

## In-Service Education and Training: Task-Based-Learning in the 21st Century

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**Abstract:** *Teaching English is an academic sector valued in the education structure of our interconnected world as the target language is a worldwide instrument. English teachers should pursue cooperation with colleagues' in-depth understanding of instructional approaches and problem-solving efforts for individual growth. Therefore, In-Service Education and Training (INSET) is significant in equipping instructors to face the challenges of their career field on a theoretical and practical base. The specific article presents an original INSET course designed to be implemented with in-service English as Foreign Language (EFL) state school teachers in primary and secondary education in the Greek context. The course concerns the Task-Based Learning (TBL) method and it is based entirely on the use of technology as it is organized via a padlet. The training course aims to enable trainees to construct professional knowledge collaboratively through shared experiences, discussion and reflection. Its content and process will increase their awareness of TBL, enhance their concepts and offer practice for creating and adapting TBL material, integrating the appropriate strategies, 21st century skills and technological tools effectively into their teaching.*

**Keywords:** EFL, In-Service Training, Padlet, Task-Based Learning, Teacher Education Models

### Introduction

The degree to which instructors are prepared to pursue independent roles in an academic setting determines the effectiveness of an educational process. The present article aims to promote the professional development of in-service EFL Greek state school teachers through a trainee-centred approach, focusing on the TBL model that is appropriate to the trainees' needs of the 21st-century while connecting theory and practice through reflective thinking and purposeful engagement in the training procedure.

The suggested course, *Task-Based Learning in the 21st century*, is organized by a Greek state school and it addresses EFL teachers of other state schools in the area, both in primary and secondary education. When many schools are reached simultaneously, the program is rendered cost-effective, having a significantly larger sharing of experiences among different schools, while trainees almost instantly implement new practices into action.

The invitation, poster and agenda should be sent to state schools to inform teachers about the event. They should register through a confirmation e-mail to the organizer as the number of participants should not exceed 20, forming four groups. It is a one-day programme planned for the beginning of the school period before lessons start, it will last approximately six hours while attendees will receive a certificate at the end of the course. It should be held in a fully equipped computer lab with an Over Head Projector (OHP) or White Board (WB) and an internet connection. Trainees hold a university degree in English Language and Literature since it is a prerequisite for working at public schools, having a high level of the target language expertise and prior teaching experience at all levels. They are usually highly motivated to gain additional knowledge to cope with the new teaching requirements.

### Rationale

Recently, public schools are responsible for organizing in-school training. Therefore, a short questionnaire was sent via email to schools, investigating the EFL teachers' needs. It is logical to base offerings on selection rather than prescription and thus to display a range of choices (Freeman, 2002). The

suggested INSET course attempts to deliver a trainee-centred teacher development course, combining trainees' expectations and curriculum requirements for incorporating communicative teaching methods and authentic use of the target language.

Specifically, the TBL method provides an alternative for English instructors who desire to deliver their learners with targeted and customized linguistic experiences, strengthen their communication skills and encourage real-world language. The course content is designed to be interactive and adaptable to the group's dynamics, using authentic material and technology while attempting to empower their concerns about student motivation. Therefore, it is constructed gradually and 'naturally' by drawing on individual and vicarious experiences, reflective thinking and relevant literary works (Farrell, 1998; Ur, 1999).

Adult trainees present distinctive traits associated with adulthood that influence their learning mechanisms (Kokkos, 1998; Rogers, 1999), carry deeply embedded assumptions about language instruction based on their own experiences (Britten, 1988, in Beaumont, 2018) and may be resistant to change as they have grown habitual to their current techniques. Therefore, they should receive adequate training to employ TBL efficiently for their educational purposes. As a result, trainees will be able to modify their actions and rationales for their choices (Pennington, 1995).

### Aims and Objectives

The specific course aims to familiarize trainees with the TBL teaching model framework, equip them with skills for implementing TBL and integrate the 21st-century skills and technology for EFL teaching purposes. It also attempts to develop their capacity to connect theory to classroom instruction and direct them to incorporate the TBL method while providing opportunities for career growth.

The objectives are associated with the aims but are more precise and quantitative, highlighting if the training program meets these objectives through constructive criticism and evaluation (Wallace, 1991, Beaumont, 2018). On this ground, trainees will be able to think critically about their own and other teachers' instructional practices and become capable of choosing the appropriate teaching strategies. They will be able to adapt the material for different contexts, become aware of TBL principles, acquire the skills and knowledge to create and implement TBL lessons for their learners and use technology, reforming their mindset towards TBL pedagogical approaches and upgrading their overall EFL teaching expertise.

### The Course Plan

A form of blended training is employed as, after the end of the course, trainees will form a community of learning at the course's padlet. At the outset, the trainer attempts to create a welcoming environment by first introducing herself and then having trainees answer some questions about themselves, getting to know each other and forming an idea about the characteristics of the group. The trainer acts as a facilitator who supervises and guides trainees to self-reflection through cooperation while appreciating their self-reliance, sharing their expertise and exchanging views in a trainee-centred procedure.

**The First Stage:** aims to activate trainees' prior knowledge make connections between TBL and 21st-century skills and create expectations. Specifically, they discuss in groups some basic terms and watch two videos taking notes. Then, they reflect on the videos' content and compare individual experiences and ideas through a plenary discussion on how TBL and 21st-century skills can benefit learners. It concludes with trainees exchanging feedback on significant concepts, promoting critical thinking. Each stage finishes with trainees exchanging feedback, following Wallace's (1991, in Beaumont, 2018) suggestion, while this feedback is recapitulated as a transition point at the outset of the next stage giving the trainer the flexibility to make adjustments.

**The Second Stage:** aims to enhance trainees' knowledge through analysis and synthesis while being exposed to theoretical input. In groups, they read a TBL lesson plan to define the purpose of the activities and divide it into parts. Trainees reflect critically and share their ideas, constructing new knowledge. Thus, instead of transmitting pre-existing firmly established concepts, learner knowledge is reconstructed through social knowledge, following the constructivist theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Then, they match the TBL stages to their definitions and self-correct their answers through a key, consolidating theory comprehension. After that, they label the lesson plan's stages and compare their answers with the other groups. Through a feedback task, trainees note down possible questions and the main points of this stage.

**The Third Stage:** aims to deepen trainees' understanding of the TBL framework through a workshop in which groups study TBL lesson plans and discuss their structure, the integration of the 21st-century skills, possible changes or improvements and the achievement of pedagogical and learning objectives. Trainees think critically and share their views, improving their self-development skills. Then, trainees watch a video of an actual TBL teaching session for peer observation and evaluate it, discussing its strengths and weaknesses. Trainees acknowledge how to perform the procedure by watching rather than hearing about it and are motivated to instruct this way (Hendry & Oliver, 2012). These two tasks also are a means for trainees' assessment concerning their understanding of TBL. Next, trainees discuss the advantages and disadvantages of TBL and read a relevant article while the trainer tries to elicit their opinions on TBL and draw conclusions. Although not each aspect of the issue discussed can be exhausted, trainees are immersed in its diversity, reaching some concrete realizations. Then, trainees provide feedback on what they consider more or less significant during this stage.

**The Fourth Stage:** In the fourth stage trainees should be aware of TBL aspects, pedagogy and implications concerning their teaching context. First, they design an original TBL lesson plan in groups, integrating 21st-century skills and putting theory into practice. Then, each group engages in micro-teaching with another group implementing their lesson plan and exchanging constructive feedback on its effectiveness. They should employ some of the new techniques they have experienced as experiential practice assists them to internalize specific teaching skills that they will use with their learners. Alternatively, groups could present their lesson plans to everyone, compare them and justify which one they prefer, providing constructive feedback. Trainees can select one of the two suggested tasks based on the group's dynamics. The trainer can assess informally trainees based on the tasks of this stage and draw conclusions on their comprehension and the delivery of the course. Then, trainees reflect on the activities of this stage and provide feedback, sharing their opinions.

**The Fifth Stage:** gives trainees space to pose queries and express thoughts and feelings on implementing TBL. At this point, trainees discuss TBL in connection to their level of autonomy in terms of curriculum, syllabus, learner assessment and needs, various teaching contexts and employed methods, roles and anticipated behaviour as professionals. Then, they are familiarized with the follow-up activities. Trainees should implement their TBL lesson plan in their classrooms and share their experience on the padlet, opting for feedback. Additionally, they can share new TBL lesson plans and experiences, exchange feedback and communicate through the Forum section, establishing a mentality of development and lifelong learning. They can also fill in individually a self-assessment form and select accordingly to read some of the suggested additional resources to expand their knowledge of TBL teaching. Finally, the trainer gathers data about the course through an online questionnaire provided to trainees.

### Teacher Education Models

The suggested training course applies the Reflective Model of teacher education demonstrated by Wallace (1991). As Akbari (2007) states, the reflective procedure involves instructors scrutinizing how they teach, exploring different instructional practices and incorporating them into their classrooms. Thus, reflective thinking examines instructors' views, cognitive skills and decision-making processes (Borg, 2003) while

promoting meaningful learning in terms of cognitive, affective and motivational aspects (Korthagen, 2017). In this light, the course reinforces the advancement of trainees' potential to reflect on their practices through a wide range of development tasks, including group work, discussions, peer observation, evaluation and development of TBL lesson plans, micro-teaching and presentations being active constructors of knowledge.

Concerning Strevens' (1974, in Beaumont, 2018) elements, the course addresses in-service EFL state school teachers with basic computer skills in terms of selection. As for personal education, the subject is English and is delivered in the target language, while general training involves incorporating 21st-century skills and technology. Specific training refers to TBL principles, seeking to enhance trainees' awareness and knowledge. Furthermore, according to Freeman's (1989, in Beaumont, 2018) components of language teaching, the specific course advances trainees' knowledge of TBL instruction and skills in successfully integrating it in teaching the receptive and productive skills. It also assists them in forming a positive attitude towards TBL, 21st-century skills and technology, promoting awareness of the necessity to progress their teaching methods and reshape their current practices for the advantage of their learners, given the TBL model's positive impact.

As for Zahorik's (1986, in Beaumont, 2018) teaching conceptions, the course embodies the art/craft conceptions, which support that there is not an ideal framework of instruction and teachers must select suitable techniques and form judgements based on the specific teaching situation and the learners' requirements (Freeman & Richards, 1993, in Beaumont, 2018). In this vein, the course employs bottom-up processes leading trainees to re-discover and re-define their teaching perceptions throughout the training process.

## Discussion

A training program promotes critical analysis and reflective practice, retrieving and investigating prior instructional experiences as a core factor for making judgments, informed choices and assessment as a basis for action plans (Richards, 1990; Sifakis, 2009). In this vein, following Ur's (1999) enriched reflection, the specific course's trainees have the opportunity to recollect and report their instructional experiences, analyze them in group discussions, make inferences and draw conclusions, initiating the need to learn and form individual concepts about TBL.

Research findings have evidenced that reflective instructors can supervise, make judgements and react more appropriately to learners' evolving requirements than instructors with limited reflective thinking skills (Mann, 2005), becoming knowledgeable of the demand for evolution through critical reflective thinking (Pennington, 1995). To this end, the course's 'reflective' orientation places trainees at the centre of the process, attempting to reshape their attitudes and achieve long-term benefits, the initial stage towards their professional advancement in a broad socio-cultural environment.

In this respect, trainees' awareness of the community's existence is undoubtedly critical to the internalization of their learning as communities have the potential to be effective transformational sites (Kennedy, 2005), where the cumulative effect of personal knowledge and experience is expanded through collaborative effort (Kennedy, 2005; Wenger, 2011). Consequently, the 'padlet community assists trainees to grow as experts through a distant information transfer, exchanging material and feedback.

Theory benefits instructional practices to the degree that it assists teachers in enhancing their reasoning (Fenstermacher, 1986, in Johnson, 1996) and, therefore, it should be promoted by encouraging trainees to obtain extensive information from reading research literature, lesson plans, teaching suggestions of EFL teachers and a recommended list of references for additional studying (Farrell, 2003; Ur, 1999). In this vein, the theoretical knowledge supplied to the trainees is suitable, as they are provided with ample input material to deepen their understanding while being exploitable in terms of TBL applicability.



Maintaining a balance between theory and practice can assist trainees to evolve professionally in a holistic manner by expanding their ideology and cultivating a favorable disposition toward implementing TBL.

Furthermore, the selected procedures, the data delivery methods, the experiential activities and tasks are among those proposed by Ellis (1986, in Beaumont, 2018), while the incorporated activities are in Parrot's (1993, in Beaumont, 2018) list. These development activities attempt to achieve trainees' individual and professional advancement in the process of teacher development (Hiep, 2001), taking into consideration different learning styles and exposing them progressively to more challenging training. To this end, the trainer illustrates many new techniques, which, as O'Brien (1981, in Beaumont, 2018) claims, benefits trainees as they become motivated to adopt them in their contexts.

Furthermore, the course supports the trainees' language development by enabling them to manipulate English in various ways. Trainees are treated as analysts, focusing on language awareness as group discussions during the course, via speaking and listening, cover the need for conducting their lessons, reading articles and locating information strengthens their ability to choose effectively teaching materials, taking notes and lesson planning qualifies them in creating and adapting textbook activities. As instructors, trainees can implement the linguistic structures practised in the training activities and the trainer's new techniques in their teaching environments. Finally, as language users, they involve actively in activities employing both the productive and receptive skills requiring extensive use of English, such as group discussions, lesson planning, micro-teaching, video watching, presenting and reading.

## Conclusion

Teacher-learning is knowledge and theory construction through involvement in particular social settings and participation in specific tasks and procedures rather than mere knowledge and theory interpretation into practice (Richards, 2008). The article seeks to inspire trainees to reconsider their teaching practices through providing theory and practice on TBL, encouraging them to reflect while contextualizing training within an empirical setting. The core principle is that in a constantly evolving field, EFL public school teachers should pursue professional development through constructing their reflective identity to cogitate on their instructional choices and adjust to the new trends.

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