



FOSTERING EFL STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH CASE-BASED TECHNOLOGY: A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. In the contemporary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, the primary objective has shifted from mere grammatical accuracy to the development of holistic communicative competence. However, traditional teacher-centered methodologies often fail to provide the authentic context required for students to internalize these skills. This paper explores the efficacy of Case-Based Learning (Case Technology) as a student-centered pedagogical intervention to foster communicative competence in higher education EFL contexts. By analyzing the theoretical underpinnings of the case method and its practical application, this paper proposes a structured three-stage framework (Pre-case, While-case, and Post-case). The discussion highlights how this technology specifically targets the linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components of communicative competence. The paper concludes that integrating case technology not only bridges the gap between theoretical language knowledge and practical application but also significantly enhances critical thinking and learner autonomy, preparing EFL students for global professional environments.

Keywords: Communicative competence, Case-based learning, EFL pedagogy, Student-centered approach, Higher education, Critical thinking.

Introduction. The rapid globalization of the 21st century has redefined the goals of English language teaching. In higher education, producing graduates who possess robust communicative competence is paramount. Communicative competence, as conceptualized by Canale and Swain (1980), extends beyond grammatical knowledge to



include sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Despite this, many EFL contexts still rely heavily on structural, form-focused instruction, which often leaves students ill-equipped for real-world, spontaneous communication.

To address this pedagogical gap, educators are increasingly adopting interactive, task-based methodologies. Among these, Case Technology (or the Case Study Method) has emerged as a highly effective tool. Originally developed at Harvard Business School, the case method immerses learners in complex, real-world scenarios. This paper aims to demonstrate how Case Technology can be systematically adapted for the EFL classroom to holistically develop students' communicative competence, providing a practical framework for language educators.

Communicative Competence in EFL. The concept of communicative competence was introduced by Hymes (1972) as a reaction to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence. Canale and Swain's (1980) foundational model broke this down into four interrelated competencies: grammatical (linguistic), sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. In modern EFL pedagogy, the focus is on integrating these four domains so that learners can use language appropriately, fluently, and strategically in various contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Case-Based Learning (CBL) in language education. Case-Based Learning is an instructional method that uses real-life scenarios to stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving. While historically dominant in business, law, and medicine (Reynolds, 2011), its application in language education is a growing field. Research indicates that CBL lowers the affective filter (Krashen, 1982) by shifting the focus from language form to meaning and problem-solving. When students are engrossed in resolving a case, they utilize language as a genuine tool for communication rather than an object of study, leading to more natural language acquisition (Borg, 2003).

Developing the four competencies through CBL. The proposed framework directly targets the four pillars of communicative competence:



Linguistic Competence: Cases provide rich, contextualized input. Students encounter and must produce target vocabulary and complex grammatical structures (e.g., conditionals for hypothetical solutions, modals for suggestions) in a meaningful context, promoting deeper lexical retention.

Sociolinguistic Competence: Cases often involve diverse stakeholders with varying power dynamics (e.g., a manager and an employee). Students must adjust their register, tone, and level of politeness depending on who they are "speaking" to in the role-play, refining their pragmatic awareness.

Discourse Competence: To persuade their peers and present their final solutions, students must organize their thoughts logically. They practice using cohesive devices, structuring arguments, and maintaining conversational coherence over extended turns.

Strategic Competence: During unscripted group discussions, communication breakdowns are inevitable. Students are forced to employ communication strategies such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, asking for clarification, and using non-verbal cues to keep the interaction flowing and achieve their task goals.

While highly beneficial, implementing Case Technology in EFL contexts presents challenges. Designing or selecting cases that are linguistically appropriate for the students' proficiency level (i+1) requires significant teacher preparation. If the language is too complex, it hinders communication; if too simple, it fails to stimulate cognitive engagement. Furthermore, students accustomed to passive learning may initially resist the high level of autonomy required by CBL. Therefore, teachers must gradually introduce this method, starting with highly structured, simpler cases before moving to open-ended, complex scenarios.

Conclusion. The development of communicative competence in the EFL classroom requires a departure from rote memorization toward authentic, meaning-focused interaction. Case-Based Learning offers a robust, theoretically sound, and highly engaging pedagogical framework to achieve this. By immersing students in realistic problem-solving scenarios, Case Technology seamlessly integrates the



linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions of language use. As EFL educators, embracing this technology not only enhances our students' language proficiency but also equips them with the critical thinking and collaborative skills necessary to thrive in an interconnected, globalized world. Future research should focus on empirical studies measuring the long-term impact of CBL on EFL learners' oral fluency and pragmatic competence.

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