

ASSESSING BUSINESS ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH DIGITAL TASKS: EVIDENCE FROM STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE AND PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The growing demand for workplace English communication has increased the need for assessment methods that reflect authentic professional practices. This study explored the use of Digital Task-Based Assessment (DTBA) to assess Business English (BE) communication competence in higher education. Employing a convergent mixed-methods design, the study involved 72 undergraduate students enrolled in a Business English course at an Indonesian university. Participants completed three digitally mediated tasks: online business presentations, business email writing simulations, and virtual meeting role-plays. Quantitative data were collected using analytic performance rubrics, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with 15 students. The findings showed that students performed strongest in task completion ($M = 4.21$) and message clarity ($M = 4.12$), whereas fluency ($M = 3.88$) and virtual meeting role-plays ($M = 3.87$) posed the greatest challenges. Students also perceived the assessment tasks as authentic, engaging, and relevant to future workplace communication. These findings provide preliminary classroom-based evidence that DTBA is a promising approach for assessing Business English communication through work-related digital tasks. However, further studies involving larger samples, multiple raters, and comprehensive validation procedures are needed to strengthen the evidence for its effectiveness.

Keywords: Business English; digital task-based assessment; ESP assessment; performance assessment; workplace communication

ABSTRAK

Meningkatnya kebutuhan akan kemampuan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris di dunia kerja telah mendorong perlunya metode penilaian yang mencerminkan praktik komunikasi profesional secara autentik. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan Digital Task-Based Assessment (DTBA) untuk menilai kompetensi komunikasi dalam Business English di tingkat pendidikan tinggi. Dengan menggunakan desain mixed-methods konvergen, penelitian ini melibatkan 72 mahasiswa sarjana yang mengikuti mata kuliah Business English di sebuah universitas di Indonesia. Peserta menyelesaikan tiga tugas penilaian berbasis digital, yaitu presentasi bisnis daring, simulasi penulisan email bisnis, dan role-play rapat virtual. Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan menggunakan rubrik penilaian analitik, sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 15 mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memperoleh skor tertinggi pada aspek penyelesaian tugas ($M = 4,21$) dan kejelasan penyampaian pesan ($M = 4,12$), sedangkan kelancaran berbicara ($M = 3,88$) dan role-play rapat virtual ($M = 3,87$) merupakan aspek yang paling menantang. Mahasiswa juga memandang tugas penilaian tersebut sebagai autentik, menarik, dan relevan dengan komunikasi di dunia kerja. Temuan ini memberikan bukti awal berbasis kelas bahwa DTBA merupakan pendekatan yang menjanjikan untuk menilai kemampuan komunikasi Business English melalui tugas-tugas digital yang berorientasi pada dunia kerja. Namun, penelitian lanjutan yang melibatkan sampel lebih besar, penilai yang lebih beragam, serta prosedur validasi yang lebih komprehensif diperlukan untuk memperkuat bukti mengenai efektivitasnya.

Kata Kunci: Business English; penilaian berbasis tugas digital; penilaian ESP; penilaian performa; komunikasi profesional

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INTRODUCTION

With the growth of global business, there is now more pressure than ever to be able to communicate effectively in English in the professional domain. In the international workplace, English is the lingua franca for negotiations, meetings, and professional communication among members of different cultural and linguistic groups (Nickerson, 2005). There is no doubt that in the current working environment, English has served as the language for business communication in meetings, presentations, negotiations, and written communications across linguistic or cultural borders. Hence, for business English students, communicative competence does not only mean being grammatically accurate or lexically rich but also being able to get messages across clearly, to use professional language appropriately, to respond to interlocutors, and to carry out workplace-related communicative tasks. This calls for testing methods that assess students' use of English in real professional environments and not their recognition of linguistic forms in context-free tests. Recent trends in language education show an increasing emphasis on the use of digital technologies in teaching, learning, and assessment (Reinders & Hubbard, 2021; Hampel & Stickler, 2023; Kessler, 2024).

However, even today the assessment instruments used in Business English (BE) courses are frequently still based on written examinations, grammar and vocabulary exercises, or on isolated language tasks which are not truly representative of the communicative demands of the digital workplace. Such assessments can yield valuable information about a student's knowledge of language, but they have limited ability to assess interactional competence, on-the-spot responses, multi-modal communication, and task performance in professional settings (Chapelle & Voss, 2023; Fulcher, 2024). In this regard, what happens is that a gap is created between what students need to do when they communicate at work and what is tested in a traditional way in institution-based business English assessments.

The philosophies and approaches of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and TBL testing can greatly contribute to correcting this imbalance because tasks engage learners in using language to achieve meaningful communicative goals through authentic interaction (Nurhadi et al., 2024; Haerudin et al., 2024). In a Business English context, digital task-based assessment (DTBA) may incorporate such tasks as delivering business presentations, composing professional e-mails, and participating in business meetings. When such tasks are subject to mediation through digital means, they come closer to reflecting the kind of contemporary professional communication, which increasingly involves meetings, presentations, and written documents being exchanged via videoconferencing tools, learning management systems (LMS), and online communication platforms (OCP) (Lustenberger, 2023; Robillos & Bustos, 2023).

Therefore, language assessment under the framework of DTBA could potentially align with realistic work communication practices (Ellis et al., 2024). Through meaningful tasks that simulate real-world activities, learners are encouraged to use language for authentic purposes (Long, 2024; Prianty et al., 2022). When combined with digital tools, the task-based method may contribute to better students' learning motivation and independence, especially in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) discipline (Mulyadi et al., 2023). Consequently, technology-mediated TBLT has been proposed as an appropriate means of delivering task-based communication pedagogy in digital learning environments (Thomas & Reinders, 2024; Smith & González-Lloret, 2021).

Digital technologies not only support the processes of language learning but also provide new potential for the improvement of assessment practices. Instructors can capitalize on technology-enhanced assessment environments to design more authentic tasks of evaluation that can evaluate learners' communicative performances closer to real life. For example, digital assessment tasks can include online presentations, group discussions, or professional writing simulations that act as a proxy for workplace communications. According to previous research analysis,

the utilization of technology-advantaged assessment has been found to enhance the evaluation judgment and feedback processes, in turn providing a more rewarding experience of learning (Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2025). Likewise, it has been attested that digitalized BC assessment practice in BE classes was able to assess BE students' professional communicative competency more effectively than traditional assessment (Rachmawati, 2025).

From an assessment standpoint, the employment of digital tasks should be considered alongside validity. Validity is not just a feature of a test, but a question about the degree to which particular interpretations and uses of scores are supported by theoretical and empirical investigation. Messick's perspective on construct validity is the congruence between intended construct, assessment task, scoring procedures, and score use. In the same vein, Kane's (2013) argument-based approach to validation posits that one must supply a rationale for the inferences drawn from observed performances to more general assertions about an individual's abilities. With regard to DTBA, this suggests that assessment tasks, rubric dimensions, and scoring schemes need to be consistently aligned with the communicative constructs under assessment—message clarity, professional language use, fluency, interactional competence, and task completion. In the context of language testing, Bachman and Palmer (1996) further claim that the usefulness of a test should be evaluated in terms of a number of characteristics, including validity, reliability, authenticity, interactiveness, impact, and practicality. Such views are applicable to DTBA as the value of a test task is determined by whether the test task measures the ability it purports to measure, and whether the test task is a reflection of real-world language use (i.e., task authenticity), whether test takers are engaged in meaningful communication during the test task, and whether the task can be implemented practically in classroom settings.

Based on these views, this study defines digital task-based assessment (DTBA) as the convergence of three interrelated components. First, TBA focuses on the assessment of language through the performance of meaningful tasks of communication. Second, authenticity is the extent to which the activities in an assessment resemble those encountered in real-life professional communication. Third, based on the theoretical discussion on construct validity, it is expected that assessment items, scoring rubrics, and score interpretations should converge. These principles come together in Business English because learners must communicate in the workplace, performing real professional tasks with real communicative contexts. Thus, in this study, DTBA is not conceptualized merely as the application of technology in assessment, but rather as a model that integrates authentic workplace communication tasks and theoretically derived assessment constructs.

Another issue concerns the validity of digital instruments in assessing communicative competence. Research in technology-mediated speaking assessment indicates that computer-based assessment can offer dependable and valid evaluations of learners' language ability when the constructs underlying the assessment tasks closely align with the learning objectives (Yan & Fan, 2021). Nevertheless, the merits of digital testing continue to be debated. Although some scholars claim that technology-based assessment is more authentic (because it is based on real modern communication), others warn that technology-based assessment may induce construct-irrelevant variance related to the user's access to, or familiarity with, the technology, or even his/her general technical skills. Likewise, digital tasks may boost engagement of the language learners; however, increased engagement does not necessarily verify the quality or validity of an assessment. These conflicting views imply that the proof for the (productive) potential and suitability of digital assessment continues to be situational and needs to be cautiously investigated, particularly so in ESP contexts where the communication needs are quite unique.

In addition, digital technologies allow for the incorporation of automatic feedback and scoring mechanisms, which facilitate the evaluation procedures, especially in the assessment of writing (Link & Koltovskaia, 2023). Additionally, digital tool use in learning environments bears a positive effect on students' learning engagement and academic achievement (Shao et al., 2025). There is growing interest in technology-enhanced language learning and assessment; still, there are a relatively small number of empirical studies specifically investigating the application of digital tasks for the assessment of Business English communication skills. Much research has focused on digital learning environments or on task-based approaches to teaching language, but there is less research on how digital tasks might be systematically employed as assessment tools within ESP. Given the rising demand for workplace-oriented communication competence, developing assessment approaches that combine authentic tasks and digital technologies to test students' professional communication skills is imperative.

Although the fields of technology-enhanced language learning, task-based language teaching, and digital assessment are becoming increasingly intertwined, some significant questions still have not been adequately addressed. Prior studies have concentrated on the application of digital technologies to facilitate language learning, not on the potential of different digital task designs to serve as assessment instruments for Business English communication. In particular, there is little empirical evidence on whether different digital task types provide insight into different facets of communicative competence, and on learners' perceptions of their authenticity, engagement, and relevance to the workplace. Filling this gap is crucial as our current evidence suggests that contemporary communication in the workplace is primarily realized through digitally mediated interactions which demand not only linguistic accuracy but also interactional competence, spontaneity, and professional communication skills. To address the aforementioned concerns, this study investigates students' task performance in three digital-based assessment tasks and their perceptions of digital task-based assessment in the context of a Business English class.

Hence, this research focuses on Business English communication skills in Digital Task-Based Assessment (DTBA) at the university level. Rather than conducting a comprehensive validation of the assessment methodology, the study presents initial classroom-based findings on students' performance across various digital task types and explores their perceptions of the assessments in terms of authenticity, engagement, and workplace relevance. Specifically, the study examines students' performance across the assessment dimensions of digital task-based Business English assessment, compares their performance on different types of digital assessment tasks, and investigates their perceptions of the authenticity, engagement, and workplace relevance of DTBA.

METHODS

Research Design

A convergent mixed methods design was adopted in the study to investigate the application of DTBA in evaluating students' communication competence in Business English. Both quantitative and qualitative data in this design were collected at the same time in the course of teaching and merged at the stage of interpreting. Numerical data were gathered from students' scores on the assessment tasks digitally, while qualitative data were obtained via semi-structured interviews to gain insight into students' views on the process of assessment. The choice of a convergent design was deemed suitable as the research set out to investigate students' assessable performance as well as their experiences of authenticity, engagement and workplace relevance in digital assessment.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard

deviations, to summarize students' performance across the five assessment criteria and the three digital task types. As the study was conducted within a single classroom context without an experimental design, the quantitative findings were interpreted as preliminary evidence rather than as generalizable results. Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify meaningful segments, which were coded and grouped into broader themes related to authenticity, engagement, challenges, and workplace relevance. To enhance trustworthiness, both researchers independently coded the transcripts, discussed coding differences until consensus was reached, and verified the resulting themes against the original data. Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through side-by-side comparison to identify areas of convergence and divergence, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of students' performance and perceptions of Digital Task-Based Assessment.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted in a Business English class at a university in Indonesia. In order to maintain the anonymity of the institution, the university name has been changed to Global Business University (GBU). The participants were 72 undergraduate students of the English Education Study Program. They were purposively sampled as they were the students taking the Business English course in that particular semester. Purposive sampling was deemed suitable as the study was focused on the delivery of DTBA in one particular teaching context, and all the participants were engaged in the same set of Business English assessment tasks. The goal was not to statistically generalize but to acquire context-sensitive evidence about students' performance and perceptions in a real-life classroom.

The participants had an age range of 20 to 22 years and had completed basic English courses such as General English and Academic Writing. They also brought with them experience in engaging with digital learning platforms (e.g., LMS, online meeting applications). Such features were pertinent because students were required to undertake professional communication via digital platforms in the assessment tasks. During the qualitative phase, 15 students took part in semi-structured interviews. Pseudonyms are used when reporting interview fragments to ensure anonymity.

Data Collection and Procedure

Data were collected through three digital task-based assessment (DTBA) activities designed to represent authentic workplace communication in a Business English context, such as an online business presentation, a business email writing simulation, and a virtual meeting role-play. These tasks were aligned with the course learning outcomes, requiring students to demonstrate professional oral and written communication skills in digitally mediated workplace situations. Together, the tasks provided opportunities to assess both prepared and spontaneous communication performance.

Students' performances were evaluated using an analytic rubric consisting of five criteria: message clarity, professional language use, fluency, interactional competence, and task completion. Each criterion was rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). The rubric was developed based on the Business English course learning outcomes and reviewed by two experienced lecturers specializing in Business English and language assessment to enhance content relevance and descriptor clarity. Before the assessment, students were informed of the assessment criteria to ensure transparency.

Three sources of data were collected. First, quantitative data consisted of students' scores obtained from the analytic rubric across the three digital assessment tasks. Second, documentation of students' performances, including submitted business emails and recordings of online presentations

and virtual meetings, was retained to support the scoring process. Third, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 15 volunteer students conducted after the completion of all assessment activities. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes and explored students’ perceptions of the authenticity, engagement, challenges, and workplace relevance of the digital assessment tasks. Pseudonyms were used throughout the interview transcripts to ensure participants’ anonymity.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, data collection procedures, and the intended use of the data for research publication before providing their consent. They were assured that participation or non-participation would not affect their course grades. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in reporting interview excerpts, the institution was anonymized, and all data were used solely for research purposes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Students’ Performance in Digital Communication Tasks

Students had to complete three digital activities—online business presentation, business email writing simulation, and virtual meeting role-play—that were designed to replicate communication in a real-world environment. A five-dimensional (message clarity, professional language, fluency, interactional competence, completeness of task) analytic rubric was used to evaluate their performance. Students’ scores on the three digital tasks were described in Table 1.

Table 1. Students’ Performance in Digital Task-Based Assessment

Assessment Criteria	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Performance Level
Message Clarity	4.12	0.63	High
Professional Language Use	3.95	0.71	High
Fluency	3.88	0.74	Moderate-High
Interactional Competence	3.92	0.69	Moderate-High
Task Completion	4.21	0.58	High

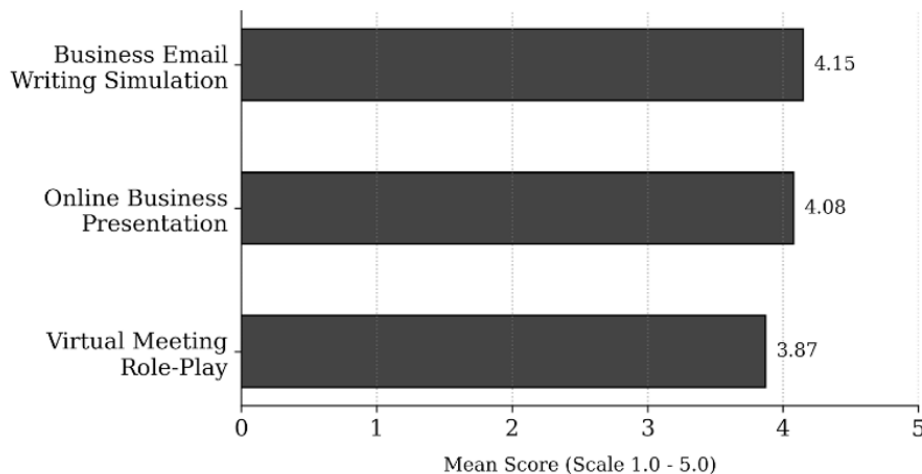
Table 1 shows the performances of students in the five dimensions of assessment. Task completion had the highest mean ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.58$), followed by clarity of enunciation ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.63$). Using coherent professional language demonstrated a mean score of 3.95 ($SD = 0.71$), and interactional competence gained a mean score of 3.92 ($SD = 0.69$). Fluency was the lowest rated among the five scales ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.74$). To sum up, all aspects were evaluated at a moderate-high to high level of performance.

Table 2. Students’ Scores Across Digital Assessment Tasks

Digital Task	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Online Business Presentation	4.08	0.66
Business Email Writing Simulation	4.15	0.60
Virtual Meeting Role-Play	3.87	0.72

Table 2 shows the scores of students on the three digital assessment tasks. Business email writing simulation received the highest mean ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.60$), then online business presentation ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.66$). Virtual meeting role-play was the lowest rated ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.72$). The difference in students' performances among the three digital task types is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Mean Scores Across Digital Assessment Tasks



Students' Perceptions of Digital Task-Based Assessment

The thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in three themes: perceived authenticity, assessment of engagement, and applicability to future workplace communication.

Perceived authenticity was the first theme. Several students commented that the online tasks were similar to communication tasks that they do in their jobs. Online presentations and virtual meeting simulations were considered more realistic than traditional written examinations as students had to speak, reply, and express their thoughts in a virtual platform. "The virtual presentation and meeting simulation were like working in a real office," said one student. However, it gave me a chance to get practice on how to talk in business." This response suggests that the authenticity was for students associated not only with the task content, but also with their means of communication.

Another participant also noticed: "The tasks made me feel as though I were speaking to colleagues rather than completing a school assignment. It gave me a clearer idea of what professional usage in real life is like." Such comments appeared to imply that students felt authenticity not only in the content of the tasks but also in the way they communicated while carrying out the tasks.

The second theme was engagement. Students reported that digital assignments required greater engagement than paper-based exams. Rather than completing written assignments alone, they gave presentations, wrote professional e-mails, and met online as class groups. "*I was more motivated because the assessment consisted of tasks such as giving presentations and participating in discussions,*" said a user. "*It was not like regular exams.*" This implies that DTBA may foster students' sense of engagement as the assessment procedure comprises real performance and communicative involvement.

Another student said, "*I was more listening during the test, because I wanted to take part. It was more challenging than answering multiple-choice questions, but also more entertaining.*" The feedback indicated that the need to perform meaningful communicative acts in test tasks rather than just display language capacity as in conventional testing forms drove the commitment to engagement.

The third theme was workplace relevance. A number of students felt that the tasks were valuable in helping to prepare them for future professional communication, particularly in relation to working online or remotely. They felt writing e-mails, making online presentations and holding virtual meetings was similar to how you would be expected to communicate in a modern office. But a few students expressed that playing the role in a virtual meeting is harder because they have to think on their feet and keep the conversation moving. This attitude confirms the numerical result where virtual meeting role-play attracted the lowest mean score out of the three task types.

One participant stated:

"Writing professional emails and attending virtual meetings are skills I will use in my career. The evaluation made me apply those skills in real life."

Another participant added:

"I found that virtual meetings were challenging as it was instant response, but it was also the most useful session, because we don't have time lag in real communication at the workplace."

These responses are consistent with the quantitative results indicating that virtual meeting role-plays were rated the highest in challenges and future relevance among the professional communication topics.

Discussion

Findings indicate that digital tasks can offer authentic opportunities for learners to engage in workplace communicative practices. Thus, the outcomes of this study need to be viewed as suggestive rather than as conclusive evidence of the validity of the assessment. The study adds to the debate on BE assessment by demonstrating that different types of digital tasks can potentially capture different aspects of communicative performance. This research investigated the potential of DTBA in testing students' Business English communicative ability. Results indicate that digital tasks can bring valuable opportunities for students to show workplace-related communicative competences via online presentations, business e-mail writing, and virtual meeting role-plays. The findings should be viewed as tentative evidence rather than conclusive evidence of the validity of the assessment. The cautious interpretation of this study is necessary, considering that validity reflects the extent to which score interpretations and assessment uses are supported by theoretical and empirical evidence and is not an attribute of tests or testing (Messick, 1989; Kane, 2013).

The lower-quality results in virtual meeting role-plays could shed light on the multifaceted nature of the communication in Business English. At odds with asynchronous tasks, synchronous digital interaction requires learners to draw on their linguistic resources, manage the interaction, and make decisions in real time, all at once. This implies that communicative competence in the workplace is not a unidimensional construct, but rather a complex interplay of linguistic, cognitive, and interactional skills. Consequently, alternative digital task types may expose dimensions of communicative performance less observable in conventional language assessments.

A key outcome of this research relates to the importance of authentic task design in the testing of Business English. In contrast to classic pen-and-paper tests, which tend to segregate language knowledge, digital tasks have learners apply language, manage interactions, be aware of their audience, and complete a task in a manner reminiscent of real communication in the modern workplace. Consequently, DTBA may allow testing of elements of communicative competence that are not easily assessable in traditional testing formats. The tasks let students apply English to real communication instead of simply testing isolated knowledge of grammar or vocabulary. This finding aligns with task-based language teaching, which promotes meaningful language use

in authentic situations. In line with previous research, task-based activities can also facilitate learners' oral communication because these activities require students to communicate for a purpose (Detken et al., 2024). In this study, the application of digital tasks brought this principle into the realm of assessment by enabling students to display their communicative performances in situations that simulated professional communication contexts.

From a testing point of view, digital authenticity tasks may increase the similarity of the assessed construct to the assessment task. Business English communication is the ability to communicate clearly, use professional language, manage interaction, and complete work communication-related tasks; if so, students should be given the chance to show such competence in an assessment task(s). This is consistent with Messick's (1989) conceptualization of construct validity that focuses on the linkages among the construct under measurement, the assessment task and scoring procedures, and score use and interpretation. In the same way, Kane's (2013) argument-based approach would require assertions about what students can do to be bolstered by well-reasoned arguments from observed performances to score interpretation. The convergence between the performance scores and the students' perceptions may be taken as preliminary evidence in favor of the authenticity dimension of the assessment. Students who viewed the tasks as work-related and completed the tasks successfully at all communicative levels also suggested that there was a match between task and communicative construct. While not sufficient on its own to form an entire validity argument, this evidence does provide initial support for interpreting scores in classroom-based assessment of Business English.

The second major result is about the contrast among different types of tasks. Students received the highest mean score in the business email writing simulation, and then the online business presentation, with the virtual meeting role-play getting the lowest mean score. This pattern implies that asynchronous or prepared tasks might be cognitively less demanding than synchronous interactional tasks. In business email writing, the students were allowed to plan, revise, and monitor their language use before they submitted their answers. Students were also able to prepare content for online presentations. By contrast, the virtual meeting role-play required them to think on their feet, take turns, listen to other participants, and pursue interactions. The results indicate that Business English communicative competence can be considered as a multidimensional entity involving linguistic, cognitive, and interactional aspects. Thus, tasks of assessment involving negotiation-in-real-time may elicit aspects of competence that are less visible in more traditional written types of assessments (Ziegler, 2016).

The results suggest that task type mediates communicative performance. Planning and revision are more feasible in tasks such as message organization and linguistic accuracy, while synchronous interaction is more demanding in terms of processing speed, interactional competence, and strategies of communication. Hence, differences in performance between task types might reflect variations in cognitive and interactional demands rather than in language proficiency per se. This implies that the task sensitivity of Business English communication competence and its assessment can be better captured by a composite of complementary task types than by an individual task type.

Thus, this should not be interpreted as just poor performance on the part of how somewhat worse the score was in virtual meeting role-play. What perhaps these instructions tapped more on was a more complex set of transactional and interactional communication elements in BE, especially interactional competence, spontaneity, and professional responsiveness. In office talk, students are expected not only to speak a language correctly but to speak it properly, to interrogate meaning, and to converse on the fly. These are in line with the Business English learners' demands as business communication is inherently imbued with the need for language to perform effectively in authentic work-related scenarios (Chan, 2021). Previous research has also suggested that English-medium business students may face challenges when having to speak off the cuff, e.g.,

in professional contexts (Alhassan et al., 2021). The lower score on the virtual meeting role-play adds an intriguing layer to the particular challenges synchronous digital communication students appear to be confronted with.

Results suggest that even digital spaces can be conducive to more interactionful and stimulating modes of assessment. Students shared that digital exercises were more captivating than traditional paper tests, as they needed to be actively engaged in presentations, discussions, and writing to make their writing professional. This aligns with studies demonstrating that technology-facilitated learning environments have the potential to foster participation and engagement among students in HE (Bond et al., 2020). Likewise, findings on technology-mediated TBLT indicate that digital contexts can provide more opportunities for authentic language use and interaction (Bhandari et al., 2025). Students' positive attitudes in this study indicate that the use of DTBA might enhance perceived applicability and engagement as the assessment tasks are similar to communicative activities employed in modern workplaces.

But engagement is not validity. An activity may be engaging and meaningful for students, but that doesn't mean the test yields valid interpretations of test scores. For this reason, the positive perceptions of students in this study could be interpreted as indicative of perceived authenticity and relevance. They complement the performance data, but they are no substitute for increased levels of validation. This is an important distinction, as the study was largely based on descriptive statistics and rubric scoring in the classroom. Thus, the results may serve as a tentative indication that the DTBA may be suitable for BE testing, with additional validation testing needed.

The results further emphasize the relevance of simulation. Such digital simulations as online presentations and virtual meetings have the potential to create secure but realistic environments in which students can participate in professional communication. Simulation-mediated learning or education via simulation has been identified as an effective approach in learning practical skills since it provides an opportunity for students to carry out real work in a simulated work environment in an educational context (Asegid & Assefa, 2021). The technology-based simulations also enhance learning by providing a more engaging and authentic experience of learning (Bergamo et al., 2022). In this study, digital simulations were not simply learning experiences, but assessment experiences that allowed students to demonstrate their Business English skills in realistic workplace scenarios.

Regarding Business English pedagogy, the results suggest that DTBA can be used to bridge the gap between classroom assessment and the communication demands in the workplace. Effective Business English communication involves a clear message, suitable professional terminology, interactional adaptability, and the achievement of communicative aims. These facets of BUs were also identifiable in the analytic rubric employed in this study. These results add support to Chan's (2021) contention that instruction in Business English needs to be aligned with what students actually require with respect to communicating effectively in the workplace. Through digital tasks, teachers can evaluate not just what students know about English, but also how they use English to carry out professional communication.

Overall, the results suggest that DTBA for Business English is a potentially effective but nascent means to assess Business English communication skills. This study makes a contribution to ESP assessment in demonstrating that a variety of digital tasks can expose different dimensions of communicative performance. Email writing and online presentations seem to be features of more controlled communication; oral virtual meeting role-play seems to embody the requirements of synchronous interaction. Thus, DTBA might be particularly advantageous when the teacher wishes to evaluate both rehearsed and impromptu workplace communication. Nonetheless, more rigorous methodology is required before stronger statements regarding the validity of assessment are warranted.

In conclusion, the results indicate that the DTBA is a viable method for assessing Business English communication competence as it allows learners to communicate in workplace contexts (OPLs) across different task types. Results show that two different digital tasks can evoke two different types of communicative performances. Whereas business email writing and online presentations seem to facilitate message organization and professional language use because of options for planning and preparing, role-plays in virtual meetings involve higher requirements for real-time interaction, meaning negotiation, and strategic communication. These results suggest that DTBA is not to be considered as a mere technological reproduction or adaptation of classical assessment, but rather as an assessment procedure which can bring to light multiple layers of communicative competence as dictated by the interactional needs of the task. Theoretically, the study indicates that Business English communicative competence is task-sensitive and that a fuller assessment of it is achieved by employing a range of complementary digital task types rather than a mono-task format for assessment. However, more stringent validation involving inter-rater reliability, construct validation, as well as larger sampling is still required before any stronger assertion about the assessment validity can be made.

Communicative Competence is Task-Sensitive

A potential theoretical consequence from this study is that the Business English communicative competence seems to be context-bound and not consistent in different test formats. Students performed better on both prepared and asynchronous tasks than on synchronous interactional tasks, implying that communicative competence can be task-specific with regard to the cognitive, interactional, and temporal characteristics of assessment tasks. This finding adds to the existing literature on task-based assessment by illustrating how different digital task types can elicit various aspects of communicative competence, such as the organization of messages, the use of professional language, the management of interactions, and the ability to generate spontaneous responses.

There are a few limitations to this study. First, the study was conducted in one Business English class at one university; thus, the results may not be applicable to all ESP or Business English class contexts. Second, the quantitative analyses were limited to descriptive statistics and did not involve inferential tests or construct validation. Third, while the rubric was designed to reflect course learning outcomes and content validity was established through peer review, no formal inter-rater reliability was calculated. Fourth, the qualitative results were derived from interviews with 15 students who volunteered to participate in the study and may not fully represent all the participants' experiences. These limitations point to the need for further research involving larger samples, more raters, greater rubric validation, and more rigorous quantitative analysis.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

This research offers initial proof that digital task-based assessment might have the potential for evaluating Business English communication via workplace-centered digital tasks. Methodologically, the study exemplifies how a convergent mixed-methods design can be employed to investigate both outcomes of performance and perceptions of learners in the context of digital assessment. The results indicate that various types of digital tasks illustrate distinct facets of communicative competence, in terms of, for example, controlled communication versus communication in real-time interactional performances. Pedagogically, the findings validate the inclusion of authentic workplace-based digital tasks in ESP testing. Taken together, these results demonstrate that DTBA is a promising instrument for better matching classroom assessment with workplace communication requirements in the modern era.

Nevertheless, the results need to be taken with caution since this study offers only first classroom-based evidence about DTBA rather than an overall validation. Future studies are recommended to enhance the validity claim with larger samples, multiple raters, inter-rater reliability as well as more rigorous construct validation procedures in various ESP settings. The findings should not be interpreted as evidence of assessment validity but rather as initial classroom-based observations requiring further validation.

Suggestions

On this basis, some recommendations are presented. First, Business English teachers may want to consider the inclusion of digital communication tasks in assessment, particularly those tasks that simulate work communication, i. e., online presentations, business e-mail writing, and virtual meetings). In these exercises, students have more opportunities to demonstrate their communication skills in real-life situations.

Second, it is also desired that further studies improve the methodological quality of DTBA, such as involving multiple raters, reporting inter-rater reliability, validating rubric descriptors, and examining the inter-relation among dimensions of the evaluation. Future research might also assess how DTBA fares against more conventional assessment formats to grant further support for its potential added value.

Third, research should also examine the emotional and interactional outcomes of digital assessment such as students' anxiety, confidence, cognitive load and interactional agency while participating in synchronous digital communication. One such concern is that of students having to do more work, with virtual meetings and other real-time digital tasks typically requiring more of students than prepared or asynchronous tasks.

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