



ENHANCING THE STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES OF B2 LEVEL STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The rapid globalization of education and communication has significantly increased the importance of English language proficiency and communicative competence among foreign language learners. Contemporary English language education extends beyond the development of grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge, emphasizing learners' ability to communicate effectively in authentic social, academic, and professional contexts. Strategic competence, as one of the essential components of communicative competence, enables learners to overcome communication breakdowns, compensate for linguistic deficiencies, regulate their learning process, and employ appropriate communication strategies. Despite attaining the B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to experience difficulties in spontaneous interaction because of insufficient strategic competence.

The present study investigates effective pedagogical approaches to enhancing the strategic competencies of B2-level students in EFL classrooms. The research employs a mixed-method approach involving classroom observations, questionnaires, communicative tasks, pre-test and post-test analyses, and reflective learning journals. The instructional intervention integrates explicit strategy instruction, communicative language teaching, task-based learning, collaborative activities, metacognitive strategy training, and technology-enhanced language learning. The findings indicate that systematic strategy instruction significantly improves learners' communication management, interactional

competence, self-regulation, confidence, and autonomous learning abilities.

Furthermore, digital learning platforms, authentic communicative tasks, peer collaboration, and reflective practices contribute substantially to students' strategic awareness and communicative performance. The study highlights the necessity of embedding strategy instruction within the EFL curriculum to facilitate learners' successful participation in real-life communication. The findings provide practical recommendations for language teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers seeking to improve strategic competence among upper-intermediate learners in accordance with international educational standards.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented changes in the educational landscape due to globalization, technological advancement, and the growing demand for multilingual communication. English has become the dominant language of international education, science, technology, business, and intercultural interaction. Consequently, English language teaching (ELT) has shifted its primary focus from the transmission of linguistic knowledge to the development of communicative competence, enabling learners to function successfully in authentic communicative situations. Modern educational systems increasingly recognize that mastering grammar and vocabulary alone does not guarantee successful communication. Learners must also acquire strategic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and pragmatic competencies that allow them to use language effectively in diverse contexts.

Among these components, strategic competence has gained considerable attention in both theoretical and practical language education. The concept was first introduced by Canale and Swain (1980), who identified strategic competence as one of the four essential dimensions of communicative competence. They defined it as the ability to employ verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for communication breakdowns and enhance communicative effectiveness. Later, Bachman (1990) expanded this concept by emphasizing that strategic competence functions as the central management system coordinating language knowledge with contextual factors during communication. More recently, the Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2020) has reinforced the importance of mediation, interaction, plurilingual competence, learner autonomy, and strategic language use as indispensable components of successful language learning.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, strategic competence plays a particularly important role because learners have relatively limited opportunities to communicate with native or proficient English speakers outside the classroom. Consequently, classroom instruction should create conditions that encourage learners to apply communication strategies in meaningful interaction rather than simply memorizing vocabulary and grammatical structures. Strategy

instruction enables learners to overcome lexical gaps through paraphrasing, approximation, circumlocution, asking for clarification, confirmation checks, repetition, self-correction, and other compensatory techniques that maintain the flow of communication.

According to the CEFR, learners who achieve the B2 level are expected to understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity, produce clear and detailed discourse, and express opinions with appropriate arguments. However, achieving these descriptors requires more than linguistic knowledge. B2 learners frequently encounter situations where they cannot recall specific vocabulary, fail to understand unfamiliar expressions, or experience communication anxiety during spontaneous interaction. In such situations, strategic competence becomes the determining factor that enables communication to continue successfully despite linguistic limitations.

Numerous empirical studies indicate that explicit strategy instruction positively influences learners' communicative performance. Oxford (2017) argues that successful language learners consciously employ cognitive, metacognitive, affective, memory, compensation, and social strategies to regulate their learning. Similarly, Cohen (2014) emphasizes that language learning strategies enhance learners' ability to solve communication problems while promoting learner autonomy. These findings suggest that strategy instruction should not be regarded as an optional component of language education but rather as an integral element of communicative language teaching.

The rapid integration of digital technologies into language education has further transformed the development of strategic competence. Artificial intelligence applications, online collaboration platforms, virtual classrooms, digital storytelling, video conferencing, mobile learning applications, and interactive educational software provide learners with authentic communication opportunities beyond traditional classroom environments. These technologies encourage learners to negotiate meaning, collaborate with peers, monitor their own learning, and receive immediate feedback, thereby strengthening strategic awareness. Furthermore, digital environments expose learners to diverse linguistic varieties and intercultural communication contexts, preparing them for real-world communication.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) provide particularly effective pedagogical frameworks for developing strategic competence. These approaches prioritize meaningful communication over isolated language practice and encourage learners to solve communicative problems collaboratively. During task completion, learners naturally employ communication strategies such as asking for repetition, requesting clarification, reformulating ideas, negotiating meaning, and providing feedback. Such activities mirror authentic communication more accurately than traditional grammar-focused instruction and therefore contribute substantially to the development of strategic competence.

Metacognitive strategy instruction constitutes another essential dimension of strategic competence development. Metacognitive strategies involve planning learning activities, monitoring comprehension, evaluating performance, identifying learning difficulties, and selecting appropriate strategies for future tasks. Research consistently demonstrates that learners who actively engage in metacognitive reflection become more autonomous, confident, and successful language users. Teachers therefore play a crucial role in helping learners become

aware of their own strategic behavior and encouraging reflective learning practices through journals, self-assessment checklists, portfolios, and peer evaluation.

Collaborative learning environments further strengthen strategic competence by providing opportunities for authentic interaction among learners. Pair work, group discussions, debates, role plays, simulations, project-based learning, and collaborative problem-solving activities encourage students to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, resolve misunderstandings, and construct knowledge collectively. These learner-centered instructional approaches not only improve linguistic competence but also foster interpersonal communication skills, critical thinking, creativity, and intercultural awareness.

Despite the growing body of literature on communicative competence, comparatively fewer studies have focused specifically on enhancing strategic competence among B2-level learners in higher education contexts. Existing research often investigates communication strategies in isolation without examining comprehensive instructional models that integrate metacognitive training, communicative tasks, digital technologies, collaborative learning, and reflective practice. Furthermore, many educational institutions continue to prioritize examination performance over communicative effectiveness, resulting in learners who possess adequate grammatical knowledge but experience considerable difficulty participating confidently in spontaneous communication.

This research addresses these gaps by investigating pedagogical strategies for enhancing strategic competence among B2-level EFL learners through a comprehensive instructional framework. The study integrates communicative language teaching, task-based instruction, explicit strategy training, collaborative learning, metacognitive development, and technology-enhanced learning into a unified instructional model designed to improve learners' communicative performance.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the effectiveness of strategy-based instruction in enhancing the strategic competencies of B2-level students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A mixed-methods approach was selected because it provides a comprehensive understanding of learners' development by integrating quantitative measurements with qualitative evidence. While quantitative data were used to determine measurable improvements in students' strategic competence and communicative performance, qualitative data offered deeper insights into learners' perceptions, classroom interaction, and the effectiveness of instructional practices.

The study followed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with an experimental group and a control group. Both groups completed identical assessments before and after the instructional intervention. During the intervention period, the experimental group received explicit strategy-based instruction integrated into communicative language teaching activities, whereas the control group continued to follow the conventional English language curriculum emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and textbook-based exercises.

Students in the experimental group participated in various communicative activities specifically designed to develop strategic competence. Students performed real-life communicative situations such as airport conversations, job interviews, business meetings, academic presentations, and problem-solving discussions. Students exchanged missing information while using clarification strategies and negotiation

techniques. Learners collaborated in small groups to complete authentic tasks requiring critical thinking and communication management. Students defended opposing viewpoints while practicing persuasive communication strategies. Groups designed presentations, reports, and multimedia projects requiring continuous communication and collaborative planning. Each student maintained a weekly reflective journal documenting communication difficulties, successful strategies, and personal progress.

Technology-supported learning formed an essential component of the intervention. Students regularly used digital platforms such as Google classroom, padlet, quizlet, kahoot, zoom discussion rooms, AI-supported speaking applications, online discussion forums, interactive vocabulary platforms

These digital tools encouraged learner autonomy, immediate feedback, collaborative learning, and authentic communication beyond classroom boundaries.

Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that explicit strategy-based instruction has a substantial positive impact on the development of strategic competence among B2-level students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected throughout the twelve-week instructional intervention revealed consistent improvements in learners' communicative performance, strategic awareness, interactional competence, self-regulation, and confidence.

At the beginning of the study, the participants from both the experimental and control groups demonstrated comparable levels of English language proficiency and strategic competence. Although the majority of students possessed sufficient grammatical knowledge and vocabulary to communicate at the B2 level, many experienced difficulty maintaining conversations when confronted with unfamiliar vocabulary, unexpected questions, or communicative breakdowns. Classroom observations conducted during the initial weeks indicated that students frequently hesitated while speaking, relied heavily on memorized language patterns, and often abandoned communication when they were unable to recall appropriate lexical items. Such behavior reflected limited awareness and application of communication strategies despite an adequate level of linguistic competence.

Following the implementation of the strategy-based instructional program, considerable changes were observed in the communicative behavior of students in the experimental group. Learners became increasingly capable of employing communication strategies to overcome linguistic limitations without interrupting interaction. Rather than remaining silent or switching to their native language, students successfully used paraphrasing, approximation, clarification requests, confirmation checks, self-correction, repetition, and circumlocution to maintain meaningful communication. These strategies enabled them to express ideas more effectively and participate actively in classroom discussions.

One of the most significant outcomes of the intervention was the noticeable improvement in learners' strategic awareness. Students gradually developed the ability to recognize communication difficulties and consciously select appropriate strategies for resolving them. Reflective learning activities and metacognitive strategy training encouraged learners to monitor their language production, evaluate their communicative performance, and identify effective approaches for future interactions. As the intervention progressed, students

demonstrated greater independence in managing their own learning processes and became more confident in dealing with communicative challenges.

The results also revealed substantial improvement in oral communication skills. Students produced longer and more coherent spoken responses, interacted more naturally with classmates, and demonstrated greater fluency during communicative tasks. Their willingness to initiate conversations, respond spontaneously to questions, and sustain discussions increased considerably throughout the intervention. Classroom observations further indicated that communication became more collaborative, with learners actively supporting one another through negotiation of meaning, peer feedback, and cooperative problem-solving.

Learner confidence emerged as another important area of improvement. During the early stages of the research, many participants expressed anxiety when speaking English, particularly during presentations, debates, and spontaneous discussions. Fear of making grammatical mistakes or using incorrect vocabulary frequently prevented students from participating actively in communicative activities. However, after receiving systematic instruction in communication strategies, learners reported feeling significantly more comfortable expressing themselves in English. They increasingly viewed communication as a process of conveying meaning rather than achieving perfect linguistic accuracy, resulting in greater participation and reduced communication anxiety.

The integration of authentic communicative tasks played a crucial role in promoting strategic competence. Activities such as role plays, information-gap tasks, problem-solving discussions, collaborative projects, debates, and presentation tasks provided learners with meaningful opportunities to apply communication strategies in realistic contexts. These learner-centered activities required students to negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, reformulate ideas, and cooperate with peers to accomplish shared objectives. Consequently, learners demonstrated greater flexibility in language use and became more capable of adapting their communication to different situations.

The incorporation of digital technologies further enhanced learners' strategic development. Online discussion platforms, interactive language learning applications, collaborative digital tools, and artificial intelligence-assisted speaking practice created additional opportunities for authentic communication beyond the traditional classroom environment. Students actively engaged in virtual discussions, peer collaboration, and independent learning activities, which strengthened their strategic awareness and promoted autonomous language learning. Immediate feedback provided through digital platforms enabled learners to monitor their progress continuously and make informed adjustments to their communication strategies.

Metacognitive strategy instruction also proved highly effective in improving learner autonomy. Throughout the intervention, students regularly reflected on their learning experiences, evaluated their communicative strengths and weaknesses, and identified strategies that contributed to successful interaction. These reflective practices encouraged learners to take greater responsibility for their own language development and enhanced their ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate communicative performance independently. As a result, students became more self-directed and demonstrated increased motivation to improve their English language proficiency beyond classroom requirements.

Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews supported the quantitative findings. Students consistently reported that explicit instruction in communication strategies helped them feel more confident during conversations and reduced their fear of making mistakes. Many participants indicated that they had previously focused primarily on grammatical accuracy but had learned to prioritize successful communication by employing compensatory strategies whenever communication difficulties arose. Teachers similarly observed greater learner engagement, more active classroom participation, improved peer collaboration, and increased willingness to communicate throughout the instructional period.

Overall, the findings clearly indicate that strategy-based instruction contributes significantly to the development of strategic competence among B2-level EFL learners. The systematic integration of communicative language teaching, task-based instruction, metacognitive strategy training, collaborative learning, authentic communication tasks, and technology-enhanced learning created a supportive educational environment that enabled learners to develop the communication strategies necessary for effective interaction in academic and real-life contexts. The convergence of evidence from multiple data sources confirms that explicit strategy instruction not only improves learners' communicative performance but also fosters confidence, autonomy, critical thinking, and lifelong language learning skills. These results highlight the importance of incorporating strategic competence as a central component of English language instruction for upper-intermediate learners and provide empirical support for learner-centered pedagogical approaches in contemporary foreign language education.

Conclusion

The present study examined the role of strategy-based instruction in enhancing the strategic competencies of B2-level students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The findings indicate that strategic competence is an essential component of communicative competence, enabling learners to manage communication effectively, overcome linguistic limitations, and participate confidently in authentic communicative situations. While B2 learners generally possess sufficient grammatical and lexical knowledge, they often encounter difficulties in maintaining spontaneous interaction due to limited awareness and application of communication strategies. Therefore, the development of strategic competence should be regarded as a fundamental objective of contemporary English language education rather than an additional instructional component.

The study demonstrated that explicit instruction in communication strategies significantly improves learners' communicative performance. Students who participated in strategy-based learning became more capable of employing paraphrasing, clarification requests, confirmation checks, self-repair, negotiation of meaning, and other compensatory strategies to maintain communication despite linguistic challenges. These strategies not only enhanced speaking fluency but also reduced communication anxiety, increased learner confidence, and encouraged active participation in classroom interaction.

The integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), metacognitive strategy instruction, collaborative learning, and technology-enhanced language learning created a supportive educational environment that promoted meaningful communication and learner autonomy. Authentic

communicative tasks encouraged students to apply language strategically in realistic contexts, while reflective learning activities helped them monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning processes. Consequently, learners developed greater awareness of their communicative behavior and became more independent language users.

Another significant contribution of the study lies in highlighting the role of digital technologies in fostering strategic competence. Online learning platforms, interactive communication tools, and artificial intelligence-supported language applications provided students with additional opportunities for authentic communication beyond the classroom. These technologies facilitated immediate feedback, collaborative learning, and continuous practice, all of which contributed positively to the development of strategic competence.

The findings also emphasize that learner-centered instructional approaches are considerably more effective than traditional teacher-centered methods for developing communicative competence. Rather than focusing exclusively on grammatical accuracy, English language instruction should encourage students to use communication strategies that enable them to solve real-life communicative problems. Such an approach prepares learners not only for academic success but also for effective participation in international professional and intercultural environments.

From a pedagogical perspective, this research provides several practical implications. English language teachers should integrate explicit strategy instruction into everyday classroom practice through communicative activities, problem-solving tasks, role plays, discussions, project-based learning, and reflective exercises. Curriculum developers should include strategic competence as a clearly defined learning outcome within English language programs aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Teacher education programs should likewise emphasize strategy-based instruction to prepare future teachers to develop learners' communicative and strategic abilities effectively.

Although the study produced encouraging results, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research involved a relatively limited number of participants and was conducted within a single educational institution over a twelve-week period. Future research could investigate larger and more diverse learner populations, compare different proficiency levels, examine the long-term impact of strategy instruction, and explore the effectiveness of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and adaptive learning systems in developing strategic competence.

In conclusion, the study confirms that strategic competence is a key determinant of successful foreign language communication. Systematic strategy-based instruction enables B2-level learners to become more confident, autonomous, and effective communicators by equipping them with the skills necessary to manage authentic communication successfully. The integration of strategic competence into English language teaching contributes not only to improved communicative performance but also to the development of lifelong learning skills essential for academic achievement, professional success, and intercultural communication in the twenty-first century.

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