

Competence-Based Approach to ELT

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Summary

Competence-based approach to ELT is linked to teaching communicative competence. Yet, this relationship is not straightforward. The presentation attempts to make concept visible, distinguishes between “subject”, “performer”, and “development” competencies, recognises systemic architecture of the concept under study, considers quality control and testing procedures.

(From “Teacher-Preacher in Competence Land”)

Teacher-Preacher: Excuse me, Sir. What is “competence”?

LEAr-the-King: What, do you think, it is?

Teacher-Preacher: I don’t know ...

LEAr-the-King: If you don’t know what it is, how do you know that you need it?

Teacher-Preacher: Clever words always make me feel so stupid...

LEAr-the-King: Clever words always make me feel so important...

What is known about “competence” so far?

- **Competency-based training originated in performance-based education (USA 1960s). The goal was to increase competitiveness in the market**
- **Behaviourist stance was adopted towards competency-based training. The critics said the programme would be reduced to teaching simple skills**
- **Competency-based training proved insufficient for creativity and originality in learners. Two concepts of “competency” and “competence” came to be distinguished**
- **“Competencies” began to be understood as curriculum areas and outcomes of practice, while “competence” was approached as a whole-person attribute**
- **“Competencies” are now interpreted as the “anatomy of competence” helpful for representing the architecture of the concept**

Today in England employers want employees who

- are literate
- have IT skills
- can solve problems
- possess communication skills
- are flexible and adaptable to innovations
- can learn new skills and develop continuously

Hence the 6 key competencies (skills) are: communication and literacy, numeracy, information technology, problem solving, working with others, improving one's own learning and performance

False assumptions about competence-based approach:

Competence-based programmes develop in learners of arithmetic the ability to count change while shopping, in learners of physics the ability to fix a plug at home, in learners of biology to raise chicken, in learners of geography to find the way home, and in learners of English to ask how to get to the British Museum or Trafalgar square.

What is competence in ELT?

In the most general sense, a competence in ELT means
“observable areas of successful performance”

Observable areas of successful performance in ELT exist as

- a) subject knowledge (ability to elicit language from memory)
- b) communicative skills (behaving in communicative situations)
- c) performing beyond the school (being effective with using English)

Successful implementation of competence-based approach to ELT means that learners know the language, demonstrate communication skills and are equipped to win beyond the school in the real world.

The following three components have always been implied in the theory of language teaching and learning:

- A. Knowledge of the subject**
- B. Skills in resolving problem tasks**
- C. Performance in the real world**

Towards this agenda, humanistic education develops in students:

knowledge, skill and performance.

Cognitive science has contributed to the way we understand how “competence” is learned (dog-cat-rat paradigm):

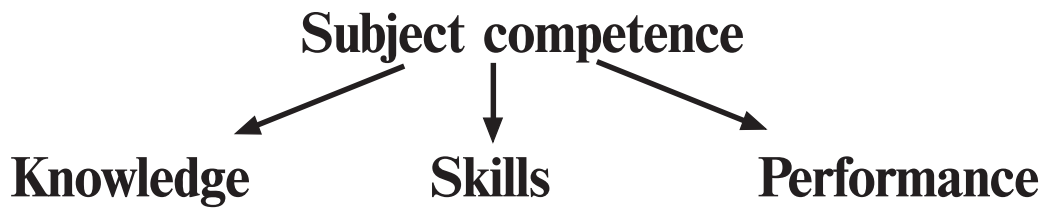
- A. Behaviourism — learning to react with “correct” or “incorrect” choice. A dog reacting correctly to a piece of meat. “Competence” means ample knowledge of correct and/or incorrect responses.**
- B. Mentalism — forming internal rules for decision making. A cat learning how to get food by pressing the lever. “Competence” means effective problem-solving”.**
- C. Cognitivism — developing an active model of the environment. A rat forming a cognitive map of the maze in order to get out of it. “Competence” means successful performance.**

Constructing knowledge — Developing skills — Achieving goals

A controversial motto about competence-based teaching is: let them “get things done instead of talking about them!”

Intellectualism VS. Anti-intellectualism

- A. Are we after theoretical or practical instruction?**
- B. Are we after dependent or independent learners?**
- C. Are we after dreamers or achievers?**



Subject competence is the beginning of the road

- **Subject competence is based on the declarative and procedural knowledge of what is “correct” in the language**
- **Subject competence is created through higher order problem-solving communicative tasks**
- **Subject competence is developed through simulating the real world and participating in it**

Effective performance survives with errors, trips over inadequate problem-solving skills, and dies without experience

Subject competence and learning

Types of subject competence

Knowledge of the “correct” forms

Skills of problem-solving

Performance in/as if in the real-world settings

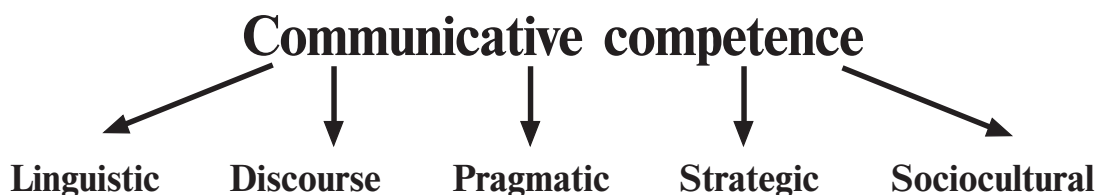
Mode of learning

Transmission learning (from teacher to class)

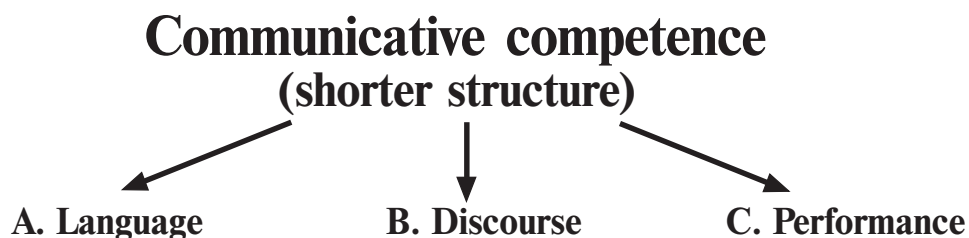
Active learning (social construction)

Deep learning (immersion in the real-world context)

The way towards subject competence is through transmission of knowledge, construction of skills, and gaining experience through deep immersion in the real-world context.



Is communicative competence the “subject competence” of ELT with the knowledge-skills-performance structure?



A. Knowledge of vocabulary and grammar

B. Skills of using the language for communicative purposes

C. Performing in a variety of real-world settings

Communicative competence is subject competence in ELT but is *different* to “performer competence”

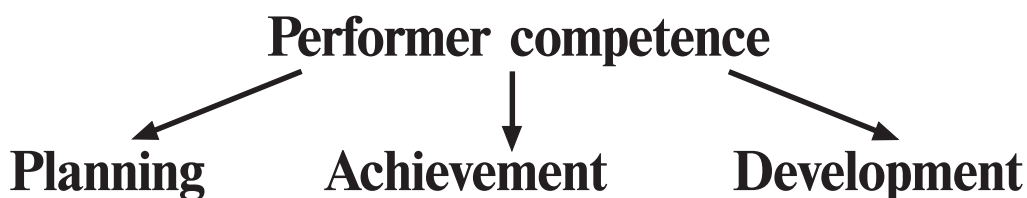
Performer competence (in the real world)

- Performer competence requires more than language knowledge and communicative skills
- Performer competence means transfer of subject competence to the real world
- Performer competence implies interdisciplinary and cross-cultural training

Performer competence

- a) draws upon world knowledge
- b) ensures achievement through winning strategies
- c) builds upon reflection and lifelong learning

Performer competence is ability to swim farther and faster than others in the rough sea of life



- A. Performer competence includes planning capacities in individuals enabling them to self-steer towards their goals
- B. Performer competence includes goal achievement in a competitive environment through successful strategies
- C. Performer competence includes development by reflection and creation of one's own theory of action

School develops performer competence in learners by anticipating, modelling and approaching the real world

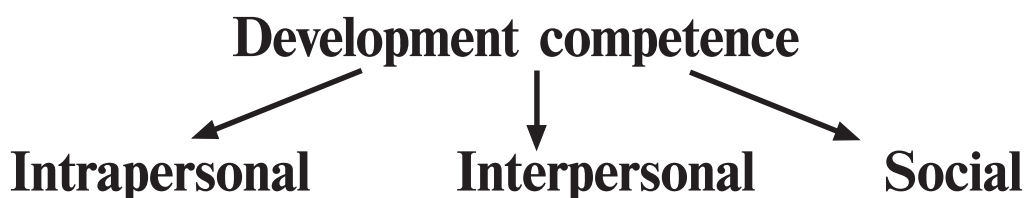
Performer competence can be developed in learners by introducing “project culture” to the subject studies.

Teaching through projects is problem driven (any project is boosted by a problem), product oriented (any project produces a “product”), and change bringing (any project adds something new to the previous situation).

Performer competence can be developed through

- **interdisciplinary projects (bringing different subjects together)**
- **cross-cultural projects (bringing different cultures together)**
- **out-of-school projects (bringing classroom and reality together)**

Participation in the projects is the way towards learning performer competence



- A. Intrapersonal competence is ability to evaluate one’s own strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of one’s personality growth**
- B. Interpersonal competence includes co-operation, interaction, empathy and promoting efficacy in others**
- C. Social competence means absorption, sharing and creation of values, norms and knowledge contributing to one’s community**

Development competence is a bridge towards a whole person

Development competence is learned through:

- **discovering one's strengths and weaknesses in learning**
- **raising awareness of one's learning styles and strategies**
- **describing one's cultural identity (stereotypes, conventions and values)**
- **being conscious of one's needs and motivational hierarchy**
- **developing one's style of relating to other people**
- **finding effective strategies of interpersonal interaction**
- **building one's personal capacity to contribute to the partners, team, and community**

Development competence is the product of one's continuous self-actualisation

Competence-based programme develops in learners:

Subject competence: knowledge, skills, performance

Performer competence: planning, achievement, development

Development competence: intrapersonal growth, interpersonal interaction, active social role

One needs all three to be successful

Assessment and testing in competence-based programmes

Thesis to depart from:

Competence can be tested and assessed because it is an ability to perform a task to predetermined standards

Parameters, areas and criteria of assessment

Quantity	Knowledge	Retrieval from memory
Quality	Skill	Finding a solution
Qualification	Performance	Achieving a goal

Possible judgements passed: a) knowledge competent, b) skill competent, c) performance competent

Subject competence is assessed through testing

Performer competence is assessed through project

Development competence is assessed through language portfolios

Assessing development = benchmark + “added value”

Concept revisited

Competence is

a whole-person resource

featuring

active knowledge

effective achievement

efficient performance

that develops in the life-long learning

**COMPETENCE APPROACH SETS
STANDARDS FOR KNOWLEDGE,
PERFORMANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT**

(from Teacher-Preacher in the Competence Land)

Teacher-Preacher: Excuse me, Sir! I would like to go back to my classroom...

LEAr-the-King: Do you feel competent to do this?

Teacher-Preacher: I will never be confident to say this, sir... Competence is what you achieve at the end of a long journey...

LEAr-the-King: Competence is CONFIDENCE!!!

On these words LEAr-the-King's crown fell off his head with a loud bang and Teacher-Preacher awakened to the alarm-clock. It was time for a quick cup of coffee and back to school teaching and preaching. After all, COMPETENCE comes when CONFIDENCE is gone. That's what Teacher-Preacher knew for sure...

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