

Enhancing Conceptual Clarity and Professional Communication Through Team-Based Terminology Discussion: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of a structured team-based discussion activity designed to improve students' understanding of specific and business terminology in a higher education setting. A total of 60 students participated in the activity, out of which 48 students (n = 48) submitted their responses via Microsoft Forms. The study employed a descriptive survey methodology to analyze student perceptions across eight key parameters: overall experience, understanding of specific terminology, understanding of business terminology, conceptual clarity, real-world application, confidence in usage, active participation, and depth of exploration. Quantitative analysis of the Likert-scale responses revealed that more than 90% of students provided positive ratings across all parameters, with overall experience receiving a 100% high rating (4 or 5). The findings indicate that collaborative, discussion-based learning is highly effective in developing professional communication skills, conceptual clarity, and student engagement. These results have significant implications for instructional design in business communication and language education at the undergraduate level.

Keywords: Team-based learning, Business terminology, Collaborative learning, Professional communication, Conceptual clarity, Active learning, Higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary higher education, the ability to communicate effectively using domain-specific vocabulary is increasingly recognized as a critical professional competency. Business and industry-specific terminology forms the foundation of professional discourse, and students who lack proficiency in

such language may face significant challenges in workplace communication, academic performance, and career advancement (Nation, 2001).

Traditional lecture-based methods of vocabulary instruction have often been criticized for their passive nature and limited retention outcomes (Prince, 2004). Active learning approaches, and in particular collaborative or team-based learning (TBL), have emerged as powerful alternatives that promote deeper cognitive engagement, peer learning, and the practical application of concepts (Michaelsen & Sweet, 2008).

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a structured team discussion activity titled "Team Discussion on Specific & Business Terminology," conducted with undergraduate students. The activity was designed to encourage collaborative exploration of business and industry-related terms through discussion, peer explanation, and real-world contextualization.

The central research questions guiding this study are:

- (i) To what extent does team-based discussion improve students' understanding of specific and business terminology?
- (ii) Does collaborative discussion enhance conceptual clarity and confidence in professional communication?
- (iii) What is the level of active participation and peer-driven exploration during the activity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative learning has been extensively studied as a pedagogical strategy in higher education. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory posits that learning is fundamentally social, occurring through interactions with peers within the Zone of Proximal Development. Team-based activities provide precisely such an environment, enabling learners to scaffold each other's understanding of complex concepts.

Michaelsen, Knight, and Fink (2004) formalized Team-Based Learning as a structured instructional strategy with four essential elements: groups, accountability, feedback, and assignment design. Research consistently demonstrates that TBL improves content mastery, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication skills compared to traditional instruction (Haidet et al., 2012).

In the domain of language and terminology learning, Nation (2001) emphasizes the importance of contextualized vocabulary instruction, arguing that learners retain terminology more effectively when it is encountered in meaningful, authentic contexts. Business English and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) literature further supports the integration of real-world language tasks in professional communication education (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Several studies have reported significant learning gains from peer discussion in terminology comprehension. Lou et al. (1996) found in a meta-analysis that small-group learning consistently produced higher achievement outcomes than individual learning.

Despite this body of evidence, few studies have quantitatively evaluated short-duration, structured team discussion activities using systematic student feedback instruments. This study contributes to filling that gap.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey research is appropriate when the objective is to systematically describe the characteristics, perceptions, or responses of a defined population at a specific point in time (Creswell, 2014). The data were collected immediately following the completion of the activity to capture students' fresh perceptions.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

A total of 60 undergraduate students enrolled in a Business Communication course participated in the team discussion activity. Of these, 48 students (80%) submitted their responses through an online survey instrument administered via Microsoft Forms. The response rate of 80% is considered robust for survey-based educational research (Baruch & Holtom, 2008).

3.3 THE ACTIVITY

Students were divided into small teams and assigned specific business and industry-related terminology topics. Each team engaged in a structured discussion covering the meaning, contextual application, and real-world relevance of their assigned terms. Teams were encouraged to explore examples beyond the provided material and to collaboratively clarify any conceptual doubts. At the conclusion of the activity, responses were collected and analyzed systematically.

3.4 INSTRUMENT

The data collection instrument consisted of an eight-item structured questionnaire. Seven items employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess specific dimensions of the activity's effectiveness. One item used a 5-point rating scale (1 = Poor to 5 = Excellent) to measure overall experience. The questionnaire was administered digitally via Microsoft Forms immediately following the activity.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Frequency distributions and percentage calculations were performed for all items. Responses rated 4 (Agree/Good) and 5 (Strongly Agree/Excellent) were classified as positive responses, in line with standard Likert analysis practices. Neutral (3), negative (2), and strongly negative (1) responses were analyzed separately to identify any areas requiring improvement.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents a comprehensive summary of student responses across all eight parameters evaluated in the study.

Table 1: Summary of Student Responses (n = 48)

Parameter	Strongly Agree / Excellent (5)	Agree / Good (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	SD (1)	Positive %
Overall Experience	33 (68.75%)	15 (31.25%)	0	0	0	100.00%
Understanding of Specific Terminology	19 (39.58%)	27 (56.25%)	1 (2.08%)	1 (2.08%)	0	95.83%
Understanding of Business Terminology	20 (41.67%)	27 (56.25%)	1 (2.08%)	0	0	97.92%
Conceptual Clarity Through Discussion	19 (39.58%)	26 (54.17%)	3 (6.25%)	0	0	93.75%
Connection to Real-World Applications	19 (39.58%)	26 (54.17%)	2 (4.17%)	1 (2.08%)	0	93.75%
Confidence in Using Terminology	18 (37.50%)	26 (54.17%)	4 (8.33%)	0	0	91.67%
Active Participation by Team Members	20 (41.67%)	23 (47.92%)	1 (2.08%)	4 (8.33%)	0	89.59%
Sharing of Examples Beyond Material	24 (50.00%)	21 (43.75%)	3 (6.25%)	0	0	93.75%

4.1 OVERALL EXPERIENCE

All 48 respondents rated their experience as either Good (4) or Excellent (5), resulting in a 100% positive response rate. Specifically, 33 students (68.75%) rated the activity as Excellent and 15 students (31.25%) as Good. This exceptional outcome is consistent with prior research indicating that active, learner-centred tasks generate high levels of student satisfaction and engagement (Freeman et al., 2014).

4.2 UNDERSTANDING OF SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY

A total of 46 students (95.83%) indicated positive improvement in their understanding of specific terminology, with 19 students strongly agreeing (39.58%) and 27 agreeing (56.25%). Only one student (2.08%) remained neutral and one (2.08%) disagreed. These results affirm that structured peer discussion is highly effective for vocabulary acquisition in specialized domains, corroborating findings from Nation (2001).

4.3 UNDERSTANDING OF BUSINESS TERMINOLOGY

This parameter recorded the second-highest positive response rate at 97.92% (n = 47). Twenty students (41.67%) strongly agreed and 27 (56.25%) agreed that their understanding of business terminology improved. Only one student (2.08%) remained neutral. This outcome aligns with the communicative approach to ESP instruction, where contextual, collaborative engagement is recognized as superior to rote learning (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

4.4 CONCEPTUAL CLARITY THROUGH TEAM DISCUSSION

93.75% of students (n = 45) indicated that team discussions deepened their conceptual clarity, with 19 students strongly agreeing (39.58%) and 26 agreeing (54.17%). Three students (6.25%) remained neutral,

which may reflect individual differences in collaborative learning preferences. These findings support Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural framework, which emphasizes peer interaction as a mechanism for conceptual development.

4.5 CONNECTION TO REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS

93.75% of respondents positively affirmed their team's ability to connect terminology with real-world examples (Strongly Agree: 39.58%, Agree: 54.17%). One student (2.08%) disagreed, and two (4.17%) remained neutral. The capacity to contextualize vocabulary in authentic scenarios is a key indicator of deep learning and transferable professional competency (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

4.6 CONFIDENCE IN USING TERMINOLOGY

91.67% of students reported increased confidence in using business terminology following the activity (Strongly Agree: 37.50%, Agree: 54.17%). Four students (8.33%) remained neutral, indicating that confidence-building may require additional sustained practice for a minority of learners. These results are consistent with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, which posits that successful collaborative performance enhances individuals' belief in their own competence.

4.7 ACTIVE PARTICIPATION BY TEAM MEMBERS

89.59% of students affirmed that all members of their team participated actively (Strongly Agree: 41.67%, Agree: 47.92%). Four students (8.33%) disagreed. This was the lowest positive response rate across all parameters, suggesting that group dynamics and individual accountability warrant continued attention in instructional design. Michaelsen and Sweet (2008) similarly note that inter-group participation disparities are a common challenge in TBL implementation.

4.8 SHARING OF ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES AND EXPLORATION

93.75% of respondents confirmed that their team shared examples beyond the provided material (Strongly Agree: 50.00%, Agree: 43.75%), with three students (6.25%) remaining neutral. The high proportion of strong agreement (50%) suggests that the activity successfully stimulated intrinsic motivation and intellectual curiosity, key attributes of deep-approach learners (Marton & Säljö, 1976).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide compelling empirical evidence for the effectiveness of structured team-based discussion as a pedagogical tool in higher education business communication contexts. Across all eight parameters, positive response rates consistently exceeded 89%, with five of the eight dimensions exceeding 93%.

The near-universal high rating for overall experience (100%) suggests that the activity format itself was engaging and perceived as valuable by students, which is a necessary precondition for effective learning (Keller, 1987). The particularly strong performance on understanding of business terminology (97.92%) and sharing of examples (93.75%) indicates that collaborative, peer-driven learning environments are especially conducive to vocabulary acquisition and deep exploration.

The slightly lower positive response rate for active participation (89.59%) — the only parameter to receive any disagreement responses — highlights an inherent challenge of group-based learning: equitable contribution. These results are consistent with the social loafing literature (Latané et al., 1979), which identifies uneven participation as a recurring concern in collaborative settings. Future iterations of this activity may benefit from structured individual accountability mechanisms, such as individual readiness assurance tests (iRATs) as advocated by Michaelsen et al. (2004).

Overall, the consistent pattern of high positive ratings across conceptual, affective, and participatory dimensions confirms the multi-dimensional effectiveness of the team discussion approach. This aligns with the construct of 'active learning' as defined by Bonwell and Eison (1991): learning that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that a structured team-based discussion activity is a highly effective pedagogical tool for enhancing undergraduate students' understanding of specific and business terminology. With consistently high positive response rates across all dimensions — including conceptual clarity (93.75%), confidence in language use (91.67%), and real-world application (93.75%) — the findings affirm the value of collaborative, active learning over passive instructional methods.

The activity's success in stimulating peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, contextual vocabulary learning, and professional communication skills underscores its potential as a replicable model for language and business communication instruction in higher education. To further optimize outcomes, instructors are encouraged to supplement team discussions with individual accountability mechanisms to address participation disparities.

Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of repeated TBL interventions on vocabulary retention and professional communication competency, as well as comparisons across different disciplinary contexts and student cohorts.

7. LIMITATIONS

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample size of 48 respondents, while sufficient for descriptive analysis, limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the cross-sectional survey design captures perceptions at a single point in time and does not assess long-term retention or transfer of learning. Third, self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias. Fourth, the absence of a control group precludes causal inference. Future studies employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs with larger, more diverse samples are recommended to validate and extend these findings.

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