles and levels.

Subsequently, teachers were asked about the different ways they integrate TB approach in their ESP teaching. The majority confirmed that they encourage pair work and group work activities. However, they further put forth that it all depends on the assigned task; sometimes the task requires an individual work, sometimes in pair, and sometimes in group. Also, a teacher stated that he uses whole class discussion, especially when it is a speaking activity.

After investigating the different types of activities and the ways they are incorporated in the classroom, teachers were asked about their role in TB teaching and learning. All respondents maintained that they play the role of the guide, facilitator, coach, and motivator. For example, a teacher answered:

I try to monitor them, guide them, and give them useful instructions. Moreover, I always try to motivate them to do the tasks and never be afraid of making mistakes. Meanwhile, providing positive feedback at the end is among the things I do while using TB approach.

As a matter of fact, interviewees further claimed that in TB teaching, the teacher is required to be an evaluator who provides feedback and checks if the integration of tasks in their classroom works in the context to a specific lesson. Eventually, respondents were asked about the way they evaluate their students' interaction and performance while/after completing the assigned tasks. A teacher said that she always opts for formative evaluation "by observing students while performing a task and having individual conversations, followed by asking

them questions about the task while/after completing it. This is done following a goal-oriented approach". Another teacher also confirmed that asking questions to students while performing their tasks usually provides positive results as it allows both the teacher and student ensure understanding. Two other teachers argued that they adopt for peer assessment to stimulate students' sense of ownership, responsibility, and autonomy. One of them said "I always try to transfer the locus of control to my students; for instance, while a group of students gives an oral presentation, I ask their classmates to evaluate their work, what they liked, what they did not like, what pieces of advice can they give them for the future...". The teacher further explained that the use of this peer evaluation in TB instruction helps students gain more self-confidence and self-esteem as they share their perspectives with each other in a supportive environment. Another teacher uses checklist evaluation for oral presentations in order to assess her students' presentation skills, such as the use of non-verbal language, personal appearance, fluency in language use, among other aspects.

Overall, teachers stated that while evaluating their students' task performance, they usually feel satisfied with the outcome. Students tend to make more efforts than when they are just recipients; they tend to be more motivated, more engaged, and more interested in the course material. Afterwards, respondents were asked to share their opinion about the extent to which TB model improves their students' learning autonomy. All teachers stated their positive attitudes towards TB teaching as a learner-centered approach that fosters autonomy and lifelong learning. Some explained that assigning tasks to students either in the classroom or outside increases their engagement, self-confidence, and sense of responsibility. For instance, for presentations and projects, students choose a topic, do research, make a plan, divide tasks between partners, write their text, work on their personal appearance and attitude, among others.

In addition to learning-autonomy, teachers maintained that the use of TBLT increases students' motivation. According to the interviewees, their students feel extremely motivated when they are given a task to work on, especially if it is in group; they seem enjoying themselves more than when they are just receiving what the teacher transmits. A teacher further explained that the teachers' feedback is what motivates students the most; she stated:

In fact, it is the feedback you provide to students concerning the task that increases their motivation. It is true that students who succeed to complete the given task feel competent, which increases their motivation; however, those who do not succeed to do so can be motivated by giving them a positive feedback to try again. To conclude, what I notice is that TB approach increases motivation of students who are interested in the subject and the learning process (intrinsically oriented learners).

As far as collaborative learning in concerned, teachers said that the implementation of TB promotes collaboration, cooperation, and communication skills among learners. The majority of respondents attempt to encourage pair and/or group work because, according to their answers, it gives the opportunity to students to develop some skills deemed necessary in ESP learning such as critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, negotiation, and leadership. A teacher added that engaging students in pair or group work to complete a task is very efficient while having a heterogeneous classroom. He explained that students with different levels work together, help each other, and learn from each other. In fact, teachers confirmed that using TBLT with pair/group work creates a healthy and motivating teaching and learning environment. However, some respondents put forth that asking students to work

in pair or group is not always functional, especially in large size classes as students tend to make noise and lose more time.

In addition to overcrowded classrooms, teachers mentioned other obstacles that impede the integration of TB teaching in ESP instruction. The main problem highlighted by interviewees is the lack of time; that is, the insufficient time allocated to English per week, which is two hours. They explained that they barely find time to explain the main course. Other teachers referred to the issue of materials and equipment. Another interviewee stated that students are sometimes considered as an obstacle, like those having bad attitudes and those with a low level. He said that “while working in a team, some students take advantage to make noise and have fun, while others use Arabic to complete the task”. On the other hand a teacher put forth that “task-based approach is applicable in all situations because any lesson given should go through the three phases: present, practice, and produce”.

5. Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

This study is an attempt to investigate the impact of using task-based approach in ESP classroom on enhancing students’ learning achievement and skills’ acquisition. As presented in the previous section, the results emanating from the survey conducted with students as well as the interviews with teachers confirmed that the use of TB approach is boosting students’ learning-autonomy, increasing their learning motivation, encouraging their classroom engagement, and participating in the development of their communicative, critical, and collaborative skills. In this regard, Savignon (2007) stated that, within the TB learning literature, learner-centeredness has been primarily related to enhancing situated and communicative language use, motivation, and collaboration.

To start with, the majority of students believe in their ability to learn English. They are aware of their English language learning and study level, their skills, strengths, and weaknesses. As for their attitudes towards task based approach in ESP learning, respondents positively perceived the different tasks and activities assigned by their teachers. They found them meaningful, motivating, and relevant to their needs, especially their learning needs as students in the fields of business, engineering, and law. In the same context, Gonzales-Lloret and Nielson (2015) and Bao and Kirkebaek (2013) reported that learners appreciate and welcome the use of task-based approach as it equips them with the language they need for work, also it is a teaching and learning paradigm that increases their engagement and creates an interactive and interesting learning environment (cited in Ellis et al., 2020). TB approach is a teaching model that stimulates the use of real and authentic communication activities, which activate students’ prior knowledge and emphasize their understanding of the target language.

Additionally, students stated that the use of task-based approach significantly improves their productive skills, namely speaking and writing. As a matter of fact, the implementation of TB learning in ESP is considered an effective model for developing learners’ oral fluency and communication competency, as students feel more motivated while engaged in different authentic tasks and activities, especially the ones performed in pair or in group. As for the writing skills, its importance is increasingly gaining ground in professional contexts; it is considered as a means through which learners prove their understanding and consolidate their professional retention. In the same vein, Swain and Lapkin (2001) said that TB learning allows learners develop their writing abilities by giving more attention to forms and structures.

Moreover, the majority of students maintained that the assigned tasks and activities help them develop their critical thinking. TB model emphasizes students' autonomy in planning, monitoring, analyzing, evaluating their own learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2004). For instance, participants stated that being engaged in ESP assignments such as in oral presentation, classroom debates, role-play, among others, allows them to gain more control over managing and organizing their working time as well as taking decision about their own learning. Another aspect of TB instruction in relation to ESP, which was previously highlighted in this study, is collaborative learning. Students considered the tasks given in classroom as a platform where they can establish positive interdependence, individual accountability, and equal participation. They stated that team work improves their social and collaborative skills and sense of responsibility; each one in the group acts actively and responsibly to complete the task in due time. The literature puts forth that task-based approach goes hand in hand with collaborative learning; that is, the integration of different types of input and interaction using pair or group work can foster collaboration and facilitate learning among students. According to Van Den Branden (2009), task-based model creates real, collaborative, dynamic, and unpredictable learning situations (cited in Shehadeh and Coombe, 2012). Finally, students were asked about the role of their teacher instructions and feedback; in the majority, respondents positively perceived their ESP teacher's active role in giving instructions, answering their questions, and providing constructive comments. McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) explained that whatever their performance, learners always need their teachers' support and timely feedback; without the teacher's intervention, accuracy in the target language may be decreased.

As for the second phase of this research, the interviews conducted with the 10 ESP professors about their opinions and perceptions of TB learning significantly confirmed that teachers have a good understanding of this approach and are aware of its effective role in creating an active, interactive, and autonomous learning environment. Interviewees use task-based approach in their classrooms, integrating different tasks and activities such as role play, case studies, presentations, reasoning-gap, information-gap, to name but a few. According to them, the TB as a pedagogical paradigm improves students' learning processes and outcomes as it stimulates their interest in the course material, increases their motivation, encourages their engagement, and fosters their sense of responsibility and self-dependence in learning. In a similar study, Zhang and Hung (2012) concluded that using task-based instruction in ESP enhances students' academic achievement, motivation, and learning attitudes which positively influence on their academic achievement. In fact, teachers said that TB model helps students to be actively involved in the classroom work; especially those who feel shy and often reluctant to participate. In this context, Willis (1996) stated that task-based provides learners with a comfortable learning environment where they can overcome their stress and fear, communicate, and interact with others.

Additionally, teachers argued that TB learning is increasingly developing collaboration, cooperation, and communication skills among ESP learners. By using pair and group work activities, students tend to foster their social skills, positive interdependence, individual accountability, and equal participation. Respondents also stated that by incorporating the TB approach they tend to encourage peer teaching and peer assessment. The latter is a good teaching and learning strategy that helps learners develop their own understanding of the course content, learn from each other, broaden their knowledge, and improve their skills, especially critical thinking. Besides, respondents claimed that the implementation of tasks and

activities is beneficial for both teachers and students to keep track on the teaching-learning process. However, they further explained that TBLT is student-centered and their role consists of being a guide, a facilitator, a motivator, and an evaluator. They added that their role as teachers is very critical before, while, and after the task. They need to provide early and clear instruction that would allow students to think, search, and organize the work; also, they should be alert during the task to check students' performance, answer their questions, and give them comments and remarks when necessary. Finally, according to respondents, a good teacher is an evaluator who provides feedback and makes sure if the integration of tasks in their classroom works in the context to a specific lesson. Long (2015) said that "the teacher's role in TBLT requires greater expertise, and is more demanding and certainly more communicative than in PPP" (p.24).

At last, participants claimed that many challenges impede the incorporation of TB approach in their ESP classroom such as large class size, insufficient time allocated to English per week, lack of resources and materials, as well as students' negative learning attitudes; for instance, those who tend to use Arabic or chat while completing the task. Littlewood (2007) referred to another issue related to TBTL implementation; it is teachers' misunderstanding and uncertainties surrounding the concept of "task". Teachers need to be provided with guidelines to help them design appropriate tasks and activities with clear and achievable aims and objectives.

6. Conclusion

This study has shed light on the effective incorporation of task-based approach in the ESP classroom and its role in enhancing students' learning achievement and skills' acquisition. The results obtained from the students' questionnaire were similar to the results obtained from the semi-structured interview. Both teachers and students have positive attitudes towards the use of TB learning; according to them, it is an approach that increases learning motivation, interaction, communication, responsibility, self-dependence, critical thinking and collaboration. This research is an attempt to raise language teachers' understanding and awareness of the important role of TB in education, ESP in particular, to utilize it in their practice. While engaged in a task or activity, learners tend to be more active, enthusiastic, confident, and autonomous. Therefore, it is deduced from the findings presented earlier that the application of task-based approach is an important prerequisite for language instruction thanks to its wide range of advantages. Nevertheless, a number of obstacles impede the implementation of this approach in language teaching and learning, namely large size class, insufficient time, lack of materials and facilities, and students' negative attitudes and behaviors.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

TBA: Task-based approach

TBTL: Task-based teaching and learning

ESP: English for specific purposes

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