

## ABSTRACT

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**Name:** Ernest Michael Seely

**Dissertation Title:** An Investigation of the Transactional Competence of International University Students Studying Through English as a Medium of Instruction

**Dissertation Advisor:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Joseph Foley

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Within international universities, learners' achievements can largely depend on their ability to function within the paradigm of studying through English as a medium of instruction (EMI). As a result of this paradigm, the achievements of reading and writing have long been regarded as the benchmarks of progress, while the assessment of listening and speaking skills have often been considered arbitrary and subjective. However, for students, the necessity of these two skills becomes abundantly apparent as they try to navigate a world in which English may be their only means of communication across linguistic boundaries. Such boundaries become even more difficult to traverse when the communication becomes transactional and requires varying tasks to be given, comprehended, and or performed.

The conceptual framework of this dissertation regards transactional competence as an extension of interactional competence, which is also a pillar of communicative competence. Through this framework, the purpose of this research is to better understand communicative competence by examining transactional competence via the interrelationship of language-related episodes and the use of communication strategies (CSs) with regards to task-based communication by international university students. By developing a Model of Transactional

Competence, the study explores how task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be used in the explicit instruction of achievement based communication strategies. By doing so, the research posits the relevance of transactional competence within task-based communication by analyzing the directive function of language and its negotiation through exploring the effects that such strategies have on communicative performance where the participants are required to facilitate understanding in order to achieve specific outcomes.

The methodology uses transactional pre/post-test assessments based on Yule's (1997) theory of Referential Communication. The tests were designed to elicit the illocutionary act of directives, the negotiation of Language Related Episodes (LREs) via Communication Strategies, and the resulting test answers. The twelve-week program was interposed by the instruction of prescribed communication strategies using TBLT. To ensure English communication, ten international university students of four different ethnicities participated. The investigation focused on achievement strategies such as asking for clarification, miming, and comprehension checks while maintenance strategies such as expressing confirmation were also examined.

Results found that empowering the participants to be able to maintain communication played the most significant role in improving task-based outcomes. While there were no significant differences in the number of occurrence of LREs, the tests demonstrated that the achievement strategies used resulted in significant improvements in test scores and the participants' willingness to communicate. The explicit instruction of CSs through TBLT also demonstrates that the opportunities for further research and applications exist within the specific contexts of other faculties who use English as a medium of instruction where transactional competence is crucial to their students' future employment.