

Contextualising subject-specific lexis using a task-based approach

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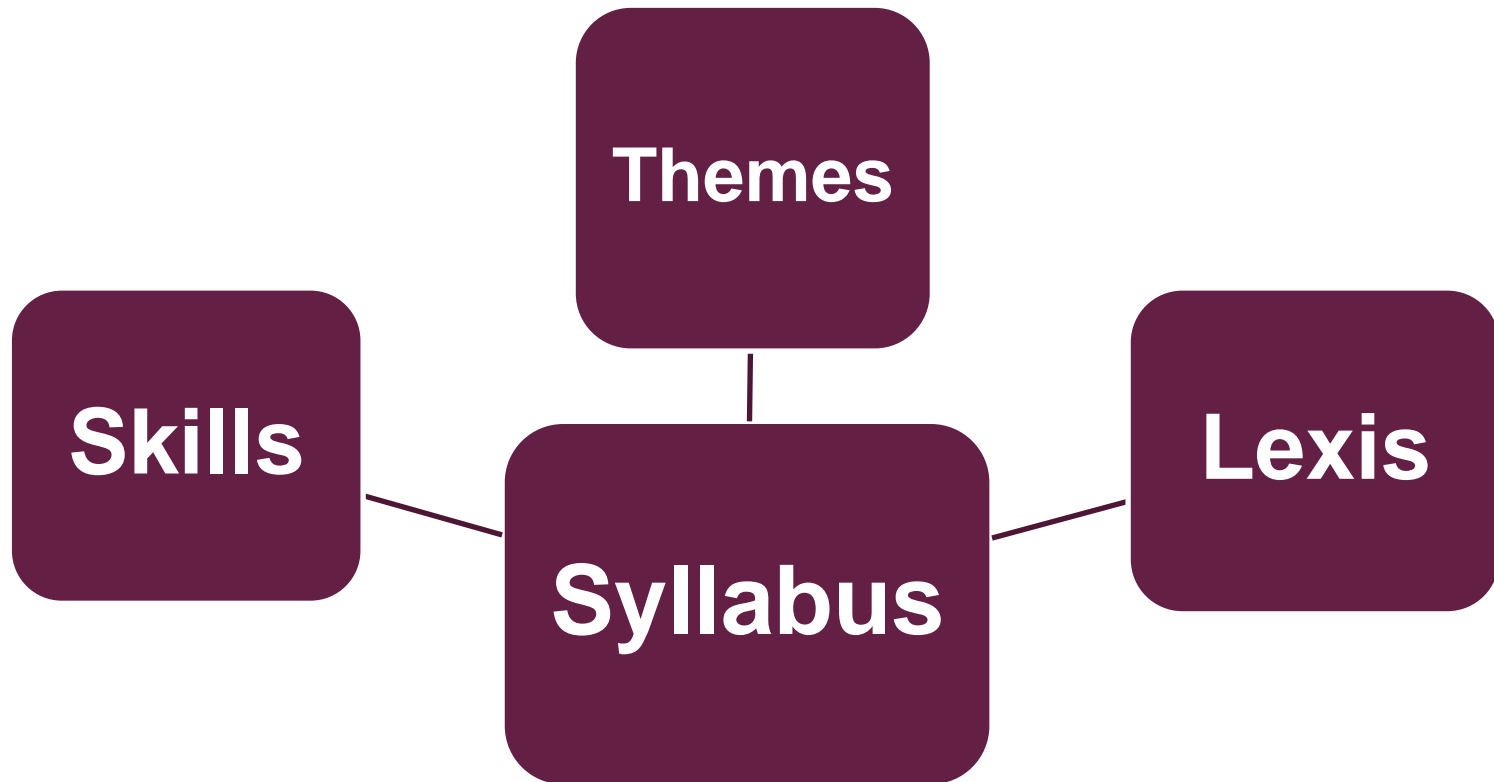


Overview

- ▶ Context: module and students
- ▶ Aims of research
- ▶ Rationale behind the approach (why Task-Based Learning?)
- ▶ Procedure
- ▶ Evaluation

Module

- ▶ Part of the International Foundation Programme
- ▶ 20 credits out of 120



Students



- ▶ Language level: IELTS 6.5 +
- ▶ Background: from the Middle East, Africa, Russia
- ▶ Previous exposure to Academic English: very limited, but some instruction in Term 1
- ▶ Group size: small group of 6

Problems

acquisition of subject-specific and general academic **vocabulary**

little exposure to and use of academic texts

motivation

Aims of the project

- helping the students to acquire subject-specific lexis used in academic context

- increasing the students' exposure to academic texts in their subject area

Tasks - definition

“a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome” (Willis, 1996:53)

Ellis (2003: 9)

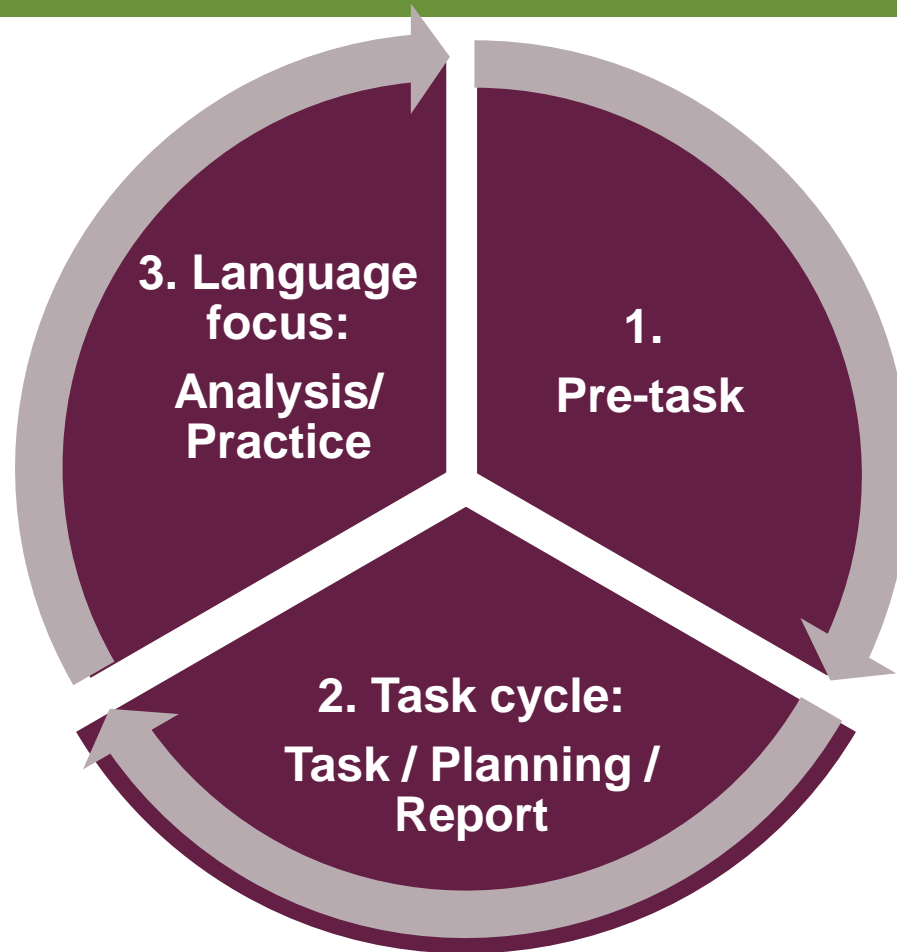
1. A task is a workplan
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning
3. A task involves real-world processes of language use.
4. A task can involve any of the four language skills.
5. A task engages cognitive processes.
6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome.

Do you use tasks in your classroom? How?

Why TBL?

- ▶ Facilitates integration of skills and contextualisation of language
- ▶ Motivates through meaningful and 'real-world' task
- ▶ Facilitates negotiating meaning and modifying output (Ellis, 2003)
- ▶ Facilitates noticing the gap between interlanguage and target language (Skehan, 2003)
- ▶ Requires cognitive investment/mental effort → deeper language processing → long-term retention (Cobb & Lovick, 2007)

Procedure: Willis' (1996) model of a task cycle



Evaluation – student questionnaires

How useful did you find the classes?

- All respondents – **to a certain extent**
- ‘learning useful skills’, ‘engaging in discussion’, ‘explained things we needed to do for the last assignment’, ‘some members will participate more than others’

How motivated did you feel?

- All respondents - **most of the time**
- interactive, everyone participating; BUT differences of opinion considered a problem

Evaluation – student questionnaires

To what extent did the classes help you to develop your range of academic and business vocabulary?

- **50%** - to a great extent, **50%** - to a certain extent
- 'I am now eager to learn as much vocabulary as I can', 'helped me improve my speaking and writing skills in business related subjects' 'I was able to learn some words I never knew before'

How useful was reading journal articles as part of the classes?

- **83%** - very useful, **17%** - only partly
- 'it taught me to read the abstract which I used to ignore', 'sometimes the articles were too long', 'the journal articles didn't really help with the main coursework'

Evaluation: my reflection - positives

- ▶ The project raised the students' awareness of the level and complexity of vocabulary which they should aim to use.
- ▶ It provided opportunities for the use of vocabulary in context in each stage.
- ▶ It created meaningful opportunities to read academic journals and exposed the students to the concept of using theoretical models.
- ▶ It created opportunities for reflective learning and collaborative learning.
- ▶ It allowed me to give a lot of feedback and monitor the students' use of vocabulary.

Evaluation: my reflection – practical issues and limitations

- ▶ Very time-consuming
- ▶ Reading articles in class – not practical (and not recommended) as a regular feature.
- ▶ Pre-task stage – more productive if students prepare at home.
- ▶ No evidence of long-term positive effects on vocabulary acquisition.

BUT: I intend to experiment further.

References

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