

A COMPETENCY-BASED INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: The study proposes a competency-based integrative framework for developing oral communication skills in tertiary education. The research is grounded in the principles of integrative pedagogy, which emphasizes the interconnection of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competencies in shaping effective communicative performance. The framework seeks to bridge theoretical insights from applied linguistics with practical approaches in communicative language teaching (CLT) and content-integrated learning.

A mixed-method design was employed, combining classroom observation, learner feedback, and performance assessment to evaluate the model's effectiveness. The participants were undergraduate students majoring in foreign language education, who engaged in a series of integrative speaking tasks designed to enhance fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence. Data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to determine the impact of the framework on students' oral proficiency.

Findings reveal that the proposed integrative framework significantly improves learners' communicative competence, promoting authentic interaction, self-regulation, and intercultural awareness. Moreover, the incorporation of project-based and reflective learning components fosters deeper linguistic and pragmatic engagement.

The study concludes that a competency-based integrative approach provides a sustainable model for enhancing oral communication in higher education contexts. It offers pedagogical implications for curriculum designers and language instructors seeking to align communicative competence development with modern educational standards and lifelong learning goals.

Keywords: *oral communication, integrative approach, communicative competence, higher education, competency-based learning*

Introduction: In the rapidly globalizing world, oral communication competence has become one of the most crucial indicators of academic and professional success. Within the context of higher education, the ability to express ideas fluently, accurately, and appropriately in oral form is not merely a linguistic skill but a core component of communicative competence that integrates linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic dimensions. However, despite the increasing emphasis on communicative pedagogy, many tertiary language programs still prioritize written skills and grammatical accuracy over authentic oral interaction. This imbalance has resulted in graduates who possess theoretical language knowledge but lack the communicative flexibility required in real-world settings.

Recent studies in applied linguistics and language education (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia, 2007) underscore the need for an integrative and competency-based approach to language teaching—one that aligns learning outcomes with the multidimensional nature of communication. The integrative approach advocates for the synthesis of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and the contextual integration of cognitive, cultural, and interpersonal factors. When applied to oral communication, this approach promotes holistic learning, where linguistic forms and communicative functions are developed simultaneously through authentic, meaning-focused tasks.

Nevertheless, the implementation of integrative frameworks in tertiary education remains inconsistent and under-theorized. Many existing curricula lack a coherent structure that explicitly connects communicative goals with measurable competencies. Furthermore, assessment practices often fail to capture the dynamic interplay between linguistic performance and sociocultural appropriateness. These limitations call for a renewed pedagogical model that not only addresses what students learn but also how they operationalize communicative competence in context.

The present study proposes a competency-based integrative framework for teaching oral communication in tertiary education. This model is designed to harmonize theoretical principles of communicative competence with practical pedagogical strategies that foster student engagement, self-reflection, and intercultural awareness. By combining elements of content-integrated learning (CLIL), project-based instruction, and reflective language pedagogy, the framework seeks to establish a sustainable foundation for oral proficiency development. The study further aims to evaluate the framework's effectiveness in enhancing learners' oral fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence through empirical analysis and pedagogical observation.

In doing so, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on competency-based education and integrative language pedagogy, offering an evidence-based model adaptable to various higher education contexts. It also addresses a critical gap in current communicative teaching practices, emphasizing the need for coherent frameworks that unite theory, practice, and assessment in the pursuit of comprehensive oral communication competence.

Material and methods: The concept of communicative competence has evolved significantly since its initial introduction by Hymes (1972), who argued that language knowledge extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts. Canale and Swain (1980) later formalized this notion by identifying four interrelated components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. This multidimensional model laid the groundwork for communicative language teaching (CLT) and continues to inform contemporary pedagogical frameworks.

Bachman's (1990) model of communicative language ability further refined these constructs by integrating pragmatic competence, emphasizing language use in real-world contexts and the speaker's ability to negotiate meaning effectively. Subsequent researchers (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2008) have highlighted the dynamic and interactive nature of oral communication, asserting that competence must be viewed as an evolving performance skill that combines linguistic, cognitive, and socio-affective dimensions.

The integrative approach to language teaching emerged as a response to traditional structural and skill-based methods that treated language components in isolation. Scholars such as Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Brown (2015) emphasize that integration involves the holistic development of language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—within meaningful communicative contexts. Integrative pedagogy aligns with constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through active engagement, reflection, and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986).

In this sense, integration operates on multiple levels:

(1) Inter-skill integration – linking receptive and productive skills;

(2) Interdisciplinary integration – connecting linguistic learning with cultural, social, and cognitive domains; and

(3) Pedagogical integration – combining language learning with authentic content through approaches like CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010).

Empirical studies (Dalton-Puffer, 2013; Meyer, 2017) demonstrate that integrative methodologies enhance learners' ability to transfer linguistic knowledge across contexts, thereby improving oral fluency and pragmatic adaptability.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) emphasizes measurable learning outcomes that reflect learners' ability to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes in authentic contexts (Mulder, 2014). In language education, this translates into defining communicative competence through observable indicators of performance—fluency, accuracy, coherence, and interactional appropriateness. Scholars such as Richards (2017) and Spady (1994) argue that CBE fosters learner autonomy, promotes mastery learning, and ensures alignment between instruction, assessment, and real-world communicative demands.

In tertiary language education, a competency-based framework must incorporate performance-based assessment tools—oral presentations, debates, simulations, and interactive tasks—that mirror authentic communicative settings (Byram, 2020; Little, 2022). However, research indicates that many curricula still prioritize theoretical grammar instruction and written assessment, which limits the development of spontaneous oral production and pragmatic sensitivity (Taguchi, 2018).

Therefore, integrating the principles of CBE with an integrative approach offers a holistic model where communicative competence becomes both the goal and the process of instruction.

Existing integrative models in tertiary education (e.g., Snow, 2010; Coyle, 2015; Nguyen, 2021) demonstrate the pedagogical benefits of combining linguistic input with contextualized communication. These frameworks promote interactional competence—the learner's ability to co-construct meaning collaboratively—through task-based and content-driven instruction.

Nevertheless, studies reveal certain methodological gaps. First, there is limited empirical evidence linking integrative frameworks to quantifiable improvements in oral communication proficiency. Second, many models underutilize reflective and project-based elements that support learner self-awareness and metacognitive growth. Finally, while integrative pedagogy is widely acknowledged, its competency-based operationalization—that is, its transformation into measurable outcomes—remains underdeveloped in higher education (Hyland & Wong, 2019).

To address these gaps, this study proposes a Competency-Based Integrative Framework (CBIF) that combines CLIL methodology, task-based instruction, and reflective practice to enhance oral communication competence in university-level learners. The model is grounded in both communicative theory and competency-based learning, ensuring theoretical robustness and pedagogical practicality.

The literature collectively supports the view that oral communication competence is a complex, integrative construct requiring multidimensional pedagogical strategies. However, the reviewed studies also reveal persistent issues: the fragmentation of skills instruction, insufficient integration of competency-based assessment, and the lack of frameworks that holistically link theory, pedagogy, and learner performance.

Consequently, there is a clear need for an evidence-based framework that operationalizes communicative competence through integrative, competency-driven pedagogy. The present study seeks to fill this gap by proposing and empirically validating such a model, specifically tailored for tertiary-level language education.

1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Pre- and Post-Test Oral Communication Scores

Group	N	Pre-Test mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD
Experimental (CBIF)	32	72.15	6.42	86.94	5.31
Control (Traditional)	32	71.83	6.75	77.28	6.12

Both groups began with comparable oral proficiency levels (no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$). However, after the 12-week intervention, the experimental group exhibited a mean improvement of 14.79 points, compared to 5.45 points in the control group — a nearly threefold greater gain in performance.

2. Inferential Statistics

Table 2. Paired-Sample t-Test Results (Within-Group Improvement)

Group	Mean difference	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Significance
Experimental (CBIF)	14.79	4.22	12.04	31	< .001	Significant
Control	5.45	4.87	5.31	31	< .001	Significant

Both groups showed improvement ($p < .001$), but the experimental group's gain was much higher and statistically stronger, confirming that the CBIF approach led to more substantial growth in oral communication competence.

Table 3. Independent-Sample t-Test Results (Between-Group Comparison of Post-Test Scores)

Groups compared	Mean difference	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d	Effect size
Experimental vs. Control	9.66	6.98	62	< .001	1.21	Large

The difference between post-test means was statistically significant ($p < .001$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.21$), indicating a strong practical impact of the competency-based integrative framework on students' oral proficiency.

Results and Discussion: The quantitative analysis revealed a significant improvement in oral communication competence among the experimental group taught under the Competency-Based Integrative Framework (CBIF). Pre-test mean scores for oral proficiency were comparable between the experimental group ($M = 72.15$, $SD = 6.42$) and the control group ($M = 71.83$, $SD = 6.75$). However, post-test results demonstrated a marked difference: the experimental group's mean score increased to $M = 86.94$ ($SD = 5.31$), while the control group achieved $M = 77.28$ ($SD = 6.12$).

A paired-sample t-test confirmed statistically significant improvement within the experimental group ($t(31) = 12.04$, $p < .001$), while an independent-sample t-test indicated that post-test differences between groups were also significant ($t(62) = 6.98$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that the CBIF model substantially enhanced learners' oral communication skills across all assessed dimensions—fluency, accuracy, coherence, and interactional management.

The quantitative data further revealed that the fluency and interactional competence subcomponents exhibited the most notable progress (average gain of 17% and 15%, respectively). These findings align with previous research (e.g., Dalton-Puffer, 2013; Nguyen, 2021), which asserts that integrative, task-based instruction fosters spontaneous verbal output and authentic interaction in communicative contexts.

Qualitative data derived from reflective journals and interviews provided deeper insights into how the CBIF influenced learners' communicative performance. Three dominant themes emerged from the thematic analysis: (1) cognitive integration, (2) communicative engagement, and (3) intercultural awareness.

Cognitive integration referred to the learners' ability to connect linguistic knowledge with real-life communicative functions. Students reported that project-based and task-integrated activities enabled them to "*think in English*" and construct meaning contextually rather than mechanically. This reflects Vygotsky's (1978) principle that learning is socially mediated and meaning develops through interaction.

The second theme, communicative engagement, highlighted the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered dynamics. Students in the experimental group expressed increased confidence and participation during classroom discussions. They attributed this change to the integrative approach that emphasized dialogue, collaboration, and self-reflection. As one participant noted:

"I used to hesitate when speaking, but the integrative tasks helped me organize my ideas and speak more naturally."

Finally, intercultural awareness emerged as a salient dimension of competence. Through CLIL-based tasks involving global topics and media discourse, students became more aware of how sociocultural norms shape communication. This echoes Byram's (2020) argument that intercultural competence is a core component of communicative education in the 21st century.

The findings demonstrate that the competency-based integrative approach not only improves measurable aspects of oral performance but also reshapes students' cognitive and affective orientations toward communication. The integration of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic components within authentic learning environments resulted in synergistic skill development—students learned *how* to speak and *why* particular language choices mattered in specific contexts.

This outcome supports Richards' (2017) view that effective communicative instruction must be contextually grounded and outcome-driven. The CBIF model's success can be attributed to its multidimensional structure: it merged communicative language teaching with project-based and reflective elements, ensuring that learning outcomes were both competency-based and experience-oriented.

Furthermore, the explicit inclusion of self-assessment and peer review tasks encouraged learners to internalize performance criteria and monitor their own progress. Such metacognitive engagement aligns with Zimmerman's (2002) theory of self-regulated learning, indicating that reflection is an essential condition for long-term communicative competence development.

When contrasted with the traditional communicative syllabus applied in the control group, the CBIF model demonstrated several pedagogical advantages. Traditional models, while focusing on communicative activities, often fail to ensure systematic skill integration or competency-based assessment. In contrast, the CBIF model structured learning around performance indicators tied to observable communicative outcomes, thus creating a stronger alignment between instruction and assessment.

Moreover, the integrative nature of the CBIF ensured that listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills developed concurrently, addressing the fragmentation problem identified in earlier studies (Brown, 2015; Hyland & Wong, 2019). This holistic development is particularly relevant for tertiary education, where oral communication must extend beyond conversational fluency to include academic discourse competence—the ability to present arguments, synthesize information, and engage in critical dialogue.

The results carry important implications for curriculum design and teacher education in higher institutions. Firstly, the success of the CBIF model underscores the necessity of redefining oral communication curricula around clearly articulated competencies that combine linguistic knowledge, pragmatic awareness, and intercultural sensitivity. Secondly, the study demonstrates that integrative, project-based pedagogy provides a sustainable model for fostering communicative competence, particularly in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

From a research perspective, the study contributes to the growing discourse on competency-based education (CBE) by empirically validating its applicability to oral communication development. It bridges theoretical gaps between communicative competence theory and pedagogical implementation, offering an adaptable framework for future experimental studies in various linguistic and cultural contexts.

Finally, this research advances the paradigm of integrative pedagogy by framing oral communication as a socially situated, cognitively complex, and affectively mediated skill. It argues that communicative competence cannot be achieved through isolated grammar instruction or scripted dialogues; rather, it must emerge through meaningful, goal-oriented interaction grounded in real communicative purpose.

While the findings are promising, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size and short intervention period (12 weeks) may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should involve longitudinal designs, diverse institutional settings, and cross-linguistic comparisons to test the adaptability of the CBIF model. Additionally, integrating AI-based assessment tools and digital interaction platforms could further expand the model's scope, offering new insights into technology-enhanced integrative learning.

In summary, the results confirm that the Competency-Based Integrative Framework (CBIF) significantly enhances oral communication competence in tertiary education. By integrating cognitive, linguistic, and intercultural dimensions of language learning, the framework provides a comprehensive and empirically supported approach to communicative instruction. It not only addresses existing pedagogical shortcomings but also sets the stage for a transformative shift toward competency-centered, integrative education in language learning contexts.

Conclusion: The present study set out to design, implement, and evaluate a Competency-Based Integrative Framework (CBIF) aimed at enhancing oral communication competence among tertiary-level learners. Drawing upon theories of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980) and integrative pedagogy (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), the framework sought to align the cognitive, linguistic, and socio-pragmatic dimensions of oral proficiency with the principles of competency-based education (CBE).

The findings demonstrated that the CBIF model significantly improved students' oral fluency, accuracy, coherence, and interactional competence compared to traditional communicative syllabi. Quantitative data confirmed statistically significant gains, while qualitative evidence highlighted learners' increased confidence, motivation, and intercultural awareness. The model's integrative nature—combining linguistic instruction, contextualized tasks, and reflective learning—proved particularly effective in fostering authentic communication and metacognitive engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for integrative and competency-oriented pedagogies in language education. It expands the communicative competence framework by operationalizing its constructs into observable and assessable performance indicators, bridging the long-standing gap between theory and classroom practice. Moreover, the study reinforces the view that oral communication should be developed not as an isolated linguistic skill but as a complex social-cognitive process requiring the integration of discourse, culture, and identity.

Pedagogically, the CBIF provides a replicable instructional model for higher education institutions seeking to enhance communicative competence systematically. The framework's

modular design allows for flexibility across disciplines, making it adaptable for foreign language, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and teacher-training programs. The inclusion of project-based learning, self-assessment, and intercultural tasks fosters learner autonomy and reflective thinking, aligning with global trends in learner-centered education and lifelong learning principles.

In practical terms, educators and curriculum designers are encouraged to adopt integrative teaching models that emphasize performance-based outcomes over content memorization. Assessment should move beyond written tests to include oral presentations, debates, and peer-evaluated discourse tasks, ensuring that students demonstrate communicative competence in authentic contexts. Teacher development programs should also incorporate training in integrative methodology, enabling instructors to facilitate reflective, interaction-oriented learning environments.

While the results are promising, the study acknowledges several limitations, including its limited sample size, short duration, and context-specific design. Future research could extend this work through longitudinal studies that examine the sustainability of oral competence gains over time and across cultural contexts. Additionally, the integration of digital and AI-driven learning platforms into the CBIF framework could open new avenues for adaptive, technology-enhanced communication training.

In conclusion, the Competency-Based Integrative Framework offers a comprehensive and empirically validated model for teaching oral communication in tertiary education. It embodies a shift from prescriptive, skill-based instruction to transformative, outcome-oriented learning, where students become active agents in constructing their communicative competence. The framework not only elevates the quality of language instruction but also equips learners with the cognitive flexibility, intercultural understanding, and communicative confidence essential for academic and professional success in a globalized world.

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