

Developing Students' Lexical Competence in English Classes Based on Problem-Based Learning Technology

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ABSTRACT

The article provides a scientific-theoretical and methodological discussion of developing university students' lexical competence in English classes through problem-based learning (PBL). Within competence-based and learner-centered frameworks, the paper уточняет (clarifies) the conceptual distinction between lexical competence and lexical competency/competent performance and substantiates their integration with the components of communicative competence. Drawing on CEFR principles, the study systematizes the structural components of lexical competence and describes functional indicators of oral lexical proficiency: conscious lexical selection aligned with communicative goals, grammatically and semantically appropriate word combination within syntagms and sentences, building lexical-semantic and lexical-thematic links, integrating new vocabulary with previously acquired items, and selecting adequate options. The article concludes that PBL and interactive tasks enhance purposeful vocabulary acquisition, promote its use in authentic communicative situations, and support the development of stable speech skills.

Keywords: Problem-based learning, English language teaching, lexical competence, lexical competency, communicative competence, CEFR, cognitive activity, learning strategies, interactive methods, learner-centered approach, competence-based approach.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the acceleration of globalization and integration processes worldwide, socio-economic, political, and cultural relations between countries are increasingly expanding. These processes require the effective establishment of international cooperation, scientific and technical information exchange, academic mobility, and the development of professional communication. In turn, this leads to a growing need to learn foreign languages, particularly English. Today, English functions not only as a means of international communication but also as an important instrument of global integration in the fields of science, technology, business, and education.

In higher education systems of developed countries, the

process of teaching foreign languages is organized on the basis of competence-based, communicative, and learner-centered approaches. In this context, language teaching is not limited to delivering linguistic knowledge only, but is directed toward developing students' intercultural communicative competence, independent thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to effectively use language resources in problematic situations. In modern pedagogical practice, interactive methods such as task-based learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning are widely applied, through which students are involved in the educational process as active subjects.

In international scientific research, modernization of the content of English language teaching in higher education institutions, adaptation of curricula to competence-based

requirements, and improvement of assessment criteria according to international standards are considered priority directions. The use of innovative pedagogical technologies, digital educational platforms, multimodal resources, and artificial intelligence-based tools has proven effective in developing lexical, grammatical, and communicative competences.

Accordingly, modernization of the content of English language education in higher education, systematic implementation of innovative pedagogical technologies, and development of effective methodological mechanisms for enhancing lexical competence constitute one of the urgent scientific and practical tasks of modern pedagogy.

In our republic, the theoretical and methodological foundations for developing lexical competence in English language teaching at higher education institutions have been gradually formed and implemented in practice. This process is being improved in close connection with national educational policy and regulatory legal documents.

In the Concept for the Development of the Public Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030, priority tasks include qualitative renewal of the continuous education system, training and retraining professional personnel, improving their qualifications, enhancing teaching methods, gradual implementation of the principles of individualization in the educational process, as well as wide introduction of modern information and communication technologies and innovative projects. These strategic directions necessitate reconsidering the content of English language education on the basis of modernization and competence-based approaches.

On the basis of these conceptual requirements, developing and improving an effective model for enhancing students' lexical competence in English at higher education institutions is an urgent scientific and practical task. In this process, the role of the student as a subject of communicative activity - as a recipient - information receiver, a producer - speech creator, and a cognitively active individual - is of particular importance. It is necessary to systematically introduce modern pedagogical methods and technologies aimed at developing lexical competence into the educational environment. In particular, problem-based learning, project-based approaches, interactive methods, digital platforms, and

multimodal educational tools contribute to the conscious acquisition of lexical units and the formation of skills for their appropriate and purposeful use in speech situations.

Thus, the priority tasks defined in national educational concepts determine the improvement of methodological mechanisms for developing lexical competence in English language education, the enhancement of students' communicative and cognitive potential, and the organization of the educational process on an innovative basis as an important pedagogical necessity.

Researchers such as B.V. Avvo, I.A. Zimnyaya, D.A. Meshcheryakov, and A.V. Khutorskoy scientifically substantiated the distinction between the concepts of competence and competency. According to I.A. Zimnyaya, "competence" is a normative description defined within the framework of predetermined goals, objectives, and requirements for the learner's educational preparation. In other words, competence is a set of socio-pedagogical requirements imposed on educational outcomes.[6]

"Competency" refers to the degree to which these competences are mastered by an individual and manifested in practical activity. It characterizes a person's possession of certain knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as their capacity to effectively apply them in real situations. Thus, competence is a system of requirements and norms, whereas competency represents their real manifestation in a person's activity.

From this perspective, lexical competence is understood as a set of knowledge, skills, and experience related to understanding lexical units of a foreign language, comprehending their semantic and functional features, and applying them appropriately according to speech situations. Lexical competency, in turn, reflects the degree to which this knowledge and these skills are effectively manifested in practical speech activity, that is, the individual's ability to express thoughts clearly, logically, and in accordance with communicative goals.

It is well known that communicative competence consists of linguistic competence - the language system and its units, sociolinguistic competence - constructing speech according to socio-cultural norms, and pragmatic competence - organizing speech according to communicative purpose. The integration of these components determines an individual's ability to communicate effectively and serves as an important

methodological basis for the development of lexical competence.

In foreign language teaching theory and practice, one of the most effective and widely used didactic concepts is the learner-centered approach. This approach places the learner at the center of the educational process and organizes the content and methods of teaching in accordance with their needs, interests, goals, motivation, individual abilities, and psychological characteristics.[9] Within the learner-centered approach, the educational process acquires a differentiated and individualized character, enabling the step-by-step development of students' lexical competence through adaptation of pedagogical technologies, curricula, and learning environments.

Scientific research shows that the main part of students' active vocabulary is formed at the lower and intermediate stages of foreign language learning. At these stages, lexical units are semantically comprehended, applied in speech situations, and consolidated intensively. At the higher stages of foreign language instruction, lexical competence is developed through deeper systematization of lexical units and their application considering stylistic, pragmatic, and cultural features. Therefore, lexical competence is not limited to expanding vocabulary size but also includes the ability to select and use lexical units appropriately according to communicative tasks.

According to A.A. Fetisova, lexical competence is characterized as the level of preparation based on acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities, linguistic and speech experience, as well as the ability to carry out interpersonal and intercultural communication in accordance with stylistic and socio-cultural norms.[2] This approach allows lexical competence to be interpreted as a multi-component system. Lexical knowledge and skills imply not only understanding the semantic characteristics of lexical units but also the unity of word and action, that is, the ability to use language units appropriately according to communicative purposes.

Based on the above-mentioned scientific views, lexical competence can be characterized through the following components:

-a set of lexical knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for communicative speech activity;

-personal qualities and capacities manifested in the process of performing specific speech activities;

-a complex integrative system including the ability to make appropriate lexical choices in problematic situations, achieve goals based on experience, and solve various communicative tasks.[6,7]

Within the framework of the competence-based approach, the main goal of foreign language teaching is to form core competences that ensure successful intercultural communication. In this context, lexical competence appears as an important component of communicative competence and develops in integration with linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic components.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), lexical competence is defined as knowledge of the lexical system of a language, mastery of lexical and grammatical units, and the ability to use them appropriately in speech activity.[10] This approach emphasizes that lexical competence should be evaluated not only by the size of vocabulary but also by the conscious functional, semantic, and pragmatic use of language units.

Research results have identified the following structural components of lexical competency:

1. Lexical knowledge – knowledge of semantic, stylistic, and functional characteristics of words;
2. Lexical skills and experience of application – ability to select and use lexical units according to speech situations;
3. Cognitive activity experience – use of lexical means in cognitive processes;
4. Strategies for implementing cognitive activity – methods of making appropriate lexical choices in problematic situations.

In English language teaching, exercises for vocabulary instruction consist of informational and operational components. Informational exercises are aimed at explaining the meaning of new lexical units and forming initial perception, while operational exercises serve to develop independent and conscious use of lexical units in speech activity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, lexical competence has a multi-component, integrative structure formed through the interaction of lexical knowledge, skills, cognitive experience, and strategic activity elements. Organizing English language instruction on the basis of CEFR requirements and problem-based learning enhances students' preparedness for successful intercultural communication and increases the effectiveness of foreign language teaching in higher education.

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