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## **COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING ENGLISH**

***Summary.** The article investigates the development of ESL communication skills within the framework of communicative competence, emphasising interactive communication as a key component of spoken proficiency. Drawing on current approaches in second language acquisition and communicative language teaching, communicative competence is viewed as an integrated construct involving linguistic, pragmatic, and interactional dimensions. Particular attention is devoted to interactive communication, understood as the ability to initiate, sustain, and negotiate meaning in dialogue.*

***Key words:** assessment, communicative competence, English language learning, interactional competence.*

Communicative competence has long been recognised as a central objective of second- and foreign-language education. Contemporary approaches to English language learning emphasise that successful communication extends beyond the accurate use of grammatical forms to include the ability to use language appropriately and meaningfully in diverse social and interactional contexts. Communicative competence is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct that includes grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences, which together enable effective language use [1]. Crucially, these components are

realised through actual language use in interaction rather than through abstract linguistic knowledge alone.

This interaction-oriented view foregrounds interactional competence as a key dimension of communicative competence, capturing learners’ ability to participate effectively in spoken discourse through turn-taking, meaning negotiation, and the collaborative construction of understanding. Interactional competence thus serves as a bridge between theoretical models of communicative competence and the practical demands of real-world communication, offering a focused lens through which communicative ability can be observed and evaluated in use.

The relevance of this topic is particularly pronounced in contemporary English language education, where communicative language teaching remains a dominant pedagogical paradigm and where assessment practices increasingly seek to capture learners’ ability to perform in authentic communicative situations. Traditional assessment methods that prioritise discrete linguistic knowledge are insufficient for evaluating communicative competence as a dynamic and interactional construct. This challenge is further intensified by the growing role of technology in language learning and assessment. Digital tools, computer-based testing, and technology-mediated interaction provide new opportunities to assess communicative and interactional competence through performance-based and integrated tasks, while also raising important questions regarding validity, authenticity, and pedagogical alignment.

Against this backdrop, the present article aims to examine communicative competence as a framework for English language learning, with particular emphasis on interactional competence as enacted in real communicative contexts. The study explores approaches to assessing communicative competence, focusing on performance-based and technology-enhanced methods for evaluating learners’ communicative and interactional abilities in English as a second or foreign language.

Communicative competence is a construct that has attracted interest since the early 1970s, when language practitioners and researchers began to see excessive emphasis on the structural and cognitive trends of the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, a distinction was made between linguistic and communicative competence to highlight the difference between knowledge about language forms and abilities that enable a person to communicate functionally and interactively. In the last two decades, there has been a greater emphasis on the myriad social, cultural, and pragmatic implications of communicating in a second language [1].

Seminal work on defining communicative competence remains a primary reference point for discussions of it in relation to second language teaching. The construct of communicative competence comprises four components, or subcategories. The first two subcategories reflect the use of the linguistic system itself, and the last two define the functional aspects of communication.

1. Grammatical competence. Knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology. It is the competence we associate with mastering a language's linguistic code: linguistic competence.

2. Discourse competence. The ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances. With its inter-sentential relationships, discourse encompasses everything from simple spoken conversations to lengthy written texts (articles, books, etc.).

3. Sociolinguistic competence. The ability to follow sociocultural language rules. This type of competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the interaction's function.

4. Strategic competence. The ability to use verbal and nonverbal communicative techniques to compensate for breakdowns in communication or insufficient competence. It includes the ability to make "repairs" and to sustain

communication through paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, avoidance, and guessing [1].

Overall, communicative competence is a multifaceted construct that integrates linguistic knowledge with functional and sociocultural dimensions of language use. The four components – grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence – collectively account for both formal accuracy and effective communication in context. This framework underscores the need for second-language instruction to move beyond isolated language forms and address the interactive and pragmatic demands of real-world communication.

It should be pointed out that effective communication is widely recognised as a foundational component of both academic achievement and social development. Clear expression of ideas, attentive listening, and interpersonal interaction contribute significantly to students’ success across educational contexts and prepare them for future professional and personal endeavours.

Communication skills serve multiple functions in educational settings. They facilitate the articulation of understanding, promote active participation in collaborative activities, and enable students to seek academic support when required. Additionally, strong communicative competence supports social integration, contributes to a positive learning environment, and underpins the development of leadership capacities. Furthermore, these skills are valued in the workplace and predictive of employability outcomes.

Based on pedagogical insights and practice-oriented recommendations, the following strategies have been identified to enhance students’ communication skills:

1. Foster active listening

Active listening is a core component of effective communication. Encouraging students to maintain focus on the speaker, demonstrate engagement through appropriate nonverbal cues (e.g., eye contact, nodding), and ask clarifying questions supports comprehension and reinforces reciprocal communication.

## 2. Facilitate expression of opinions

Creating supportive classroom environments where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts enhances communicative confidence. Systematic inclusion of opportunities for open discussion within curricular activities enables learners to articulate their viewpoints and engage in respectful dialogue.

## 3. Promote collaborative activities

Participation in team-based and group tasks, including study groups, cooperative projects, and structured extracurricular activities, fosters both verbal and nonverbal communication competencies. Collaborative contexts provide authentic opportunities for negotiation, perspective-taking, and interpersonal problem-solving.

## 4. Develop nonverbal communication skills

Nonverbal cues such as eye contact, gestures, and body orientation play an essential role in augmenting spoken language. Instruction that deliberately addresses these elements helps learners accurately interpret and effectively use nonverbal cues.

## 5. Encourage public speaking

Structured opportunities for public speaking – such as brief presentations or classroom debates – can reduce apprehension related to oral communication and strengthen rhetorical skills. The integration of visual supports, such as presentation slides, can aid message organisation and clarity.

## 6. Provide constructive feedback

Specific, clear, and balanced feedback promotes self-awareness and skill refinement. Constructive comments should identify strengths and areas for growth, and where feasible, written feedback allows learners to revisit guidance and track progress over time.

Integrating these strategies into regular instructional practice can contribute to holistic communicative development. Educators are advised to design

scaffolded tasks that gradually develop communicative competence and to foster inclusive learning environments that help all students become more confident and proficient communicators [2].

Developing strong English communication skills is critical for effective interaction in both personal and professional contexts, particularly in increasingly globalised environments where English serves as a lingua franca for diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Improving communicative competence encompasses receptive and productive domains, requiring targeted strategies to enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Listening proficiency is a foundational element of language comprehension and communication. Immersive exposure to English through media such as films, television programs, and audio podcasts can improve learners’ recognition of pronunciation patterns, intonation, and syntactic structures in authentic contexts. Active listening – characterised by focused attention, interpretation of meaning, and responsive engagement – facilitates adaptive use of language and supports subsequent communicative exchanges.

While mastery of vocabulary and grammatical conventions is necessary, frequent and purposeful speaking practice is essential for fluency and confidence. Interaction with fluent speakers, whether native or advanced non-native interlocutors, provides opportunities for real-time conversational practice. Self-monitoring techniques, such as audio recordings of one’s own speech, enable learners to identify and correct pronunciation errors and to refine articulatory precision.

A broad and accessible vocabulary supports learners’ capacity to express complex ideas and emotions in both spoken and written modalities. Reading extensively across genres and registers exposes learners to lexical items in varied contexts, facilitating deeper semantic understanding. Systematic vocabulary exercises, including flashcards, mobile applications, and word games, can aid memorisation and retrieval, reinforcing lexical retention and active use.

Written proficiency is an integral component of overall communicative competence. Regular practice in composing essays, emails, and other written texts enhances learners’ ability to organise ideas logically, apply appropriate grammatical structures, and employ register-appropriate tone and cohesion. Emphasis on clarity and precision in written expression helps learners produce comprehensible, contextually appropriate texts.

Intercultural competence is essential for nuanced communication in English, particularly given the diversity of cultural norms and communicative styles across English-speaking contexts. Awareness of non-verbal cues, such as gestures, body language, and culturally specific etiquette, enables learners to navigate social interactions with greater sensitivity and to reduce the risk of misunderstandings in cross-cultural exchanges.

Digital technologies play a central role in contemporary approaches to developing English communication skills, offering flexible, interactive, and learner-centred opportunities for practice. Technology-enhanced language learning environments support continuous exposure to authentic input, promote autonomous learning, and facilitate communicative interaction beyond the constraints of time and location.

Language learning apps like Duolingo, Babbel, or Memrise are widely used to support vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and pronunciation development. These platforms employ adaptive learning mechanisms, gamification, and repetition techniques to reinforce language structures and encourage consistent engagement. Pronunciation features, including speech recognition and model comparison, allow learners to receive immediate feedback and improve phonological accuracy.

Online learning platforms and courses, including Coursera, Udemy, and edX, provide structured instruction across all language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These platforms typically integrate video lectures, interactive tasks, and assessment components, enabling learners to monitor their

progress and systematically develop communicative competence. The availability of self-paced courses also supports differentiated learning and accommodates diverse proficiency levels.

Language exchange platforms, such as Tandem and HelloTalk, offer opportunities for authentic interaction with native and proficient English speakers. Through text, audio, and video communication, learners engage in real-time conversational practice, negotiate meaning, and develop pragmatic awareness. Such exchanges contribute not only to linguistic fluency but also to intercultural communicative competence, which is essential in global communication contexts.

In addition, video conferencing tools, including Zoom and Microsoft Teams, facilitate synchronous oral communication in simulated real-world settings. These platforms are particularly effective for practising presentations, participating in discussions, and collaborating on group tasks. Features such as screen sharing, breakout rooms, and session recording support interactive learning and reflective practice, enabling learners to review their performance and identify areas for improvement.

Overall, integrating digital platforms into language learning enhances communicative development by increasing exposure to English, enabling meaningful interaction, and providing diverse contexts for skill application. When aligned with pedagogical objectives, technology serves as a powerful tool for fostering communicative competence, learner confidence, and long-term language development.

Consistent engagement with language activities is crucial for sustainable improvement. Establishing realistic, measurable goals (e.g., targeted vocabulary acquisition, daily speaking practice) provides learners with direction and maintains motivation. Tracking progress – through journals, recordings, or digital tracking tools – allows learners to identify patterns of growth and areas requiring further attention. Moreover, celebrating milestones supports learner persistence and reinforces positive attitudes toward language acquisition [3].

Speaking proficiency in a second or foreign language involves not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to engage in interactive communication, a multifaceted construct that encompasses verbal sub-skills used to negotiate meaning and sustain dialogic exchanges. For example, Cambridge English Qualifications are designed to develop real-life language competencies that enable learners to communicate effectively across diverse contexts, with interactive communication constituting a central dimension of oracy development [4].

It is worth noting that interactive communication refers to the ensemble of sub-skills that are essential in dialogue but are absent in monologic speech. These sub-skills include asking and responding to questions, making offers, soliciting opinions, and requesting clarification or repetition. Collectively, these elements enable learners to initiate, respond, maintain, develop, and negotiate meaning during interpersonal interaction. The competence to perform these functions depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on social and pragmatic skills that support collaborative meaning construction.

Interactive communication assumes vital importance in both instructional and real-world contexts. Most naturally occurring speaking situations are interactive rather than monologic, and learners who lack proficiency in interactive sub-skills may face substantial challenges in everyday communication. In formal assessments, interactive communication is represented prominently across multiple components of the speaking test, particularly in tasks designed to elicit discussion and collaboration. The ability to deploy interactive sub-skills effectively is, therefore, a robust indicator of learners' readiness for authentic communicative demands.

Effective instruction in interactive communication requires deliberate task design that transcends simple pair or group work. Collaborative activities must be structured to require learners to exchange information they individually lack. An example of such an activity is the information-gap task, in which learners complete a task only by communicating with one another and sharing unique

pieces of information. This design compels learners to engage in active listening, responsive contribution, and mutual negotiation, thereby activating the targeted interactive sub-skills.

In addition to structured interaction, pedagogical practices should incorporate functional language teaching to support learners’ ability to perform interactive acts. Explicit teaching of pragmatic expressions and conversational routines facilitates the memorisation and subsequent application of language forms necessary for successful interaction. Furthermore, classroom activities that engage learners in assessing spoken interaction – such as analysing practice speaking tests or peer dialogues – can cultivate learners’ awareness of interactional criteria and promote the strategic use of interactive sub-skills. Over time, learners develop metacognitive insights into effective conversation management, which in turn enhances their capacity for autonomous interaction.

In short, interactive communication represents an essential dimension of spoken language proficiency that integrates linguistic, social, and pragmatic components. Instruction that systematically incorporates structured collaborative tasks, functional language support, and reflective analysis can facilitate the development of learners’ interactive competencies. Aligning pedagogical practice with authentic communicative demands equips learners to participate effectively in real-world interactions and formal assessment tasks [4].

It should be emphasised that assessment of language skills is crucial to the development and evaluation of communicative competence. Within a communicative language teaching framework, assessment is conceptualised not merely as a measure of linguistic knowledge but as an evaluation of learners’ ability to use language effectively and appropriately in real-world contexts. Consequently, assessment practices are closely aligned with authentic language use, integrated skills, and meaningful interaction.

Assessment of communicative competence is guided by several interrelated principles. Foremost among these is authenticity, which requires that assessment

tasks reflect real-life communicative situations. Rather than focusing solely on discrete grammatical or lexical items, assessment evaluates learners' capacity to understand, produce, and negotiate meaning in contextually appropriate ways.

Closely related is the principle of integration of language skills. Communicative competence involves the coordinated use of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and effective assessment mirrors this integration. Tasks such as responding orally to spoken input, summarising written texts, or participating in discussions based on reading materials reflect the interconnected nature of language use.

Another key principle is the emphasis on performance and interaction. Assessment focuses on how learners manage communicative exchanges, including turn-taking, coherence, fluency, and sociolinguistic appropriateness. While accuracy remains an important component, it is evaluated in relation to communicative effectiveness rather than in isolation.

Finally, assessment within this framework adopts a formative orientation, particularly in instructional settings. Ongoing assessment provides feedback that informs teaching practices and supports learners' progressive development of communicative competence, rather than functioning solely as a summative measure.

Building on these principles, a distinction is made between large-scale assessment and classroom-based assessment, both of which contribute to the evaluation of communicative competence while serving different purposes [5].

Large-scale assessments are standardised tests designed to measure language proficiency across wide populations. These assessments typically evaluate all four macro-skills and often include performance-based tasks intended to simulate authentic communicative situations. Well-known examples include the TOEFL iBT, IELTS, and Cambridge English examinations, which incorporate integrated reading, listening, speaking, and writing tasks. In the context of communicative competence, such assessments prioritise validity and reliability,

ensuring that test scores meaningfully represent learners’ ability to use language in academic, professional, or social domains.

In contrast, classroom-based assessment is embedded within instructional practice and focuses on learners’ communicative performance in immediate learning contexts. Teachers employ methods such as role-plays, simulations, integrated skills tasks, portfolios, and project-based assessments to observe how learners use language to achieve communicative goals. These approaches allow for continuous feedback and instruction adjustments, supporting the development of fluency, accuracy, and pragmatic competence over time [5].

Advances in technology have further expanded the possibilities for assessing communicative competence. It should be stressed that technology-enhanced assessment can increase both the authenticity and efficiency of evaluation while enabling assessment at scale.

Computer-based testing platforms used in large-scale assessments allow for the delivery of integrated tasks that combine listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Automated speech recognition tools provide feedback on pronunciation, fluency, and intelligibility, supporting the assessment of oral communication. Additionally, online writing platforms and digital portfolios facilitate the submission, revision, and evaluation of written work, often incorporating peer and instructor feedback.

The use of technology offers several advantages, including immediate feedback, improved task authenticity, and the ability to assess multiple skills simultaneously. However, its effective implementation requires careful attention to task design, test validity, and learner familiarity with technological tools. Importantly, technology is positioned as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, teacher judgment, particularly in evaluating interactional, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic aspects of communicative competence.

Taken together, the assessment framework highlights the need to align communicative teaching goals with assessment practices. By integrating large-

scale testing, classroom-based assessment, and technology-supported approaches, educators and researchers can obtain a more comprehensive picture of learners' communicative competence. Assessment thus functions not only as a means of measurement but also as a catalyst for learning, reinforcing the central role of meaningful communication in second- and foreign-language education.

To sum up, this article has examined communicative competence as a foundational framework for English language learning, emphasising its realisation through interaction and its relevance for contemporary assessment practices. Communicative competence has been conceptualised as an integrated construct encompassing grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, strategic, and interactional dimensions, all of which are manifested through meaningful language use rather than abstract knowledge alone.

The discussion has highlighted the central role of interactional competence in bridging theoretical models of communicative competence and real-world communication. By focusing on learners' ability to participate in spoken interaction, negotiate meaning, and co-construct understanding, interactional competence provides a more comprehensive and authentic perspective on communicative ability. This perspective challenges traditional assessment approaches that prioritise discrete linguistic forms and underscores the need for performance-based evaluation.

Furthermore, the article has emphasised the growing importance of technology in assessing communicative competence. Technology-enhanced assessment tools offer valuable opportunities to design authentic, integrated, and scalable assessment tasks that capture learners' communicative performance in realistic contexts. At the same time, their effective use requires careful attention to validity, task design, and pedagogical alignment to ensure that assessment remains focused on communicative meaning rather than technological proficiency.

Future research should further investigate how interactional competence can be operationalised and reliably assessed across different proficiency levels and learning contexts. Empirical studies examining the validity and reliability of technology-mediated assessment tools, particularly those targeting interactional and pragmatic dimensions of communicative competence, would be especially valuable. In addition, longitudinal research exploring the impact of technology-supported, performance-based assessment on learners' communicative development could deepen understanding of how assessment practices influence language learning outcomes in second- and foreign-language education.

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