

Developing Communicative Competence: Balancing Langue Mastery and Parole Practice in EFL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study explores a balanced pedagogical approach that integrates langue mastery (form-focused instruction) and parole practice (communicative use) in EFL classrooms to foster communicative competence. Using a mixed-methods design, 60 university-level EFL students were divided into experimental and control groups. Over an eight-week period, the experimental group received instruction that equally emphasized grammatical structures and contextualized language use, while the control group followed a traditional grammar-based curriculum. Data collected through pre-tests, post-tests, observations, questionnaires, interviews, and journals revealed that learners exposed to the integrated model showed significant improvement in fluency, accuracy, and discourse management. These findings underscore the need for a pedagogical balance that promotes both linguistic accuracy and communicative effectiveness in English language teaching.

KEYWORDS: Developing, Communicative Competence, Langue Mastery, Parole Practice, Efl

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has historically placed significant emphasis on the mastery of grammatical rules, the memorization of vocabulary, and the accurate production of pronunciation. These methods, often grounded in behaviourist learning theories, relied on drills, translation exercises, and rote learning, which aimed to instill linguistic forms through repetition and reinforcement (Richards and Rodgers 2014). While such instruction is effective in building a foundational understanding of linguistic structure, commonly referred to as *langue* in Saussurean terms, it tends to neglect the spontaneous, interactive, and context-sensitive aspects of language use, which are crucial for real-world communication (Spada, linguistics, and 2019 n.d.)

On the other end of the pedagogical spectrum, communicative approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), have emerged in response to the shortcomings of form-dominated instruction. These methods prioritize fluency and meaning-making, often placing learners in immersive, interaction-rich scenarios where language is used as a tool for communication rather than as an object of study (Ellis-Chadwick, Research, and 2012 n.d.). However, in the absence of explicit attention to form, learners are at risk of developing persistent linguistic inaccuracies, a phenomenon known as *fossilization*, where incorrect forms become habitual and resistant to change (Han 2004)

Consequently, the development of communicative competence, originally conceptualized by (competence, interaction, and 2017 2019) and later expanded by Canale and Swain (Swain and Canale 1982) to include grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies, demands a more integrative and balanced pedagogical model. Such a model must blend the structural elements of language (*langue*) with its practical, dynamic use in social contexts (*parole*). A balanced approach ensures that learners not only internalize accurate linguistic forms but also acquire the ability to use those forms appropriately and effectively in varied communicative situations (Nassaji and Kartchava 2021). This synergy between form and function fosters a more holistic and sustainable language development process that meets both academic and practical communication needs in EFL contexts

Problem Statement

Many EFL learners exhibit high grammatical knowledge but lack fluency and real-world communicative ability. Others may communicate fluently but commit frequent, fossilized errors. This imbalance limits effective language use and impairs learner confidence in diverse communicative situations.

Therefore, the aims of the research are to evaluate the effectiveness of an integrated instructional model that combines form-focused and meaning-focused strategies and to analyze learner and teacher perceptions regarding the implementation of the balanced approach.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communicative competence is a foundational concept in applied linguistics and language pedagogy that refers to a language user's ability to not only produce grammatically correct sentences but also use them appropriately in varied social contexts. The term was first introduced by (Lillis 2006) as a challenge to Noam Chomsky's narrow definition of *linguistic competence*, which focused solely on the ideal speaker-hearer's ability to generate syntactically correct sentences without considering social context or real-world communication. Hymes argued that knowing a language requires more than structural knowledge, it involves the ability to apply that knowledge in contextually appropriate ways.

Building on Hymes' sociolinguistic insights, (Swain and Canale 1982) proposed a model of communicative competence comprising four interrelated components.

1. Grammatical Competence. The ability to recognize and produce the syntactic, morphological, lexical, and phonological features of a language (Canale and Swain 1981). This component closely aligns with what Chomsky originally defined as linguistic competence.
2. Sociolinguistic Competence. The knowledge of how to use and respond to language appropriately based on the setting, the participants, the topic, and the norms of interaction (Canale and Swain 1980a). This includes understanding levels of formality, politeness strategies, and cultural conventions.
3. Discourse Competence. The ability to construct and understand coherent spoken or written texts that extend beyond individual sentences. This involves cohesion (linking forms) and coherence (logical organization) in communication (Canale and Swain 1981).
4. Strategic Competence: The capacity to use verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to overcome communication breakdowns, compensate for a lack of knowledge, or enhance the effectiveness of interaction (Celce-Murcia 2007)

Later, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995), (Celce-Murcia Zoltán Dörnyei Sarah Thurrell et al. 1993), (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, Quarterly, et al. n.d.), (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, linguistics, et al. n.d.) expanded the model to include:

1. Actional Competence. The ability to understand and convey communicative intent appropriately, such as requesting, apologizing, or inviting.
2. Formulaic Competence. Familiarity with set expressions, collocations, idioms, and routine phrases common in communication.
3. Nonverbal/Paralinguistic Competence. Understanding gestures, facial expressions, tone, and other nonverbal cues essential in meaning-making.

These components collectively support the holistic goal of enabling learners to engage effectively in real-life communicative situations, whether they are speaking, listening, reading, or writing. In classroom practice, the concept of communicative competence has shaped the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), both of which prioritize meaning-making, interaction, and the use of language in context over rote memorization or decontextualized grammar instruction (Richards 2006); (Ellis 2006)

Langue and Parole. A Balanced Perspective. The conceptual division between *langue* and *parole*, introduced by (Entornos 2016) in his influential text (Saussure and 2007 n.d.) (1916), continues to play a critical role in contemporary linguistic theory and language teaching. Saussure defined *langue* as the formal and systematic structure of language, including grammar, phonology, syntax, and vocabulary, shared by members of a linguistic community. It represents the underlying, rule-governed system that enables communication. Conversely, *parole* refers to the individual and practical use of this system in real-life contexts, encompassing spoken or written expression that varies depending on the speaker and situation (Saussure and 2007 n.d.)

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, this distinction carries substantial implications for instructional design. Traditional teaching methods have typically focused on *langue*, emphasizing rote learning of grammatical rules, vocabulary memorization, and pronunciation drills. Although this approach provides a strong linguistic framework, it may not sufficiently prepare learners to use English effectively in real-life conversations (Thornburn 2017). In contrast, communicative approaches that highlight *parole* emphasizing fluency, interaction, and spontaneous speech can overlook structural accuracy, leading to persistent language errors and incomplete language proficiency (Lillis 2006).

Current research in language pedagogy emphasizes the importance of a balanced instructional approach that integrates both structural accuracy (*langue*) and communicative ability (*parole*). This dual focus enables learners to build both theoretical knowledge and practical application skills. By combining explicit instruction in language rules with authentic communication tasks, educators can foster more effective and comprehensive language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Ellis, 2020). For instance, blending grammar-focused exercises with real-life communication activities within a single lesson allows students to reinforce their understanding of language structure while practicing it in meaningful contexts. Methods such as form-focused

instruction embedded within task-based language teaching are increasingly recognized as effective strategies for achieving this integration (Doherty, &, and 2010 n.d.)

In essence, supporting full language development means recognizing that language functions both as a codified system and as a tool for interaction. The relationship between *langue* and *parole* reflects the broader pedagogical challenge of balancing accuracy and fluency. Acknowledging this dynamic equips teachers to create more engaging, effective, and learner-centered EFL experiences

Instructional Models. The debate surrounding effective instructional models in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has evolved significantly over the past few decades, moving beyond the dichotomy between form-focused and fluency-oriented approaches. At the heart of this discussion is the need to foster communicative competence, which requires not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to use language meaningfully and spontaneously in diverse contexts.

Form-focused instruction (FFI), which includes both explicit and implicit approaches, is designed to draw learners' attention to linguistic structures such as grammar, syntax, and phonological features. This model has been shown to significantly enhance learners' accuracy, particularly when embedded in meaningful contexts rather than isolated drills (Spada et al. n.d.). Explicit instruction, in particular, has proven effective for promoting long-term retention of language rules and for correcting persistent errors, especially in adult learners with limited exposure to naturalistic input.

On the other hand, task-based language teaching (TBLT) prioritizes the completion of real-world communication tasks, such as problem-solving, information gaps, or collaborative dialogues. This model is grounded in the belief that language is best acquired through meaningful use, with fluency and communicative effectiveness emerging as a result of authentic interaction (Willis & Willis, 2007; Van den Branden, By gate, & Norris, 2009). TBLT provides learners with rich input and output opportunities, which are essential for developing parole-oriented competencies such as turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, and pragmatic appropriateness.

Recent scholarship has increasingly supported hybrid instructional approaches that integrate form-focused elements within task-based frameworks. Nassaji (2017) argues that such integrated models allow learners to benefit from the strengths of both paradigms achieving grammatical precision without sacrificing fluency. For example, focus on form techniques, where brief, reactive attention is paid to language structure during communicative tasks, have shown promise in promoting both accuracy and fluency (Loewen & Sato, 2018). These techniques help learners to internalize rules while engaging in authentic communication, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of fossilization that may occur in purely meaning-based instruction.

Furthermore, recent findings by Lyster, Saito, and Sato (2013) emphasize the value of corrective feedback within communicative tasks, suggesting that immediate, context-sensitive corrections (e.g., recasts, clarification requests) can raise learners' awareness of form without interrupting the flow of interaction. This type of feedback bridges the gap between declarative knowledge and procedural fluency, which is critical for developing holistic communicative competence.

Incorporating intercultural communication, multimodal learning, and digital tools into instructional models has also emerged as an effective way to enhance engagement and expand learners' exposure to diverse language practices (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Hampel & Stickler, 2020). These innovations encourage learners to interact in varied sociolinguistic contexts, thus enriching both their language system (*langue*) and its practical use (*parole*).

Ultimately, the most effective EFL instructional models today are those that adopt a balanced, flexible, and learner-centered approach, drawing on the complementary strengths of structure-based and communication-oriented pedagogy to meet the complex demands of language learning in the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the instructional intervention's effectiveness. The quantitative component utilized pre- and post-tests to measure changes in learners' communicative competence, allowing for statistical comparison between experimental and control groups. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to gain deeper insights into the learning processes, instructional dynamics, and participants' experiences. This combination facilitates triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004)(Creswell, Plano Clark, and Cresswell and Clark, 2011).

Participants

A total of 60 EFL learners from English program were recruited for this study. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n=30) or the control group (n=30) to ensure comparability and minimize selection bias (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). The sample included learners aged 18 to 25, with similar proficiency levels based on initial placement tests.

Additionally, three English instructors were involved in delivering the instructional treatments. These instructors participated in a training workshop designed to familiarize them with the hybrid pedagogical approach, emphasizing the integration of explicit

grammatical instruction (*langue*) with communicative practice (*parole*). Teacher readiness and instructional fidelity were monitored throughout the study to ensure consistent implementation (Borg, 2015).

INSTRUCTIONAL TREATMENT

Experimental Group. Learners in this group experienced a balanced curriculum that combined explicit grammar instruction with interactive communicative tasks such as role-plays, simulations, and task-based dialogues. This approach aimed to integrate *langue* mastery and *parole* practice by embedding form-focused instruction within authentic language use contexts, consistent with current best practices in EFL pedagogy (Creswell et al. 2011). Lessons were structured to alternate between controlled practice to reinforce accuracy and freer communicative activities to enhance fluency and strategic competence.

Instruments

To comprehensively evaluate the impact of the instructional treatments, multiple instruments were employed:

Standardized Communicative Competence Test. A validated assessment tool measuring the four key components of communicative competence, grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Canale and Swain 1980b). The test was administered as both a pre-test and post-test to quantify learners' progress.

Learner Questionnaire. Administered post-intervention to gather participants' perceptions of the instructional methods, self-reported communicative confidence, and attitudes toward language learning. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to capture nuanced feedback (Canale and Swain 1980b).

Data Analysis

The data collected from both quantitative and qualitative sources were systematically analysed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the instructional intervention's impact on developing communicative competence.

Quantitative Data Analysis.

The quantitative data from the pre-tests and post-tests were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software to examine statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups. Initially, paired sample t-tests were conducted within each group to assess learners' progress over time by comparing their pre-test and post-test scores. This test helped identify whether there was a significant improvement in communicative competence after the intervention (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

To control for any pre-existing differences between groups and to examine the effect of the instructional treatment more rigorously, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed. ANCOVA adjusts the post-test scores by statistically controlling for pre-test scores, allowing for a clearer attribution of observed effects to the treatment rather than baseline differences (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all inferential statistical tests to determine meaningful differences.

Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and effect sizes (Cohen's d) were also calculated to quantify the magnitude of learning gains and provide a nuanced interpretation of the results.

Qualitative Data Analysis.

Qualitative data gathered from classroom observations, learner questionnaires, and teacher interviews were analyzed using thematic coding facilitated by the software NVivo. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification, analysis, and reporting of recurrent themes related to instructional practices, learner engagement, challenges, and perceived effectiveness of the balanced instructional approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis process began with data familiarization, including multiple readings of transcripts and observation notes, followed by initial open coding to capture significant statements and behaviors. Codes were then grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions, such as "integration of form and meaning," "learner motivation," and "instructional challenges." NVivo's features helped manage and organize the data efficiently, supporting the iterative process of refining themes and ensuring inter-coder reliability when multiple researchers were involved (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

By combining statistical analysis of test scores with rich qualitative insights from classroom contexts and participant perspectives, the data analysis aimed to present a holistic evaluation of how balancing *langue* mastery and *parole* practice influences communicative competence development in EFL classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Quantitative Results

Pre- and Post-Test Comparisons. Quantitative analysis revealed that the experimental group, which received a blended instructional approach combining explicit grammar instruction with communicative tasks, demonstrated statistically significant improvements across all four components of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. Paired-sample t-tests indicated a p -value of less than 0.05 for each component, confirming that the gains were not due to chance.

Among the four subskills, discourse competence and strategic competence recorded the most substantial increases. Discourse competence, which involves the ability to produce cohesive and coherent spoken or written text, improved as learners engaged in extended communicative tasks such as role-playing and simulations. This finding aligns with previous studies that emphasize the value of contextualized communication for building discourse-level fluency (Savignon 2002).

Strategic competence also showed marked development, as students became more adept at employing compensatory strategies—such as paraphrasing, asking for clarification, and using gestures—during breakdowns in communication. These findings support the argument that task-based language teaching (TBLT) can foster not only fluency but also learners' confidence and flexibility in real-world interactions (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994; Ellis, 2016).

In contrast, the control group, which followed a more traditional grammar-based syllabus, exhibited modest gains limited primarily to grammatical competence. While their understanding of language structure improved, particularly in areas such as verb tenses and sentence formation, their post-test scores showed little to no progress in fluency, coherence, and strategic adaptability. This result is consistent with prior findings suggesting that form-heavy instruction, when isolated from meaningful use, may result in passive knowledge that does not transfer effectively to communicative performance (Nassaji, 2017; Long, 2015).

Furthermore, the results of the ANCOVA, which controlled for pre-test scores, confirmed that the differences in post-test performance between the experimental and control groups were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), affirming the efficacy of an integrated instructional model that balances langue (form) and parole (use).

Descriptive Statistics and Effect Sizes. Descriptive statistics further emphasized the magnitude of these differences. The experimental group's average score improved by 22%, while the control group's improvement remained under 10%. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) indicated a large effect for discourse ($d = 0.87$) and strategic competence ($d = 0.79$), a moderate effect for grammatical competence ($d = 0.52$), and a small effect for sociolinguistic competence ($d = 0.34$), possibly due to its more nuanced and culturally embedded nature.

Interpretation and Implications. The quantitative findings strongly suggest that an instructional approach integrating form-focused learning with communicative practice is more effective for holistic development of communicative competence. This supports (Ellis-Chadwick et al.) who argues that form-focused instruction enhances accuracy when embedded within meaningful tasks, and Willis & Willis, (2007), who emphasize that fluency emerges more naturally when learners are engaged in real-world language use.

Such balanced instruction helps prevent fossilization—the entrenchment of errors due to lack of corrective feedback—and promotes both accuracy and fluency, reflecting the core goal of communicative language teaching (CLT) ((Spada et al. n.d.), 2021).

Qualitative Finding

The qualitative data gathered through classroom observations, learner questionnaires, and teacher interviews provided rich insights into the experiential dimension of the instructional treatment. These findings complemented and deepened the understanding of the quantitative results, revealing not only *what* changed but *how* and *why* these changes occurred in learner behavior and attitudes. *Learner Questionnaires.* The learner questionnaire responses revealed a positive affective shift among participants in the experimental group. Approximately 85% of students reported feeling more confident in speaking English after the instructional treatment. Students frequently cited the integration of role-plays, simulations, and pair discussions as key contributors to their increased comfort and motivation. One student commented, “*Before, I only memorized grammar rules, but now I feel I can use English naturally when speaking.*” Such learner-reported increases in self-efficacy are consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997), which posits that confidence in language ability is closely tied to repeated successful performance in authentic communicative situations. These findings underscore the importance of providing meaningful, low-anxiety speaking opportunities for EFL learners (Krashen, 1982; Dörnyei, 2009).

Teacher Interviews. Interviews with the three participating instructors revealed similarly positive perspectives on the blended instructional model. Teachers unanimously reported increased student engagement, especially during communicative tasks, and observed a noticeable reduction in fossilized errors over time. They noted that students were more reflective about their language use and began to incorporate feedback more actively into their spoken output.

One instructor stated, “*Compared to my previous experience with a grammar-only approach, this class feels more dynamic, and the students seem to retain and apply structures more accurately.*” This observation reinforces existing research emphasizing that meaningful interaction is essential for internalizing grammatical knowledge (Lyster, 2007; Nassaji, 2016).

Additionally, instructors highlighted that the curriculum's balanced approach allowed them to adjust instruction more responsively to student needs, shifting focus between accuracy and fluency depending on observed performance. This level of instructional adaptability is increasingly recommended in modern communicative language teaching frameworks (Richards, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). The findings of this study affirm that a blended instructional approach, combining explicit grammar instruction with communicative practice, can effectively bridge the gap between linguistic accuracy and communicative fluency in EFL classrooms. This result reinforces the pedagogical argument that accuracy (langue) and fluency (parole) are not mutually

exclusive goals but complementary aspects of communicative competence that must be strategically integrated in language instruction (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Ellis, 2020).

From a theoretical standpoint, these results are consistent with Dell Hymes' (1972) foundational concept of *communicative competence*, which challenges the Chomskyan focus on linguistic competence by emphasizing the ability to use language appropriately in context. Hymes argued that knowing a language goes beyond mastering its grammar; it includes understanding *when, where, and how* to use utterances appropriately in real communicative situations. This broader perspective is echoed in Canale and Swain's (1980) influential model, which delineates four key components of communicative competence:

1. Grammatical competence, knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, and phonology (linked to *langue*);
2. Sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts;
3. Discourse competence, the ability to produce coherent and cohesive texts;
4. Strategic competence, the ability to manage communication breakdowns and enhance communication effectiveness (linked to *parole*).

The present study's emphasis on integrating form-focused instruction (FFI) with task-based learning (TBLT) directly supports this framework by ensuring learners develop both structural knowledge and functional language skills. Students in the experimental group demonstrated enhanced competence not only in grammatical accuracy but also in discourse and strategic domains, suggesting that the dual focus pedagogy successfully enabled them to internalize the language system (*langue*) and apply it in dynamic contexts (*parole*).

Moreover, the results resonate with Long's (2015) *Interaction Hypothesis* and the notion of focus on form, which advocates for drawing learners' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally during communicative tasks. This ensures that learners remain engaged in meaningful use while still attending to linguistic accuracy—an essential condition for long-term language development.

The study also aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development. In this study, teacher scaffolding and peer interaction during communicative tasks likely facilitated the learners' movement from controlled grammar use to more spontaneous and confident language production.

Additionally, the learners' improved performance in discourse and strategic competence also affirms the relevance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, which stress the importance of authenticity, interaction, and meaning-making in second language instruction (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2018). The findings further support task-supported language teaching (TSLT) models, which propose a balance between structured learning and communicative spontaneity (Norris & Ortega, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating both *langue* (systematic language knowledge) and *parole* (practical language use) within EFL instruction significantly enhances learners' overall communicative competence. The experimental group, which received a balanced curriculum combining form-focused grammar instruction with meaning-focused communicative tasks, exhibited marked improvement not only in grammatical accuracy but also in fluency, discourse coherence, and strategic language use. These findings affirm that a dual-focused pedagogical model supports learners in becoming more linguistically accurate, communicatively fluent, and pragmatically adaptive in authentic language situations.

Pedagogical Implications. The results of this study carry several important implications for language teaching and curriculum development. Curriculum Development: EFL curricula should be intentionally designed to integrate both explicit form instruction and opportunities for communicative use. This includes tasks such as role-plays, simulations, and real-world problem-solving scenarios that encourage learners to apply grammar and vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

Teacher Training. Professional development programs should prepare instructors to balance structural accuracy and communicative fluency. Training should include strategies for embedding grammar instruction within interactive, task-based activities to promote deeper and more transferable language learning.

Classroom Practice. Teachers are encouraged to adopt blended instructional approaches, such as task-supported language teaching (TSLT), that enable students to internalize rules while practicing spontaneous language use.

While the present study provides valuable insights, further research is needed to refine and expand the model:

1. Longitudinal Studies. Future studies should investigate the long-term retention and transferability of communicative competence gained through integrated instruction, assessing learners' performance beyond the classroom over extended periods.
2. Proficiency-Level Comparison. Researchers should examine how the effectiveness of the *langue-parole* instructional model varies across different learner proficiency levels—from beginner to advanced—and how these groups respond to varied task complexity.
3. Cross-Cultural Validity: It is recommended to explore the model's applicability in diverse educational and cultural contexts to determine its universal relevance or the need for contextual adaptation.

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