

The Effectiveness of Contextual and Communicative Exercises in Developing Students' Professional Communication Competence

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Abstract: The article examines the pedagogical effectiveness of contextual and communicative exercises in developing students' professional communication competence, with particular attention to the use of economic terminology in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The study is theoretical and methodological in nature and synthesizes established approaches to communicative competence, vocabulary learning, ESP, and task-based language teaching. It argues that professional terminology becomes communicatively functional when learners encounter lexical items in meaningful contexts, process them through problem-oriented tasks, and reuse them in interaction that resembles authentic professional communication. Contextual exercises support semantic precision, collocational awareness, and the interpretation of terminology within disciplinary discourse, whereas communicative exercises transform receptive knowledge into productive professional performance through negotiation, explanation, comparison, decision-making, and presentation. The article proposes a staged sequence that moves from contextual recognition and guided use to interactive problem solving and independent professional communication. It concludes that the systematic integration of contextual and communicative exercises can provide a theoretically grounded basis for strengthening students' ability to use economic terminology accurately, appropriately, and purposefully in future professional settings.

Keywords: Professional communication competence, economic terminology, contextual exercises, communicative exercises, English for Specific Purposes, task-based learning, lexical competence, professional discourse.

Introduction: The growing internationalization of higher education and professional activity has increased the importance of students' ability to communicate within specialized domains rather than merely demonstrate general foreign-language knowledge. For students whose future work is connected with economics, agribusiness, management, entrepreneurship, finance, or market-oriented professional activity, successful communication requires more than the memorization of isolated terms. They need to interpret specialized information, explain economic processes, compare alternatives, justify decisions, participate in discussions, and present professional information in a linguistically accurate and

contextually appropriate manner. This requirement makes professional communication competence a central outcome of professionally oriented foreign-language education.

The concept of communicative competence provides the theoretical foundation for understanding professional communication as more than grammatical correctness. Canale and Swain argued that successful communication requires an interaction of several types of knowledge and ability, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence [1]. Their model shifted attention from the formal mastery of language to the learner's capacity to select and use language appropriately in communicative situations.

For professionally oriented teaching, this principle is especially important because the same lexical item may be accurate at the level of dictionary meaning but inappropriate in a specific professional context if it is used with the wrong collocation, register, or communicative intention.

Celce-Murcia later expanded pedagogical interpretations of communicative competence by emphasizing discourse, sociocultural, formulaic, interactional, linguistic, and strategic dimensions [2]. From this perspective, professional communication competence cannot be reduced to the acquisition of terminology. It involves the ability to organize extended discourse, recognize professional relationships, use conventional expressions, manage interaction, and repair communication when difficulties occur. In an economics-related classroom, a learner should therefore be able not only to define inflation or investment but also to explain causes and consequences, respond to questions, compare data, qualify a claim, and formulate recommendations.

The CEFR Companion Volume similarly treats language users as social agents who perform meaningful actions through language and highlights interaction and mediation alongside reception and production [10]. This action-oriented view is directly relevant to professional communication: students learn more effectively when they use language to complete a meaningful professional action, such as interpreting a graph for a colleague, summarizing a market report, negotiating a price, or presenting an investment proposal. Thus, the methodological focus should move from “knowing economic words” to “using economic language to perform professional tasks.”

Context is fundamental to specialized vocabulary learning because the meaning of a professional term is shaped by its disciplinary use. Nation notes that knowing a word involves knowledge of form, meaning, and use, including grammatical behavior, collocation, constraints on use, and associations [4]. This has important implications for economic terminology. For example, revenue and profit are semantically related but not interchangeable; cost, expense, and expenditure overlap yet differ in common professional usage; capital may refer to financial resources, assets, or other disciplinary concepts depending on context. Contextual exercises help learners notice these

distinctions and connect lexical form with conceptual meaning.

Hutchinson and Waters define ESP through the learner’s reasons and needs for learning, arguing that course design should be driven by the communicative purposes for which language will be used [5]. Accordingly, contextual materials should not be selected solely because they contain target vocabulary. Their value depends on their relationship to the learners’ future communicative needs. For students in agricultural or economic specializations, for instance, contextual tasks can integrate terminology connected with production, agricultural markets, pricing, supply chains, farm management, investment, export, profitability, and resource allocation.

Contextual comprehension is a necessary but insufficient condition for professional communication. Learners also need opportunities to retrieve terminology under communicative pressure, select appropriate expressions, respond to partners, and formulate their own professional meanings. Littlewood distinguished between pre-communicative work and communicative activity and emphasized the importance of moving learners toward the functional use of language [3]. This distinction supports a staged methodology in which lexical and structural preparation is followed by tasks requiring genuine information exchange and communicative choice.

Dudley-Evans and St John stress that ESP is shaped by the communicative practices of specific academic and professional communities and that needs analysis, discourse, and genre are central to course design [6]. Consequently, professional communicative exercises should reproduce relevant features of target situations: participants should have roles, an information gap or problem, a realistic purpose, and an expected communicative product. A role-play between a farmer and a bank representative, for example, becomes pedagogically valuable when students must discuss loan conditions, investment needs, expected revenue, risk, and repayment rather than merely read a prepared dialogue.

The task-based perspective strengthens this argument. Ellis describes tasks as pedagogical activities that prioritize meaning, require learners to use their linguistic resources, and lead toward an outcome [7].

Nunan likewise presents task-based teaching as an approach in which classroom work is organized around meaningful use of the target language [8]. Long emphasizes that task-based language teaching should be connected to learners' real-world target tasks and needs [9]. These views suggest that communicative exercises are particularly suitable for the development of professional competence when they are designed around recognizable occupational actions rather than around isolated grammar or vocabulary points.

Nation's discussion of vocabulary learning supports systematic exposure, attention to word knowledge, repeated encounters, and meaningful use [4]. In professional language education, repeated encounters should not mean repeating the same sentence. The same term should reappear across multiple contexts and communicative functions. For instance, investment can first be identified in a text, then used in collocations, interpreted in a graph, discussed as part of a case, negotiated in a role-play, and finally included in an independent presentation. Each encounter adds a different dimension of knowledge and use.

A second advantage is that integrated exercises make assessment more valid. A vocabulary test based only on translation may show whether a learner recognizes terminology but cannot demonstrate whether that learner can participate in professional communication. Performance tasks reveal a broader competence: whether students can select the correct term, integrate it into coherent discourse, respond to a partner, clarify meaning, and achieve a communicative outcome. This is consistent with the communicative and action-oriented principles represented in Canale and Swain's model [1], Celce-Murcia's pedagogical framework [2], and the CEFR Companion Volume [10].

A third advantage concerns motivation and professional relevance. ESP research emphasizes the importance of matching instruction to learner needs [5; 6]. Students are more likely to perceive specialized vocabulary as useful when it is embedded in activities that resemble future professional practice. A discussion about real or realistic price changes, a simulation of a business meeting, or a decision about resource allocation gives terminology an operational purpose. This purpose can increase attention, participation, and the perceived relevance of language learning without turning the foreign-language classroom into a content-only course.

Finally, integration helps balance accuracy and fluency. Contextual exercises allow focused attention to precise meaning, collocations, and appropriate forms; communicative exercises create conditions for fluency, strategic competence, and interaction. Neither dimension should replace the other. Professional communication requires accurate terminology, but accuracy becomes valuable only when it supports clear, purposeful, and socially appropriate communication.

Several methodological principles follow from the analysis. First, terminology should be selected according to frequency, professional relevance, and communicative utility rather than according to the size of a thematic word list. Second, each important term should be taught together with typical collocations, related concepts, and examples of professional use. Third, every lexical unit should progress through a pathway from recognition to guided use and then to independent communicative application.

Fourth, exercises should model communicative roles and purposes that students are likely to encounter in future professional activity. Instead of asking learners simply to "use five new words in sentences," the teacher can ask them to explain a change in demand, compare two pricing strategies, recommend an investment option, or present a brief market forecast using the target terms. Fifth, feedback should distinguish between terminological accuracy, discourse effectiveness, and interactional success. A learner may use a technically correct term but still fail to communicate clearly because the argument is poorly structured or insufficiently adapted to the interlocutor.

Finally, contextual and communicative exercises should be interconnected across a lesson or unit rather than treated as separate methodological techniques. A coherent unit may begin with a short professional text, move to terminology analysis, continue with guided contextual practice, develop into an information-gap or case-based discussion, and end with a professional product. Such sequencing reflects the movement from input and noticing toward interaction, output, reflection, and transfer, thereby aligning specialized vocabulary learning with the broader goal of professional communicative competence.

The analysis demonstrates that contextual and communicative exercises perform complementary

functions in the development of students' professional communication competence. Contextual exercises enable learners to understand the semantic, collocational, conceptual, and discourse properties of economic terminology, while communicative exercises require them to mobilize this knowledge in purposeful interaction. The theoretical positions of Canale and Swain, Celce-Murcia, Littlewood, Nation, Hutchinson and Waters, Dudley-Evans and St John, Ellis, Nunan, Long, and the Council of Europe collectively support a shift from decontextualized language practice toward meaningful, needs-based, action-oriented professional communication. A staged sequence from contextual recognition through guided use, interactive application, problem solving, and independent professional production provides a coherent methodological framework for this shift. The proposed approach does not claim experimental proof; its effectiveness is theoretically grounded in established research on communicative competence, ESP, vocabulary learning, and task-based pedagogy. Future empirical studies can test the framework through pre- and post-intervention measures, performance-based assessment, observation, and analysis of students' use of economic terminology in professional tasks.

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