



Importance of Integrating Effective Teaching Methods in Business English Classroom

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Abstract

The paper will highlight the importance of integrating effective teaching methods in teaching English for Specific Purposes, in particular Business English. Based on the survey, where 48 BE instructors participated from different countries, the article will demonstrate the significance of Lexical Approach, Task-Based and Project-based Learning by evaluating the outcomes of integrating them in teaching practice and beyond. The results once again confirmed the hypothesis. The survey consisted of both open and close-ended questions and aimed at voicing the opinion of BE Course Instructors globally. The target audience was exposed to the above-mentioned teaching methods. At the same time, the survey provides recommendations for beginner BE Lecturers on how to ensure maximal approximation to the authentic environment via practicing most useful teaching methods and making the learning process more result-driven,

engaging and enjoyable.

Keywords: Teaching methods, Business English, Lexical approach, Task-based learning, Project-based learning

Introduction

It goes without saying that economic globalization, on the background of English language privilege, due to its international status, expanded the need for Business English teaching.

All the leading global organizations like the United Nations, World Bank, Commonwealth of Nations, etc. use English as their primary language of choice. This, once again, emphasizes the importance of the English language as a lingua franca not to reflect the diversity represented in the membership. Since these organizations use English as their vehicular language to solve various world problems, it would be logical to believe that English is not only the present, but also the future of world communication. Nowadays, every professional, who is eager to succeed, needs to possess Business English skills, regardless of their occupation. Therefore, teaching this subject to students effectively is vital. In this rapidly changing world, it is impossible to stay on top of the latest developments in different industries without access to the Internet and information which is mostly in English.

All things considered, there is a rising demand for Business English teaching, therefore, it is highly relevant and important to research the best possible methods and approaches for Business English classes.

Business English learners vary from young students to adult learners of no age limit. Adult learners know exactly what they want from the course and come with high expectations, deadlines, pre-determined goals and tend to be more self-directed, committed, goal-oriented, and focused with established learning styles.

It is great to have motivated learners in the class that are eager to learn; however, it comes with its challenges for the teacher of English to children. Different from children, adult learners are more detail-oriented and expect high professionalism from their teacher. Business English teachers should understand both the rewarding and challenging nature of the teaching process. Therefore, teachers need to come up with the best teaching approaches and stick to the most effective teaching methods to make their classes inspiring, enjoyable and most importantly, result-driven.

Literature Review

English as a lingua franca (ELF) has increasingly been a subject of interest for Applied Linguistics over the last 20 years or so. How ELF facilitates intercultural communication is closely related to today's global

communication. There are indications in English demographic trends that "the constant movement of people across the world has led to the usage of English for intercultural communication (Graddol 2006). Thus, the view that "today's ideal speaker lives in a heterogeneous society (stratified along increasingly globalized lines) and has to negotiate with different people representing all sorts of power" (Mufwene 2007: 63) is validated. English speakers in multilingual and multicultural environments have to communicate with other speakers from a variety of language and culture origins, who speak the language more or less proficiently. Should the English used in such situations be that of its native speakers or that of non-native speakers? Moreover, this status of English as the lingua franca of our time poses relevant implications for English language teaching (ELT) and learning.

When we talk about the importance of English in the international surroundings we should bear in mind the recent emergence of BELF - Business English as Lingua. Susanne Ehrenreich (2010) highlights the similarity between English as Lingua Franca (ELF) and BELF as both of them are used by non-native speakers of English during interpersonal interactions. At the same time, the authors note that the main distinction of BELF from ELF is 'Business'. Business ELF is characterized by the following features: its domain of usage, i.e. global business; the role of its users (business professionals) and the overall goal of the interactions held in ELF (getting the job done, or business as usual). All these characteristics are closely linked with the expertise in the field of business, be it any type of business, i.e. academic, international, medical, media, maritime or in general business in which it bridges any gap of miscommunication and moreover, it contributes to effective communication for business via English as the most powerful tool of communication among professionals on the globe. In fact, it is of utmost importance for professionals of any field to be equipped with proper knowledge of business combined with BELF as a means of global communication with multicultural competence.

As we already saw from the importance of professional competence of BELF, we need to integrate BELF in our teaching curriculum, as the graduates of Higher Educational institutions are naturally supposed to be using BELF when communicating for business, be it academic or general business. With this purpose, Grigol Robakidze University as well other HEIS in Georgia and abroad (i.e. Italy) offers students both courses in general English, that are compulsory, and optional classes in Business English.

With this in mind, when teaching Business English which is supposed to be ESP, i.e. considering teaching English with the subject matter, it is of paramount importance to engage the learners in efficient and effective

communicative activities during all lesson stages and beyond the classroom. What do we mean by effective communicative activities? How can they be effectively integrated when teaching Business English? What should we as BELF teachers target at? Which methods can be used in Business English Classroom to support second language acquisition in tandem with the subject? What EFL methods can best suit BELF learners and teachers' expectations? Which methods should be selected out of already existing ready-made methods offered by the course books? Would it help to go beyond the course books and try to utilize real-life situations and simulations in our BELF classroom?

These are the research questions, which we intend to answer after presenting modern EFL teaching methods, characterizing their advantages and disadvantages for achieving specific goals in BE classroom, surveying students and instructors of Business English participating in virtual exchange Business English Class during Spring Term 2022 at Grigol Robakidze University and Azerbaijan Pedagogical Universities. The aim of the above-mentioned virtual learning experience was to engage teachers of Business English from Georgia and Azerbaijan and also foreign fellow instructors together with their students into meaningful and real-life interaction by using BELF. The methods used by all this research authors will be presented below together with the activities provided at each series of lessons after which the findings of the survey distributed among the above-mentioned groups will be analyzed to highlight the importance of integrating effective teaching methods, i.e. TBL, Lexical Approach, etc in Business English classroom and provide further recommendations for continued application in face-to-face classroom.

Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Since it is preferred to utilize authentic materials in teaching business English, the Task-Based approach is one of the top methods to use in teaching Business Students. What is Task-based learning and what are the benefits of using it in Business English?

Task-based learning, which involves student-to-student interaction, means working in small groups to perform particular tasks. The activity that is guided by the teacher involves all four skills. For example, this might include sales campaigns, making a phone call to make a reservation, making a short movie, making an advertisement, visiting the doctor, etc.

The main advantage of this approach stands in the ability to prepare students for real world and genuine communication. Participants develop language flexibility needed at the workplace, that is new if compared to the use of pre-taught materials. They are "forced" to brainstorm their knowledge in their respective fields and imagine themselves as if they were at work and

performing tasks with their colleagues. This activity already provides a purpose for the language usage and focuses students' efforts on the needed area which makes the language acquisition process not only more effective, but also more enjoyable. After all, the basic aim of a task is not only to communicate, but to accomplish the outcome while focusing first and foremost on pragmatic meaning. (Ahmed & Bidin, 2016) TBL also asserts that the language is best acquired when focus is on meaning instead of grammatical structure, as language is a highly interpersonal enterprise. (Ahmed & Bidin, 2016) The form vs. meaning debate is an ongoing debate, but if we consider the student-centered nature that is a priority for Business English class, then we can obviously admit the advantage of "meaning-based" focus. Even though TBL focuses on acquiring language through constructive communication, interactions and negotiation, it also allows students to practice grammar via using authentic language. (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Of course, TBL has its flaws. It is hard to motivate students to take the task seriously and be actively engaged in the learning process of each stage. However, this can be overcome by the teacher's ability to raise students' curiosity and establish credibility. TBL is itself an answer to this disadvantage, as following on "the Expectancy-Value Theory" on motivation, people are motivated to perform things that they perceive to have a value and at which they are prone to succeed (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). TBL activities are connected with students' chosen fields, therefore they should be more inspired to perform them. Furthermore, experiential learning vs. academic one is argued to improve motivation and awareness of language skills in addition to providing support to develop essential language ability (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

To conclude, we could consider TBL as one of the most effective approaches in teaching Business English. Richardson and Schmidt perfectly sum up this advantage in a sentence: "TBL is a more effective way of learning a language since it provides a purpose for the use and learning of a language other than simply learning language items for their own sake." (Richards & Schmidt, 2010) Hence, TBL is a perfect fit for the student-centered, result-driven nature of Business English Classroom.

Lexical approach

The lexical approach is a unique teaching method that is based on the idea that language is made up of lexical units or "chunks" rather than standard grammatical structure. These chunks are formed by fixed phrases or words that have a habitual juxtaposition between each other. This was a method developed in 1993 by the linguist Michael Lewis in his written work titled "The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward". The

concept is that, rather than having students memorize vocabulary lists, they would analyze useful phrases. It is primarily based on the idea that certain words will trigger a reaction to a particular set of words. In doing so, students would be able to understand which words share a connection. Students are expected to learn the grammar structure through the recognition of the patterns of the words. Lewis states that “The Lexical Approach implies a decreased role for sentence grammar, at least until post-intermediate levels. In contrast, it involves an increased role for word grammar (collocation and cognates) and text grammar (suprasentential features)” (Lewis 1993, ppg. 3).

Lexical approach provides many benefits while implementing it in Business English courses. The lexical approach speeds up language acquisition. The use of “chunking” is actually a technique that helps enhance one's memory and receptive skills in grammar (Coady & Huckin, 2012). As mentioned before, by assembling a common set of words and treating them as one larger whole, the brain is allowed to process greater amounts of information. The method of chunking makes it easier to teach a wide range of information quickly. The nature of the lexical approach is communicative and reflects how native speakers actually communicate among themselves. Reciprocating this in the classroom would lead to better results of students sounding natural and fluent.

The lexical approach also has a practical usage that can be applied in real world situations. Students get fixed phrases and expressions that can be used in daily conversations with native speakers. In the case of Business English, this works well for the many that will work in a professional setting later in life. Constant practice of the use of these phrases prepares the students to naturally engage and respond to others in an English speaking workplace.

Lexical Approach also addresses the problem of how we successfully get students to memorize the large number of terms, idioms and phrases within the subject of Business English and of English for Specific Purposes in general. This problem can be resolved with the help of the Lexical Approach. It focuses on language functioning, how we learn and remember it, and how we use it. The main idea of the approach is to show how grammar and vocabulary interact through multiple representations in different contexts (Rubtsova, 2020). Using a lexical approach allows us to focus on grammar structure and vocabulary that really count so they don't feel overwhelmed by the plethora of terms in Business English.

Project- Based Learning

Similar to that of Tasked-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning is another active learning teaching method that educates students through the

explorations of real-world scenarios and challenges. It's a teaching method in which students engage in a project for an extended period of time to critically assess and solve authentic complex questions, challenges, and problems. Project based learning differs from an ordinary project because it makes the project the unit of the course, rather than being a short project for a teaching unit. It can be considered as a versatile vehicle for fully integrated language and content learning (Beckett & Miller, 2006). This also allows room for diversity within the activities, since students get the opportunity to share their culture, interest, and thought process with each other. With that being said, PBL offers many advantages when teaching courses such as Business English.

Similar to that of Task-based learning, project-based learning helps prepare students for professional workplaces. These project activities allow them to hone their skills in project planning, decision making, team building, and time management. It increases motivation and productivity within the classroom. PBL has the capacity to keep students interested and motivated while they are learning due to its context-driven nature, versatility, and practicality. These conditions are necessary ingredients for success in EFL and ESL teaching and learning processes (Velásquez, 2012). PBL connects learning with reality as students retain more knowledge and skills when they are engaged in stimulating projects. Unlike traditional teaching methods where students are taught to memorize facts word for word, these project activities utilize real world situations allowing students to harness their creative thinking skills. The result will lead to students reacting and speaking more naturally in the language. In addition, project-based learning provides collaborative opportunities to construct knowledge. Collaborative learning allows students to bounce ideas off each other, voice their own opinions, and negotiate solutions, all skills that will be necessary in the workplace (Velásquez, 2012).

The downside of Project-based learning is that it can be time consuming. The teacher must be prepared to use a significant amount of their time to thoughtfully plan out a project idea that will be impactful to the students. Another disadvantage is that PBL can be quite intimidating for some teachers as it is more student-centered rather than teacher-centered. The teacher's role is to pose the driving questions and to facilitate each phase of the project while the students are the ones in direct control of how they would want to approach the topic. Teachers might be afraid that students will struggle to keep up to pace with each phase or it might be unbalanced, because some students might have a lack of knowledge on the present task. To resolve this issue, teachers need to remember to actively monitor students' performance through each step and stimulate discussions when possible. As they feel more comfortable by themselves, students will realize

that PBL is teaching skills in self-assessment and responsibility of their own learning.

It is of particular importance to analyze and highlight the responses on the open-ended questions, which evidently showed a very interesting approach of Business English instructors in Georgia, Azerbaijan and abroad .

Survey

To highlight the importance of integrating effective teaching strategies in the Business English classroom, a mixed type of survey was developed, consisting of close and open-ended questions. The survey was distributed in an online form among BE instructors from different countries, starting from the teachers initially involved in virtual exchange classes from Grigol Robakidze University and Azerbaijan Pedagogical University, who have delivered virtual classes to Georgian and Azerbaijani students during Spring 2022. Other respondents were Business English Instructors invited via IATEFL BESIG, Partner HEI of GRUNI in Italy , the University of Catania, as well as other social and personal professional networks. The link of the survey is as follows:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPKMv1OVi2Fj4Oe0p4c0f0TmGLDlxpzPLv6DVB_4DcskIIVA/viewform?usp=sf_link

Discussion of Survey results

The total number of respondents was 48. As mentioned above, the survey was filled out by Business English Instructors with the following nationally: Georgian, Azerbaijani, US, Canadian, Greek, Italian, Polish, Scottish, Turkish, Ukrainian, American /French.

The majority of the surveyed ones (74.4%) strongly agreed with the statement that Business English is a key to career success for the professionals of all areas. This means that emergence of BELF is indeed supported with the findings of a small-scale survey. The majority of the respondents (25%) strongly agreed, whereas 29.2% agreed with the statement that Business English must be a compulsory subject in higher education, which shows its growing demand in the corporate surrounding as well as among the students and instructors of higher educational institutions in a number of countries covered with the survey.

An absolute majority of BE teachers (39.3%) strongly agree and 43.7% agree with the statement that Business English can be found difficult to teach without maximal approximation to authenticity, which at the same time supports the idea of integrating authentic materials while teaching Business English with the effective methods and teaching strategies reviewed in this article. Therefore, we should remember that authenticity can be best achieved with properly selected methods and strategies. Hence,

on the statement 'Effective teaching methods should focus on developing both receptive (reading/listening) and productive (speaking/writing) skills in the classroom - an absolutely majority of the respondents (74/5%) strongly agreed, whereas 21.3% agreed, which highlights the importance of boosting both skills, i.e. receptive and productive in the process of second language acquisition.

An absolute majority of the respondents also (75%) strongly agreed, whereas 16.7% agreed with the next statement - Selecting right teaching methods is essential for achieving specific goals of a Business English classroom, which once again demonstrates the need for making a reasonable decision when selecting proper teaching methods in a Business English classroom.

It was very interesting to analyze the results of BE instructors on the role of different teaching methods, i.e. Lexical Approaches, Task-Based Learning and Project-Based learning in Business English Classroom. 35.4% of the respondents agreed and 50 % strongly agreed with the statement that Lexical Approach should be used as one of the key methods when teaching subject-relevant vocabulary in BE classroom, which shows primary function of integrating LW into business English classroom to deal with special terminology characteristic for the field.

45.8% of the respondents strongly agreed and 50 % agreed with the statement that - Task Based Learning (TBL) should be used as one of the key methods for boosting productive/receptive skills in BE classroom which is more than understandable due to the advantages listed in the literature review of the latter method and once again it validates very practical, useful and effective features of TBL for all BE learners.

45.8% of the respondents strongly agreed, 35.4 % agreed and 18.8 % of the surveyed showed a neutral attitude towards the last statement - Project based learning should be used as one of the key methods for boosting productive/receptive skills in the BE classroom. This variety of responses can be justified with the fact that PBL indeed as highlighted in the Literature Review part needs more preparation, experience, and evidently efforts, though worth taking.

On the open-ended question: What are the advantages of Lexical Approach, TBL and PBL from your BE teaching experience - a wide range of responses were obtained, which shows the individual approach of BE teachers towards each method. As we see from the responses, Lexical approach "It gives students necessary vocabulary, TBL helps students to continue learning ESP based on tasks, and PBL is very effective in terms of generating outcomes.'

According to other respondents 'TBL is very useful as it reflects real-life world. Lexical approach also helps us use pre-taught materials and

phrases in communication’. One of the respondents even cannot hide admiration towards LA stating that ‘lexical approach works wonders as it provides logical connections among words, and learners are very keen on getting information as systematically as possible’. Some of the teachers directly show their preference for this method – ‘PBL is the best method for me. It focuses on practices which are taken from real-life situations and which undoubtedly will be useful for students in the future, however, I have applied TBL many times, which has more language focus and in fact, all of them are necessary and timely in teaching Business English’. Though, other teachers also try to display pros and cons of all the above mentioned methods, stating that ‘As all teaching methods, Lexical Approach has some advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages from my BE teaching experience are: It encourages the process of noticing the lexical item, allows the brain to process greater amounts of information, and speeds up language acquisition., in addition it teaches communication. They break with the grammar translation method’. So, as we see BE teachers admit the advantageous nature of LA in comparison to other methods, as it enables the learner to have access to ‘Student-centered lessons; Closeness to authenticity, practicability’, which is very important when teaching Business English.

When asked about advantages of each method, one expresses her/his inclination towards ‘Lexical approach - learning vocabulary and then being able to implement it in some specific professional situations and in a variety of contexts is the starting point of ongoing professional communication. Implementation of TBL and BBL will enable our students to make their future professional communication effective, by being able to implement their knowledge of business vocabulary in the process of problem-solution. Thanks to TBL and BBL they will be able to concentrate on and solve the whole variety of problems typical for their everyday professional activity’ – which is really understandable and well-justified.

Another respondent writes that ‘Lexical Approach - It speeds up language acquisition. TBL - It is very conducive to group learning. PBL - Encourages student self-assessment of learning. They improve teamwork, collaboration and creative thinking’.

One of the BE teachers uses ‘Lexical Approach to teach Reading. I have been teaching for over 30 years and TBL and PBL are the best ways to teach Business English’. According to the same respondent, when teaching BE it is very important to take the experience in the field of business or work in Business before teaching into account . It makes a big difference. So many FAKE Business English teachers out there now’. This shows that being a BE teacher really requires expertise in both language teaching methodology and subject matter.

According to one of the respondents when commenting on the three methods ‘all three allow us to paint a realistic picture of how things work in real business life. As a language coach supporting BE for many clients, I see the more independence and control learners are 'allowed' and the more decisions learners may make, and the more control they have over input and output, the higher motivation and development will be. In combination, they make an unbeatable method of teaching Business English’.

According to another experienced BE teacher, who ‘used all three in various degrees during his 25-year career depending on the students he used more TBL and PBL with groups’. According to the same author, LA: prioritizes vocabulary and provides a varied focus to help raise students’ awareness of how words work; TBL provides meaningful and usually authentic-like (& usually enjoyable) practice to help prepare students for the real world and PBL: I rarely use this. They are all result-oriented and provide measurable skills development; Authentic materials, vocabulary specific to their needs, authentic situations, collaborative skills are strongly developed and motivational because they are truly useful. Terminology teaching is essential because it is linked to credibility in business life. TBL is essential because it is linked to real life tasks. So, as we see the same authors agree on teaching with LA for better acquisition of the special language and TBL for integrating real-life tasks in the BE classroom.

Other respondents state that ‘Lexical approach is fundamental both in formal and informal contexts, as it is consciousness raising. TBL helps students use their skills at their current level, developing language through its use. I have no experience of project-based teaching. Better approximation of real usage than g+v TBL & PBL also allow professionals to leverage their real world experience to support language learning. Their common advantages can be considered: learner independence, authenticity and student centeredness; motivation of all stakeholders, relevance and applicability of results’.

Some respondents give the following characterization of teaching methods: ‘LA: boosting vocabulary, fluency; TB: hands-on, effective; PB: complex, collaborative. These approaches are student centered’.

As we see, all surveyed BE teachers are well acquainted with all three teaching methods, especially LA and TBL and use them regularly in their teaching practices with a variety of reasons well-justified in the responses.

On the final open-ended question - Which of the above-mentioned teaching method(s) was/were most useful and effective in your experience? The following responses were obtained: ‘TBL; PBL; All of them’; ‘I love using Lexical Approach at the initial stage _ presentation stage of the lesson whereas TBL can be used effectively during practice and production stage.

PBL is very effective for longer period tasks'. 'lexical approach'. Another BE teacher states 'there's no single way to teach English and, in fact, there have been many popular approaches over the years. Which is the best? It depends on the level of English of your students. By asking questions and solving problems, with the teacher as a mere learning facilitator, student motivation and participation in tasks and projects are thought to increase. So called -an active learning style is best suited for interactive classrooms, which helps the student gain knowledge'.

Others write that 'TBL is one of the most effective methods'.

Others vote for 'Task based and project based teaching'. 'The Lexical approach'; 'Pbl'. 'All and each of them'.

For others, 'PBL seems to be the most useful in my experience because it is a self-directed method that allows the student's freedom to be creative yet at the same time prepares them for real-life scenarios'.

'Depends on context and needs analysis'. 'I think TBL and PBL were the most useful and effective methods in my professional life since I have been working at a multinational organization for a long time'.

'TBL and PBL'; 'Lexical Approach with Projects thrown in'. 'PBL and TBL' 'All three in combination'; Project based M'. 'TBL with a big dose of vocab and typical expressions'; 'I mostly use TBL in my classes'; 'LA'. 'all three of them'; TBL, Lexical Approach'; 'Lexical approach, TBL'.

'I use them all in parallel - they work well together. TBL first, then Lexical Approach for input and feedback, and PBL for extended exploration'. 'Lexical approach'.

'A mix according to specific needs of the individuals/groups being taught'. 'TBL and PBL'; 'LA and TB'. 'PB is hard to implement in a corporate environment in the frame of a language course'.

'I believe all of them would be extremely useful'; 'Lexical Approach', 'TBL, Lexical Approach'.

'TBL allows students to be fully immersed in the lexicon of a subject, which boosts confidence in writing and oral skills'.

As we see from the replies provided by 41 respondents, all of them have individual preference when selecting each method, though it is noteworthy that the majority of them show preference towards LA and TBL, though more experienced teachers also vote for PBL. This once again highlights that all of the surveyed BE teachers have made a good usage of them for more effective BE classes in the teaching experience.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that due to growing demand for Business English at the watershed of the new millennium, a good mastery of BELF is necessary in order to succeed in workplace communication globally and

locally. At the same time, due to a wide range of Business English learners from young students to adult learners of no age limit it is important for BE instructors to identify the need of each category, seek for most applicable effective teaching methods for this very category and respond to them in an efficient and timely manner. Some adult learners know exactly what they want from the course and come with high expectations, deadlines, pre-determined goals and tend to be more self-directed, committed, goal-oriented, and focused with established learning styles. Whereas, younger learners, especially teenagers, may not be in the same situation and can afford spending more time being engaged in the activities offered by BE teachers via selecting the most effective teaching methods as discussed above.

Based on the findings of the survey and analyzing the input from BE teachers at GRUNI and Azerbaijan Pedagogical University delivering joint Virtual Classes in BE, as well as more experienced educators of BE from abroad we could once again highlight that Business English is a key to career success for the professionals of all areas. At the same time, survey outcomes enabled us, BE teachers, to raise the issue of adding BE among compulsory disciplines due to growing demand for BELF. It is noteworthy that the survey validated the hypothesis teaching Business English can be facilitated with maximal approximation to authenticity, i.e. application of real-life examples, case studies, situations and scenarios can definitely contribute to effective acquisition and practice of the target vocabulary by producing practical solutions related to the field of business.

It is very important to remember, as BE teachers, to use a versatility of methods targeting at developing both receptive and productive skills in a business English classroom, which was unanimously supported by an absolute majority of BE teachers. Besides, an absolute majority of respondents strongly agree on the necessity of selecting right teaching methods for achieving specific goals of the Business English classroom, which is also supported with the responses of open ended questions in the qualitative part of the survey. And finally, BE teachers participating in the survey all admit that all the discussed methods - Lexical Approach, Task-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning should be used as key methods when teaching Business English depending on the primary and subsidiary goals of the lessons, i.e. teaching subject-relevant vocabulary, boosting productive/receptive skills in BE classroom.

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