

УДК 811

THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH: COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AS THE GOAL OF ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICE

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The communicative approach aims to improve students' communicative competence, with its theoretical basis evolving from D. Hymes' proposal to many contemporary scholars. It encounters practical challenges in English classrooms worldwide, especially in Chinese EFL settings, due to teacher-centered discourse, limitations of pre-service teachers, and contextual factors, requiring implementation tailored to specific contexts.

Keywords: Communicative approach; communicative competence; Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); EFL teaching; classroom discourse.

The communicative approach focuses on developing students' communicative competence as its main goal. Its foundational theoretical framework evolved from D. Hymes' conceptual proposal to models by M. Canale and M. Swain, as well as L. F. Bachman, and has been expanded through recent research, including work by N. Taguchi and R. Thomson.

Building on a critique of N. Chomsky's narrow definition of linguistic competence, which was limited solely to grammatical correctness, D. Hymes proposed that communicative competence should include four dimensions: possibility, feasibility, appropriateness, and actual use, highlighting the social and contextual aspects of language use [1, c. 281-285]. The main value of his theory lies in moving away from N. Chomsky's idealized assumptions of an "ideal speaker-listener" and a "homogeneous speech community" [2, c. 3-4]. D. Hymes incorporated grammatical rules and usage rules within the framework of communicative competence, creating a model based on four key questions: (1) whether (and to what extent) something is formally possible; (2) whether (and to what extent) it is feasible; (3) whether (and to what extent) it is appropriate; (4) whether (and to what extent) it is done [1, c. 277]. These four dimensions relate to the individual's linguistic system, psycholinguistic capacity, the

nature of communication, and the diverse qualities of language use, respectively. By combining the social functions of language with individuals' language-use skills, D. Hymes established the theoretical foundation for developing communicative competence and shifted language teaching from simply transmitting grammatical knowledge to practical language use, thereby laying the groundwork for fostering communicative competence in language education [3].

Building on D. Hymes' foundational work, C. B. Paulston further clarified communicative competence for language teaching by distinguishing it from simple linguistic interaction. She defined it as the mastery of "social rules of language use" that regulate both referential meaning (sharing information) and social meaning (social appropriateness). She emphasized that this distinction is crucial for language educators, as failing to recognize social meaning can lead to cross-cultural communication failures, as illustrated by her story of mistakenly scolding her Swedish sister-in-law for "bad manners" when using American conversational norms in Swedish social settings (e.g., expecting third-party introductions instead of direct self-introductions) [3]. C. B. Paulston also criticized common misunderstandings of communicative competence among language teachers, pointing out that equating it with "spontaneous expression" overlooks the cultural and situational factors that influence effective communication.

M. Canale and M. Swain initially developed a classic four-dimensional model of communicative competence, which includes grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence, with discourse competence added by M. Canale in 1983[4]. While building on D. Hymes' theory, this model has certain limitations. Its sociolinguistic component overemphasizes the "appropriateness" aspect from D. Hymes' framework, limiting the concept of appropriateness to specific contexts and somewhat neglecting the development of linguistic forms (i.e., grammatical accuracy) needed to fulfill communication functions [3]. Nevertheless, the model by M. Canale and M. Swain bridged the gap between theory and practical application. Their proposed guiding principles for the communicative approach, including authenticity, practice versus real-world language use, personalization, and legitimacy, closely align with the ten principles outlined by the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILTR), the main British agency for language teaching and research [4]. This was the first major integration of communicative competence theory with practical language teaching, offering direct theoretical guidance for classroom practice in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) [3].

Building on M. Canale and M. Swain's model, L. F. Bachman further refined and expanded the subdimensions of communicative competence, proposing the Communicative Language Ability (CLA) framework, which includes language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms [5]. His research focused on the impact of strategic competence on language test performance and its measurement. From the perspective of communicative language teaching, L. F. Bachman's model clarified the functional logic of the three core competencies. Language competence serves as the tool for communication, psychophysiological mechanisms provide the channels and modes for communication, and strategic competence determines the most effective means to achieve communicative goals [3]. Language competence can be further divided into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence includes grammatical competence and textual competence, while pragmatic competence involves the ability to apply pragmatic conventions and sociolinguistic norms. This division clarifies the structure of

communicative competence and offers more specific guidance for the targeted development of various competencies in classroom teaching [3].

The development of communicative competence theory has progressed through three main stages: initiation, supplementation, and application. It began with D. Hymes' pioneering work, was followed by M. Canale and M. Swain's model enhancement [4] and culminated in L. F. Bachman's framework expansion. This evolutionary process reflects not only advances in linguistic theory but also a response to the growing communicative needs of individuals amid the global spread of English [3]. W. Littlewood further explains that this development was driven by two interconnected perspectives: a communicative view of language (what we learn), emphasizing language functions, and a communicative view of learning (how we learn), focusing on natural acquisition processes [6]. These perspectives gave rise to the widely recognized "weak" and "strong" versions of CLT. The "weak" version emphasizes controlled practice and analytic learning, offering a more familiar and less demanding framework for teachers, and is the most common in published course materials [6]. Conversely, the "strong" version asserts that participation in communication alone suffices for learning, thereby excluding traditional techniques such as drills and explicit explanations [6]. This distinction is fundamental to our communicative-cognitive framework, as it underscores that teachers' cognitive choices about which approach or combination of approaches to adopt are central to their professional competence in any given context.

With the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1970s, the focus on how to achieve communicative competence in teaching settings became a key research issue. L. F. Bachman's model, which identifies organizational, pragmatic, and strategic competence as the three main pillars, has since served as the main theoretical framework for developing students' communicative skills in CLT, providing vital guidance for designing and implementing subsequent classroom instruction [3].

Contemporary research has further expanded understanding of the communicative approach. N. Taguchi highlighted pragmatic competence, which is the main challenge in developing communicative skills, and proposed specific strategies for cross-cultural communication [7]. R. Thomson transformed communicative competence into classroom discourse competence, emphasizing the importance of teachers' discourse in organizing instruction and fostering students' communicative abilities [8]. C. Jewitt extended this concept to the multimodal field, addressing new communication features in the digital age [9]. Classrooms have long served as controlled environments for studying patterns of conversational interaction, and research consistently indicates that control is centralized [11]. Specifically, teachers dominate classroom conversations, accounting for 80%–95% of total class time. Regarding interaction control, teachers initiate 90% of questions, make 90% of structuring moves, and produce 70%-80% of reactive moves, while students only generate 70%-80% of responses without initiating conversations, setting topics, or repairing misunderstandings [10]. Furthermore, teachers remain the central figures in classroom interactions, often forming a wheel-spoke structure with teachers at the hub, acting as initiators while students respond passively. This pattern is consistent across grade levels and underscores the practical challenge of developing communicative competence in traditional classrooms. Students lack sufficient authentic interaction opportunities and metalinguistic awareness development, which reduces communicative competence training to a mere formality.

The main contribution of the communicative approach to teachers' professional competence research is clarifying the external focus of teaching practice. This approach requires teachers to possess comprehensive skills to design and implement

communicative teaching activities and to prioritize developing students' communicative competence in all teaching behaviors. To address the practical challenge of classroom conversational interaction, S. A. Bernhardt noted that cultivating students' communicative competence must break away from traditional "rules" of classroom discourse [11]. Students cannot acquire real language and communication skills through passive listening or merely reciting answers to teachers' questions. Teachers need to take practical steps to help students understand how conversation works and develop the skills necessary to become "good talkers," which provides clear and practical expectations for applying the communicative approach in the classroom [10].

In the Chinese EFL teaching context, students' development of communicative competence is also restricted by traditional classroom discourse patterns. Successful teachers overcome this challenge by combining communicative teaching methods with engaging classroom activities [12]. This issue of fostering real communication is not unique to China. For example, when teaching Russian to international medical students in Belarus, using specialized literary texts proves effective in moving beyond textbook dialogues and immersing students in authentic, professional language use and ethical dilemmas relevant to their future careers [13]. This demonstrates that communicative competence, especially in professional settings, depends on access to and involvement with real materials that mirror the complexities of actual language use. In a case study at a Chinese university, Miss H viewed the EFL teacher's role as a "tour guide" in students' language learning. She emphasized helping students develop communicative skills and autonomous learning strategies while creating ample opportunities for classroom interaction, thus enabling students to practice language skills through communicative activities in an environment where daily exposure to English is limited [18]. This teaching approach not only aligns with the primary goal of the communicative method but also addresses the real needs of Chinese EFL learners, showing how communicative competence theory can be applied within China's specific context.

The development of students' communicative skills in communicative language teaching not only faces the challenge of teacher-led classroom discussions [10], but is also limited by pre-service teachers' perceived abilities and teaching visions [14]. Although pre-service EFL teachers generally understand the importance of developing students' communicative skills and consider "communicatively competent" as one of the key expected learning outcomes, their lack of instructional strategies and classroom management skills hampers their ability to effectively design and carry out student-centered communicative activities in real teaching settings [14]. For instance, their incompetence in working with diverse groups and motivating students will directly impact the fairness and effectiveness of communicative activities, causing the development of students' communicative skills to remain at the stage of "theoretical recognition but practical inability" [14].

The development of communicative competence among pre-service non-English-major teachers faces additional challenges due to their learning environment and motivation traits [15]. Hong Kong pre-service Chinese teachers, despite having strong instrumental and integrative motivation to learn English, tend to be passive in communicative classroom activities. They only answer questions when called on by teachers, are hesitant to volunteer responses, and focus more on academic English than real-life language use [15]. This passivity results from cultural factors (e.g., viewing uninvited answers as impolite) and language anxiety, which lead to fewer opportunities for authentic communicative practice. To address this, the communicative approach

should be adapted for these groups: for example, creating low-anxiety communicative tasks (e.g., small-group discussions instead of whole-class presentations) and using authentic language materials related to their future teaching careers (e.g., English academic writing for educational research), thereby increasing their willingness to participate in communicative practice while supporting their instrumental motivation [15].

The development of teachers' communicative competence is also shaped by cross-cultural educational settings and system requirements [16]. Catalan primary teachers, working in a multicultural classroom environment with 14.1% foreign students [16], emphasize cross-cultural communication skills and inclusive interaction in their teaching. For instance, they implement "reception classrooms" to provide personalized linguistic and cultural support to immigrant students, which requires teachers to master multilingual communication techniques and culturally responsive teaching methods [16]. Conversely, Chinese primary teachers, working in relatively homogeneous cultural contexts and larger classes (35-45 students per class), focus more on managing effective classroom communication—such as organizing group discussions to encourage equal participation and using clear verbal expression to deliver knowledge efficiently [16]. These differences highlight that the communicative approach must be adapted to contextual factors like cultural diversity, class size, and educational goals.

The development of communicative competence in Chinese EFL classrooms faces significant challenges due to gaps between teachers' perceptions and their actual teaching practices. While 71.2% of in-service teachers agreed that fostering students' cultural awareness is a key goal of communicative teaching, only 42.7% actively incorporated cultural elements into their classroom activities [17]. Similarly, although 69.4% of teachers recognized the importance of organizing communicative activities, their practices were often limited to textbook reading and basic writing tasks, with few opportunities for genuine listening, speaking, or interactive communication [17]. This gap results from several factors: large class sizes that hinder personalized communicative practice, exam-focused pressure that emphasizes linguistic accuracy over communication, and teachers' limited pedagogical content knowledge to effectively design communicative tasks [17]. To address this, the communicative approach in Chinese EFL teaching needs adaptation: for example, creating scalable communicative activities suitable for large classes, integrating exam preparation with communicative practice, and improving pre-service training in designing communicative tasks and classroom management [17].

Implementing communicative language teaching (CLT) in primary education presents unique challenges. I. Anić reports that although teachers in her study recognize the importance of developing young learners' communicative competence, they often struggle to design tasks that balance linguistic accuracy with meaningful interaction [18]. This is especially true in classrooms with mixed-age groups or students who speak different first languages. Her findings echo W. Littlewood's concerns about the gap between CLT principles and actual classroom practices, emphasizing the need for a communicative-cognitive framework that equips teachers with both strategic and reflective skills [18].

In summary, the communicative approach has continuously developed in both theory and practice, while its primary goal of building communicative competence stays unchanged. Despite various challenges across different teaching settings, adapting the approach to specific educational contexts, enhancing teachers' skills, and offering genuine opportunities for communication will effectively support its implementation.

This will help students truly develop practical language skills and meet the demands of cross-cultural communication worldwide.

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КОММУНИКАТИВНЫЙ ПОДХОД: КОММУНИКАТИВНАЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЯ КАК ЦЕЛЬ ПРАКТИКИ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Коммуникативный подход повышает коммуникативную компетентность учащихся; его теория развилась от идей Д. Хаймза до работ многих ученых. Он сталкивается с трудностями в английских классах по всему миру, особенно в Китае, из-за доминирования учителя, ограниченности молодых педагогов и факторов контекста, требующих адаптации.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативный подход; коммуникативная компетентность; Коммуникативное языковое обучение (КЛО/CLT); Обучение английскому языку как иностранному (EFL); Классовый дискурс