

Developing Communicative Competence in Uzbek for International Students

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Abstract. This article examines strategies for fostering communicative competence in the Uzbek language among international students, a growing demographic due to Uzbekistan's expanding global educational and cultural partnerships. The study explores effective pedagogical approaches that integrate task-based language teaching and cultural immersion to enhance learners' communicative abilities. Employing a mixed-methods design—comprising both quantitative assessments and qualitative interviews—the research highlights significant improvements in linguistic and pragmatic skills among participants. The findings emphasize the importance of context-rich, interactive instruction and provide practical recommendations for curriculum development aimed at international learners of Uzbek.

Key words: communicative Competence, uzbek Language Teaching, international Students, task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), intercultural Communication, second Language Acquisition (SLA), sociolinguistic Competence, language Pedagogy, cultural Immersion, pragmatic Competence, language Curriculum Development, central Asian Languages, foreign Language Education, reflective Language Learning.

Introduction. The rise of international academic mobility has increased the demand for instruction in less commonly taught languages, including Uzbek. Uzbekistan's strategic regional position, coupled with its deep cultural and historical appeal, makes the language particularly attractive to international students pursuing studies, cultural engagement, or professional opportunities in Central Asia.

However, language learning extends beyond memorizing vocabulary and mastering grammar. Effective communication requires a broader skill set known as communicative competence—a concept introduced by Dell Hymes (1972) and expanded by Canale and Swain (1980). This includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies.

While Uzbek is gaining attention in academic programs abroad, there remains limited research on how international students can develop communicative competence in the language. This study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating pedagogical practices that support meaningful language use and interaction, particularly in educational settings involving diverse learners.

Literature Review. The concept of communicative competence has significantly influenced language teaching methodologies over the past few decades. Hymes (1972) argued that linguistic competence alone is insufficient without the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts. Canale and Swain (1980) provided a structured model, identifying four dimensions of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic.

Savignon (1997) emphasized that communicative language teaching (CLT) must prioritize interaction, real-life language use, and learner autonomy. This perspective is particularly relevant for learners aiming to function effectively in social and academic environments.

In the context of Turkic languages, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a particularly effective approach. Willis (1996) and Ellis (2003) highlight the importance of meaningful tasks that reflect real communicative needs. Kharitonova (2015), focusing on Kazakh and Turkish, demonstrated that integrating cultural elements into language tasks enhances learner motivation and pragmatic competence. Similarly, Byram (1997) emphasized intercultural communicative competence, noting that cultural immersion is crucial for understanding language use within context.

Although studies on Uzbek remain limited, for modernizing Uzbek language curricula by incorporating communicative and culture-oriented methods. Some of the study builds on these insights, applying contemporary language teaching principles to the Uzbek context.

Methodology. Participants. The study involved 30 international students enrolled in an intensive Uzbek Language and Culture program at Buxara state medical university. Participants were aged 18–30 and represented various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including speakers of Russian, English, Persian and Arabic.

Research Design. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to explore both measurable improvements in language proficiency and the lived experiences of learners.

- Quantitative Component: Students completed pre- and post-course assessments using an adapted version of Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence Questionnaire (1997) and oral proficiency interviews based on the CEFR guidelines.
- Qualitative Component: In-depth semi-structured interviews and classroom observations captured students' perspectives on learning activities, cultural engagement, and communicative challenges.

Instructional Approach. The curriculum spanned one academic semester (14 weeks) and focused on:

- Task-Based Activities: Including market simulations, group debates, academic presentations, and problem-solving tasks relevant to daily life and academic contexts.
- Cultural Immersion: Students participated in Uzbek cultural events, watched native media, interacted with local speakers, and engaged in experiential learning both online and in person.
- Reflective Journaling: Each student maintained a weekly journal to document progress, note challenges, and reflect on communication strategies used in and outside the classroom.

Data Analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired t-tests to identify statistically significant gains in communicative competence.

Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis, identifying common patterns and key learner experiences.

Results. Quantitative Findings. The data showed a statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.01$) in overall communicative competence after the intervention. Specifically:

- Oral proficiency scores increased by an average of 20%.
- The strongest gains were observed in sociolinguistic and strategic competences—notably in learners' ability to adjust language for context, use honorifics appropriately, and repair communication breakdowns.

Qualitative Findings. The interviews and classroom observations revealed several key themes:

- Engagement with real-life tasks was cited as highly effective in building fluency and confidence.
- Cultural immersion helped students understand the subtleties of Uzbek pragmatics, such as the use of indirect speech, gestures, and expressions of politeness.

- Reflective journaling allowed learners to become more aware of their own communicative development, especially in identifying moments of growth and remaining challenges.

Many participants reported reduced anxiety and increased willingness to communicate in Uzbek by the end of the course.

Discussion. These findings reinforce the value of communicative competence as a multi-dimensional construct, aligning with the theoretical models of Canale and Swain (1980) and later elaborations by Byram (1997). The success of task-based learning in this study is consistent with the work of Ellis (2003), supporting the idea that students develop fluency and interactional strategies more effectively when language is taught through meaningful, contextualized tasks.

Cultural immersion played a critical role in helping students acquire sociolinguistic norms specific to Uzbek, such as forms of address, the use of honorifics, and culturally appropriate turn-taking. These aspects, often overlooked in traditional grammar-based approaches, are essential for achieving real communicative competence. The combination of structured tasks and cultural engagement appears particularly beneficial for learners of Uzbek, given the language's rich pragmatic and social context.

Conclusion. Developing communicative competence in Uzbek among international learners requires an instructional approach that integrates language form with cultural meaning. This study provides evidence that task-based language teaching, enriched with cultural immersion, significantly enhances learners' ability to use Uzbek in real-world settings.

These results support the call for curriculum innovation in Uzbek language education and suggest a path forward for institutions seeking to support international student success. Further longitudinal studies are encouraged to explore the long-term impact of these instructional methods and their adaptability across various learner profiles and settings.

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