

Oral Proficiency in Higher Education: A Comprehensive Examination of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) for ESP Students

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ABSTRACT

There have been various conceptualizations about the implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in the context of English language teaching. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been proposed as a potentially efficacious approach for instructing English as a second language (ESL) in Asian settings, such as Indonesia. The present study aimed to investigate the optimal implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT) at higher education students in ESP classroom. A cohort comprising seventy ESP students pursuing a degree in the Accounting Study Program participated as research subjects. This research used a descriptive quantitative research method. The results show that the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) into the teaching of speaking skills resulted in beneficial results with regard to students in ESP classrooms. The findings of this study indicate a statistically significant increase in the mean scores of oral English proficiencies among students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, as seen by the comparison between pretest and post-test scores. This study can be implemented in providing opportunities for students to engage in spoken language practice rather than learning sessions primarily focused on the explicit instruction of grammatical rules and ESP students' comprehensibility. This study can be applied in the TBLT approach in the ESP classroom setting for comprehensibility in EFL students' oral English.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of English language education is to equip students with the necessary skills to effectively communicate in English (Rinantanti et al., 2017; Duong & Nguyen, 2021;

Sujarwo et al., 2023). One strategy for achieving the learning objective involves assigning students with tasks to do. A task refers to a specific activity that an individual engages in either for personal reasons or to fulfil the needs of others (Somawati et al., 2018). These activities can be performed voluntarily or in exchange for some form of compensation. Examples of tasks include painting a fence, assisting with dressing a child, completing a form, purchasing footwear, making travel arrangements, borrowing a book from a library, undergoing a driving examination, composing a written correspondence, measuring the weight of a patient, organizing mail, reserving accommodations at a hotel, issuing a check, locating a specific street address, and aiding an individual in crossing a road.

In recent times, the English Language has experienced significant adoption within the realms of business sectors and industries (Leeming, 2019; Rinantanti et al., 2019; Farida Febriati et al., 2022; Suhirman, & Rinantanti, 2023). As a result of the significant transformation of the English language as a lingua franca (Sujarwo & Akhiruddin, 2020; (Sujarwo et al., 2022) and its role in worldwide trade and finance, learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) are encouraged to improve their communication abilities in order to navigate the intensifying global rivalry (NamazianDost et al., 2017; Bin-Tahir et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2023). The majority of universities and colleges have implemented courses in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Business English with the aim of enhancing learners' communication abilities (Amaliah et al., 2022; Sasabone et al., 2021; Sukmawati et al., 2023). Recent additions to the educational resources include a range of books and materials that specifically target the enhancement of oral communication abilities. These resources concentrate on many aspects of oral communication, including telephoning, presenting skills, and English for socializing (Elsayed & Hassan, 2019; Puspitasari et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, a significant issue arises in the realm of instructing oral communication and speaking abilities, stemming from the utilization of inadequate instructional methodologies and procedures (Liu et al., 2021). In EFL classes at universities, the prevailing teaching strategy has always been centered around the teacher and focused towards lectures (Niratama, 2023). Consequently, learners encounter challenges when attempting to develop their oral communication and speaking skills, as they require exposure to authentic language situations that closely mirror real-life conversation (Sukmawati et al., 2023).

Numerous research investigations have been undertaken to examine the application of TBLT within the domain of ESP stated that the majority of students expressed contentment with task-based instruction and provided constructive criticism and suggestions for enhancing task-based instruction in ESP courses, so offering valuable insights for future instructional practices (Wu et al., 2016). English language teachers and students encounter challenges, prompting the necessity of implementing the TBLT approach in teaching ESP to higher education students (Motuziene, 2013). The results of this study have the potential to increase the knowledge and understanding of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors and administrators regarding the implementation of TBLT in ESP reading courses within the specific research environment and other comparable contexts (Duong & Le Truong, 2022). The TBLT technique demonstrated a significant positive influence on the students' utilization of ESP vocabulary and grammar structures, as well as their reduction in anxiety during assessments and increased readiness for real-life activities following their engagement in in-class simulations (González et al., 2019).

Recent studies have explored the integration of task-based instruction (TBI) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, focusing on various aspects such as instructional practices, challenges in implementing the TBI approach, and teaching reading through TBI. Additionally, these studies have examined how students utilize ESP vocabulary and grammar within the TBI framework. However, research on teacher perceptions regarding the applicability of TBI has predominantly been limited to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly for

accounting students. This highlights a gap in understanding how TBI can be effectively employed in ESP courses across different disciplines.

Currently, there is a notable gap in the application of TBI within ESP, particularly in enhancing oral English skills for accounting students at Universitas Cenderawasih Jayapura. This gap is critical as effective oral communication is essential for preparing students to navigate the demands of the globalized era and the evolving industry 5.0. The lack of sufficient opportunities for oral communication practice in the classroom can lead to an imbalance in learners' speaking abilities. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the use of TBI in improving the oral English proficiency of ESP students in higher education, thereby equipping them with the necessary communicative skills to excel in their professional fields.

Oral communication skills are widely recognized as a combination of integrated skills that encompass both listening and speaking abilities. Oral skills encompass a dynamic exchange of verbal and nonverbal elements, wherein individuals engage in a reciprocal role as both speaker and listener (De Vera, J., & De Vera, 2018). This implies that the integration of listening and speaking abilities is a bidirectional process that facilitates language practice. As students engage in the act of listening, they acquire knowledge that imparts significance and understanding (Puspitasari et al., 2023).

Recent additions to the educational landscape include a range of newly published books and instructional materials that specifically target the development of oral communication abilities. These resources concentrate on many aspects of oral communication, including telephoning, presenting skills, and English proficiency for social interactions (Elsayed & Hassan, 2019). Nevertheless, a significant issue arises in the realm of instructing oral communication and speaking abilities, stemming from the utilization of inadequate instructional methodologies and procedures.

In order to facilitate the development of speaking skills in educational settings, it is imperative to ensure that both teachers and students are cognizant of the significance of this skill (Hasan, 2014). Additionally, it is crucial to adopt alternative approaches that diverge from traditional methods, which often impose language practice that is disliked by students.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has gained significant traction among administrators and educators in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, since its inception as an offshoot of communicative language teaching (CLT) during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Kessler et al., 2021). This continues to share some of the same basic assumptions, in that both approaches are student-centered and call for students to engage in meaningful interactions with others in order to learn a foreign language (Moore, 2018). TBLT has evolved to the point that it is now seen to have its own rationales and practices toward foreign language instruction (Pino & Beh, 2018; Ellis, 2017).

TBLT is an instructional strategy in language education that aims to facilitate genuine and meaningful utilization of the target language by students via the completion of various activities (Khatib & Dehghankar, 2018). The task serves as the primary component in TBLT, serving as the central context and focal point for learning (El-Nashar, 2019; Vellanki & Bandu, 2021). It promotes language usage that mirrors real-world language use beyond the confines of the classroom (Douglas & Kim, 2015; Pham & Nguyen, 2018).

The theory of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on teaching and learning English as a second or non-native language, tailored to enable learners to effectively use English within specific fields or contexts (Flowerdew, 2012). The origin of ESP instruction arose from the need to facilitate cross-linguistic communication in areas such as commerce and technology (Sarré & Whyte, 2016). To address these needs, it is crucial for ESP learners to have ample opportunities to actively engage with the English language. This active engagement is essential for performing professional responsibilities on a global scale without facing communication barriers in English.

Consequently, ESP educators must devise instructional strategies that encourage active participation, fostering a sense of enjoyment and motivation towards English language practice through expressive language learning activities (Mulyadi et al., 2021).

Despite these efforts, ESP students in Jayapura often exhibit comparatively low speaking skills. A significant factor contributing to this deficiency is the inadequacy of current instructional approaches, which do not effectively support the development of communicative competence. ESP courses are designed to meet the demands of professional and scholarly communication, aiming to enable learners to communicate effectively in English within their professional contexts (Kailani & Murtiningsih, 2019). However, without proper instructional methods that focus on enhancing speaking abilities, students struggle to achieve the necessary proficiency, underscoring the need for improved pedagogical strategies in ESP programs.

Nonetheless, a notable issue persists in the instructional approaches used to teach oral communication, which are often inadequate and overly teacher-centered (Liu et al., 2021; Niratama, 2023). As a result, students frequently struggle to develop effective speaking skills due to a lack of exposure to authentic language use scenarios. Given this context, this study aims to investigate the use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving oral English proficiency among ESP students, specifically at Universitas Cenderawasih Jayapura. The research seeks to fill the gap in understanding how TBLT can enhance speaking skills within ESP programs, addressing the critical need for communicative competence in professional settings. The research questions guiding this study are: How can TBLT be effectively implemented in ESP courses to improve oral communication skills? What are the specific challenges and benefits of using TBLT in this context? By addressing these questions, this study aims to provide insights and practical strategies for ESP educators to enhance their instructional practices and better prepare students for global professional environments.

2. METHOD

In this research, data analysis was carried out using a descriptive quantitative design. Descriptive quantitative research can be quantitative because it collects data that can be measured to statistically analyze a population sample. These numbers can show patterns, relationships and trends over time and can be discovered through surveys, polls, and experiments (Gay, 2021).

The research was conducted using respondents who are EFL students from the Accounting Study Program of Universitas Cenderawasih, Jayapura from four classes (A Class, B Class, C Class, and D Class), with total students of two hundred and eighty students with choosing 20% from population become fifty eight students as respondents (Sugiyono, 2018).

The activities given below are conducted for one group in order to attain the language proficiency. This study applied purposive sampling. The advantage of purposive sampling is faster and easier to carry out. This method allows researchers to take samples in the field without having to use a sampling frame.

Purposive sampling is used in research with the aim of determining the sample deliberately. The classes selected as samples have the same initial abilities but are not based on random or the same background. The steps to carry out purposive sampling: create a sampling frame or list of population units, determine the requirements for being sampled, select samples from existing population members and according to requirements, and compile a list of selected sample members.

The research instruments employed in this study encompass questionnaires and testing methodologies. A total of fifty-eight English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students were subjected to interviews in order to get insights into the challenges they face when attempting to communicate in English. In addition, in response to the issues raised by students, a task-based

teaching approach was used, accompanied by a 14-week training program consisting of two hours per week. The speaking proficiency of the students was assessed on two occasions prior to their exposure to the intervention, as well as after the intervention. The individuals who took part in the present study exhibited comparable ages, spanning from 19 to 20 years. All of them were students from Universitas Cenderawasih Jayapura who were pursuing their studies in English for Specific Purposes. All individuals in the group exhibit homogeneity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, primary language, as well as educational and cultural upbringing. Furthermore, the participants exhibited homogeneity in terms of their exposure to the English language.

Some students think TBLT is a good way of learning and teaching interesting. It is clear that most of the students' feedback supports the effectiveness of TBLT, and their perceptions tend to agree and strongly agree that English language teaching should use the TBLT approach. This also shows that students like teaching using the TBLT approach and is evidence that it is a learner-centered language teaching approach. To analyze the data, the research determined the scoring classification uses J.B Heaton profile which includes Accuracy, Fluency and comprehensibility. Those assessment criteria as follows (Heaton, 1998):

Table 1. The scoring classification

Rating	Accuracy	Fluency	Comprehensibility
6	The influence of the mother tongue on pronunciation is minimal. There are a few minor grammatical or lexical problems in the text.	Uses a reasonable variety of expression while speaking with little effort. Occasionally, although more than once, word searches stalled in an odd way	It is simple for the listener to comprehend the speaker's overall meaning and aim. Very few pauses or explanations are needed
5	The mother tongue has a modest influence on pronunciation. Some small lexical and grammatical mistakes, however the most of the statements are accurate	Sometimes has to put in effort to look up words. Overall, though, the delivery was fluid with very few awkward pauses	The speaker's overall message and goal are quite evident. For the purpose of clarification, the listener must make a few interruptions
4	There are no significant phonological problems, although the mother tongue still has a substantial influence on pronunciation. a few lexical and grammatical mistakes, but only one or two significant mistakes that are confusing	There are not too many awkward pauses, despite his attempt to find the right words. Delivery was mainly fairly seamless. Though occasionally disjointed, the overall idea is successfully communicated. Reasonably expressed range	The speaker's points are often straightforward to understand. Although he always has the best of intentions, it takes multiple pauses for him to get his point across and ask for clarification
3	Mother tongue has an impact on pronunciation, however there are very few significant phonological and lexical mistakes, some of which lead to confusion	Most of the time, one must exert effort. Frequently needs to look for the intended meaning. Delivery was rather sluggish and fragmented. Expression range is frequently restricted	Many things are understandable to the listener, but he has to ask questions all the time. Many of the speaker's longer or more complicated sentences are difficult to grasp
2	Communication breaks down due to mispronounced words that are heavily affected by	He/She pondered for a long time, searching for the intended meaning.	A person used to listening to the speaker may be able to understand just limited portions

	the mother tongue. Numerous grammatical and basic mistakes	delivery that is sometimes halting and incomplete. At the time, almost give up on making the attempt. restricted expressive spectrum.	(often brief sentences and phrases) and only then with great effort
1	severe pronunciation mistakes in addition to several elementary grammatical and vocabulary mistakes. No proof that any of the language skills or subject subjects covered in the course have been mastered	Full of strangely extended pauses. Very jerky and disjointed delivery. occasionally gives up trying. extremely constrained expressive range	Almost little that is stated can be comprehended. The speakers are unable to make sense of what he appears to have said, even when the listeners try very hard to interject

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Pre-Task Preparation

The objective of this phase is to equip learners with the necessary skills to acquire the language through exercises that simulate real-world activities. At this stage, the teacher's role involves clearly delineating the subject matter and elucidating the objectives and desired outcomes that learners must achieve to successfully complete the assignment. To ensure comprehensive comprehension, educators should provide students with the opportunity to view a demonstrative representation of the task at hand, thereby clarifying expectations and processes.

During the course of the task, it is essential to engage in authentic learning experiences that necessitate effective communication. Students are expected to converse with one another using the target language, fostering an environment of practical language use. Educators should actively involve students in various activities throughout the instructional process to enhance their proficiency in oral communication. The teacher's primary responsibility during this phase is to oversee the execution of the assignment and serve as a facilitator or counselor in the educational process.

The act of speaking can be divided into three distinct stages: task, planning, and report. During the task phase, the instructor motivates students to use the designated language to complete the assignment, whether through collaborative work in pairs or small groups. This phase involves strategic decision-making and organizing activities to achieve specific goals and objectives. Learners are expected to engage in preparation and strategic planning for their reports, wherein they will communicate to the entire class their approach and execution of the assigned work.

Upon completing the assigned task, it is time to reflect on the process and outcomes. The purpose of this reflection is to provide learners with an opportunity to engage in language practice exercises. Learners are encouraged to enhance their confidence in verbalizing the desired language, ultimately improving their proficiency. In this scenario, the teacher facilitates language practice and guides the analysis of prior activities in oral English, helping students to better understand and improve their language skills.

Table 2. The students' Oral English testing score in ESP materials

Score Range	Classification	Pretest						Posttest					
		Accuracy		Fluency		Comprehensibility		Accuracy		Fluency		Comprehensibility	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
80-100	Very Good to Excellent	12	20.7	11	17.2	13	22.4	15	25.8	17	29.3	16	27.5
66-79	Good	10	17.2	9	15.5	11	17.2	25	43.1	27	46.5	28	48.2
56-65	Fair	18	31.0	20	34.4	19	32.7	10	17.2	12	20.7	13	22.4
41-55	Poor	17	29.3	16	27.5	14	24.1	8	13.7	6	10.3	1	1.7
< 40	Very poor	1	1.7	2	3.4	1	1.7	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	58	100	58	100	52	100	58	100	58	100	58	100

Table 1.2 presents data indicating that a majority of the students in the pretest exhibited fair levels of accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility, falling within the fair category. The pretest results indicated that a total of 17 students (29.3% in accuracy, 27.5% in fluency, and 24.1% in comprehensibility) were classified as low achievers, while only 18 students (31.0% in accuracy, 34.4% in fluency, and 32.7% in comprehensibility) were classified as high achievers. The analysis of pretest data revealed that the proportion of students classified as good achievers was higher than that of students classified as high achievers. The results suggested that the students were classified as fair and there is still room for improvement. The post-test results demonstrated an improvement in students' achievement following the implementation of the task-based teaching and learning (TBTL) approach. The overall percentage of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students was distributed among the high achiever group. The proportion of students classified as high achievers in the post-test was 28, accounting for 48.2% of the total. Additionally, a majority of students had higher scores in terms of comprehensibility.

Based on a statistical investigation of the students' oral English exam scores in ESP materials, it was determined that the utilization of Task-Based Language Teaching for teaching speaking had a good impact on the students' speaking proficiency. The results indicated that there was a significant increase in the mean score of oral English among ESP students from the pretest to the post-test.

The importance of learning and teaching English as a foreign language has been create everyday conversations to apply effective strategies for teaching and learning the four main skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), because these skills are the ultimate goal in learning a language. The many difficulties and obstacles on this path require us to revise and implement new teaching methods daily for better adaptation and superior results.

The majority of students who participated in the pretest had fair levels of accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility, falling within the fair group. The overall percentage of pretest scores was classified as indicative of low achievement in terms of accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. Furthermore, the individual demonstrates exceptional proficiency in terms of correctness, fluency, and comprehensibility. The analysis of pretest results indicated that the proportion of students classified as good achievers was greater than that of high achievers. The findings

suggested that the students were classified as fair and there was room for improvement. The results of the post-test demonstrated that the students' academic performance showed improvement following the implementation of the task-based teaching and learning (TBTL) strategy. The cumulative percentage of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students is distributed among the high achiever group. The cumulative proportion of post-test results classified as high achievers is notable, with a majority of ESP students demonstrating superior performance in terms of comprehensibility.

Some findings supported this study revealed that both teachers and learners held a good perception of task-based teaching and learning (TBTL). It is widely held that the integration of this methodology in language education, specifically in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), establishes advantageous conditions for teaching and learning. This approach engages learners in tasks that are pertinent to their academic and professional requirements, cultivates their capacity for independent learning and motivation through diverse means, enables them to delve into their comprehension of the subject matter at hand, enhances their interpersonal aptitudes and communication proficiencies, and nurtures their capacity for creative and critical thinking, which are deemed essential for their future professional endeavors (Ait Hattani, 2020).

The results of the study reveal that there are generally good motivational effects on students when Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is implemented and organized according to the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach within the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction (Rodríguez-Peñarroja, 2022). The use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) resulted in a notable enhancement in students' fluency and pronunciation abilities, as compared to the conventional instructional technique. Furthermore, the participants in the experimental group shown a significant enhancement in their speaking competence when Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) was used (Elsayed & Hassan, 2019).

The task-based learning approach demonstrated a significant beneficial influence on the enhancement of students' oral production skills, leading to notable improvements in their speaking proficiency (Soria-guerrero et al., 2020). The findings of this study provide support for the implementation of task-based learning in the instruction of English as a second language (Santhosh & Meenakshi, 2017). The task-based teaching and learning (TBTL) approach in language education, particularly in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is widely regarded as beneficial by both teachers and learners. This approach has been found to establish a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning (Ait Hattani, 2020).

This study was contradictive with the other finding revealed a notable deficiency in the instructors' understanding of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), with a tendency to employ a weaker version of the task-based approach (Liu, Y., & Ren, 2021).

The implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the classroom setting shown clear improvements in both students' oral English. This finding was supported by another finding that conveyed that task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been found to be a successful approach to improving the English-speaking skills of non-English major university students from Indonesia. This pedagogical approach focuses on developing accuracy, fluency, and confidence by incorporating contemporary situations and resources (Azhari & Rizki, 2023). Comprehending the prevailing practices of students Verbal communication may be more effective in facilitating the design and development of tasks and other activities within the educational setting (Kessler et al., 2021). This phenomenon may be attributed to the utilization of instructional stages that incorporate both implicit and explicit form-focused learning. The teaching of implicit form-instruction was facilitated through the utilization of "leading," "activating," and "naturalization" activities, while explicit form instruction was imparted through the implementation of "enriching" activities.

The aim is to enhance the learning experience of students by facilitating a deeper understanding and awareness of the explicit forms of language. The introduction of students to the expression, language functions, and sentence structures employed within a specific topic has proven to be advantageous for students. According to the test results, the study showed that students displayed a greater degree of increase in their fluency as opposed to their accuracy. This phenomenon can be explained by a situation in which the emphasis is placed on offering students opportunity to engage in oral language practice, rather than primarily focusing on instructional sessions that explicitly teach grammatical principles. The current circumstance could potentially be attributed to an overabundance of regulated practice exercises that restrict the opportunity for open-ended exploration and precision in the session.

The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach implemented in this research has the potential to facilitate students' acquisition of language in a meaningful manner (Elsayed & Hassan, 2019). The origin of this practice can be identified in the context of a free exercise, wherein students were instructed to complete a task by conducting interviews and recording the responses of the interviewees on a form. The aforementioned actions effectively diverted their focus away from language acquisition and towards language use in order to accomplish the given task. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) earned considerable attention from administrators and educators in the field of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). It emerged as a derivative of communicative language teaching (Flowerdew, 2012).

Lecturers play a crucial role in facilitating the development of students' task performance by providing assistance, expressing positive feedback, and fostering motivation. It is imperative that educators refrain from placing excessive emphasis on linguistic accuracy, specifically in relation to grammar. Furthermore, it is imperative for educators to adapt the content inside their instructional materials, including textbooks, in accordance with the methodologies and concepts of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

The present study conducted a statistical analysis of students' oral English examination scores in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials. The findings revealed that the use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a pedagogical approach for teaching speaking skills had a positive influence on students' oral English. The findings of the study revealed a statistically significant improvement in the average oral English scores of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students, as investigation results from the pretest to the post-test with a majority of ESP students demonstrating superior performance in terms of comprehensibility. As novelty of this study is the comprehensibility of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing the oral English proficiency of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students in higher education in Accounting Study Program of Universitas Cenderawasih, Jayapura.

4. CONCLUSION

The students enrolled in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program showed greater progress in their comprehensibility skills compared to their accuracy and fluency skills. This can be attributed to the emphasis on providing students with opportunities for oral language practice rather than focusing primarily on explicit grammatical instruction. Consequently, most students achieved higher scores in terms of comprehensibility.

The investigation conducted a statistical analysis of students' oral English test scores within the context of ESP materials. The results indicate that implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT) to teach speaking skills led to significant improvements in ESP students' speaking abilities. A statistically significant rise in average oral English scores from the pretest to the post-test was observed, with many students demonstrating superior performance

incomprehensibility. This suggests that ESP students can effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas, enhancing mutual understanding during oral communication. However, due to the study's small scale, further research with a larger sample and the inclusion of qualitative data is recommended to validate and expand these findings.

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