

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# The Role of The Communicative Approach in Developing Students' Linguistic Competencies

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## Abstract

This article examines the role of the communicative approach in developing students' linguistic competencies in higher education. In contemporary language education, linguistic competence is no longer understood only as knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics; it is interpreted as the ability to use language units appropriately, accurately, and meaningfully in real communicative situations. The communicative approach creates favorable pedagogical conditions for transforming theoretical knowledge about language into practical speech experience. The purpose of the article is to analyze the methodological value of the communicative approach in developing students' grammatical, lexical, phonetic, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies. The study is based on theoretical analysis, comparative interpretation of scientific literature, and methodological generalization of language teaching practices. The findings show that communicative language teaching increases students' motivation, strengthens their ability to express ideas independently, develops interactional skills, and improves the functional use of linguistic units in oral and written communication. The article argues that the effectiveness of the communicative approach depends on the systematic organization of classroom interaction, meaningful tasks, authentic language materials, student-centered instruction, and assessment criteria aimed at real communicative performance. The results may be useful for teachers, researchers, curriculum designers, and higher education institutions seeking to improve the quality of linguistic competence development.

## KEY WORDS

Communicative approach, linguistic competence, communicative competence, language teaching, higher education, student-centered learning, speech activity, methodology, interaction, language education.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of students' linguistic competencies is one of the central tasks of modern language education. In higher education, language learning is not limited to memorizing grammatical rules, lexical units, or theoretical definitions. Students are expected to use language as a means of communication, academic expression, professional interaction, and intercultural understanding. Therefore, the

methodological system of language teaching should be directed not only toward the acquisition of linguistic knowledge, but also toward the formation of the ability to apply this knowledge in real communicative contexts.

The communicative approach emerged as a response to traditional methods that treated language mainly as a system of forms. In grammar-translation and structurally oriented

approaches, learners often mastered rules and isolated sentence patterns, but they experienced difficulties when they had to use language spontaneously in conversation, discussion, academic writing, or professional communication. The communicative approach changed the focus of language teaching from the mechanical reproduction of language forms to meaningful interaction. It emphasized that knowing a language means being able to use it appropriately according to purpose, situation, interlocutor, and context.

The concept of communicative competence, introduced and developed in linguistic and sociolinguistic research, expanded the understanding of language ability. Dell Hymes argued that language competence should include not only grammatical correctness but also the ability to choose appropriate expressions in social situations. Later, Canale and Swain developed this idea by identifying grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components of communicative competence. These theoretical foundations are especially important for higher education, where students must be prepared to participate in academic discussions, interpret texts, present arguments, write research-based papers, and communicate in professional environments.

In the context of developing students' linguistic competencies, the communicative approach plays a methodological and didactic role. It helps connect the formal aspects of language with their communicative functions. For example, grammar is not taught as a set of abstract rules, but as a tool for expressing time, modality, condition, cause, comparison, and argumentation. Vocabulary is not studied only through translation or memorization, but through contextual use in speech situations. Pronunciation is not reduced to repetition of sounds, but is developed through intelligible oral communication, dialogue, presentation, and discussion. Thus, the communicative approach creates an integrated environment in which linguistic knowledge and speech practice complement each other.

The relevance of this topic is also determined by the needs of modern higher education. Students must be able to work with information, participate in dialogue, express their opinions clearly, understand different texts, communicate in academic and professional communities, and adapt their speech to various communicative purposes. These requirements make it necessary to revise traditional language teaching practices and introduce more interactive, task-based, and student-centered methods. The communicative approach is significant

because it corresponds to these needs and provides a methodological basis for developing active, independent, and competent language users.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the role of the communicative approach in developing students' linguistic competencies. The article analyzes the theoretical foundations of communicative language teaching, determines its methodological potential, and explains how it contributes to the development of grammatical, lexical, phonetic, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic aspects of language competence. The main research question is how the communicative approach can improve the quality and effectiveness of linguistic competence development in higher education.

The methodological basis of the study is formed by theoretical analysis, comparative interpretation, and pedagogical generalization. The article relies on the analysis of scientific works devoted to communicative competence, communicative language teaching, linguistic competence, and student-centered methodology. Theoretical sources were examined in order to clarify the relationship between linguistic knowledge and communicative use. Special attention was paid to the works of Hymes, Canale and Swain, Littlewood, Richards, Savignon, Nunan, Brown, and other scholars who contributed to the development of communicative language teaching.

The study also uses a comparative methodological approach. Traditional form-focused teaching and communicative teaching are compared according to their goals, content, classroom organization, teacher and student roles, types of tasks, and assessment principles. This comparison makes it possible to identify the specific advantages of the communicative approach in developing students' linguistic competencies. The analysis does not reject the importance of grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation; rather, it shows that these elements become more effective when they are taught through meaningful use.

Pedagogical generalization was used to formulate methodological conclusions relevant to higher education. Classroom practices such as pair work, group discussion, role-play, problem-solving tasks, academic dialogue, text interpretation, project work, oral presentation, and reflective feedback were considered as tools for developing linguistic competence. These activities were analyzed from the point of view of their contribution to students' ability to use language accurately, fluently, appropriately, and independently.

The study is qualitative in nature. Its main aim is not to measure numerical indicators, but to interpret and systematize the pedagogical possibilities of the communicative approach. However, the article also suggests that the effectiveness of communicative teaching can be evaluated through observable criteria such as students' ability to construct coherent utterances, use vocabulary in context, apply grammar in meaningful speech, participate in interaction, ask and answer questions, express opinions, and respond to communicative difficulties.

The analysis shows that the communicative approach has a strong methodological influence on the development of students' linguistic competencies because it changes the internal logic of the learning process. In traditional teaching, the lesson often begins with explanation of a rule and ends with exercises based on repetition or substitution. In communicative teaching, the learning process is organized around meaningful language use. Students are encouraged to understand, negotiate, ask, explain, argue, clarify, summarize, and evaluate. As a result, linguistic units are learned not as isolated forms, but as functional tools of communication.

One of the most important results of the communicative approach is the development of grammatical competence in context. Grammar remains a necessary component of linguistic competence, but its role changes. Instead of memorizing rules separately from speech practice, students learn how grammatical structures serve communicative purposes. For example, conditional sentences are used to discuss possible solutions to problems, passive constructions are used in academic and scientific descriptions, modal verbs are used to express obligation, possibility, probability, or advice, and complex sentences are used to build arguments. This contextualization helps students understand not only how a grammatical structure is formed, but also why, when, and how it is used.

The communicative approach also contributes to the development of lexical competence. Vocabulary acquisition becomes more effective when words are connected with topics, situations, intentions, and discourse. Students remember lexical units better when they use them in discussion, problem-solving, text analysis, presentation, or written argumentation. In communicative classrooms, vocabulary is not limited to individual words; students learn collocations, phrases, functional expressions, academic formulas, and discourse markers. This is especially important

for higher education students, because academic and professional communication requires precise and contextually appropriate vocabulary.

Phonetic and pronunciation competence also develops more naturally in communicative teaching. Pronunciation is often difficult to improve through mechanical repetition alone. When students participate in dialogues, presentations, debates, and role-play activities, they become more attentive to intelligibility, stress, rhythm, intonation, and fluency. Communicative tasks create a real need to be understood by others. This need encourages learners to monitor their speech, correct pronunciation problems, and improve oral clarity. In this sense, pronunciation becomes not only a phonetic skill but also a communicative necessity.

Another significant result is the development of discourse competence. Students learn to produce not separate sentences, but coherent oral and written texts. Communicative tasks require them to organize ideas logically, connect statements, develop arguments, maintain topic continuity, and use cohesive devices. For example, during group discussion students must listen to previous speakers, respond to their ideas, add information, express agreement or disagreement, and conclude the conversation. In academic writing, they must formulate a thesis, support it with arguments, use transitions, and create a coherent structure. These skills are central to linguistic competence because real communication always takes place in connected discourse.

The communicative approach also strengthens sociolinguistic competence. Students learn that language use depends on context, participants, purpose, level of formality, cultural norms, and communicative intention. The same meaning can be expressed differently in formal academic speech, friendly conversation, professional correspondence, or public presentation. Through communicative tasks, learners practice selecting appropriate forms of address, polite expressions, modal structures, and speech strategies. This is important because grammatically correct speech may still be communicatively inappropriate if it does not correspond to the social situation.

Strategic competence is another important outcome. In real communication, students may forget a word, misunderstand a question, face hesitation, or need clarification. The communicative approach teaches them to overcome these difficulties through strategies such as paraphrasing, asking for repetition, giving examples, using synonyms, checking

understanding, and reformulating ideas. These strategies make students more independent and confident language users. They also reduce fear of making mistakes, because students learn that communication is a dynamic process in which meaning can be negotiated.

The analysis further shows that the communicative approach increases student motivation. When learners see that language is used for meaningful purposes, their participation becomes more active. They understand the practical value of language learning and become more willing to speak, ask questions, and express personal opinions. Communicative activities also create emotional involvement because they are connected with real-life situations, professional topics, social problems, and students' own experiences. This motivational aspect is essential in higher education, where students need to develop not only knowledge but also readiness for continuous self-improvement.

The role of the teacher also changes in the communicative approach. The teacher is not only a source of information, but also an organizer of interaction, facilitator, consultant, observer, and evaluator. The teacher creates communicative situations, selects authentic materials, guides students' participation, provides feedback, and helps learners reflect on their language use. This change does not reduce the importance of the teacher; on the contrary, it requires higher methodological competence because communicative lessons must be carefully planned and managed.

The role of students changes as well. They become active participants in the learning process. They are expected to cooperate, make decisions, express opinions, solve problems, and evaluate their own progress. This student-centered character of communicative teaching supports the development of autonomy. Students gradually learn to take responsibility for their learning, identify their linguistic difficulties, use resources independently, and improve their communicative performance.

The findings indicate that the communicative approach should be considered an essential component of the methodological system for developing students' linguistic competencies. Its main advantage is that it integrates language form, meaning, and use. Linguistic competence cannot be fully developed if language is studied only as a theoretical system. Students may know definitions and rules, but they may not be able to communicate effectively. The communicative approach solves this problem by creating conditions in which language

knowledge is constantly applied in meaningful contexts.

At the same time, the communicative approach should not be interpreted as a complete rejection of grammar teaching or systematic language analysis. A common misunderstanding is that communicative teaching means only speaking practice or free conversation. In fact, effective communicative teaching combines accuracy and fluency. Students need explicit explanation, examples, correction, and structured practice, but these elements should be connected with communicative purposes. Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation should be taught in such a way that learners understand their practical function in communication.

The development of linguistic competencies through the communicative approach requires a carefully organized methodological system. The first condition is the selection of meaningful content. Topics should be relevant to students' academic interests, future profession, social experience, and communicative needs. If tasks are artificial and unrelated to real communication, students may complete them mechanically without developing deeper competence. Authentic texts, professional situations, problem-based tasks, and academic discussions make the learning process more productive.

The second condition is the organization of interaction. Communication cannot develop in a passive classroom environment. Students need opportunities to speak with the teacher and with each other. Pair work and group work are especially useful because they increase the amount of student talking time and create a more natural communicative environment. However, interaction must be purposeful. It should require the exchange of information, negotiation of meaning, joint decision-making, or collective problem-solving. Simple repetition of dialogues is less effective than tasks that require students to think, choose, respond, and create.

The third condition is the use of authentic and semi-authentic materials. Authentic materials expose students to natural language use, different registers, discourse patterns, and cultural meanings. They may include academic texts, interviews, presentations, articles, videos, professional documents, and real-life dialogues. At the same time, the teacher must adapt materials according to students' level and learning objectives. The main goal is to provide language input that is rich, meaningful, and pedagogically manageable.

The fourth condition is feedback. In communicative teaching,

mistakes are viewed as part of language development, but this does not mean that they should be ignored. Feedback should help students improve accuracy, appropriateness, coherence, and fluency. The teacher may use immediate correction when mistakes prevent understanding, or delayed feedback after communicative activity when the focus is on reflection and improvement. Peer feedback and self-assessment are also useful because they develop students' awareness of their own language use.

The fifth condition is assessment based on communicative performance. If students are taught communicatively but assessed only through isolated grammar tests, the teaching and assessment system becomes inconsistent. Evaluation should include tasks that measure the ability to use language in context. Oral presentations, interviews, discussions, written essays, project reports, text interpretation, and portfolio assessment can provide more complete information about students' linguistic competencies. Assessment criteria should include accuracy, lexical richness, pronunciation clarity, coherence, appropriateness, interactional ability, and strategic use of language.

The communicative approach is particularly important in higher education because university students need language for academic and professional purposes. They must read scientific texts, write papers, participate in seminars, defend opinions, prepare presentations, and communicate in professional contexts. These tasks require more than basic grammar knowledge. They require the ability to select language resources according to communicative purpose. Therefore, communicative language teaching should be connected with academic literacy, professional discourse, and intercultural communication.

However, the implementation of the communicative approach may face several methodological difficulties. Some students may be afraid of speaking because they fear mistakes or negative evaluation. Some teachers may find it difficult to manage group work or balance fluency with accuracy. Large classes, limited time, insufficient materials, and exam-oriented curricula may also create barriers. These problems show that the communicative approach should be introduced systematically, not superficially. Teachers need methodological training, clear lesson objectives, appropriate materials, and flexible assessment tools.

Another important issue is the balance between native language support and target language use. In some contexts,

the native language may help explain complex grammar, compare linguistic structures, or clarify meaning. However, excessive dependence on translation may reduce communicative practice. Therefore, the teacher should use the native language strategically while gradually increasing students' ability to think and communicate in the target language.

The communicative approach also supports the integration of digital technologies. Online discussion platforms, interactive tasks, video communication, digital storytelling, language corpora, and multimedia resources can expand opportunities for communication. Digital tools are especially useful when they support collaboration, feedback, authentic input, and independent practice. Nevertheless, technology itself does not guarantee communicative competence. Its effectiveness depends on methodological purpose and the quality of task design.

From a theoretical perspective, the communicative approach corresponds to the idea that language is a social, functional, and interactive phenomenon. From a practical perspective, it helps students overcome the gap between knowing the language and using it. This is why it has a central place in modern language education. It provides the methodological foundation for developing students who can not only understand language structures but also use them effectively in academic, professional, and social communication.

The communicative approach plays a crucial role in developing students' linguistic competencies because it transforms language learning from formal knowledge acquisition into meaningful speech activity. It enables students to master grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse organization, sociolinguistic appropriateness, and communication strategies in an integrated way. The approach develops not only linguistic accuracy but also fluency, coherence, confidence, and independence.

The article has shown that communicative language teaching is especially effective when it is organized as a systematic methodological process. Its success depends on meaningful content, authentic materials, interactive tasks, student-centered classroom organization, teacher facilitation, constructive feedback, and communicative assessment. The approach does not deny the importance of grammar and linguistic analysis; rather, it places them within the broader context of language use.

In higher education, the communicative approach is particularly valuable because students need language competence for academic learning, professional development, intercultural dialogue, and lifelong communication. By participating in discussions, presentations, problem-solving tasks, project work, and written communication, students learn to use language as a tool of thought, cooperation, and self-expression. Therefore, the communicative approach should be regarded as one of the key methodological foundations for improving the quality of language education and developing competent, active, and socially responsive language users.

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