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## DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: APPROPRIATE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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**Abstract:** EFL classrooms often emphasize grammar instruction, which limits learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. This study addresses this problem by exploring how communicative competence can be developed through appropriate classroom activities. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Chomsky (1965), Hymes (1972), and Canale and Swain (1980), it reviews the four components of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. A qualitative literature review of theoretical and empirical studies was conducted to identify classroom practices that foster these competencies. Findings indicate that activities such as games, role-plays, debates, discussions, and information-gap tasks are effective in enhancing communicative skills when they are learner-centred and reflect real-life communicative needs. The study argues that language teaching must move beyond grammar to emphasize purposeful interaction and contextualized use of language. It concludes that designing meaningful, activity-based instruction is essential for enabling EFL learners to achieve communicative competence.

**Key words:** classroom activities, communicative competence, Communicative Language Teaching, EFL, language teaching

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**Résumé:** Les cours d'anglais langue étrangère (EFL) mettent souvent l'accent sur l'enseignement de la grammaire, ce qui limite la capacité des apprenants à communiquer efficacement dans des situations réelles. Cette étude s'attaque à ce problème en explorant comment la compétence communicative peut être développée à travers des activités de classe appropriées. S'appuyant sur les fondements théoriques de Chomsky (1965), Hymes (1972), ainsi que Canale et Swain (1980), elle examine les quatre composantes de la compétence communicative : grammaticale, sociolinguistique, discursive et stratégique. Une revue qualitative de la littérature théorique et empirique a été menée afin d'identifier les pratiques pédagogiques favorisant ces

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compétences. Les résultats indiquent que des activités telles que les jeux, les jeux de rôle, les débats, les discussions et les tâches sont efficaces pour renforcer les aptitudes communicatives lorsqu'elles sont centrées sur l'apprenant et reflètent des besoins communicatifs réels. L'étude soutient que l'enseignement des langues doit dépasser la grammaire pour mettre l'accent sur l'interaction, le contexte et l'usage authentique de la langue.

**Mots-clés** : activités de classe, compétence communicative, enseignement communicatif des langues, EFL, didactique des langues

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## **Introduction**

In the domain of language learning, the ultimate goal of foreign or second language teaching is not merely to develop knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary in learners, but to allow the learner to use the language meaningfully and appropriately in real-life situations. This capacity of doing so is referred to as communicative competence, a concept that has changed language teaching since it was coined by Dell Hymes in the early 1970s. Hymes challenged the view that solely focused on the linguistic competence stating to opt for an approach that included not only grammatical knowledge but also the social and pragmatic competences needed to use language effectively.

This change from a purely structural view of language to a communicative one has had important outcomes for language teaching methodologies. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) have been developed in reaction to the need to develop learners' communicative competence through activities that reproduce authentic communication. In this regard, it becomes crucial to understand what communicative competence requires and how classroom activities can be planned to promote its development.

This study aims to explore the concept of communicative competence in language learning, with a particular focus on the development and components of communicative competence. It will also examine the types of classroom activities that are appropriate for developing communicative competence. Thus, this study seeks to highlight how appropriate classroom activities can play a crucial role in fostering the ability of the learners to communicate effectively in a target language.

This study draws on several complementary theories, namely Stephen Krashen's **Input Hypothesis** (1982), Merrill Swain's **Output Hypothesis** (1985), and Michael Long's **Interaction Hypothesis** (1996). The Input Hypothesis emphasizes the central role of comprehensible input in language acquisition, arguing that learners acquire language when they are exposed to input slightly beyond their current level of competence. The Output Hypothesis, on the other hand, highlights the importance of production, suggesting that learners consolidate their linguistic knowledge and notice gaps in their competence when they are encouraged to produce language. The Interaction Hypothesis brings these perspectives together by

underscoring the value of interaction, where input and output mutually reinforce one another. Through negotiation of meaning, learners not only receive comprehensible input but also practice output in ways that facilitate deeper processing and learning. Taken together, these three theories provide a strong theoretical foundation for examining how input, output, and interaction jointly contribute to effective second language acquisition. The discussion starts with a general examination of the concept of competence and then considers communicative competence as a distinct conception. Attention subsequently turns to a number of classroom activities that can foster the development of communicative competence, especially debates and discussions, games, information gap activities, and role-plays. The analysis also underlines the role of input and materials in supporting communicative language teaching. The paper concludes by resuming the key insights and outlining their implications for EFL teaching.

## **1. COMPETENCE**

The debate on language teaching was about identifying the kind of knowledge that a speaker of a language possesses. Chomsky (1965) clarified it through his distinction between competence and performance. According to him competence is considered as the internalised rules that permit individuals to formulate and understand grammatically correct sentences. In this perspective, in order to speak a language, the mastery of the grammatical knowledge was required. Thus, competence is the idealised knowledge of language, and performance is the actual use of language in real situations. Wardhaugh (1972) stated that competence is “a native speaker’s knowledge of his language” (p.12). According to him, competence is such knowledge of the speaker to understand new sentences and reject ungrammatical sentences. Otherwise, performance is the actual use of such knowledge of the language.

From this point of view, language teaching was limited to learning the grammatical rules of a given language. However, this perspective was criticised of lacking the social and functional aspect of language use. In this theory, competence is linked to the grammatical knowledge of language. The theory focuses on the grammatical rules of language rather than how language is appropriately used in different contexts. This critique laid the foundation of extended conceptualisation of competence that includes other aspects of language use such as social, pragmatic, and strategic dimensions.

As a result, in language teaching, the concept of competence expanded to include more than just syntax and morphology. It became crucial to regard how learners could use language to communicate effectively in diverse social contexts. This perspective later gave birth to theories such as communicative competence.

## **2. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

The concept of communicative competence is coined by Dell Hymes (1972) as a reaction to Chomsky's partial view of linguistic competence. Hymes argued that the mastery of grammatical rules is not sufficient; speakers also need to recognise *what to say, to whom, and in what context*. Therefore, communicative competence comprises the linguistic knowledge discussed by Chomsky, and the ability to use language appropriately in social interaction.

Canale and Swain (1980) later further developed this idea identifying four components that communicative competence includes: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge of phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. Sociolinguistic competence is the ability of the appropriate use of language depending on the social context comprising politeness norms, formality, and cultural expectations. Discourse competence refers to the ability to generate coherent and cohesive spoken or written texts. Strategic competence is the ability to manage communication breakdowns utilising strategies such as paraphrasing, repetition, or clarification requests. Thus, strategic competence is a compensatory tool.

Later Bachman (1990) enlarged the model to add strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms as crucial components of language use. He redefined Canale and Swain's strategic competence. He then defined his strategic competence as a set of metacognitive strategies that help speakers plan, execute, and evaluate communication-not only compensate for gaps. His strategic competence is different from that of Canale and Swain. While Canale and Swain's strategic competence is like a first aid kit (you use it when something goes wrong), Bachman's is like a manager (guides the whole communication process from start to finish). So, the main difference is that Canale and Swain see it as a reactive tool, while Bachman sees it as a proactive and ongoing process. Therefore, his framework stressed that language knowledge is not stable, but actively interacts with individual strategies and real-world communicative demands.

### **3. ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

Developing communicative competence in language classroom requires specific activities that can promote all the four components of communicative competence. Scholars agree to design activities that can encourage learners to use language purposefully and interactively. These activities aim to promote real-life communication.

#### **3.1. DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS**

Debate is one of the most effective activities for promoting communicative competence. In this activity, students engage in discussions on selected topics such as "girls' education" or "polygamy". Based on my teaching experience, student engagement significantly increases when the topic aligns with their interests. I recall an instance where students showed little to no participation in a discussion on a particular topic; they were expected to share their viewpoints,

yet no one spoke. However, when I switched to a topic suggested by a student, participation improved dramatically.

This experience highlights the importance of selecting discussion topics that genuinely interest learners rather than insisting on so-called “ideal” topics that may hinder language use. This is especially crucial in EFL contexts, where students have limited opportunities to practice the target language. Encouraging students to speak—even if it is just a few words or expressions in the target language each day—can gradually enhance their language skills. After all, consistent practice, no matter how minimal, contributes to progress. As the saying goes, practice makes perfect. Additionally, with debate and discussion activity, students practice several language skills spontaneously. They practice the skills of listening, speaking, giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, expressing preference, likes and dislikes etc.

### **3.2. GAMES**

Games are fun, motivating, and engaging. They can be effective for developing any components of the communicative competence. According to Chen (2005), games are reported to motivate, and to get students involved in their learning. They can also encourage creative and spontaneous use of language.

Scholars have classified language games into various categories, such as vocabulary games, structure games, reading games, and writing games. Alternatively, others categorised them into linguistic and communicative games (Hadfield, 1998). From this perspective, games are designed to develop linguistic competence, and others to develop communicative competence. For instance, each game type is designed to develop a specific aspect of language, depending on the objective of the lesson. For instance, if the lesson aims to develop lexical competence, vocabulary games may be the most appropriate choice. So, games can be used to develop the different competences of language. Although games are fun and motivating, there should be a clear objective for their effectiveness.

### **3.3. INFORMATION GAP ACTIVITY**

Information gap activity is a type of completion task. In this activity, students are given incomplete information in which they are asked to complete the task by asking their peers. For example, one student is given a piece of information; the other student is asked to look for the information to complete the task. In order to complete it, the student needs to ask the one who has got the information. It is an effective activity for developing communicative competence because during the activity several language skills are practiced by learners such as the skills of asking for and giving information and other skills.

According to Harmer (1991), the gap in the concept “information gap activity” means that there is a discrepancy in the information students have, and they should ask each other questions

to close this discrepancy in order to have the same information. From this perspective, it is also a problem-solving activity, as students are required to find the missing information and add it to what they already have to complete the whole. Additionally, this activity can promote spontaneous use of language, since students must create their own language during the interaction.

### **3.4.ROLE-PLAYS**

Broadly speaking, role-plays can be considered as any speaking activity in which students play roles. Similarly, Gower et al (2005) states that a role-play is an activity in which students take the identity of a character such as a customer, manager, or shop assistant acting out the conversation. They further specify that the exchanges are unscripted though what should be said is somehow prepared in advance, which is usually taken from a text or a previous context.

Scholars view role-play as a pedagogical strategy that creates real-life situations within the classroom. For example, Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2016) stated that “role-plays [...] give students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles” (p.167). According to Harmer (2007), role-play activities reproduce real-life situations in the classroom, demanding students to adopt assigned roles. Additionally, students are given all the information about what they should do including the identity and viewpoint of the characters. While students are performing roles, the teacher may intervene by guiding, correcting or monitoring their actions. For Ur (1996), role-play refers to diverse activities in which students put themselves in situations beyond the classroom, often taking on roles different from their own and using language appropriate to that imagined context.

In light of the above definitions, role-play is then an activity which requires students to take on roles to practice language in different situations. Which role and what is said is sometimes given to them before the play begins, thus the role-play can be scripted. For instance, students may be asked to act out different characters taken from a passage of a book. What they have to do is to reproduce on scene what the character thinks and says. However, the role-play can also be unscripted, meaning that students are given the situation, and they are free to decide what language to use and how the interaction will unfold.

### **3.5. ROLE OF INPUT AND MATERIALS IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

The above activities described were mainly based on output-based instruction, which places greater importance on getting students to use language communicatively. However, scholars have also praised input-based instruction. According to them, exposure to authentic materials is essential in second/foreign learning. Thus, this section will discuss this way of teaching/learning process.

With regard to input, it is defined as language data, oral or written, of the target language to which foreign language learners are exposed through diverse sources (Kumaravadelu, 2006). Input can come from any source such as teacher's talk, books, songs, radio, movies, social media, and classmates' speech. However, materials in language learning are anything that facilitates learning. In other words, they are pedagogical tools that are specifically selected or designed to facilitate learning. They usually aim to organise and present input in a way that supports teaching goals. Examples of input include texts, audio recordings, videos, exercises, tasks, handouts, textbooks, and digital resources. Input and materials may overlap, but they are not exactly the same. While they share certain features, input is more general and may not be specifically designed for teaching; it is the language data, whether or not it is designed for instructional purposes. By contrast, materials are more specific and deliberately designed for teaching.

After clarifying the distinction between input and materials, it is essential to highlight their importance in language learning, particularly the use of authentic materials and comprehensible input. Consequently, scholars have emphasised the importance of using authentic materials and comprehensible input (Krashen 1985). For instance, Patten and Benati (2010) have pointed out that language serves as a primary source of information through which learners build their linguistic competence or mental representation of the language, drawing on the examples contained within that input. Grady et al. (2011) further underscore that in certain instances of second language acquisition, evidence suggests that particular aspects, such as lexical growth, are directly influenced by the input. Put differently, the process of language acquisition relies on the accessibility of suitable linguistic input.

Therefore, teachers are encouraged to use materials created by native speakers, such as video recordings of natural conversations, to expose students to real-life language use. When selected, the materials should be slightly above the learners' current proficiency level- a concept advocated by Stephen Krashen, whose contributions have been foundational in the field of second language acquisition. However, input alone is not sufficient, teachers should also engage students in producing language (Swain 1985), or use language interactively (Long 1996).

To ensure learners understand the content, it is also recommended that teachers use modified input-language that is simplified through slower speech, repetition, gestures, or visual aids. These strategies help make input more accessible and enhance comprehension. Furthermore, teachers can reinforce learning and promote communicative competence by providing multiple examples of the same concept, a technique known as "input flood," which increases exposure and strengthens understanding.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has explored the concept of communicative competence and discussed appropriate classroom activities that can be used to develop it. The review has unveiled that communicative competence goes beyond the mastery of grammatical structures. It also includes other competences such as sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. All these competences are essential for effective language use. By linking these theoretical perspectives to classroom practice, the discussion underlines the importance of designing activities that engage learners in authentic, meaningful communication rather than mechanical drills.

The contribution of this article lies in its attempt to bridge theory and pedagogy by identifying activity types that align with the broader components of communicative competence. Activities such as role-plays, debates, games, and information-gap exercises were highlighted as particularly effective in creating opportunities for learners to practice language in realistic contexts. Such classroom practices, when implemented thoughtfully, can provide the experiential foundation necessary for learners to internalise and perform communicative skills with greater confidence.

While this article has outlined the theoretical underpinnings and practical relevance of communicative competence, it also points to directions for further exploration. Future studies may investigate how these activity types function across different EFL contexts, learner levels, and cultural backgrounds, and how teachers can adapt them to specific classroom realities. Such research would strengthen the link between theory and practice, ensuring that communicative competence remains a dynamic and applicable construct in language education. In conclusion, developing communicative competence requires more than conceptual clarity; it demands pedagogical practices that are sensitive to learners' needs and contexts. By promoting classroom activities that reflect authentic communication, teachers can play a crucial role in transforming the theoretical construct of communicative competence into a lived classroom reality.

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