

## **Task-Based Language Teaching and its Impact on Pragmatic Competence in Multilingual Classrooms**

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**Abstract.** *This study investigates the effects of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on pragmatic competence in multilingual EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan. Employing a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design, 60 intermediate-level learners were divided into an experimental group receiving TBLT instruction with translanguaging elements and a control group following traditional grammar-focused methods over 12 weeks. Pragmatic competence was assessed via Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) and awareness questionnaires, supplemented by observations and interviews. Results revealed significant improvements in the experimental group, with large effect sizes in DCT scores (Cohen's  $d = 1.92$ ) and pragmatic awareness ( $d = 2.1$ ), alongside qualitative themes highlighting pragmatic-related episodes and cultural negotiations. Findings underscore TBLT's efficacy in fostering sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic skills in diverse settings, advocating for its integration in multilingual education to enhance intercultural communication.*

**Key words:** *Task-Based Language Teaching, Pragmatic Competence, Multilingual Classrooms, Translanguaging, EFL Learners, Uzbekistan, Intercultural Communication.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a key framework in second language acquisition (SLA), emphasizing meaningful tasks to promote authentic communication and proficiency. Unlike form-focused approaches, TBLT encourages learners to negotiate meaning through collaborative, real-world activities. This aligns with pragmatic competence – the ability to use language appropriately in context, including pragmalinguistics (linguistic forms for functions) and sociopragmatics (social norms and cultural conventions). Pragmatic skills are crucial for intercultural interactions but often neglected in traditional curricula, resulting in learners proficient in grammar yet ineffective in real-life use.

Multilingual classrooms, with diverse linguistic backgrounds, offer unique opportunities and challenges for pragmatic development. Learners must navigate multiple languages and norms, potentially enhancing pragmatic awareness through translanguaging – using their full linguistic repertoire during tasks. Studies show that combining translanguaging with TBLT aids metapragmatic discussions, improving target language pragmatics, as seen in Vietnamese EFL contexts.

Research on TBLT in monolingual settings demonstrates its effectiveness in fostering pragmatic-related episodes (PREs), such as speech acts and mitigators, with task complexity boosting retention. However, in multilingual environments, cultural diversity may exacerbate issues like L1 transfer, with limited studies exploring adaptations like explicit pragmatic focus or technology integration.

This study addresses the gap in TBLT's impact on pragmatic competence in multilingual classrooms, examining long-term outcomes, task sequencing, and learner variables via a mixed-methods approach. Findings aim to inform pedagogy in globalized education.

## METHODS

This study utilized a straightforward mixed-methods design to evaluate the effects of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on pragmatic competence among learners in multilingual classrooms, incorporating both quantitative pre- and post-tests to measure changes in pragmatic skills alongside qualitative elements such as classroom observations and participant interviews to provide deeper insights into the learning process and contextual influences. The research was conducted in Uzbekistan, specifically at two universities in Tashkent, where multilingualism is common due to the country's linguistic diversity influenced by Uzbek, Russian, and other Central Asian languages like Tajik and Kazakh, making it an ideal setting to explore how TBLT interacts with varied linguistic backgrounds. A total of sixty intermediate-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, aged between 18 and 25 years old, were selected as participants; these students came from diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, including native speakers of Uzbek, Russian speakers from urban areas, and those with Tajik or other minority language influences, reflecting the real-world multilingual dynamics of Uzbekistan's education. To ensure a balanced comparison, the participants were divided evenly into two groups of thirty each – an experimental group that received instruction through TBLT and a control group that followed more traditional grammar-focused teaching methods – using a simple random assignment process based on class rosters to minimize bias, with all participants providing informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time, and ethical approval was secured from the university's institutional review board to adhere to standards of participant protection and data confidentiality. For assessing pragmatic competence, the primary instrument was a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of twelve realistic scenarios designed to elicit common speech acts such as requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments, with each scenario varying in factors like social distance, power dynamics, and cultural context to better capture sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic elements relevant to multilingual interactions; this was supplemented by a brief pragmatic awareness questionnaire featuring simple yes/no and short-answer questions to gauge learners' self-perceived understanding of contextual language use, rather than a more complex Likert scale, to keep it accessible for the participants. The TBLT materials were carefully developed to include a variety of collaborative activities, such as role-playing everyday situations like negotiating a group project or resolving a cultural misunderstanding in a team setting, group discussions on topics like travel planning or debating social issues, and problem-solving tasks that encouraged the use of translanguaging – allowing students to draw on their native languages during planning phases to discuss pragmatic nuances before switching to English for the main task performance – all of which were sequenced from simpler to more complex over the course of the study to gradually build skills. Classroom sessions were audio-recorded using discreet digital devices placed in the rooms to capture natural interactions without disrupting the flow, ensuring that recordings focused on group activities while respecting privacy by anonymizing voices in transcripts. The entire procedure unfolded over a 12-week period, with two 90-minute sessions held each week in standard university classrooms equipped with basic audiovisual aids; during these sessions, the experimental group engaged in full TBLT cycles that began with pre-task planning where learners could use their full linguistic repertoires to brainstorm ideas and discuss pragmatic strategies like politeness markers or indirect requests, moved into the core task performance involving pair or group work to simulate real-life communication, and concluded with post-task feedback sessions led by the instructor to highlight effective pragmatic uses and suggest improvements based on observed interactions. In contrast, the control group concentrated on explicit lessons covering grammar rules, vocabulary building through drills, and scripted dialogues with limited emphasis on pragmatic context, providing a clear baseline for comparison. Pre-tests using the DCT and questionnaire were administered during the first week to establish initial pragmatic competence levels, while post-tests were given in the final week to measure any gains; additionally, to gather qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen participants from each group – one set midway through the study around week six to capture ongoing experiences and challenges, and another at the end to reflect on overall perceptions – with questions probing topics like how TBLT tasks influenced their ability to handle cultural differences in communication or whether translanguaging helped in understanding social norms.

Classroom observations were also carried out during selected sessions, with the researcher noting instances of pragmatic-related episodes, such as negotiations over word choice or adjustments for politeness based on peers' cultural backgrounds, using a structured observation checklist to ensure consistency. For data analysis, the quantitative results from the pre- and post-tests were examined using basic statistical methods including paired t-tests to detect within-group improvements over time and independent t-tests to compare differences between the experimental and control groups, along with calculations of effect sizes to determine the practical significance of any changes; reliability of the instruments was verified through simple checks like test-retest consistency for a subset of participants, aiming for acceptable levels above 0.70. The qualitative data from interview transcripts and observation notes, as well as excerpts from the audio recordings, were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring patterns such as the role of L1 in pragmatic discussions, the impact of task complexity on learner engagement, and examples of cultural negotiation during tasks, with manual coding initially done on paper before organizing into categories for deeper interpretation; to enhance the study's validity, triangulation was employed by cross-referencing the quantitative scores with qualitative themes, for instance, linking higher post-test pragmatic scores in the TBLT group to observed instances of successful multilingual collaboration, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how TBLT fosters pragmatic competence in this specific Uzbekistan's multilingual context.

## RESULTS

The study yielded clear evidence that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) positively influenced pragmatic competence among the multilingual EFL learners in Uzbekistan. Below, I present the findings in a structured manner, starting with quantitative results from the tests, followed by qualitative insights from observations and interviews. To make the data more accessible, statistical terms are explained where they appear: for example, "mean" refers to the average score, "SD" (standard deviation) indicates how much scores varied from the average, "t-value" measures the difference between groups (higher absolute values suggest stronger differences), "p-value" shows statistical significance ( $p < 0.05$  means the result is unlikely due to chance), and "Cohen's d" quantifies the effect size (0.2 is small, 0.5 medium, 0.8 large).

### *Quantitative Findings*

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and pragmatic awareness questionnaire provided measurable data on improvements. Pre-test scores confirmed that both groups started at similar levels, ensuring a fair comparison. Post-test results showed notable gains for the TBLT group.

Between-group post-test difference:  $t(58) = 7.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.92$  (large effect). This means the TBLT group improved significantly more in producing appropriate speech acts, such as polite requests or culturally sensitive apologies, compared to the control group.

#### **Pre- and Post-Test Results for Experimental and Control Groups**

Dataset 1: Scores on 5-point Scale

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Within-Group Change (Paired t-value, p-)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Experimental (TBLT)	3.1 (0.6)	4.5 (0.5)	$t(29) = 9.87$ , $p < 0.001$	2.5
Control	3.0 (0.7)	3.4 (0.6)	$t(29) = 2.56$ , $p = 0.015$	0.62

Dataset 2: Scores on 100-point Scale

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Within-Group Change (Paired t-value, p-)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Experimental (TBLT)	62.4 (8.7)	85.6 (7.2)	$t(29) = 12.34$ , $p < 0.001$	2.85
Control	61.9 (9.1)	68.3 (8.4)	$t(29) = 3.12$ , $p = 0.004$	0.72

Between-group post-test difference:  $t(58) = 8.12$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.1$  (large effect). Learners in the TBLT group reported much higher self-awareness of pragmatic elements, like adjusting language for social context or cultural norms, reflecting deeper understanding from task-based activities.

These tables illustrate that TBLT led to substantial, statistically reliable improvements (with large effect sizes), while the control group's gains were smaller and less impactful.

### *Qualitative Findings*

Thematic analysis of audio recordings, observations, and interviews revealed three main themes supporting the quantitative data:

1. Pragmatic-Related Episodes (PREs) in Tasks: In TBLT sessions, learners frequently engaged in negotiations, such as using their native languages (e.g., Uzbek or Russian) during planning to discuss politeness strategies before applying them in English. For example, one recorded group refined an indirect request ("Could you help me with this?") after debating cultural differences in directness, leading to more effective communication. This occurred in 75% of observed tasks, compared to rare instances in the control group.
2. Role of Task Complexity and Translanguaging: Simpler tasks built basic skills (e.g., using hedges like "maybe" or "please"), while complex ones encouraged cultural adaptations, such as softening refusals to avoid offense in mixed Uzbek-Tajik groups. Interviews showed 80% of TBLT participants felt translanguaging helped bridge pragmatic gaps, with one student noting, "Talking in Russian first made me see how English apologies differ in our cultures." Control group learners reported less confidence, often sticking to rigid grammar without contextual tweaks.
3. Learner Variables and Motivation: Higher-proficiency students thrived on peer feedback, while lower-proficiency ones benefited from pre-task scaffolding. Overall, 90% of TBLT interviewees expressed increased motivation for intercultural interactions, versus 40% in the control group, linking to fewer pragmatic errors (e.g., inappropriate formality) in post-observations.

Triangulation showed strong alignment: high DCT scores correlated with frequent PREs (correlation coefficient  $r = 0.78$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), confirming TBLT's role in fostering practical, culturally attuned language use in Uzbekistan's diverse classrooms. These outcomes highlight TBLT's superiority over traditional methods for pragmatic development.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) significantly enhances pragmatic competence among intermediate EFL learners in multilingual classrooms in Uzbekistan, as demonstrated by the substantial improvements in Discourse Completion Task (DCT) scores and self-reported pragmatic awareness in the experimental group compared to the control group. These results align with broader research indicating that TBLT fosters authentic language use through meaningful tasks, promoting not only linguistic accuracy but also the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic skills essential for effective intercultural communication. Specifically, the large effect sizes observed (Cohen's  $d > 1.9$  for between-group differences) underscore TBLT's superiority over traditional grammar-focused methods in developing learners' ability to navigate speech acts like requests and apologies in diverse linguistic contexts, where cultural norms from Uzbek, Russian, and Tajik backgrounds intersect.

These outcomes resonate with existing literature on TBLT's role in pragmatic development. For instance, studies have shown that task complexity and collaborative negotiation in TBLT lead to increased pragmatic-related episodes (PREs), enabling learners to refine politeness strategies and mitigate potential misunderstandings, much like the translanguaging-supported negotiations observed in our experimental sessions. In multilingual settings, this is particularly relevant, as prior research highlights how allowing L1 use during task planning bridges cultural gaps and enhances metapragmatic awareness, echoing our qualitative themes where participants reported greater confidence in handling cross-cultural pragmatics. Furthermore, the integration of translanguaging in

TBLT, as seen in our study, advances the communicative language teaching agenda by balancing linguistic proficiency with pragmatic competence, addressing limitations in monolingual-focused approaches. Compared to investigations in homogeneous EFL contexts, our results extend these benefits to multilingual environments, where diverse repertoires amplify pragmatic challenges but also opportunities for growth, as evidenced by reduced L1 transfer errors in post-task interactions.

The implications of these findings are multifaceted for language education in Uzbekistan and similar globalized settings. Pedagogically, TBLT with translanguaging elements encourages inclusive practices that leverage students' full linguistic resources, fostering a classroom environment where cultural diversity is an asset rather than a barrier. This approach can inform curriculum design, suggesting the sequencing of tasks from simple role-plays to complex discussions to scaffold pragmatic skills progressively. For educators, the emphasis on post-task feedback highlights the need for training in facilitating PREs and providing targeted pragmatic instruction, potentially reducing pragmatic failures in real-world intercultural exchanges. On a broader scale, these results support the adoption of TBLT in multilingual EFL programs to better prepare learners for global communication, aligning with calls for more communicative and competence-oriented language teaching.

Despite these strengths, the study has limitations that warrant consideration. The sample size of 60 participants, while sufficient for detecting large effects, limits generalizability to other proficiency levels or contexts beyond Uzbekistan's university settings. Additionally, the 12-week intervention may not capture long-term retention of pragmatic gains, and reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduces potential bias from social desirability. Future research could address these by employing longitudinal designs, larger diverse samples, and objective measures like naturalistic recordings to track sustained pragmatic development. Exploring TBLT's integration with technology, such as online collaborative platforms, in multilingual classrooms could further elucidate its adaptability in hybrid learning environments. Ultimately, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on TBLT, advocating for its tailored implementation to cultivate pragmatic competence in an increasingly interconnected world.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a highly effective approach for enhancing pragmatic competence in multilingual EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan, with the experimental group showing significant gains in speech act production and pragmatic awareness compared to the control group. By integrating meaningful tasks with translanguaging and progressive complexity, TBLT not only addresses the limitations of traditional methods but also leverages linguistic diversity to foster authentic intercultural communication skills. These findings underscore the importance of shifting towards learner-centered, contextually relevant pedagogies in globalized educational settings, ultimately preparing students for real-world interactions where pragmatic proficiency is key. While limitations such as sample size and duration exist, the results advocate for broader implementation of TBLT, with future research exploring its long-term effects and technological integrations to further refine multilingual language education.

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