

# Task-Based Language Teaching for Employability Skills in Saudi EFL Classrooms

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*Abstract- This paper examines the use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to develop the employability skills of Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The topic is timely because Saudi higher education is increasingly expected to prepare graduates for effective collaboration, professional interaction, adaptability, critical analysis, technology use, and change management in support of Saudi Vision 2030 and the Human Capability Development Program (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025a, 2025b; Banafi, 2025). This paper presents a structured narrative review, informed by PRISMA 2020 principles, of recent literature on TBLT, employability skills, workplace readiness, motivation, anxiety, and innovation in Saudi EFL higher education from 2020 to 2025. The review suggests that TBLT is most effective when English lessons incorporate meaningful workplace-related tasks, such as presentations, email negotiation, data interpretation, meeting organization, customer communication, and problem solving (Ismail et al., 2023; Bhandari et al., 2025; Al-Rashidi, 2025). Beyond improving English proficiency, TBLT can support transferable skills such as initiative, teamwork, computer-mediated communication, self-regulation, and critical thinking. Recent Saudi studies also indicate that teachers and learners recognize the value of English learning that connects theory with practice (Aljasir, 2024; Hasan, 2025). However, implementation challenges remain, including limited performance-based assessment, large class sizes, uneven teacher expertise, and weak curriculum alignment. The paper proposes a four-stage framework for implementing TBLT in Saudi EFL classrooms: pre-task preparation, task cycle, reflection, and performance-based assessment. Overall, TBLT is presented as a pedagogical approach that can integrate language learning with employability development.*

**Keywords:** *Task-Based Language Teaching; Employability Skills; Saudi English As A Foreign Language (EFL); Higher Education; Workplace Communication; Vision 2030*

## I. INTRODUCTION

English has gained strategic importance in Saudi higher education because its role has shifted from basic language acquisition to academic mobility,

internationalization, and employability (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025a; Saudi Vision 2030, 2025b). In line with Vision 2030, English is increasingly viewed as a means of professional and economic participation, and graduates are expected to leave higher education prepared for the labour market (Yusuf & Jamjoom, 2022; Banafi, 2025; Hasan, 2025). This shift has moved attention away from English as merely an examination subject and toward English as a language for workplace communication and vocational readiness.

In this context, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a practical way to connect language learning with authentic communication. TBLT requires learners to participate in meaningful tasks through which language is used to accomplish a specific outcome. Unlike traditional methods that begin primarily with the presentation of language forms, TBLT emphasizes meaning-making, negotiation of meaning, cooperation, and the production of texts or performances that reflect authentic communication. Recent scholarship suggests that TBLT contributes to engaged, skills-based learning in EFL contexts (Ismail et al., 2023; Aljasir, 2024; Bhandari et al., 2025).

The use of TBLT appears especially relevant in Saudi EFL classrooms. In addition to disciplinary knowledge, graduates need communication skills, collaboration, critical thinking, adaptability, and digital literacy (Alzuoud & Gaudel, 2020; Yusuf & Jamjoom, 2022; Perez Zuniga et al., 2025). TBLT

can therefore be regarded as a pedagogical tool for developing employability skills because it places learners in communicative situations that resemble professional tasks and require practical outcomes.

Nevertheless, several obstacles affect the implementation of TBLT in Saudi higher education. Although active learning is widely encouraged, classroom practice may remain teacher-centered, assessment may focus mainly on linguistic accuracy, and employability skills may remain rhetorical rather than operational (Aljasir, 2024; Alwahibee & Al-Mutairi, 2024). Teachers may value TBLT but still face challenges related to task design, mixed-proficiency classes, limited time, curriculum constraints, and the demands of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Aljasir, 2024; Alwahibee & Al-Mutairi, 2024). Students may also appreciate workplace-oriented English learning while feeling anxious about collaborative performance tasks (Khojah & Thomas, 2021; Ismail et al., 2023; Al-Rashidi, 2025).

The present paper reviews contemporary literature on the use of TBLT to promote employability skills in Saudi EFL higher education. It has four objectives. First, it identifies the employability skills most frequently discussed in recent higher education and language education literature. Second, it examines how TBLT can foster these skills through classroom tasks and performance-based learning. Third, it reviews recent literature on TBLT in the Saudi context, including language policy, teacher beliefs, student expectations, and workplace-oriented curricula. Fourth, it proposes a conceptual framework for implementing employability-oriented TBLT in Saudi higher education.

The review focuses on recent literature published between 2020 and 2025, a period marked by rapid changes in Saudi higher education, digital learning, and labour-market expectations. Methodologically, the paper follows a structured narrative review approach informed by PRISMA 2020 principles. It provides a transparent account of the review scope, source selection logic, thematic synthesis, and implications for future research and practice.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This review adopted a structured narrative review design informed by PRISMA 2020 reporting principles. The aim was not to conduct a meta-analysis or a full PRISMA systematic review, but to provide a transparent thematic synthesis of recent literature linking task-based language teaching, employability skills, and Saudi EFL higher education reform. The period of publication was limited to 2020-2025 in order to capture recent debates on digital learning, post-pandemic teaching, Saudi education reform, and employability.

The literature search drew on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly review papers, book chapters, and policy documents that offered relevant insights into Saudi Arabia's reform priorities and EFL teaching. Search phrases included task-based language teaching, TBLT, employability skills development, workplace readiness, ESP instruction, Saudi EFL instruction, language policy, learner motivation, anxiety reduction, performance-based assessment, and higher education.

Studies were included if they addressed at least one of the following areas: TBLT instructional design or practice; affective outcomes of task-based learning; employability skill development in higher education; workplace-oriented language learning; or English-language reform and labour-market alignment in Saudi Arabia. Studies were excluded if they were outside the 2020–2025-time span, did not relate to higher education or language learning, or did not provide conceptual, empirical, or policy relevance to the review focus.

The review followed a qualitative interpretive approach. Sources were first sorted into four bodies of literature: recent TBLT research, employability and higher education research, Saudi English policy research, and studies on affective factors influencing task performance and persistence. Sources were then coded thematically using categories such as authenticity, collaboration, problem solving, digital communication, self-efficacy, anxiety reduction, teacher beliefs, curriculum alignment, and assessment.

Because this paper is a structured narrative review rather than a full systematic review, it does not report database-level screening totals, inter-rater reliability statistics, or a PRISMA flow diagram. Instead, it applies PRISMA-informed principles of transparency by stating the time span, source types, keywords, inclusion criteria, exclusion logic, and thematic coding categories. This approach is appropriate because the literature on TBLT, employability, Saudi EFL reform, motivation, and workplace readiness is dispersed across pedagogical, policy, and higher education research.

Table 1. Review design and synthesis decisions

Dimension	Decision	Rationale
Time span	2020-2025	Captures post-pandemic digital learning, recent Saudi reform, and current employability debates.
Source profile	Peer-reviewed studies, reviews, book chapters, and official Saudi reports	Balances pedagogical evidence with policy and labour-market framing.
Core constructs	TBLT, employability, Saudi EFL policy, motivation, anxiety, grit, and assessment	Links language pedagogy to transferable graduate capability.
Synthesis logic	Thematic coding across four literature strands	Supports comparison of dispersed evidence without fabricating intervention totals.
Reference model	Recent empirical TBLT and technology-mediated TBLT studies were used as structural references	Provides a current journal-style model while preserving the review-paper methodology.

### III. CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS

TBLT is especially relevant to employability because it begins with purposeful communication. In a task-based classroom, students do not simply practice isolated language forms; they use language to solve problems, share information, analyze data, make decisions, or produce collaborative products. These activities resemble professional communication more closely than lectures or form-focused drills. Recent reviews confirm that TBLT remains closely associated with authentic language use, interaction, negotiation of meaning, learner involvement, and improved communicative performance. Digitalization has also become an important feature of contemporary TBLT (Bhandari et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2025).

Recent research on employability indicates that the skills most frequently associated with labour-market readiness include communication, teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, self-efficacy, and reflective adaptation (Scandurra et al., 2024; Perez Zuniga et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025). Suyitno et al. (2025) argue that students develop employability skills when they engage in applied, work-related experiences that help them build a professional identity. Similarly, Rubio-Andres et al. (2023) show that employability skills are not merely an addition to academic performance; they are also motivational factors that help students become more competitive and professionally confident.

These findings align closely with the principles of TBLT. Well-designed tasks allow learners to practice behaviours that are valued in the workplace, such as proposing ideas, setting timelines, interpreting instructions, communicating with clients, solving problems, and presenting solutions. TBLT therefore offers a way to integrate language learning and skill development in the same classroom environment.

Recent studies on language and employability also support this argument. Yallew and Dipitso (2023) conclude that higher education should focus on English for communication, generic employability skills, and occupational communication. Zhao and Kularatne (2020) similarly identify a relationship

between generic skills and employability skills. In Saudi Arabia, Alzuoud and Gaudel (2020) suggest that the development of core skills through English language teaching can increase students' employability. Language classrooms can therefore become spaces where students develop both linguistic competence and broader professional capabilities.

Affective factors are also central to employability because students need confidence, persistence, and the willingness to perform in communicative situations. Ismail et al. (2023) found that task-based instruction improved reading comprehension while promoting motivation and reducing anxiety. Cao (2025) reported that technology-assisted tasks increased motivation, confidence, and autonomy in spoken communication. Dong et al. (2022) found that computer-assisted and mobile-assisted language learning had positive effects on learners' motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy. Ebadi et al. (2025) also found that AI-assisted speaking activities reduced learners' anxiety.

These affective outcomes are important because motivated and confident learners are more likely to participate actively in communication, while anxious students are more likely to remain silent. Task-based learning can also support persistence because learners repeatedly plan, perform, receive feedback, and revise. This cycle reflects the self-management expected in professional settings. The relationship between TBLT, affect, and employability therefore supports the central argument of this paper: language learning can function as a direct pathway to workplace readiness when tasks are carefully designed and assessed.

Figure 1. Employability-oriented TBLT cycle for Saudi EFL classrooms

Pre-task preparation -> Workplace task cycle -> Reflection and feedback -> Performance-based assessment -> Transfer to workplace readiness

The cycle illustrates how pre-task preparation, task performance, reflective follow-up, and performance-based assessment connect language learning with workplace capability.

#### IV. SAUDI POLICY AND CLASSROOM CONTEXT

In the Saudi context, an employability-oriented approach to TBLT is especially important. Saudi Vision 2030 and the Human Capability Development Program identify education as a central driver of economic diversification and national competitiveness (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025a, 2025b). These reform priorities require graduates who can apply knowledge and skills in a diverse and increasingly global labour market.

English has become highly significant in this reform environment because it supports access to information, international communication, business, tourism, health care, and digital work. Research on English-language learning in Saudi Arabia shows that students and institutions increasingly recognize the link between English proficiency and professional readiness. Banafi (2025), for example, reports that final-year English-language students were aware of the connection between their academic programs and Vision 2030 in relation to skills required for intercultural workplaces. Yusuf and Jamjoom (2022) similarly argue that Saudi higher education institutions need to pay greater attention to graduate employability skills in order to fulfil their institutional missions.

Recent studies also show that students want English courses that are directly connected to workplace needs. Hasan (2025) found that applied-college students considered workplace-oriented English courses relevant and useful, but wanted more practice, authentic materials, and field-specific terminology. This suggests that students do not need English only in a general sense; they need functional English that can be used in specific professional contexts.

Language policy research supports this point. Jabeen (2023) identifies links between language policy shifts in Saudi Arabia, stakeholder perceptions, implementation challenges, and the need for pedagogical support. Ismail and Namaziandost (2025) argue that Saudi Arabia's English-language policy is closely connected to economic and digital transformation. In this environment, English is not

simply an academic subject but a tool for educational, economic, and technological participation.

Teachers' beliefs are also important for successful curriculum change. Aljasir (2024) reports that Saudi EFL teachers generally view TBLT positively as a method for developing communicative skills through tasks. Alwahibee and Al-Mutairi (2024) similarly found that ESP teachers were positive toward task-based learning because they believed tasks motivate students to interact and communicate. However, positive beliefs do not guarantee successful implementation. Teachers may still struggle with task design, class size, mixed proficiency levels, limited time, institutional assessment requirements, and access to digital resources.

Student motivation also makes task-based instruction a promising option. Khojah and Thomas (2021) found that smartphone-mediated reading tasks created a motivating environment among Saudi female learners. Al-Rashidi (2025) concluded that digital task-based instruction increased the motivation of Saudi EFL university students. Khawaji (2025) reported similar results among Saudi students in an ESP-TBLT intervention for Computer Information Technology. Together, these studies suggest that Saudi students can respond positively to TBLT when tasks are relevant, structured, and supported by appropriate technology.

Despite this promise, classroom implementation can be constrained by crowded classes, dense curricula, examination pressure, limited digital integration, and uneven teacher experience. Such barriers may reduce the quality of task completion or lead teachers to use tasks superficially. A gap therefore remains between policy intentions and classroom practice, particularly in assessment and curriculum implementation. Because industries differ in their language requirements, ESP courses should include industry-specific tasks, genres, terminology, and communication scenarios. TBLT is well suited to this need because it can incorporate professional communication at the pre-task, task, performance, and evaluation stages.

## V. THEMATIC SYNTHESIS: TBLT AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Communication is one of the most frequently emphasized employability skills in the literature. However, TBLT can also develop a wider set of workplace-related competencies. Panduwangi (2021) and Ng et al. (2025) identify interaction, debate, persuasion, negotiation, and problem solving as important outcomes of TBLT activities. These skills are also valued by employers and educational institutions in Saudi Arabia (Alzuoud & Gaudel, 2020; Yusuf & Jamjoom, 2022; Perez Zuniga et al., 2025). When students complete tasks such as responding to customers, discussing problems, presenting data, or negotiating decisions, they develop both language skills and professional behaviours.

The literature on professional English and workplace learning indicates that skills should be developed through contexts that are relevant to students' future fields. Hasan (2025) and Alhumaidan and Alghamdi (2023) show that authentic situations, technical terminology, and opportunities to communicate in the target language can motivate students. Tasks should therefore be based on common workplace activities such as writing emails, reporting to supervisors, discussing operational problems, communicating with customers, presenting data, and contributing to meetings. Through such tasks, learners gain experience with multiple professional genres and discourses.

Technology-mediated TBLT is another important theme. Digital tools can support rehearsal, collaboration, feedback, and lower-stakes practice. In Saudi EFL contexts, mobile and digital task-based instruction has been linked to stronger motivation and participation (Khojah & Thomas, 2021; Al-Rashidi, 2025). Technology can also allow learners to record performances, revise written products, collaborate on documents, and receive feedback before final performance. However, technology should support communication rather than replace task interaction.

Assessment is a major challenge. If EFL outcomes are measured only through discrete-point tests, TBLT and employability development become difficult to

evaluate. Recent literature suggests that performance-based assessment can improve language achievement, motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety outcomes (Heydarnejad et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2023). Saudi universities and colleges therefore need assessment models that capture both language development and employability skills. Rubrics can evaluate clarity, accuracy, fluency, interactional management, professionalism, audience awareness, problem solving, collaboration, and reflective improvement. E-portfolios, video recordings, project reports, revision memos, and self-reflections can provide evidence of progress over time.

Teacher roles are also central. Although many teachers are willing to implement task-based teaching, they may return to explanation-centered instruction when institutional assessment emphasizes recall and grammar. Aljasir (2024) notes that effective task design requires attention to purpose, language level, timing, and outcome. Another barrier is learner heterogeneity. Students may differ in proficiency, confidence, task-completion ability, and digital skills. Scaffolding is therefore essential to ensure that tasks remain authentic without overwhelming lower-proficiency learners or under-challenging advanced learners.

Table 2. Mapping TBLT phases to employability skill development

TBLT phase	Sample classroom task	Target employability skills	Assessment evidence
Pre-task	Analyze an email chain and identify tone, purpose, and response options.	Audience awareness, digital communication, and professional judgement.	Diagnostic checklist, vocabulary log, and short briefing notes.
During-task	Role-play a team meeting to solve a service or project	Teamwork, negotiation, problem solving, and spoken fluency.	Observation rubric, peer feedback, and audio recording.

	problem.		
Post-task	Revise the spoken or written outcome after feedback.	Self-management, reflective practice, and accuracy improvement.	Revision memo, self-assessment, and teacher commentary .
Transfer task	Present the solution to a new workplace scenario.	Adaptability, initiative, and cross-context communication.	Mini-presentation score, portfolio artefact, and reflective note.

#### VI. TASK-BASED LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR SAUDI ARABIA'S EFL CLASSROOMS

Based on the reviewed literature, this paper proposes a four-stage framework for using TBLT to develop employability skills in Saudi EFL classrooms. The framework is designed to help teachers connect language objectives with workplace communication, learner motivation, digital mediation, and performance-based assessment.

The first stage is contextual diagnosis. Teachers begin by identifying a professional communication context related to learners' discipline, future career, or general workplace needs. In general English classes, this may include introductions, requests, progress reports, problem reports, presentations, and meeting participation. In ESP classes, the list may include case studies, patient briefings, solution implementation, logistics communication, customer service, or field-specific documentation (Alhumaidan & Alghamdi, 2023; Hasan, 2025). This stage ensures that tasks are workplace-oriented rather than artificially communicative.

The second stage is task-cycle design. Effective TBLT should include pre-task preparation, task performance, product creation, and reflection. In the pre-task phase, learners become familiar with the communication objective, relevant vocabulary, discourse patterns, and strategies for interaction.

During the task, learners collaborate to produce an outcome rather than merely memorize language. After the task, they present or submit the outcome, discuss strengths and weaknesses, and identify strategies for improvement (Ismail et al., 2023; Bhandari et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025).

The third stage is strategic multimodal support. Digital technology can be used to prepare learners for spoken and written professional communication through collaborative documents, practice videos, voice-message prompts, learning management systems, and AI-supported rehearsal tools. However, technology should be used strategically. Its purpose is to increase communication, confidence, feedback, and engagement rather than to distract learners from task interaction (Khojah & Thomas, 2021; Al-Rashidi, 2025; Cao, 2025).

The fourth stage is performance evaluation. Assessment should consider both language skills and employability skills. A practical rubric may include criteria such as clarity of message, audience awareness, accuracy, fluency, collaboration, problem solving, technological competence, professionalism, and reflection. Transparent criteria can reduce anxiety because learners know how their performance will be evaluated. Such assessment also helps teachers document growth in workplace readiness rather than relying only on grammar-focused tests (Heydarnejad et al., 2022; Perez Zuniga et al., 2025).

Figure 2. Maturity matrix for integrating TBLT with employability outcomes

Curricular integration	Low workplace authenticity	Moderate workplace authenticity	High workplace authenticity
Low	Language practice remains form-focused and disconnected from	Occasional work-related examples are included but are not assessed.	Authentic tasks appear as isolated activities without curriculum support.

	professional use.		
Moderate	Some employability outcomes are mentioned but tasks remain generic.	Tasks, materials, and partial assessment begin to align with workplace communication.	Authentic workplace tasks are used regularly, but assessment and progression remain inconsistent.
High	Curriculum includes skills language, but workplace authenticity remains limited.	Integrated task cycles support communication, reflection, and partial transfer.	The strongest outcomes emerge when authentic tasks, curriculum planning, teacher mediation, and performance-based evaluation are fully aligned.

The matrix suggests that robust outcomes emerge when workplace authenticity is matched by curricular integration and performance-based evaluation.

## VII. DISCUSSION

This review shows that the value of TBLT in Saudi EFL classrooms lies not simply in its novelty but in its strategic alignment with employability demands under Vision 2030. Saudi universities are increasingly expected to connect educational outcomes with labour-market needs. TBLT is one of the language-teaching approaches that can integrate linguistic, affective, and professional skills within the same curriculum because it requires learners to use English to complete meaningful tasks.

However, TBLT cannot solve all structural challenges on its own. Teacher training, assessment reform, curriculum flexibility, class-size management, and institutional support require careful attention. Without these conditions, TBLT may remain a theoretical ideal rather than a practical solution. For example, teachers may design interesting tasks but still be constrained by examinations that reward grammar recall rather than communicative performance. Similarly, students may enjoy tasks but fail to transfer their learning to professional contexts if tasks are not connected to authentic workplace genres.

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that the most promising results occur when tasks are authentic, scaffolded, digitally supported, and evaluated through performance. Such conditions can increase learner involvement, reduce anxiety, build confidence, and improve the professional use of English. The main implication is a shift from simply advocating communicative teaching to systematically mapping employability needs into task design, classroom implementation, teacher mediation, and assessment practice.

For Saudi higher education, this means that English courses should not only teach language forms or general communication. They should also provide structured opportunities for students to write professional emails, participate in meetings, analyze workplace information, negotiate solutions, present findings, and reflect on their performance. In this way, TBLT can help transform EFL classrooms into spaces where students practice the communication behaviours expected in future workplaces.

#### CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that TBLT can bridge language learning and employability development in Saudi EFL higher education. Through authentic communication, collaboration, confidence building, and active learner involvement, TBLT can help students develop English proficiency alongside transferable workplace skills. Recent Saudi research suggests that both learners and teachers value English courses that are aligned with workplace demands, Vision 2030

priorities, and communication in disciplinary contexts.

The main recommendation is that Saudi EFL curricula should be revised around contextualized task cycles, multimodal mediation, and performance-based assessment. Teachers should be supported in designing tasks that reflect authentic workplace communication while providing scaffolding for learners with different proficiency levels. Future research should include intervention studies that evaluate how task-based instruction affects employability skill acquisition, learner confidence, performance-based assessment outcomes, and transfer to workplace communication. English language education in Saudi Arabia has strong potential to contribute to graduate employability when language learning is intentionally connected to professional practice.

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