Research Article

# Applying TBLT and The PERMA Model in Teaching Business English

## Nguyen Thi Minh Ngoc

University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

## Abstract

Nowadays, Artificial Intelligence has placed a dominant role in teaching and learning English, which raises the question if AI will be able to replace the role of a teacher in the classroom. Facing those challenges, the teachers are supposed to do things differently based on their own contexts. Therefore, the researcher has applied TBLT and the PERMA model of flourishing (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievements) in designing meaningful tasks such as modified tasks, games, and speaking videos in teaching ESP. The tasks are required to meet some criteria including cognitive engagement, social engagement and affective engagement. At University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, 170 students who major in Business Studies at intermediate level participate in the research during 90 hours for two semesters. Data collected from the observation and the questionnaire proves that this model has brought many benefits to the students in terms of learning outcomes as well as positive emotions in the learning performance. The results show more cognitive engagement, social engagement and affective engagement, particularly during the more complex tasks.

## Keywords

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has placed a dominant role in teaching and learning English, which raises the question if AI will be able to replace the role of a teacher in the classroom. Facing those challenges, the teachers are supposed to do things differently based on their own contexts. At University of Economics, Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, all of the classes major in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), most of which specialize in Business English. From the researcher's observation and informal interviews with teachers and students, it is found that most students seem demotivated and feel bored when learning Business English because they find the tasks challenging and uninteresting. Furthermore, the term "well-being" has emerged in recent researches in the academic world because well-being plays a crucial role in achieving a sustainable and high-quality life and promoting lifelong learning (Aulia et al., 2020).

Therefore, the researcher has applied TBLT and the PERMA model of flourishing (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievements) in designing meaningful tasks such as modifying tasks, playing games, and making speaking videos in teaching ESP. The implementation of the PERMA model in educational contexts

*Corresponding author: Nguyen Thi Minh Ngoc

**Email addresses:** minh_ngoc111@ueh.edu.vn

will help to foster students'well-being and thus contribute to enhancing their learning performance at school (Seligman et al., 2009).

The tasks are required to meet some criteria including cognitive engagement, social engagement and affective engagement. The data proves that this model has brought many benefits to the students in terms of learning outcomes as well as positive emotions in the learning performance. The results show more cognitive engagement, social engagement and affective engagement, particularly during the more complex tasks.

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. The PERMA Model

The PERMA model has practical implications in enabling teachers to better address the well-being needs of students or the classroom environment (Kern et al., 2015). The PERMA Model of Well-Being was developed by Seligman (2011), which consists of five elements; *(1) Positive emotions, (2) Engagement, (3)Relationships, (4) Meaning, and (5) Achievement.*

*Positive emotions* refer to pleasure, happiness, joy, contentment and satisfaction. Good mood is connected with life satisfaction among students. Experiencing good feelings is an important element of total well-being. Fredrickson (2009) proposes that ten positive emotions are especially significant for humans to flourish, namely, joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love. Positive emotions refer to happiness while engagement is considered as a psychological connection to activities or organizations (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015).

*Engagement* is considered as active participation in the classroom. Engagement is where the person wholly being involved in the activities that he or she participated in with his effort and skills.Engagement is defined as living a life with a high level of interest, curiosity and absorption, and the pursuit of goals with determination and vitality (Norrish, 2015). Positive engagement can have students immerse in activities and tasks, which is beneficial for accomplishment and achievement (Froh et al., 2010).

*Relationships* focus on a feeling of connectedness to people, sense of support, social integration and concern from others in learning environment. Relationships include feeling socially integrated, cared for and supported by others, and satisfied with social connections (Kern et al., 2015). Students' relationship with teachers and friends is linked to their engagement and academic achievement at school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

*Meaning* means searching for significance in life because it makes people feel fulfilled and makes their lives worthwhile. It refers to the direction of life and feeling that one's life is valuable and there is a goal in one's life (Steger, 2012).It is also the desire of living and working for a purpose. (Butler & Kern, 2016).

*Achievement* is a desire to achieve something rather than real accomplishments, or a sensation of success and progress towards goals in one's life. To complete the task and reach a goal requires the effort made by capability, competence and efficiency. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the struggle to achieve success is linked to well-being.

The elements are not separate from each other but they interact and influence one another. In the educational contexts, five dimensions of PERMA can enhance the students' and educators' well-being. It is likely that students who have good emotions use a deep learning technique, which leads to better academic success. According to Seligman (2011), the most important aspect of engagement is recognizing which activities in life bring us to the state of flow that is full of positive endorphins and serotonin. Students' engagement in the classroom can contribute to academic achievement (Engeser et al.,2005). Besides, psychological and behavioral engagement can mediate the relationships between classroom context and students' academic achievement (Dotterer et al., 2011). There is a relationship between a higher sense of meaning, life satisfaction, positive affect, and academic success among college students (DeWitz et al., 2009).

Research highlights the critical role of engagement in learning for student success. Students who are engaged in the learning process may have a deeper understanding of the material, explore additional information and apply their knowledge in the real world. Class discussions, group projects and real-life activities can promote student engagement effectively. Neo and Neo (2009) found that students learn best when they collaborate with their peers in an environment that fosters discussion and idea exchange. Earning engagement encompasses students' level of interest, involvement, and motivation while learning (Cayubit, 2022). It refers to the degree of participation in the learning process, including asking questions and seeking feedback.

When discussing with the classmates, students actively process, integrate new information and consider diverse perspectives. Active engagement involves both mental and physical involvement, which results in deep involvement in the learning and better learning performance. Based on participating in practical activities, real-life tasks, students can apply their knowledge and abilities in meaningful ways and foster a feeling of ownership and responsibility for their learning (Green & Plessis, 2023). Fun learning activities can relieve academic pressure and motivate students to attend class.

## 2.2. 2. Task engagement

Throughout the research literature, engagement has been discussed in relation to the effort students invest when carrying out a task. This includes, in particular, behavioural effort, i.e. the work that is done when carrying out a task and mastering its content, cognitive effort concerning understanding a task and its purpose, and attitudinal effort relating to liking a task and being interested in it.

According to Linda Gijsen (2021), task engagement is considered as the special effort students invest in doing a task in the light of the requirements of task success. For example, the requirement might include establishing a relationship with peers to share information and asking questions. Linda Gijen (2021) argues that students engage in task processing in a holistic fashion, i.e. with their '*hands*', their '*minds*' and their '*hearts*'. This motivates and justifies a conceptual model according to which task engagement has *behavioural, cognitive* and *attitudinal* qualities. These qualities of being engaged closely interact when students carry out a task.

Regarding to its *behavioural* dimension, in reference to the 'hands' metaphor, task engagement concerns what students actually do when carrying out a task. When students who are behaviourally engaged, they participate actively and support their partners. Behavioural engagement may include responding to questions, contributing to the discussion, and prompting partners to say something.

With regard to its *cognitive* dimension, in reference to the 'mind' metaphor, task engagement concerns the special effort students invest when aiming to understand the task and its pedagogical purpose. The cognitive quality of task engagement can be seen in how students reflect on their own and their partners' task understanding.

With regard to its *attitudinal* dimension, in reference to the 'heart' metaphor, task engagement concerns the special effort students invest when using one's attitudinal endowment when carrying out a task. It is helpful to distinguish between emotional-attitudinal engagement and cognitive-attitudinal engagement. The former is about liking the task and certain aspects of it. The latter is about being interested in the task and about the readiness to take it seriously.

Three qualities of engagement can only be understood in interaction with each other and in regard to the effect on task engagement as a whole. In relation to studying task engagement and task aspects, teachers can develop pedagogical measures to help students to focus on meaningful task activities with their minds, their hearts and their hands. This will enhance students' knowledge, skills and attitude accordingly.

Therefore, seven *Task Performance parameters* for successful task completion should be considered including Task Appropriation, Task Management, Topic & Content, Language, Partner Orientation, Communicative Participation

and Technology (Linda Gijsen, 2021).

*Task Appropriation*

Task appropriation concerns the effort students invest while doing the task on their own. To design appropriate tasks, the teacher should pay attention to its relevance and suitability for the students' needs, purposes and desires.

*Task Management*

Task management refers the effort students invest in the preparation phase and the procedures they carry out during and after task realisation.

*Technology*

Students' engagement regarding the TP parameter Technology concerns the effort they invest in exploiting the respective task technology to the best of their ability.

*Topic & Content*

Students' engagement regarding the Topic & Content concerns the effort they invest in understanding the topic discussed and the content presented in the classrooms.

*Language*

Students' engagement regarding language concerns the effort they invest in addressing linguistic-communicative challenges and involves issues of languaging in connection with developing their topic-related vocabulary, as well as phrases and collocations.

*Communicative Participation*

Students' engagement focuses on the effort they invest in participating in communicative activities during task realisation.

*Partner Orientation*

Students' engagement is considered as the effort they invest in establishing and deepening a relationship with their communication partners for the purpose of strengthening the interaction.

## 3. Methodology

At University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, 170 students who major in Business Studies at intermediate level participate in the research during 90 hours for two semesters. During the course, the students are taught the topics related to *Career choices, Business sectors, Projects, Global Markets, Design and innovation, Safety and security, Customer service and Communication.* The main coursebook is **Business Partner B1** by Margaret O'Keeffe, Lewis Lansford, Ros Wright, Evan Frendo, Lizzie Wright (2020).

Based on the criteria of task engagement, the researcher has applied five dimensions of PERMA model for flourishing: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievements in designing meaningful and interactive tasks in teaching Business English. The PERMA framework proposed by Seligman (2011) has become a basic model for delegating work in the field of language teaching (Helgesen,

2016), which can be applied to developing and designing lesson plans (Quinlan & Hone, 2020).

## Activity 1: Modifying activities and tasks in the textbook

Let the students read a *job vacancy* of *Medical Insurance Product Writer* in the textbook including some requirements of the position such as responsibilities, skills and experience. The students are also handed the *job listing* with the category of degrees, professional experience, other interests and activities listing sub-themes of each group. The students are asked to tick one item from each group that they think best matches this job. They can choose more than one answer in each category. The students can work in groups to prepare an argument to explain their choices to other groups in class.

After discussions, they are supposed to apply for any position they would like to do after graduating from the university. They are encouraged to post his or her own *online professional profile* on the internet such as facebook, instagram or tiktok… to get some comments or reaction from the public. By doing this, it is likely that they can have more job opportunities as interns or their profiles can be screened by the interviewers or recruiters. This is a supplementary task following the main task in the textbook.

Designing tasks or modifying tasks is based on three criteria of task engagement: cognitive, behavioural and emotional. In this way, the students are constructive, emotionally positive and cognitively focused when participating with learning activities in school (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

Tasks can directly target Positive emotions in the model of PERMA. Positive emotions in TBLT focus on purposeful learning, learner-centered approach, collaborative learning, and space for the personal and interpersonal development. Lessons should build a sense of humour, movement, personal connection and being real to the students (Seligman, 2011).

## Activity 2: Doing fun activities in the classroom

Each group will design any kinds of game of vocabulary of one unit in the course. The requirement is that it must cover new vocabulary items, business terms, technical terms including phrases and collocations in business contexts. They are encouraged to present interactive and engaging games with the participation of the whole class. This task can be carried out when the students finish the unit they are in charge of. This is considered as an opportunity for them to review vocabulary and know how to use it in the business world. The first step is that they have to review the entire unit again after studying. Only new words and word partnerships with contextualized meanings are selected. In fact, the students have challenges with memorizing business terms and applying

them in the real world. Therefore, this kind of activity can enhance their vocabulary of technical terms which is also necessary for them to read specialised materials in English in their major. Each group is encouraged to design different games from other groups'. The second step is that they will choose the kind of game suitable for the words selected. Depending on the vocabulary, they will design the format of the online game or offline game. The game lasts for half an hour in one class. The winners of the game can receive a reward from the organisers. Every student is motivated to take part in playing the game by competing with each other, which leads to a happy atmosphere in the classroom.

To sum up, TBLT and the model for flourishing - PERMA should be highlighted during the learning process. The students should be motivated to do some extra-activities as homework or assignments after class. This gives them space for the personal and interpersonal development and a sense of achievement.

## Activity 3: Doing assignments outside the classroom

In the classroom, the groups are assigned to discuss the issues about Business or Economics in each unit. First, they have to brainstorm some ideas or vocabulary related to the topic of the question. Then, they argue or negotiate with each other to include his or her own ideas in the google.doc, which will be submitted to the teacher. The teacher can give some comments on the content, the organisation and the problem-solving skill. After that, each group will take turn presenting the topic in front of the class. The other groups can ask some questions related to the topic or if they want to clarify any point in the presentation.

To provide the students with supplementary materials, at the end of the course some main topics covering the coursebook will be given to the students as homework. Each student can choose one topic he is interested in to make a speaking video about it. In the video, he will present about the issue or problem to a real-life situation in the business world. They can express their own ideas, experiences, solutions based on their knowledge about their major. To make their presentation informative and interesting, they have to search for the information they want to present. Their speaking videos are measured in terms of problem-solving skill, communication skill and interaction.

## 4. Data Analysis & Results

Data collected in the research come from the teacher's observation and the questionnaire. At the end of the course, the questionnaire was distributed to students through Google Forms, with a one-week period allocated for responses. The

questionnaire is designed based on the five dimensions of PERMA and three qualities of task engagement. The first five questions target at Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Achievement. The last five questions focus on clarifying cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement. (*See Appendix*).

## Questionnaire

In terms of the happy classroom environment, 54.7 % of students agree strongly to the question and 42.4 % of them share the same ideas. Only 1.2 % of the students say that they disagree with the statement and 1.8 % of them strongly disagree with it. Only 5 out of 170 students do not think there is a happy atmosphere in the classroom. This means almost all of them find the classroom interesting and happy.

In terms of the willingness to take part in class activities, 47,1 % of students say that they agree strongly with the question. Therefore, 97,7 % of students respond that they are ready to participate in doing tasks and activities. And 2,4 % of students disapprove of the statement. 4 out of 170 students say that they do not want to do the class activities.

In terms of having a sense of support when working in group, 97% of students think they can get help or support from their peers. 3 % of them are not in favour of the statement including 0,6 % of responses of strong disagreement. This shows that the students believe working with peers brings more benefits to them than working individually.

In terms of having a purpose in the study, 47,6 % students agree strongly with the statement and 49,4% of them believe that they have a purpose in their studying. 3% of the students oppose the viewpoint, 0,6% of which is strong disagreement.

In terms of achieving learning goals after the course, 93% agree and agree strongly with the statement. However, 5,9% of the students say that they can not achieve the learning outcomes or their expectations from the course. And 1,2% of them give strong disagreement with the point. Most of them can pass the final examination, but to some extent the course does not meet their own expectations.

In terms of being ready to contribute to the discussions, 93,5 of the students give positive comments on the point. In the contrary, 4,1 % of the students do not think that they really want to take part in the discussions in the classroom, and 2,4 % of them strongly disagree with the statement. It seems that a few students do not participate in the class or group discussions because of their learning styles or the discussion itself.

In terms of investing a special effort to understand the tasks, there are 95,9 % of positive responses about the point including 35,3 % of responses of strong agreement and 60,6 % of responses of agreement. There are 4,2 % of negative responses in which 1,8 % of the students disagree strongly with the statement.

In terms of being interested in doing the tasks, 88,8% of the students are immersed in doing the activities or tasks during the course. However, 8,8 % of the students do not agree with the statement and 2,4 % of the students disagree strongly with the point. Some students do not want to do the tasks or activities during the course. This raises the questions of the kinds of tasks and the content of tasks.

In terms of being interested in playing games, 61,8 % of the students strongly agree and 34,1 % of the students agree that they want to play games in each class. Only 4,1 % of the students do not really like games.

In terms of being interested in making a speaking video, 92,3 % of the students agree with the point. However, 7, 7 % of the students do not want to make a video as an assignment. Some questions should be concerned about the technology of making a video or the students' speaking skills.

The results prove that the PERMA model has been applied successfully in the context of teaching Business English. Almost all of the students find fun and happiness in the classroom. Therefore, they are motivated to take part in class activities, especially doing group work. When working in groups, they have a feeling of connectedness and support from their peers. Moreover, they can find a meaning or a purpose in their study, which contributes a lot to get their learning goals. However, the teacher should concern about what are the criteria the students really want to get besides the good results of the examinations. In terms of task engagement, the positive finding is that most of the students invest a special effort to understand the tasks and they enjoy playing games related to their lessons, which can enhance the students' learning performance and their well-being. However, there are some tasks or activities few students are not motivated to do. Based on that issue, the teacher should consider cognitive engagement, behavioural engagement and emotional engagement when designing the tasks and class activities during the learning process.

## Teacher's observation

Doing the real-life activities related to the business world, the students seem motivated to contribute to the lessons and they are enthusiastic to discuss in groups to find out the agreement among peers. The tasks may meet the students' needs because they provide the students a chance to do practical activities based on their knowledge about the major. They know how to prepare for their future jobs and how to apply the theory into the practice when they go to work. In fact, most of the students have a difficulty in applying for a job because they lack hands-on experience in the job or in their major. During the course, they are taught the topics related to *Career choices, Business sectors, Projects, Global Markets, Design and innovation, Safety and security, Customer service and Communication.* In addition, after being assigned to do

this kind of task, the students can improve their communication skills in terms of four language skills. Most of them achieve good results in the final examination after the course, and more students can find the part-time jobs as interns.

The whole class gets involved in taking part in designing games as well as playing games. There are some rewards given to the winners, so they have a purpose to make an effort in the competition. Before the game, they have to work in group to choose the vocabulary included in the game. They spend time reviewing the lesson they have learned and they can remember the words after playing. It is necessary for them to use the new words and the word partnerships in the business contexts. Each group is engaged in doing this kind of activity. They like the challenges and they feel happy when giving the correct answers. This makes the class environment more interesting and exciting.

Before making a speaking video, the students can choose the topic they are interested in to present in his or her own video. After that, they have to search for the information and apply what they have learned during the course in the speech. In the video, he can show his own ideas, arguments or solutions to the topic. Moreover, they have to practice speaking many times before recording. They also need help from the peers in the phase of preparation or recording if they are not good at using technology. They seem to make a special effort to produce finished products. All of the videos submitted to the teacher prove that the students understand the lessons and they can apply theory into practice to discuss or solve problems related to Business or Economics. They also show deep understanding about their specialised knowledge. Most of the students get good marks in terms of problem-solving skill, communication skill and interaction.

## 5. Conclusion

The researcher has applied TBLT and the PERMA model of flourishing in designing meaningful and interactive tasks and activities in teaching ESP. Data collected from the observation and the questionnaire proves that this model has brought many benefits to the students in terms of learning outcomes as well as positive emotions in the learning performance. Positive Education should be applied in schools with the aim of explicitly combining learners' academic goals and the promotion of their well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2019). This can bring the best practice teaching to encourage and support schools and individuals to flourish (Norrish, 2015). Positive education is thus the education combined by both traditional skills and happiness (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). The research points out that the factors of positive emotions play a significant role in language teaching, which can facilitate the learning process and foster a better learning environment. This model can be seen as the bringing of the well-being to both teachers and students. To

some extent, happiness can support the learners' academic goals with the relationship with their friends and the teacher. Each dimension of the PERMA enhances the learning performance and the students' well-being in different ways. To achieve this aim, the teacher should also consider the elements of task engagement. The results show more cognitive engagement, social engagement and affective engagement, particularly during the more complex tasks.

It is recommended that this model should be highlighted in all of the classes of different levels at University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam within the ESP contexts. The changes of curriculum, teaching skills, teacher education, and community involvement should be considered. More research should be carried out to discover different perspectives of this approach and to have a deeper understanding of how this method affects the students' English proficiency. The future study should also explore more activities centered on well-being in context of whole school communities.

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## Biodata

Ms Nguyen Thi Minh Ngoc has been teaching Business English at University of Economics, Ho Chi Minh City (UEH University) in Vietnam since 2006. She got an M.A degree in TESOL from Victoria University in Australia in 2002. Her research interests are teaching methodology and action research. She has had some publications in the International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning.