

## BRIDGING GENERAL AND ACADEMIC ENGLISH: REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS FROM A TESOL PRACTICUM IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract:** This study reports on a TESOL practicum conducted with B2-level first-year undergraduates at Alfraganus University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, aimed at bridging the gap between general and academic English. Despite solid general English proficiency, students struggled with academic listening, writing, and speaking. Three scaffolded lessons focusing on authentic academic listening, paragraph coherence with article accuracy, and fluency plus pronunciation in academic discussions were implemented. Data from observations, learner reflections, and peer feedback reveal that scaffolded instruction, authentic materials, and collaborative tasks improved learner confidence and performance. The study highlights the value of reflective practice grounded in communicative and task-based approaches and stresses the importance of equity and identity considerations in multilingual TESOL contexts. Recommendations include context-sensitive and inclusive strategies for supporting academic English development.

### Introduction

Transitioning from general to academic English presents significant challenges for university learners. While general English emphasizes everyday communication, academic English demands specialized skills such as understanding rapid academic speech, producing structured written texts, and engaging in seminar discussions. In Uzbekistan, the growing internationalization of higher education increases the demand for academic English proficiency. At Alfraganus University, first-year students, although assessed at CEFR B2 level, frequently report difficulties in comprehending authentic academic content and expressing themselves fluently in academic settings. This practicum aimed to design and evaluate targeted interventions to address these challenges, while reflecting on instructional strategies informed by relevant theoretical frameworks.

### Literature Review

Academic English proficiency is multidimensional, encompassing both linguistic and social components. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory underscores the social nature of learning, positing that peer collaboration facilitates progress beyond individual capabilities. Ellis (2003) and Richards and Rodgers (2014) advocate for authentic, task-based learning to develop communicative competence. Nation and Newton (2009) emphasize balancing input, form-focused instruction, and fluency practice, often neglected in traditional classrooms. Writing pedagogy (Hyland, 2003)

positions writing as a recursive process requiring drafting and feedback, while McCarthy and Carter (1997) highlight the gap between textbook dialogues and authentic spoken English. Reflective teaching frameworks (Farrell, 2015, 2019) promote continuous professional development through reflective practice. Finally, critical TESOL perspectives (Anyia, 2018; Wong et al., 2018; Guerrettaz & Zahler, 2018) argue that pedagogy must address equity and identity, particularly in multilingual contexts such as Uzbekistan.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants and Context**

The practicum was conducted with 16 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in a General English course at Alfraganus University. Institutional placement confirmed all learners were at CEFR B2 proficiency.

### **Intervention Design**

Three lessons targeted identified difficulties:

#### **Listening & Vocabulary**

Students engaged with TED Talks featuring authentic, unscripted academic speech. The lessons included pre-teaching key vocabulary, guided note-taking, and post-listening discussions to enhance comprehension.

#### **Writing & Grammar**

Workshops focused on paragraph development with an emphasis on accurate article usage. The process included drafting, peer review, and teacher feedback.

#### **Speaking & Pronunciation**

Structured academic discussions utilized academic vocabulary lists, sentence starters, and pronunciation drills focusing on word stress to improve fluency and intelligibility.

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### **Data Collection**

Data were gathered from classroom observations, diagnostic tasks, learner reflections, and peer feedback sessions. These multiple sources enabled triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of learner progress and response to interventions.

## **Results**

### **Listening**

Learners initially found the TED Talks challenging; however, pre-listening scaffolding such as vocabulary glossaries and comprehension questions enabled improved understanding of main ideas and details.

### **Writing**

Repeated drafting combined with focused grammar feedback led to a reduction in

article misuse—a frequent issue for Uzbek learners. Peer review sessions encouraged autonomy and critical awareness of writing.

### **Speaking**

Structured speaking activities reduced hesitation and increased fluency. Word stress exercises improved intelligibility, though learners indicated a desire for more extended pronunciation practice.

### **Differentiation and Inclusion**

Using sentence frames, vocabulary banks, and additional practice for weaker students ensured the lessons were inclusive and catered to varying proficiency levels.

### **Discussion**

The practicum illustrated the benefit of aligning instructional practice with theoretical frameworks. For example, scaffolding in listening tasks corresponded with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, while task-based speaking activities reflected Ellis’s communicative approach. Reflective practice was key; after observing difficulties in the initial listening task, comprehension checks and increased scaffolding were introduced.

The inclusion of digital tools, such as student-recorded presentations, enhanced engagement and self-reflection. Importantly, the study foregrounded issues of equity and identity. Privileging “native speaker” norms risks marginalizing multilingual learners, while an equity-driven pedagogy values learners’ multilingual repertoires as assets. This approach aligns with critical TESOL perspectives, promoting inclusivity and representation.

### **Conclusion**

Bridging general and academic English requires scaffolded, authentic, and inclusive teaching strategies informed by reflection and critical awareness. The practicum’s three targeted lessons improved learner readiness for academic tasks and highlighted the need to address equity alongside linguistic development. TESOL practitioners in multilingual contexts such as Uzbekistan should integrate theory, reflective practice, and critical perspectives to support students effectively in their academic English development. Future research might explore long-term learner outcomes and the evolving teacher identity in higher education contexts.

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