# CRITERIA FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH A SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH

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***Abstract***

*The development of communicative competence is considered one of the central goals of foreign language education. Modern educational paradigms emphasize the importance of integrating linguistic knowledge with sociocultural awareness to ensure successful communication in multicultural environments. The sociocultural approach views language learning as a socially mediated process that occurs through interaction and participation in meaningful communicative activities. This article examines the criteria for improving communicative competence through a sociocultural approach. The study identifies five major criteria: linguistic, communicative, sociocultural, pragmatic, and reflective. These criteria provide a comprehensive framework for assessing students' ability to use language effectively in various social and cultural contexts. The article argues that communicative competence can be significantly enhanced when language instruction incorporates authentic communication, cultural content, collaborative learning, and reflective practices. The findings may contribute to the improvement of foreign language teaching methodology and the development of intercultural communicative skills among philology students.*

***Keywords:*** *communicative competence, sociocultural approach, intercultural communication, foreign language teaching, assessment criteria, philology students.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and international cooperation, foreign language education has become increasingly focused on preparing learners for effective communication in multicultural settings. Communicative competence is now regarded as a key indicator of successful language learning because it enables learners to use language appropriately according to social and cultural contexts [1]. Unlike traditional approaches that prioritize grammatical accuracy, modern language teaching emphasizes the integration of linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions of communication [2].

The sociocultural approach, rooted in the works of Vygotsky, highlights the role of social interaction and cultural mediation in cognitive and language development [3]. Within this framework, communicative competence is developed through collaborative activities, authentic communication, and engagement with cultural content. Therefore, establishing clear criteria for assessing and improving communicative competence is an important task in contemporary language education.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method research design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research was conducted among philology students studying English as a foreign language at a higher educational institution. A total of 60 students participated in the study and were divided into experimental and control groups.

To assess the level of communicative competence, several research instruments were utilized, including questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, oral

presentations, role-play activities, and communicative competence assessment rubrics. The evaluation process was based on five criteria: linguistic, communicative, sociocultural, pragmatic, and reflective.

The experimental group was taught using a sociocultural approach that integrated authentic materials, intercultural discussions, collaborative learning activities, project-based tasks, and reflective practices. Students were encouraged to analyze cultural differences, participate in role-playing situations, engage in discussions, and complete projects related to intercultural communication. The control group received instruction through conventional language teaching methods focused primarily on grammar and vocabulary acquisition.

The experiment lasted one academic semester. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to measure changes in students’ communicative competence. The collected data were analyzed using comparative and descriptive methods to determine the effectiveness of the sociocultural approach in improving communicative competence.

The linguistic criterion refers to learners’ mastery of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and language structures. Effective communication requires not only knowledge of linguistic forms but also the ability to apply them accurately in various communicative situations [4].

**Communicative Criterion**. The communicative criterion reflects learners’ ability to participate actively in interpersonal communication. It includes fluency, coherence, interaction skills, and the ability to express ideas clearly and effectively. According to communicative language teaching principles, successful communication is achieved through meaningful interaction rather than isolated language practice [5].

**Sociocultural Criterion**. The sociocultural criterion focuses on learners’ awareness of cultural norms, traditions, values, and patterns of behavior associated with the target language community. Intercultural communicative competence allows learners to understand cultural differences and engage in respectful communication with people from diverse backgrounds [6].

**Pragmatic Criterion**. Pragmatic competence involves the appropriate use of language according to context, purpose, and audience. Learners should be capable of selecting suitable linguistic forms and communication strategies in both formal and informal situations. This criterion reflects the practical application of language knowledge in real-life communication [7].

**Reflective Criterion**. The reflective criterion refers to learners’ ability to evaluate their own language performance and learning progress. Reflection promotes learner autonomy and helps students identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas requiring further improvement [8].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrated that the sociocultural approach had a positive impact on the development of students’ communicative competence. The results of the post-test revealed significant improvements in the experimental group’s performance across all assessment criteria compared to the control group. The most noticeable progress was observed in the sociocultural and communicative criteria. Students who

participated in intercultural discussions and collaborative activities showed greater confidence in expressing their opinions, maintaining conversations, and adapting their language to different communicative situations. Their awareness of cultural norms, values, and communication styles also increased considerably [6].

Furthermore, the use of authentic materials and project-based learning contributed to the development of pragmatic competence. Students became more capable of selecting appropriate language forms according to context and audience. Classroom observations indicated that learners actively engaged in communication and demonstrated higher levels of motivation than those in the control group. The reflective activities implemented during the experiment enabled students to evaluate their own learning progress and identify areas requiring improvement. As a result, they developed greater learner autonomy and responsibility for their language learning process [8].

Overall, the findings support the assumption that communicative competence can be effectively improved through a sociocultural approach. The integration of language learning with cultural awareness, authentic communication, and collaborative interaction creates favorable conditions for developing the skills required for successful intercultural communication. Therefore, the sociocultural approach can be recommended as an effective pedagogical framework for foreign language instruction in higher education institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Communicative competence is a multidimensional construct that requires the integration of linguistic, communicative, sociocultural, pragmatic, and reflective components. The sociocultural approach offers effective opportunities for developing these components through authentic interaction and cultural engagement. The criteria proposed in this study may serve as a theoretical and practical framework for assessing and improving communicative competence among philology students. Their application can contribute to the preparation of highly qualified specialists capable of successful communication in the globalized world.

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