

# Smart Talk: Polite Negotiation through PhBL, a Finnish-Inspired Digital ELT Model for Business English Learners

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## ABSTRACT

This extended abstract presents a phenomenon-based English language lesson for tertiary learners focusing on polite negotiation in workplace scenarios. Titled Smart Talk: Polite Negotiation Through PhBL, this lesson design integrates Finnish-inspired pedagogical principles and 21st-century digital tools to enhance learner motivation, communication fluency, and critical thinking in a Business English context. Targeting Diploma in International Business students (CEFR B1–B2), the lesson revolves around the real-world phenomenon: How can we handle professional conflict politely in English? Students engage in scaffolded, collaborative tasks using Padlet, Google Classroom, Google Lens, Google Form, YouTube, and speech-to-text tools to build vocabulary, explore polite modal grammar, perform recorded role plays, and conduct peer and self-assessment. Each stage is designed to strengthen digital literacy, workplace readiness, and authentic language use. This paper discusses how this structured yet flexible model fosters autonomy and engagement while demonstrating how simple tools can facilitate a meaningful ELT experience.

**Keywords:** PhBL, polite negotiation, Business English, digital tools, tertiary education, AR in ELT

## INTRODUCTION

A key challenge in tertiary-level ELT is helping learners apply language meaningfully in real-world contexts, especially for workplace communication. Traditional methods often lead to disengagement and limited functional use. To address this, Phenomenon-Based Learning (PhBL), inspired by Finland’s curriculum (Samutchaya, 2023), offers an inquiry-driven, interdisciplinary approach that fosters autonomy and relevance. This lesson, co-developed by IPK College lecturers, equips Business English learners with polite negotiation skills through structured, tech-integrated tasks. By anchoring learning in a workplace conflict scenario, the lesson promotes motivation, real-life application, and deeper comprehension, making language learning purposeful, reflective, and future-ready.

## PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH / TECHNIQUE

### 2.1 Phenomenon-Based Learning (PhBL)

Phenomenon-Based Learning (PhBL) moves beyond isolated instruction, encouraging students to explore real-world issues through inquiry and cross-disciplinary learning (Johnson, 2021; Samutchaya, 2023). This lesson is framed by the guiding question: “How can we handle

professional conflict politely in English?” Polite negotiation, vital in global business, requires language proficiency, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence. By grounding learning in this authentic challenge, students develop purposeful, confident communication skills while engaging meaningfully with English through real-life application.

## 2.2 Digital-Scaffolded Lesson Design

Delivered through a station-based model, the lesson builds progressively, with students completing tasks individually or in pairs and submitting evidence to unlock subsequent stations. This format fosters responsibility, self-pacing, and active learning. Padlet serves as the interactive hub for tracking progress, while Google Classroom is used for submissions. Each tool is chosen to reinforce specific learning outcomes and support a structured, blended experience.

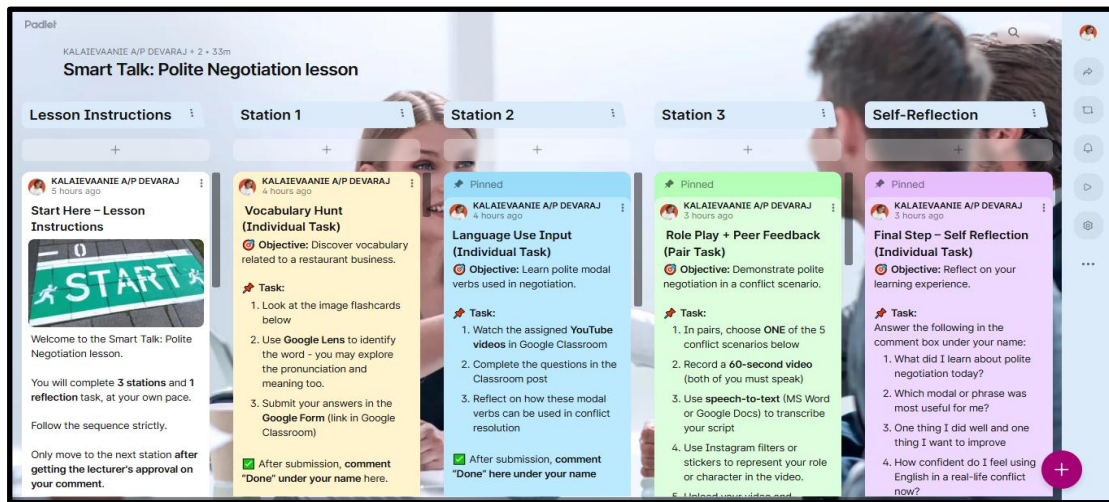
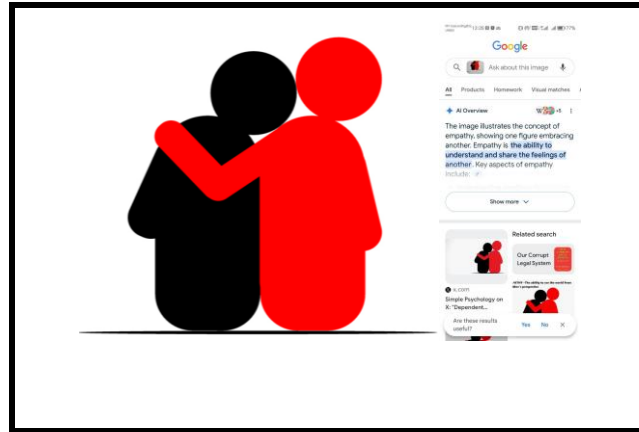


Figure 1 The Digital Hub - Padlet Structure

The session is structured into five key stages, each reflecting constructivist and communicative teaching principles:

### 2.2.1 Station 1 (Input – Vocabulary)

Students begin with a vocabulary hunt using visual flashcards shared on Padlet. Each flashcard includes image clues and cloze prompts, with detailed tasks completed via Google Form and submitted through Google Classroom. Using Google Lens, learners explore definitions, pronunciation, and example sentences. Some flashcards link to QR codes directing them to 360° business videos or native audio clips. While not full AR, this simplified model uses image recognition to boost engagement and memory (Sun, 2023; Syamsiyah & Ma'rifatulloh, 2023). An entry-ticket quiz ensures vocabulary is processed before proceeding to the negotiation-focused tasks.



**Figure 2** Flashcard and Google Lens Result



**Figure 3** QR Flashcard for Audio

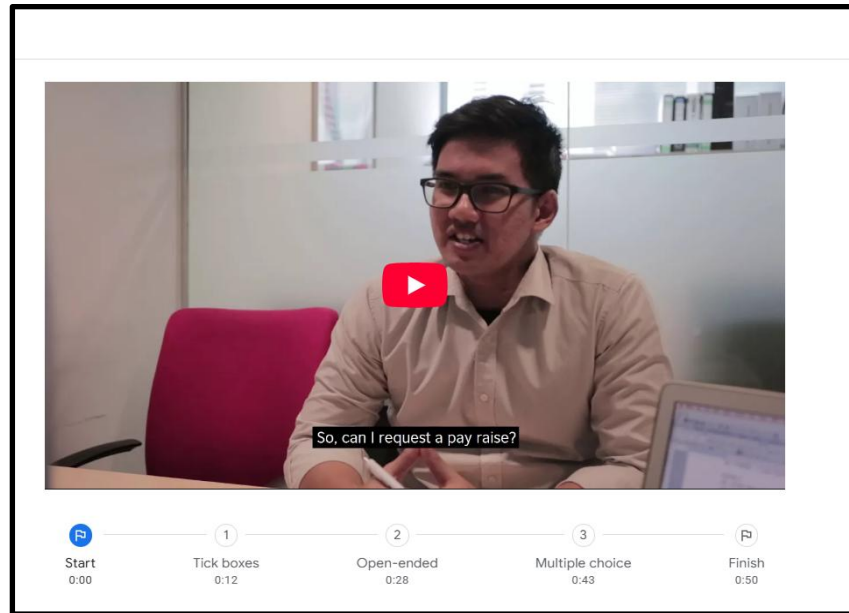


**Figure 4** QR Flashcard for Audio

*Clue: "He listened with real e\_p\_t \_ \_." Answer: Empathy*

### 2.2.2 Station 2 (Input – Grammar)

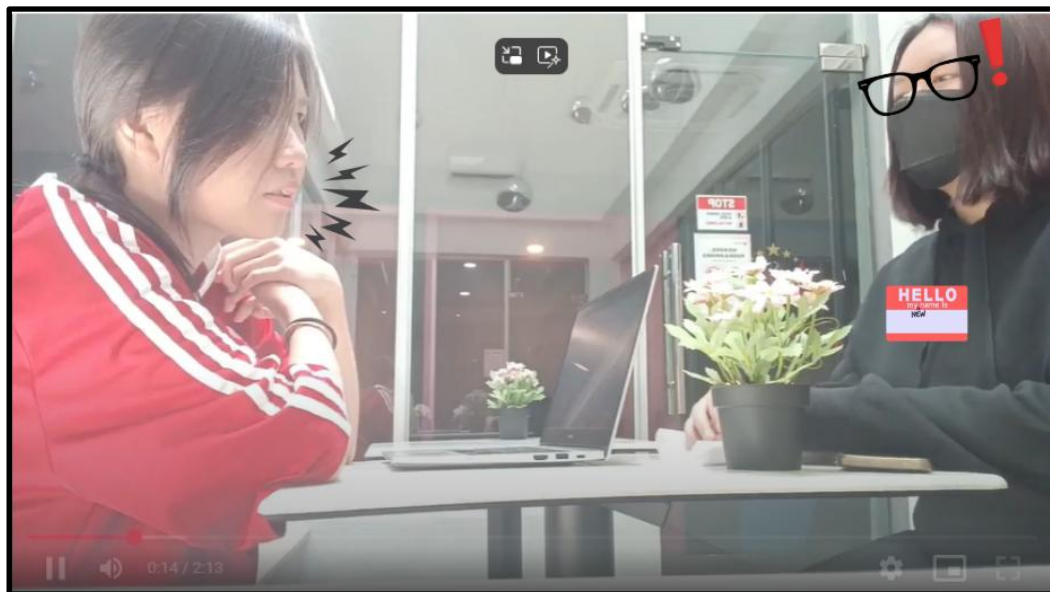
Students are individually assigned a curated YouTube video via Google Classroom featuring authentic business negotiation dialogues. Time-stamped questions are embedded to prompt critical listening and focus on grammar structures, particularly modal verbs and softening phrases commonly used in professional requests (e.g., Could we consider..., Would it be possible..., Might I suggest...). This stage supports grammar noticing and inductive learning, in line with Task-Based Learning (TBL) and Focus on Form pedagogy (Suseno et al., 2023). Students reflect on grammar function in real interaction rather than isolated practice.

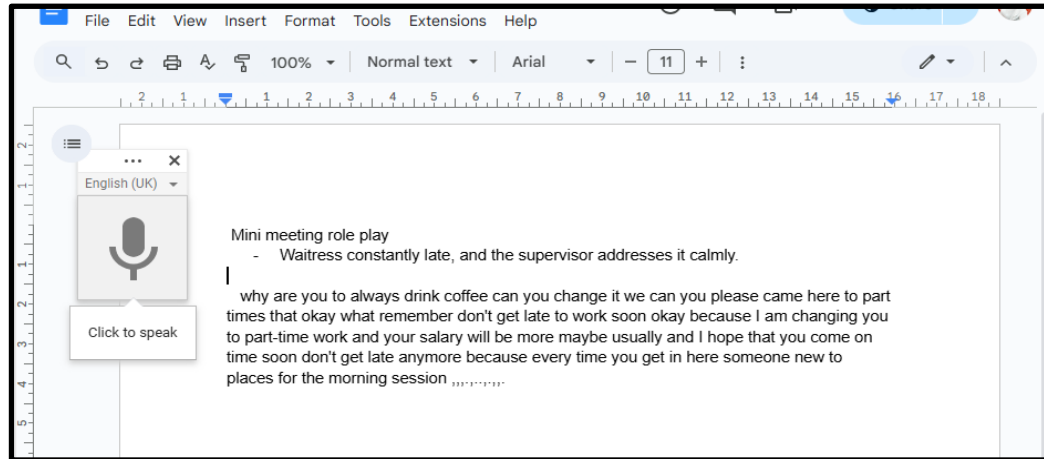


**Figure 5** YouTube video with Embedded Questions

### 2.2.3 Station 3a (Output – Application)

This is the main application task, where learners collaborate in pairs to simulate a polite negotiation scenario in a restaurant business context. Five varied role-play prompts are provided, increasing in complexity. Students are encouraged to use Instagram filters or stickers to embody their character, adding creativity and personalisation. The 60-second video is recorded and then transcribed using speech-to-text tools (Google Docs voice typing or MS Word Dictate) (Li, 2025). Both the video and transcript are uploaded to Padlet.



**Figure 6** Students' Video Screenshot**Figure 7** Students' Transcript Screenshot

### 2.2.4 Station 3b (Review – Peer Feedback)

Students watch two peer videos, evaluating language accuracy based on vocabulary and grammar from Station 1 and 2. They are guided to provide respectful, constructive feedback under each Padlet post using a checklist. This stage develops collaborative learning, critical thinking, and communicative accountability, while fostering empathy, a key component of polite negotiation.

### 2.2.5 Station 4 (Reflection – Self-Assessment)

Learners individually complete a self-evaluation, reflecting on their language performance, fluency, pronunciation, and comfort in navigating workplace conflicts. Prompts guide them to consider what they did well and what they aim to improve. Reflections are posted on Padlet. This stage encourages metacognitive awareness, tying back to the PhBL principle of deep learning through experience and reflection.

## DISCUSSION

This lesson structure demonstrates a strategic alignment with Phenomenon-Based Learning (PhBL), where real-life relevance, inquiry, collaboration, and interdisciplinary integration drive student learning.

### 3.1 Anchored in a Real-World Phenomenon

Guided by the question “How can we handle professional conflict politely in English?”, students engage with language, business etiquette, and communication strategies, reflecting PhBL’s cross-disciplinary focus (Lonka, 2018).

### 3.2 Integrated, Thematic Learning

Rather than isolating skills, the lesson integrates vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and reflection around a single, authentic scenario, creating cohesive and meaningful language use.

### 3.3 Scaffolded Learning and ZPD

Each station builds on the previous, from vocabulary discovery via Google Lens to a role-play task. Padlet checkpoints ensure mastery before advancing, supporting Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and promoting learner autonomy (Yusi Rahmawati et.al, 2024).

### 3.4 Simplified AR for Accessible Engagement

Though not full AR, tools like Google Lens and QR codes offer a low-tech AR experience. Learners scan real-world images to access videos, definitions, or pronunciation aids, enhancing retention through visual-contextual learning (Syamsiyah & Ma'rifatulloh, 2023).

### 3.5 Collaborative & Reflective Practice

Pair-based role plays and peer reviews promote real-time negotiation and feedback skills. The final self-assessment encourages reflection and metacognition, core outcomes of PhBL (Fioravanti, M. L et.al, 2021).

### 3.6 21st-Century Skills & Digital Literacy

By using tools like Padlet, Google Classroom, and speech-to-text, students build not only language proficiency but also digital competence, equipping them for tech-driven workplace communication (Cheng, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The Smart Talk lesson demonstrates how Phenomenon-Based Learning (PhBL) can enrich tertiary-level English teaching by embedding language use in real-world workplace scenarios. Focused on polite negotiation, the lesson promotes authentic communication and practical skills. Learners engaged with vocabulary through simplified AR (Google Lens), grammar via video, and applied language using speech-to-text role play. This scaffolded, self-paced approach enhanced engagement, retention, and critical thinking. Reflection and peer feedback deepened language awareness. Co-developed by Ms Vaanie and Ms Shalini, the lesson presents a replicable, digital-integrated model aligned with PhBL principles: practical, engaging, and future-focused for ELT classrooms.

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