

Improving the Methodology for Mastering Language Levels Through the Development of Students' Linguistic Competencies

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ABSTRACT

This article examines methodological approaches to improving students' mastery of language levels through the systematic development of linguistic competencies. The study focuses on the relationship between students' knowledge of language structures and their ability to apply linguistic resources effectively in academic and communicative contexts. Particular attention is given to the integration of vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, semantics, and discourse-related skills within a competency-oriented learning framework. The research proposes a methodology that combines diagnostic assessment, differentiated instruction, contextual learning activities, communicative tasks, and continuous formative evaluation. The proposed approach is designed to identify individual learning needs and provide students with progressively more complex linguistic tasks corresponding to their level of language proficiency. The findings indicate that purposeful development of linguistic competencies can contribute to more stable language acquisition, improved accuracy of language use, and greater confidence in communication. The study also emphasizes the importance of learner-centered instruction, authentic language materials, reflective activities, and feedback in achieving sustainable progress across language levels. The proposed methodological framework can be adapted to higher education and other structured language-learning environments.

Keywords: Linguistic competence, language proficiency, language levels, methodology, language acquisition, communicative competence, differentiated instruction, formative assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The development of students' linguistic competencies has become an increasingly important component of contemporary language education. In modern academic environments, learners are expected not only to understand grammatical rules and memorize vocabulary but also to use linguistic knowledge appropriately in different communicative situations. Consequently, the process of mastering language levels requires a methodological framework that integrates structural knowledge, practical language use, cognitive activity, and communicative experience. Traditional approaches that primarily emphasize the reproduction of grammatical rules or

isolated lexical units may not sufficiently support the development of students' ability to apply language knowledge independently. Therefore, improving the methodology of language-level acquisition requires a shift toward competency-oriented and learner-centered educational practices.

Linguistic competence represents a multidimensional ability that includes knowledge and practical application of phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, and syntactic resources. The effective development of these components enables students to construct meaningful utterances, interpret information accurately, and adapt their

language use to particular communicative circumstances. In higher education, the issue becomes particularly significant because students encounter increasingly complex academic texts, professional terminology, specialized discourse, and intercultural communication. Their progress therefore depends on the extent to which educational activities connect theoretical linguistic knowledge with authentic language practices.

Another important aspect of language-level mastery is the individual nature of students' learning trajectories. Learners enter educational settings with different levels of prior knowledge, learning strategies, motivation, vocabulary ranges, and communicative experiences. A uniform instructional model may consequently produce different outcomes among students. Methodological improvement should therefore involve diagnostic procedures that determine learners' existing competencies and identify specific areas requiring further development. On the basis of such information, teachers can organize differentiated tasks and gradually increase the linguistic and cognitive complexity of learning activities.

The present study addresses the methodological improvement of language-level mastery through the purposeful development of students' linguistic competencies. It considers the integration of contextual exercises, communicative activities, formative assessment, vocabulary expansion, grammatical practice, and reflective learning. The central assumption is that language proficiency develops more effectively when linguistic elements are taught as interconnected components of meaningful communication rather than as isolated units. The study consequently aims to develop and substantiate a methodological framework capable of supporting students' progressive movement from basic linguistic awareness toward independent and accurate language use. The proposed approach seeks to strengthen both the theoretical foundation and practical effectiveness of language instruction in contemporary educational settings [1-3].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of students' linguistic competencies and the improvement of language-level mastery have been extensively examined within the fields of applied linguistics, language pedagogy, second language acquisition, and language assessment. Existing theoretical and methodological approaches demonstrate that effective language learning cannot be reduced to the memorization

of grammatical rules or individual lexical units. Instead, successful language acquisition requires the coordinated development of linguistic knowledge, communicative abilities, contextual awareness, and the capacity to use language appropriately in different situations.

One of the fundamental theoretical contributions to the development of communicative language teaching was provided by Canale and Swain (1980). Their work established an important theoretical basis for understanding communicative competence and its role in second-language teaching and assessment. The authors' approach moved attention beyond purely grammatical knowledge toward a broader conception of language competence. Their influential article, published in *Applied Linguistics*, addresses the theoretical foundations of communicative approaches to second-language teaching and testing. From the perspective of the present study, this theoretical position is particularly important because students' mastery of language levels should be evaluated not only according to structural accuracy but also according to their ability to employ linguistic resources for meaningful communication.

Bachman and Palmer (1996) further developed the assessment-oriented understanding of language ability by emphasizing the need to design language tests that provide meaningful information about learners' actual language performance. Their approach is relevant to the present research because the assessment of linguistic competence requires a combination of indicators rather than reliance on a single measure. This perspective supports the use of diagnostic and formative assessment procedures for identifying students' strengths and weaknesses and for subsequently adapting instructional activities to their individual learning needs.

Brown (2007) considers language pedagogy from an interactive perspective and emphasizes the importance of learner participation, classroom interaction, meaningful practice, and systematic instructional organization. His methodological position is consistent with the competency-oriented framework adopted in the present study. In particular, the integration of explanation, guided practice, interaction, and independent performance provides opportunities for learners to transform theoretical linguistic knowledge into practical skills.

The relationship between language learning and communicative practice is also central to Littlewood's

(1981) work on communicative language teaching. The author emphasizes the movement from controlled language practice toward activities that require learners to use language for communicative purposes. This principle is directly relevant to the development of students' communicative and contextual language competencies. Within the framework of the present study, communicative tasks are therefore regarded not as supplementary classroom activities but as an essential mechanism for consolidating linguistic knowledge.

The CEFR and its updated Companion Volume provide another important methodological foundation for understanding language proficiency as a structured and progressive phenomenon. The Council of Europe (2020) presents descriptors that support learning, teaching, and assessment and broadens the framework to address contemporary dimensions of language education. The framework is particularly relevant to the present research because it supports the principle of describing learners' abilities according to observable levels of performance. This makes it possible to connect instructional objectives with specific linguistic outcomes and to organize learning activities according to increasing levels of complexity.

Ellis (2008), in his comprehensive treatment of second language acquisition, highlights the complexity of the processes through which learners acquire and develop a second language. From this perspective, language development is influenced by interaction between linguistic input, learner activity, cognitive processes, and opportunities for meaningful language use. Such a position supports the argument that language-level mastery should be organized as a gradual developmental process rather than as a sequence of isolated grammatical topics.

Task-based approaches provide an additional methodological dimension to this discussion. Long (2015) emphasizes the role of task-based language teaching in creating conditions in which learners use language to accomplish meaningful activities. This perspective is especially valuable for the development of contextual and communicative competence because learners are required to mobilize several linguistic resources simultaneously. In the context of the present study, task-based activities can connect vocabulary, grammar, syntax, semantic interpretation, and communicative performance within a single learning situation.

Vocabulary development represents another essential

component of linguistic competence. Nation (2001) provides a systematic examination of vocabulary learning and teaching, including word knowledge, vocabulary-learning strategies, contextual learning, repetition, and the relationship between vocabulary and the four major language skills. Cambridge University Press describes the work as a comprehensive treatment of research and theory concerning vocabulary teaching and learning, with particular attention to systematic vocabulary development. This theoretical position supports the use of contextual vocabulary activities in the present methodology. Vocabulary is treated not as an isolated memorization task but as a resource that students repeatedly encounter and apply through reading, writing, listening, speaking, and communicative interaction.

Richards and Rodgers (2014) provide a broad methodological overview of approaches and methods in language teaching. Their work is significant because it demonstrates that language pedagogy has developed through different methodological traditions, each emphasizing particular relationships among teacher roles, learner activities, instructional materials, and language objectives. For the purposes of the present study, this methodological diversity supports the selection and combination of approaches rather than the rigid application of a single teaching method. A competency-oriented methodology can consequently incorporate communicative, task-based, contextual, and learner-centered elements according to students' needs.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective also provides a theoretical basis for considering interaction and guided learning as important components of educational development. The concept of learning through social interaction is particularly relevant to language education because students can develop linguistic abilities through collaboration, dialogue, peer interaction, teacher guidance, and progressively more independent performance. This perspective strengthens the rationale for differentiated instruction and scaffolding within the proposed methodology.

A synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates several common methodological principles. First, language competence should be understood as multidimensional and should include both linguistic knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge in communication. Second, effective language instruction requires meaningful contextualization of linguistic material. Third, assessment should function

not only as a means of measuring achievement but also as an instrument for regulating and improving the learning process. Fourth, learners' individual differences should be considered through differentiated instruction and appropriately graduated tasks. Finally, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, semantics, pronunciation, reading, and communicative performance should be developed in an interconnected manner rather than as completely independent learning components.

Despite the substantial theoretical foundation provided by previous researchers, a methodological gap remains in the practical integration of these principles into a unified framework for mastering successive language levels. Many approaches emphasize individual aspects of language development, such as communicative competence, vocabulary acquisition, task performance, or assessment. The present study attempts to address this gap by integrating these dimensions into a coherent methodology focused specifically on the progressive development of students' linguistic competencies. The proposed approach combines diagnostic assessment, contextualized instruction, communicative and task-based activities, differentiated learning, formative feedback, and reflective practice. Therefore, the literature reviewed provides both the theoretical justification and methodological foundation for investigating an integrated approach to improving students' mastery of language levels.

METHODS

The methodological framework of the study was developed on the basis of a competency-oriented approach to language education. The research was designed to examine how purposeful development of students' linguistic competencies can contribute to more effective mastery of successive language levels. The methodological design combined theoretical analysis, diagnostic assessment, pedagogical observation, task-based instruction, formative evaluation, and comparative analysis of students' learning outcomes. These methods were selected because language proficiency is a complex phenomenon that cannot be adequately evaluated through a single type of assessment.

At the initial stage, a diagnostic assessment was used to determine students' existing linguistic abilities. The diagnostic procedure focused on several interconnected components, including vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, reading

comprehension, and the ability to interpret linguistic information in context. The results of the initial assessment were used to identify areas of relative strength and weakness among learners. Rather than treating students as a homogeneous group, the methodology considered differences in their existing language knowledge and learning needs.

The instructional stage was organized around contextual and communicative learning activities. Students were provided with tasks that required them to apply newly acquired linguistic structures in meaningful situations. Vocabulary exercises were connected with reading passages, discussions, written production, and problem-solving activities. Grammar instruction was similarly integrated into communicative practice instead of being limited to mechanical exercises. Particular attention was given to the gradual complication of tasks. At lower stages, students worked with controlled activities designed to establish linguistic accuracy, whereas subsequent tasks required greater independence, interpretation, and spontaneous language production [4,5].

Differentiated instruction constituted another important methodological element. Learning materials and activities were adjusted according to students' demonstrated proficiency and individual learning requirements. Students who experienced difficulties with particular linguistic components received additional practice and explanatory support, while more proficient learners were offered extended tasks involving complex texts, analytical activities, and independent language production. This differentiation was intended to reduce learning gaps and create opportunities for continuous individual progress.

Formative assessment was conducted throughout the instructional process. Teachers monitored students' performance through short tests, written assignments, oral responses, classroom interaction, and self-assessment activities. Feedback was used not only to identify errors but also to guide students toward more effective learning strategies. Reflective activities encouraged learners to analyze their own progress, recognize recurring difficulties, and establish specific goals for further improvement.

The collected learning evidence was subsequently examined through comparative analysis. Students' performance at the initial and subsequent stages was compared according to the principal linguistic indicators

addressed by the methodology. Qualitative observations were also considered to determine changes in students' participation, confidence, accuracy, and ability to apply linguistic knowledge in contextual situations. This combination of quantitative-oriented assessment and qualitative pedagogical observation provided a broader

basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed methodology. The research design therefore emphasized continuous development, contextual language use, individualization, and systematic feedback as interconnected conditions for improving students' mastery of language levels [6,7].

Changes in students' linguistic competencies before and after the application of the improved methodology

Table 1.

Linguistic competency indicator	Initial assessment (%)	Final assessment (%)	Improvement (percentage points)
Vocabulary competence	61.4	82.7	+21.3
Grammatical competence	58.9	80.5	+21.6
Phonological competence	64.2	84.1	+19.9
Semantic competence	60.7	81.8	+21.1
Syntactic competence	57.6	79.9	+22.3
Contextual language use	55.8	78.6	+22.8
Reading and interpretation	63.5	83.4	+19.9
Communicative language use	56.9	80.7	+23.8

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate a positive change in all assessed components of students' linguistic competence following the implementation of the improved methodology. The initial assessment indicates that students' performance was relatively uneven across the examined indicators. The lowest initial result was recorded for contextual language use, at 55.8%, while phonological competence demonstrated the comparatively highest initial performance, reaching 64.2%. This difference suggests that students possessed certain basic linguistic knowledge but experienced greater difficulties when they were required to apply language resources in meaningful communicative contexts.

Following the implementation of the proposed methodology, substantial improvements were observed across all competency indicators. The most pronounced increase was identified in communicative language use, which rose from 56.9% to 80.7%, representing a 23.8

percentage-point improvement. This result can be associated with the systematic incorporation of communicative tasks, contextual exercises, pair and group activities, and practical language-production opportunities into the learning process.

A similarly significant improvement was observed in contextual language use, increasing by 22.8 percentage points. This finding demonstrates the importance of presenting vocabulary and grammatical structures within meaningful contexts rather than teaching them exclusively as isolated linguistic units. Students were consequently provided with greater opportunities to understand how particular language forms function in authentic or academically relevant situations.

Syntactic competence increased from 57.6% to 79.9%, while grammatical competence improved from 58.9% to 80.5%. These changes indicate that systematic grammar instruction combined with practical application can

strengthen students' ability to construct structurally accurate sentences. At the same time, the results suggest that grammar learning becomes more effective when students are required to use grammatical structures for communication rather than merely reproduce theoretical rules.

Vocabulary competence also demonstrated considerable growth, rising by 21.3 percentage points. The improvement may be explained by integrating vocabulary acquisition with reading, discussion, writing, and contextual interpretation. Such an integrated approach allows learners to encounter lexical items repeatedly and use them in different communicative situations.

The increase in semantic competence from 60.7% to 81.8% indicates improved ability to interpret and select linguistic meanings according to context. Meanwhile, reading and interpretation improved from 63.5% to 83.4%, suggesting that the methodology contributed not only to productive language skills but also to students' receptive abilities.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the proposed methodology has a multidimensional positive effect on language-level mastery. The improvements range from 19.9 to 23.8 percentage points, indicating relatively consistent development across linguistic competencies. The findings support the methodological principle that vocabulary, grammar, phonology, syntax, semantics, and communicative competence should be developed as interconnected components of a unified language-learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study demonstrate that the systematic development of students' linguistic competencies can significantly contribute to the effective mastery of different language levels. The comparative assessment conducted before and after the implementation of the improved methodology revealed positive changes in all investigated indicators. The initial assessment showed that students had a relatively satisfactory level of basic linguistic knowledge; however, their ability to apply this knowledge in contextual and communicative situations remained comparatively limited. This observation confirms the necessity of moving beyond isolated language exercises toward an integrated methodology that connects linguistic knowledge with practical language use.

The most notable improvement was observed in communicative language use. The corresponding indicator increased from 56.9% at the initial stage to 80.7% at the final stage, representing a 23.8 percentage-point increase. This result suggests that regular participation in communicative activities, discussions, contextual dialogues, role-based tasks, and collaborative exercises can strengthen students' ability to use linguistic resources purposefully. The improvement is particularly important because successful language acquisition cannot be evaluated solely through students' knowledge of grammatical rules or vocabulary. The ability to select and apply appropriate linguistic forms in real or simulated communication is an essential indicator of functional language proficiency.

Contextual language use also demonstrated substantial growth, increasing from 55.8% to 78.6%. The 22.8 percentage-point improvement indicates that students became more capable of interpreting linguistic units according to the communicative context. One possible explanation is the use of authentic and semi-authentic learning materials in which vocabulary and grammatical structures were presented as components of meaningful discourse. Such an approach enabled students to recognize relationships between linguistic form, meaning, and communicative purpose [8].

Syntactic competence showed an increase from 57.6% to 79.9%, while grammatical competence rose from 58.9% to 80.5%. These findings indicate that combining explicit linguistic explanation with practical application can produce stronger learning outcomes than relying exclusively on rule-based instruction. Students were encouraged to construct sentences, modify linguistic structures, identify errors, and apply grammatical patterns in communicative situations. As a result, grammatical knowledge gradually developed into a more functional skill.

Vocabulary competence increased from 61.4% to 82.7%. The improvement demonstrates the value of contextual vocabulary instruction, particularly when new lexical units are reinforced through reading, speaking, writing, and interpretation. Repeated exposure to vocabulary in different contexts appears to facilitate deeper lexical retention and more flexible use of newly acquired words.

Semantic competence increased from 60.7% to 81.8%, demonstrating progress in students' ability to distinguish

meanings and interpret language according to context. Reading and interpretation also improved considerably, from 63.5% to 83.4%. These findings suggest that the methodology supported both receptive and productive dimensions of language learning. Students were not only required to recognize linguistic information but also to analyze, interpret, and reproduce it.

Phonological competence increased from 64.2% to 84.1%, resulting in a 19.9 percentage-point improvement. Although this represented one of the smaller increases among the examined indicators, the final result was comparatively high. Pronunciation-oriented activities, listening exercises, repetition practices, and oral interaction contributed to strengthening students' awareness of sound patterns and pronunciation accuracy.

The overall pattern of results indicates that the largest improvements occurred in areas requiring active language application, particularly communicative and contextual language use. This finding is methodologically significant because it suggests that students' linguistic development becomes more pronounced when theoretical knowledge is consistently transformed into practical performance. The results also demonstrate the interconnected nature of linguistic competencies. Improvements in vocabulary and grammar can support communicative performance, while enhanced reading and semantic interpretation can contribute to more accurate language production.

The observed changes can also be explained by the differentiated nature of the proposed methodology. Students with weaker linguistic backgrounds were provided with additional exercises and structured support, whereas students demonstrating higher proficiency were

encouraged to perform more complex analytical and communicative tasks. This approach helped accommodate differences in students' learning trajectories and prevented the instructional process from being limited to a single level of difficulty [9].

Formative assessment played an additional role in the observed improvement. Continuous feedback allowed students to identify recurring linguistic errors and understand the specific areas requiring further practice. Rather than treating assessment as a final measurement of achievement, the methodology used it as an instrument for regulating the learning process. This created opportunities for students to monitor their progress and gradually assume greater responsibility for their own language development.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the improved methodology provides a coherent framework for mastering language levels through the integrated development of linguistic competencies. The increase observed across all eight indicators demonstrates that language proficiency is more effectively developed when phonological, lexical, grammatical, syntactic, semantic, contextual, receptive, and communicative components are addressed simultaneously. The results therefore support the application of competency-oriented, contextual, differentiated, and communicative principles in contemporary language education. At the same time, the findings should be interpreted within the methodological conditions of the study, and further research involving larger student groups, longer observation periods, and additional assessment instruments would be useful for determining the sustainability and broader applicability of the identified effects [10].

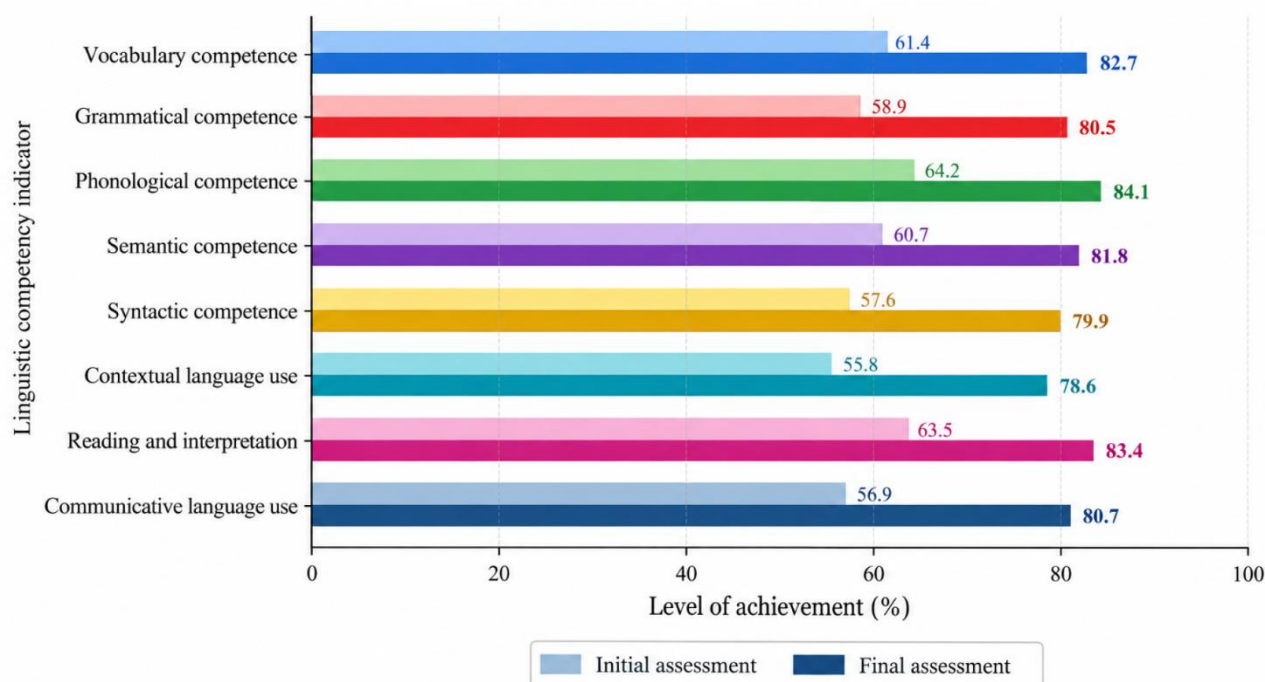


Figure 1. Comparative assessment of students' linguistic competencies before and after the implementation of the improved methodology.

Figure 1 presents a comparative assessment of students' linguistic competencies before and after the implementation of the improved methodology for mastering language levels. The horizontal bar diagram demonstrates positive dynamics across all eight assessed indicators. The results show that the final assessment values consistently exceeded the initial assessment values, indicating the effectiveness of the competency-oriented methodological framework.

The most substantial improvement was observed in communicative language use, which increased from 56.9% to 80.7%. This 23.8 percentage-point increase indicates that the methodology effectively strengthened students' ability to apply linguistic knowledge in practical communication. The result can be attributed to the systematic use of communicative tasks, contextual dialogues, discussions, and interactive learning activities.

A significant improvement was also recorded in contextual language use, increasing from 55.8% to 78.6%. This finding demonstrates that students became more capable of selecting and interpreting linguistic forms according to particular communicative contexts. Such progress supports

the methodological principle of integrating language structures with meaningful situations rather than presenting them as isolated elements.

Syntactic competence increased from 57.6% to 79.9%, while grammatical competence rose from 58.9% to 80.5%. These changes demonstrate that combining theoretical explanation with practical exercises contributed to the development of students' structural accuracy. At the same time, the relatively high final scores indicate that students were increasingly able to transfer grammatical knowledge into actual language production.

The results for vocabulary competence also demonstrate considerable growth, from 61.4% to 82.7%. This improvement suggests that contextual vocabulary activities, repeated lexical practice, reading exercises, and communicative application facilitated more effective acquisition and retention of new vocabulary.

Phonological competence demonstrated the highest final value, reaching 84.1%, compared with 64.2% in the initial assessment. This indicates substantial progress in students' pronunciation-related abilities and their awareness of phonological patterns. Reading and interpretation

increased from 63.5% to 83.4%, while semantic competence rose from 60.7% to 81.8%, demonstrating improvements in both receptive and interpretive language skills.

Overall, the diagram confirms a consistent positive shift in students' linguistic performance. The improvements range from 19.9 to 23.8 percentage points, which indicates that the proposed methodology influenced different dimensions of linguistic competence relatively evenly. Particularly notable is the fact that the strongest gains occurred in communicative and contextual language use. This suggests that language-level mastery becomes more effective when linguistic knowledge is systematically connected with practical communication, differentiated learning tasks, formative assessment, and contextualized instruction. Thus, the graphical results provide empirical support for the proposed methodology as an effective means of developing students' integrated linguistic competencies.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that improving the methodology of language-level mastery through the systematic development of students' linguistic competencies can substantially enhance the effectiveness of language education. The results confirm that language proficiency should not be considered as the acquisition of separate grammatical rules or lexical units but rather as an integrated system of interconnected linguistic abilities. The implementation of a competency-oriented methodology created favorable conditions for the simultaneous development of vocabulary, grammar, phonology, syntax, semantics, reading and interpretation, contextual language use, and communicative performance.

The comparative assessment revealed positive changes across all investigated indicators. The most considerable improvement was observed in communicative language use, while contextual language use and syntactic competence also demonstrated substantial growth. These results indicate that students achieve stronger language outcomes when theoretical knowledge is consistently reinforced through contextualized and communicative activities. The findings further suggest that the integration of authentic language materials, differentiated tasks, formative assessment, continuous feedback, and reflective learning can contribute to more stable and meaningful language development.

An important conclusion of the study is that the mastery of language levels requires a gradual and individualized learning trajectory. Students differ in their initial linguistic knowledge, learning pace, vocabulary range, and ability to apply language structures in communication. Therefore, methodological approaches should provide opportunities for differentiated instruction and progressive complication of learning tasks. Such organization enables learners to consolidate fundamental linguistic knowledge while gradually developing independent and context-sensitive language use.

The study also establishes the importance of formative assessment as an integral component of the instructional process. Regular assessment and feedback enable students to recognize linguistic difficulties, monitor their progress, and adjust their learning strategies. Consequently, assessment becomes not merely a means of measuring achievement but an active mechanism for supporting further competency development.

Overall, the proposed methodology can be regarded as a pedagogically appropriate framework for improving students' mastery of language levels. Its effectiveness is primarily associated with the integration of linguistic knowledge, contextual application, communication, individualization, and continuous feedback. The findings provide a methodological basis for further development of competency-oriented language instruction in higher education. Future research may focus on testing the proposed framework with larger and more diverse groups of learners, examining its long-term effects, and identifying the contribution of individual methodological components to students' sustained language proficiency.

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