



TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TEACHING ENGLISH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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Abstract. The goal of Vocational Education and Training (VET) is the seamless transition of graduates into the professional workforce. In the increasingly globalized economy, this transition is mediated not only by technical skills but also by communicative competence. English, serving as the international lingua franca of trade, manufacturing, and IT, is critical for operational safety, collaborative projects, and market access. Consequently, the methods used to teach English in vocational settings (English for Vocational Purposes, or EVP) must evolve. This article presents an analytical comparison between traditional, often decontextualized, approaches and modern, innovative methodologies, arguing that only the latter can provide the functional pragmalinguistic and communicative readiness required by contemporary industry.

Key words: vocational education, ESP teaching, communicative approach, task-based learning.

Introduction

Vocational education plays a crucial role in preparing students for specific careers by equipping them with both technical skills and communicative competence. In today's globalized economy, English proficiency has become indispensable in vocational contexts such as tourism, hospitality, engineering, information technology, and healthcare. The teaching of English in vocational education has traditionally relied on conventional classroom methods, but recent years have witnessed a surge of innovative approaches that integrate technology, learner-centered pedagogy, and real-world applications. “Traditional” teaching comes in many varieties, but is often characterised by an emphasis on ‘chalk and



talk' - in other words, the teacher spends quite a lot of class time using the board and explaining things - as if 'transmitting' knowledge to the class - with occasional questions to or from the learners". [6; 16] In other words, such "knowledge transfer" is not effective from the position of real-life situations and, therefore, a certain necessity to develop new approaches appeared.

The traditional paradigm: focus on accuracy over function

Traditional approaches to language teaching in VET, often inherited from General English (GE) instruction, typically prioritize linguistic accuracy over practical functionality. These methods are frequently rooted in the grammar-translation method or heavily influenced by rigid audiolingualism.

In the traditional EVP classroom, the focus is often placed on *decontextualized grammar drills*, when learners memorize complex verb tenses or conditional clauses that have little immediate application to their trade (e.g., auto repair, nursing), *rote memorization of lexical lists* by making students learn technical vocabulary lists (e.g., names of tools, components, safety warnings) without practicing their use in the specific, dynamic speech acts required on the job, and *teacher-centered instruction* i.e. when the instructor serves as the primary source of knowledge, and interaction is dominated by repetitive drills or reading comprehension of generic texts, minimizing authentic student production. [3; 3-13]

While these methods provide a foundational awareness of English structure and vocabulary, they critically fail at the pragmatic level. They do not prepare the learner to handle real-world communicative tasks – such as reporting an equipment failure to a supervisor, giving precise technical instructions to a client, or collaboratively troubleshooting an issue with an international partner. The result is a graduate who may have high grammatical accuracy but suffers from significant pragmalinguistic failure in high-stakes professional settings, rendering them communicatively incompetent where it matters most.

The innovative paradigm: contextualization and experiential learning



Innovative approaches recognize that EVP is fundamentally a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and must be driven by the communicative demands of the target workplace. These methods are learner-centered and focus on experiential, contextual, and task-based learning. One of the key features of innovative approaches is their focus on communication and authenticity. Learners engage in meaningful tasks such as role-plays, simulations, problem-solving activities, and project work related to their vocational field. [5; 21-30] For example, hospitality students may practice taking reservations, handling customer complaints, or presenting services, while engineering students may simulate workplace meetings or explain technical processes. Such activities promote fluency, interaction, and the development of pragmatic competence, enabling learners to use English appropriately in real professional settings.

In particular, Task-Based and Project-Based Learning (TBL/PBL) involve activities based on real-live situations. Instead of drilling grammar rules, students are immediately engaged in simulating authentic professional tasks. For a student specializing in electrical engineering, a task might involve “Creating an end-of-project report for an overseas client” or “Giving a five-minute briefing on safety protocols”. This forces learners to integrate grammar, technical lexis, and appropriate pragmalinguistic forms (e.g., using polite mitigation when giving bad news, or assertive language when issuing a warning). [1]

Innovative teaching also explicitly addresses the functional use of language, moving beyond *what* is said to *how* it is said. This includes teaching how speech acts are realized in the process of communication and signifies the role of discourse markers. [2] For example, giving direct instruction on the range of forms used to perform requests, apologies, or disagreements appropriately within the vocational context (e.g., distinguishing between “I need a wrench” and “Could you please bring me the adjustable wrench?”) or teaching the specific routines and organizational markers used in technical presentations, incident reports, or maintenance logs.



The most forward-thinking innovative approaches integrate technology to create authentic practice environments, which are *Virtual and Augmented Reality* (VR/AR) and *AI-Enhanced Practice*. VR/AR provides immersive, simulated workplace scenarios where students must practice oral communication under simulated time pressure (e.g., guiding a colleague through a procedure using technical vocabulary). Utilizing AI tools (as discussed previously) in offline or localized modes to provide immediate, individualized feedback on pronunciation, grammar, and even pragmatic appropriateness within a controlled conversational context. This allows for repeated practice and personalized learning paths that were impossible in the traditional classroom setting.

The distinction between the two paradigms can be summarized across three critical metrics:

Metric	Traditional Approaches	Innovative Approaches
Primary Goal	Linguistic Accuracy (Grammar/Lexis)	Functional Fluency and Communicative Competence
Curriculum Focus	Decontextualized GE Principles	Workplace Tasks, Professional Discourse, and Pragmalinguistics
Pedagogical Role	Teacher as Lecturer/Drill Master	Teacher as Facilitator/Coach; Learner as Active Participant
Industry Relevance	Low: Graduates know the language but cannot <i>use</i> it professionally.	High: Graduates can perform necessary speech acts and interact effectively in professional contexts.

The key difference lies in the transferability of skills. Traditional methods create a knowledge gap, where students know the rules but fail to transfer them into real-time, high-stakes professional interaction. [7; 9] Innovative approaches, by utilizing authentic scenarios and task-based learning, inherently bridge this gap. The



goal shifts from mastering English *structure* to mastering English *function* in the workplace.

Challenges in implementation

While innovative approaches demonstrate superior efficacy, their implementation in VET faces significant challenges, including the high cost of VR/AR technology, lack of access to specialized industrial content, and the critical need for teacher training. Many VET English instructors were trained in traditional GE methods and require professional development to become experts in TBP design, specific industry terminology, and the analysis of pragmalinguistic needs.

Therefore, the most effective path forward is a synthesis: a hybrid model that uses traditional methods to build a solid foundational grammatical and lexical base, but quickly transitions into an innovative, immersive curriculum dominated by task-based, project-driven, and technology-supported pragmatic practice. A blended approach allows teachers to use traditional methods for teaching grammar, terminology, and reading skills, while incorporating innovative strategies for speaking, listening, and professional communication. [4; 31] For instance, explicit grammar instruction can be followed by task-based activities that require learners to apply these structures in workplace simulations. Such integration ensures that learners develop both linguistic knowledge and communicative competence.

Conclusion

The traditional approaches to teaching English in vocational education are remnants of a bygone era, unable to produce the contextually and pragmatically competent graduates demanded by global industries. By embracing innovative methods – focusing on task simulation, explicit pragmalinguistic instruction, and technology integration – VET institutions can transform English language training from a passive academic requirement into an active, functional skill set, thus ensuring that the next generation of professionals are fully equipped to achieve



technical excellence and communicative success in their respective fields, truly guaranteeing their prosperity in the modern world.

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