

APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE BASED ON INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This article examines approaches to developing students' communicative competence within the framework of international assessment programs. It analyzes the role of international large-scale assessments in enhancing learners' communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and the practical application of knowledge in authentic contexts. The study also highlights the pedagogical significance of integrating international assessment approaches into the educational process to improve communicative competence and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Communicative competence, international assessment programs, communication skills, educational assessment, PISA, PIRLS, critical thinking, collaboration, competency-based education.

Introduction

In today's era of globalization, modernizing education systems in accordance with international standards and developing not only students' theoretical knowledge but also their ability to apply that knowledge in practice—that is, to develop essential life competencies—has become one of the key priorities of educational policy. International assessment programs such as PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS are designed to evaluate students' ability to apply acquired knowledge not only in standard academic settings but also in complex and unfamiliar real-life situations. Among the most important competencies assessed within these international programs is communicative competence.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is one of the world's largest international comparative studies aimed at monitoring the quality of general secondary education. The program is administered by the Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD) and evaluates the extent to which 15-year-old students can apply their knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems rather than merely reproduce curriculum content¹. This program is designed to assess not only students' level of academic knowledge but also their ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-life situations, thereby evaluating their preparedness within a competency-based educational framework. The primary objective of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is to determine the extent to which 15-year-old students have acquired the functional literacy and competencies required to participate effectively in contemporary society. From this perspective, the results of PISA provide both direct and indirect evidence of students' communicative competence, as all assessment tasks are closely associated with communicative activities such as text comprehension, information analysis, decision-making within communicative contexts, and the justification of opinions.

Within the PISA framework, students' educational achievement is assessed in three major domains: reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy. Among these, reading literacy is most closely related to communicative competence, as it evaluates students' ability to understand, analyze, interpret, and draw conclusions from written texts. Consequently, this domain contributes significantly to the development of the cognitive and discourse components of communicative competence.

The methodological framework of PISA is based on assessing students' ability to apply knowledge in authentic real-life contexts, an approach that is also fundamental to the development of communicative competence. In contemporary education, particular emphasis is placed on students' abilities to communicate effectively, receive and convey information, justify their viewpoints, and engage in meaningful communication within diverse social contexts. Furthermore, the experience of the 2018 PISA assessment conducted in the Republic of Belarus demonstrated the necessity of strengthening the competency-based approach in education. The study involved 236 educational institutions and 5,830 students, and its findings provided an opportunity to compare students' levels of functional literacy and readiness for communicative activity at the international level.

¹ OECD. PISA 2018 Assessment and Analytical Framework. – Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019. – URL: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/> (murojaat sanasi: 16.06.2025).

The PISA 2018 assessment consisted of the following components:

cognitive test items in reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy;
a student questionnaire;

a school principal questionnaire.

International assessment programs serve not only as instruments for measuring students' knowledge but also as important mechanisms for establishing contemporary educational standards aimed at developing and enhancing students' communicative competence.

One of the most significant international frameworks for assessing communicative competence is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This framework was developed by the Council of Europe. Its initial concept began to be formulated in 1991, while the official framework was published in 2001. The primary objective of the CEFR is to provide a common international standard for assessing and comparing learners' communicative competence. Rather than evaluating language proficiency solely on the basis of grammatical knowledge, the CEFR emphasizes learners' ability to use language effectively and appropriately in authentic communicative situations². The CEFR assesses communicative competence through the following core components:

Linguistic competence (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation);

Sociolinguistic competence (communication etiquette and adaptation to social contexts);

Pragmatic competence (organization of discourse, coherence, and discourse management);

Strategic competence (strategies for overcoming communication difficulties).

These components are based on the communicative competence model developed by M. Canale and M. Swain and have been further refined and expanded within the CEFR framework.

The CEFR classifies communicative competence into six proficiency levels:

A1 – Beginner

A2 – Elementary

B1 – Intermediate (Threshold)

B2 – Upper Intermediate (Vantage)

² Council of Europe. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. – URL: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages> (murojaat sanasi: 16.06.2025).

C1 – Advanced (Effective Operational Proficiency)

C2 – Proficient (Mastery)

At each level, learners are assessed using clearly defined "can-do" descriptors in four language skills:

listening,

reading,

speaking,

writing.

The CEFR employs a descriptive, competency-based approach to the assessment of communicative competence. Rather than measuring what learners know about the language, it focuses on what they are able to do in authentic communicative contexts. In other words, assessment is based not on theoretical knowledge but on learners' practical ability to use the language effectively.

Assessment within the CEFR framework is carried out through a variety of methods, including:

speaking tasks and oral interviews;

listening comprehension tasks;

written assignments;

authentic communicative situations;

portfolio assessment.

In conclusion, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, serves as the global standard for assessing communicative competence. Its fundamental principle is to evaluate learners not merely on their knowledge of linguistic rules but on their ability to use language effectively in real-life communicative situations. From this perspective, the CEFR represents one of the most comprehensive competency-based frameworks for the development and assessment of communicative competence in contemporary education.

The application of international assessment frameworks such as PISA and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in evaluating students' communicative competence in specialized schools is of considerable scientific and practical significance for improving the quality of contemporary education. These frameworks are grounded in the competency-based educational paradigm and are distinguished by their focus on assessing students' ability to perform

effectively in authentic communicative situations rather than merely measuring their level of theoretical knowledge.

One of the major advantages of international assessment systems is their standardized and criterion-referenced nature. In particular, the CEFR evaluates learners' language proficiency through clearly defined descriptors across six levels, ranging from A1 to C2, while the PISA assessment measures students' functional literacy through tasks designed to reflect real-life situations. These approaches make it possible to assess the linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic components of communicative competence in a comprehensive manner.

Within the context of specialized schools, the implementation of these assessment approaches contributes not only to the development of students' academic knowledge but also to the enhancement of their ability to communicate effectively, justify their opinions, participate in discussions, and make informed decisions in diverse communicative situations. Consequently, assessment is transformed from a tool of summative evaluation into a pedagogical mechanism that promotes learning, provides guidance, and encourages students' reflective development.

Furthermore, the adoption of international assessment approaches enables educational quality to be compared against global standards. This enhances the competitiveness of the national education system and provides opportunities to evaluate students' communicative competence according to internationally recognized criteria. In particular, the "can-do" approach of the CEFR and the functional literacy model employed by PISA constitute a robust scientific foundation for assessing learners' readiness to communicate and function effectively in real-life contexts.

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