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INTEGRATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING IN NON-PHILOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *This paper examines the integration of Task-Based Learning (TBL) within non-philological higher education to bridge the gap between students' declarative language knowledge and professional communicative needs. Combining TBL with English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the study outlines a discipline-integrated framework across various fields. It presents a functional three-phase task cycle and a practical Task Design Matrix to operationalize real-world scenarios. Addressing implementation challenges such as teacher readiness and assessment alignment, the paper offers robust strategies for modern, competency-based tertiary education.*

Key words: *Task-Based Learning, English for Specific Purposes, higher education, communicative competence, professional language development.*

Introduction.

The growing demands of international academic and professional communication have positioned English language proficiency as a critical competency for graduates of non-philological universities. Yet traditional grammar-translation and lecture-based models of English instruction often fail to develop the kind of functional, context-sensitive language use that modern professional environments require. This paper presents the theoretical foundations and practical implementation of Task-Based Learning (TBL) as an integrated instructional framework for English language teaching in non-philological higher education institutions, where learners' primary disciplinary expertise lies outside language and linguistics.

The central argument advanced here is that TBL, when properly adapted to the subject-matter contexts of specific degree programmes, bridges the persistent gap between declarative knowledge of grammar and vocabulary on the one hand, and the ability to deploy language purposefully in authentic professional situations on the other. Rather than treating language as an end in itself, TBL positions language as a vehicle for accomplishing meaningful real-world tasks — precisely the orientation required by students of engineering, economics, medicine, law, and other non-philological fields.

Main text.

Task-Based Learning (TBL), originally systematised by Willis (1996) and further developed by Ellis (2003), Nunan (2004), and Van den Branden (2006), draws on communicative language teaching theory, sociocultural approaches to learning, and second language acquisition research. Its foundational premise is that language is most effectively acquired through meaningful use rather than isolated structural practice. A task, in the TBL framework, is an activity that requires learners to use language communicatively in order to achieve a non-linguistic goal — a negotiation, a report, a problem-solving exercise, a presentation — thereby generating authentic opportunities for language acquisition.

The core principles underpinning TBL that are of direct relevance to non-philological higher education include the following:

- Meaning primacy: Learners focus primarily on conveying and negotiating meaning, with formal accuracy addressed as a secondary concern in pre-task and post-task phases.
- Real-world relevance: Tasks are designed to reflect authentic communicative situations that students are likely to encounter in their future professional or academic roles.
- Learner autonomy and interaction: Task completion requires collaborative negotiation, decision-making, and information exchange, fostering both communicative competence and teamwork skills.
- Integration of skills: TBL naturally integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing within the context of purposeful activity, avoiding the artificial isolation of discrete skills.
- Form-focused instruction in context: Grammar and lexical focus arises from communicative need, making it more salient and memorable than decontextualised rule instruction.

For non-philological institutions, these principles acquire particular pedagogical force when TBL is further integrated with content knowledge. In such contexts, TBL effectively converges with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) traditions, producing what might be termed a discipline-integrated TBL approach, in which the task content is drawn directly from students' field of professional study [1].

The practical implementation of integrated TBL for non-philological students rests on a three-phase task cycle, adapted from Willis's (1996) framework: the pre-task phase, in which the topic, relevant vocabulary, and task requirements are introduced; the task phase proper, in which learners complete the communicative activity; and the post-task language focus phase, in which linguistic forms encountered and needed during task performance are explicitly reviewed [2].

Crucially, in a non-philological context, task design must take account of students' disciplinary knowledge and career trajectories. The following categories of task have proven particularly productive across different degree programmes:

- Discipline-specific case studies and problem-solving tasks: Engineering students analyse a technical fault report and present recommended corrective measures in English; economics students interpret market data and draft a policy recommendation memo; medical students conduct a simulated patient consultation or review a clinical case summary.
- Collaborative research and presentation tasks: Students investigate a current issue in their professional field, compile findings from English-language sources, and deliver an academic oral presentation, developing information literacy alongside language skills.
- Professional writing tasks: Students draft authentic workplace genres — emails, executive summaries, technical specifications, or project proposals — within their disciplinary domain, developing register awareness and genre competence.
- Role-play and simulation tasks: Students enact professional scenarios such as business negotiations, interdisciplinary team meetings, conference discussions, or client consultations, practising interactional language in contextualised settings.
- Text analysis and synthesis tasks: Students read, compare, and synthesise multiple English-language academic or professional texts in their field, then produce a written or spoken summary, developing critical reading and academic literacy.

To operationalise TBL principles within non-philological curricula, language instructors must systematically map communicative tasks to the specific professional domains of students. This requires transforming abstract syllabus goals into concrete, discipline-specific scenarios that replicate real-world professional constraints (Table 1).

Table 1 - Task Design Matrix for Discipline-Integrated TBL

Target Field	Professional Scenario / Task Type	Core Non-Linguistic Outcome	Key Linguistic and Communicative Focus
Engineering	Technical Fault Analysis and Reporting	Written corrective action plan and oral briefing to management	Cause-and-effect structures, passive voice in technical contexts, giving recommendations
Economics / Business	Market Data Interpretation and Strategy	Executive policy memo and team presentation on market entry	Comparative/superlative forms, trend descriptions, persuasive language, turn-taking
Medicine / Healthcare	Diagnostic Simulation and Case Review	Completed clinical case summary and oral handover to a colleague	Asking clarifying questions, professional medical jargon, empathetic communication patterns
Law / International Relations	Contract Dispute Resolution and Negotiation	Drafted addendum to an agreement and oral negotiation session	Conditional sentences, modal verbs of obligation/permission, hedging, formal registers
IT / Computer Science	Product Pitch and Technical Specification	Live software demonstration and written agile user stories	Present simple for functionality, imperative forms, instruction giving, clarifying technical terms

Authoring

As demonstrated in Table 1, each task is built around a non-linguistic outcome where language serves purely as a tool for professional action. The instructional value of this matrix lies in its flexibility: while the core professional scenario remains identical for all students in a cohort, the linguistic scaffold can be adjusted based on language proficiency.

A significant implementation challenge lies in calibrating task difficulty and linguistic support for heterogeneous groups, which are common in non-philological institutions where English proficiency levels may vary considerably [3]. For instance, in the Engineering task, lower-proficiency students (CEFR B1) can be provided with pre-taught lexical frames for cause-and-effect, while higher-proficiency students (B2-C1) are expected to navigate complex, unscripted peer questions during the oral briefing phase. Scaffolding strategies — including pre-task vocabulary instruction, model texts, language frames, and peer collaboration — are essential for enabling lower-proficiency learners to engage meaningfully with cognitively demanding, discipline-specific tasks, ensuring that cognitive engagement with professional content remains high regardless of current linguistic limitations.

Research evidence converges on several significant benefits of TBL in non-philological higher education settings. Studies across European university contexts consistently report that TBL approaches produce measurable gains not only in oral communicative fluency but also in learner motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy in English [4]. From a language acquisition perspective, TBL creates the conditions identified by SLA research as conducive to acquisition: comprehensible input, pushed output, interaction, and opportunities to notice the gap between the learner's interlanguage and target-language norms. The integration of disciplinary content further enhances acquisition by providing rich conceptual scaffolding for new language encountered in the task cycle.

At the institutional level, integrated TBL supports the goals of modern higher education policy frameworks, including the Bologna Process requirements for competency-based education, graduate employability outcomes, and the internationalisation of higher education. The approach is consistent with the professional competency profiles increasingly required by employers who demand not merely passive language knowledge but the active ability to operate in English-medium professional and academic environments.

Despite its considerable potential, the widespread adoption of integrated TBL faces several systemic challenges. Teacher preparedness is a significant constraint:

TBL requires educators who can design communicatively authentic, discipline-relevant tasks, facilitate rather than direct language use, and deliver responsive form-focused feedback [2] — a substantially different pedagogical repertoire from that demanded by traditional grammar-based instruction. Professional development programmes must therefore address both TBL methodology and disciplinary content awareness.

Assessment alignment presents a further challenge. If TBL is to be implemented coherently, assessment instruments must be capable of evaluating communicative performance on authentic tasks rather than discrete grammatical knowledge. Rubric development that captures fluency, coherence, task completion, and professional register — rather than grammatical accuracy alone — is essential to maintaining the pedagogical integrity of the approach.

Curriculum integration also requires institutional commitment. TBL cannot be implemented optimally as isolated classroom episodes; it demands a coherent syllabus design that sequences tasks appropriately across a course, coordinates with subject-matter departments to ensure disciplinary authenticity, and aligns with learners' evolving language and professional development needs [3]. Finally, appropriate materials development or adaptation is required for most non-philological contexts, where commercially published TBL materials rarely address the specific professional domains of degree programmes. Locally produced, discipline-specific task materials offer the most effective solution, though this requires sustained institutional investment.

Summary and conclusions. Task-Based Learning, particularly when integrated with discipline-specific content and professionally relevant contexts, represents one of the most theoretically grounded and empirically supported approaches available for developing English language competence among students in non-philological higher education. By centring instruction on the accomplishment of meaningful communicative tasks drawn from learners' professional fields, TBL transforms English language learning from a peripheral academic exercise into a directly purposeful and motivating component of professional preparation.

The successful implementation of integrated TBL requires careful task design, appropriate scaffolding, aligned assessment, trained instructors, and institutional support — but when these conditions are met, it demonstrably enhances both the quality of language acquisition and the perceived relevance of English instruction. As higher education institutions across Ukraine and the broader European space increasingly orient their curricula towards graduate employability, intercultural competence, and international academic engagement, integrated TBL offers a pedagogically robust and practically viable framework for meeting these demands through language education.

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CONTENTS

Education and pedagogy

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-009 3
COACHING APPROACH IN WORKING WITH TEACHERS: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS
Khomenko O., Oleksenko S., Salata O.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-013 19
ENHANCING LANGUAGE EDUCATION THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Dienichieva O.I., Plakhotniuk N.P.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-017 27
FORMATION OF STUDENTS' NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE PROCESS OF STUDYING LYRICAL MESSAGES OF UKRAINE (6TH GRADE)
Mykytenko V.O.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-026 35
THE EFFICACY OF THE “BILINGUAL SEL DEVELOPMENT” INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN AGED 5-10: ASSESSING COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE OUTCOMES
Buchkovska V.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-033 56
METHODOLOGY FOR ORGANIZING VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR SPECIALISTS IN SALES OF ECOLOGICAL ENERGY SYSTEMS USING FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION TOOLS AND PRODUCTION CASES
Liubarets V.V., Batsurovska I. V., Kutsyi M. V.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-046 67
PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TEACHING BIOCHEMISTRY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
Tsviakh O.O., Larycheva O.M., Bobrova M.S.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-048 77
MODERN CONCEPTS OF MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL SPACE
Bagrii M.A.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-049 85
LLM-ASSISTED LEGAL ENGLISH INSTRUCTION: A PRE-REGISTERED QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF NLP TOOLS IN ESP ANDRAGOGY
Machuskyi V.V., Titova O.S.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-059 94
THE ROLE-PLAY METHOD AS A TOOL FOR FORMING FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF ECONOMIC AND STEM SPECIALITIES STUDENTS
Herasymchuk Yu., Kovalenko V., Parnus K., Nikolaienko S.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-061 104
ORGANIZATION OF JOINT INTERNATIONAL ONLINE LEARNING AT A HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION
Zubenko T.V., Hulik Y.O.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-066 115
FORMATION OF ACTIVATION OF COGNITIVE PROCESSES IN YOUNGER SCHOOLCHILDREN IN MATHEMATICS LESSONS IN THE PROCESS OF DIDACTIC GAMES
Zaporozhchenko T.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-067 130
THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM ON PSYCHOSOMATIC MANIFESTATIONS IN WOMEN DURING PREGNANCY
Okhromiy H., Bilan A.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-076 141
THE USE OF DIGITAL LEARNING TOOLS IN DEVELOPING THE "FOREIGN LANGUAGE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL TERMINOLOGY" COURSE ON THE MOODLE DISTANCE LEARNING PLATFORM
Kalashnykova T.S.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-078 152
UNDERSTANDING BY PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS OF THE ROLE OF FORMING PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPETENCE IN STUDENTS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
Shopina M.O., Yakunin Ya.Yu., Cherpak Yu.V.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-080 166
INTEGRATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING IN NON-PHILOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION
Zharikova L.M.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-091 173
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL WORK IN THE COMMUNITY: HUMAN-CENTERED PRINCIPLES OF INTERACTION AND DEVELOPMENT
Vasyliuk T.G., Lysokon I. O., Karytka V.V.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-102 185
THE TEACHER'S METHODOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES AS A FACTOR IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION
Chornii M.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-105 201
THE INFLUENCE OF ACTIVE TEACHING METHODS ON THE FORMATION OF THE CREATIVE PERSONALITY OF A FUTURE PRIMARY TEACHER
Pashchenko M., Fedorov M., Tabachynska K.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-106 211
THE IMPACT OF MODERN EDUCATIONAL TEACHING TECHNOLOGIES ON THE FORMATION OF FUTURE MEDICAL WORKERS
Bas O., Golovatyk A.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-107 219
COMPETENT APPROACH TO HEALTH PROTECTION ACTIVITIES WITH ADOLESCENTS WITH DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF FUTURE NURSES
Vostrova M., Heiko V.

https://www.sworldjournal.com/index.php/swj/article/view/swj37-05-108 227
BIOENERGETIC APPROACH TO ADAPTIVE SELF-REGULATION OF STRESS OF A FUTURE MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL AS THE BASIS OF HIS EMOTIONAL STABILITY
Myroniuk T., Suslenko I.