



A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO DEVELOPING STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC SKILLS

Ergashev Doniyor Dovronovich

Senior Lecturer of English at the Language Center, Faculty of Philology,
Alfraganus University, a non-state higher education institution,
independent researcher at ChSPU, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

The present thesis examines the methodological significance of a competency-based approach to developing university students' linguistic skills in English language education. Linguistic skills are understood as an integrated ability to recognize, understand, and appropriately use phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, orthographic, and discourse resources in academic, professional, and everyday communication. The study emphasizes that language knowledge becomes educationally valuable only when students can apply it independently in meaningful situations. The findings demonstrate that competency-based instruction connects learning outcomes, communicative tasks, assessment criteria, and reflective activity within a unified pedagogical system. It also promotes learner autonomy, practical language use, and the transfer of linguistic knowledge to unfamiliar contexts. The thesis concludes that the effectiveness of this approach depends on the integration of language forms with communicative functions, differentiated instruction, authentic materials, and continuous formative assessment.

KEYWORDS: Competency-based approach, linguistic skills, linguistic competence, university students, English language teaching, communicative competence, authentic materials, formative assessment, learner autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing role of English in academic mobility, international cooperation, digital communication, and professional development requires higher education institutions to reconsider the objectives of foreign language teaching. Traditional instruction frequently focuses on the transmission of grammatical rules, vocabulary items, and pronunciation patterns. Although such knowledge is necessary, it does not automatically enable students to use English effectively in real communication. A competency-based approach addresses this limitation by emphasizing not only what students know but also what they can accomplish through their linguistic knowledge.

Linguistic competence was initially defined by N. Chomsky as an internal system of language knowledge that enables a speaker to produce and understand sentences [1]. D. Hymes later expanded this understanding by introducing communicative competence, which includes the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts [2]. In foreign language education, linguistic skills therefore represent more than mastery of isolated language units. They include the capacity to select accurate forms, interpret meanings, organize coherent discourse, and adapt language to communicative purposes.



The aim of this thesis is to determine the methodological potential of the competency-based approach in developing students' linguistic skills and to identify the instructional conditions that support its effective implementation in university English courses.

The study used theoretical analysis, comparison, synthesis, and pedagogical generalization. Linguistic and methodological sources concerning competence, communicative language teaching, vocabulary development, grammar instruction, assessment, and learner autonomy were examined. The competency-based approach was analyzed through the relationship between learning outcomes, instructional content, student activity, and assessment procedures.

The analysis focused on the development of phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, orthographic, and discourse skills. These components were considered in relation to the students' ability to perform practical tasks such as understanding academic texts, participating in discussions, delivering presentations, writing formal messages, and interpreting professional information. The methodological effectiveness of the approach was evaluated according to its capacity to connect language knowledge with independent communicative performance.

The analysis shows that the competency-based approach changes the organization of English language instruction from content transmission to performance-oriented learning. Educational objectives are expressed through observable outcomes describing what students should be able to understand, produce, explain, compare, or communicate. Consequently, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are selected according to their relevance to specific academic or professional tasks.

The development of linguistic skills becomes more effective when language forms are taught through meaningful contexts. A grammatical structure is not presented only as a formula but as a means of expressing time, condition, probability, comparison, or evaluation. Similarly, vocabulary is learned through semantic relations, collocations, word formation, register, and contextual use. Nation argues that knowledge of a word includes its form, meaning, and use [3]. This interpretation corresponds to competency-based instruction because students must demonstrate not merely recognition of a lexical item but the ability to apply it accurately in communication.

Competency-based teaching also supports the integration of language skills. Reading, listening, speaking, and writing should not be organized as completely separate areas because authentic communication usually requires several skills simultaneously. A student may read a short academic text, identify its main arguments, discuss the information with peers, and prepare a written summary. During this process, linguistic knowledge is repeatedly activated in different forms, which strengthens retention and promotes transfer to new situations.

Another important result concerns the role of authentic tasks. Students develop linguistic skills more successfully when they work with texts and situations related to their educational specialization and future profession. Academic reports, presentations, correspondence, interviews, instructions, and problem-solving discussions provide a clear purpose for language use. Such materials increase motivation because students understand the practical value of the linguistic forms they are learning.

The competency-based approach requires a reconsideration of the teacher's role. The teacher is not limited to explaining language rules but designs learning situations in which students



apply, analyze, and evaluate language. Instruction must provide an appropriate balance between explicit explanation and communicative practice. Without systematic explanation, students may repeatedly produce inaccurate forms, while excessive attention to rules may reduce fluency and confidence. Effective teaching therefore connects conscious understanding with repeated contextual use.

Differentiation is essential because university students possess different levels of prior knowledge, learning strategies, and communicative experience. Competency-based tasks should allow varying levels of support while maintaining a common learning outcome. Less proficient students may use models, vocabulary prompts, or structured questions, whereas advanced students may complete the same communicative task with greater independence and linguistic complexity. This organization supports individual progress without separating learners from the shared educational objective.

Assessment is another central element of the approach. Traditional tests can measure recognition of grammatical and lexical forms, but they do not fully demonstrate whether students can use those forms in communication. Competency-based assessment should therefore combine focused language tasks with integrated performance. Oral presentations, discussions, written responses, summaries, and situational dialogues reveal the functional quality of linguistic skills. Clear criteria should assess grammatical accuracy, lexical appropriateness, pronunciation, coherence, and communicative effectiveness.

Formative feedback has particular methodological value. Students need information about the causes of their errors and strategies for improvement. Feedback should guide learners toward self-correction rather than simply indicate incorrect answers. Reflection, peer evaluation, language portfolios, and self-assessment checklists can help students recognize their progress and take responsibility for further learning. This corresponds to the CEFR emphasis on learner autonomy, mediation, and purposeful language activity [4].

Digital technologies may strengthen competency-based instruction when they are used to support active learning. Online corpora, electronic dictionaries, pronunciation tools, learning platforms, and interactive exercises provide immediate access to language models and additional practice. However, technology should remain connected to clearly defined learning outcomes. Its educational value depends on whether it helps students understand linguistic patterns, receive feedback, and apply language in meaningful tasks.

A competency-based approach provides an effective methodological foundation for developing university students' linguistic skills. It connects phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, orthographic, and discourse knowledge with practical communicative performance. Through outcome-oriented planning, contextualized instruction, authentic tasks, integrated language activities, differentiation, and formative assessment, students learn to use English accurately and independently.

The principal advantage of this approach lies in transforming linguistic knowledge into functional ability. Students become capable of selecting appropriate language resources, constructing coherent utterances, interpreting academic information, and adapting communication to different situations. Therefore, university English courses should be organized around competencies that reflect real educational and professional needs rather than around the mechanical completion of language topics.

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