

# Theoretical Foundations for Developing Pedagogical Communication Competence in Future Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study conceptualizes pedagogical communication competence as a core component of teacher professionalism and provides an integrative theoretical foundation for its systematic development in future teacher education. Although communication is often treated as an implicit by-product of teaching practice, contemporary classrooms require deliberate mastery of interactional, pragmatic, and socio-emotional resources that enable teachers to manage learning, build relationships, and sustain inclusive participation. The paper employs a conceptual-analytical methodology and synthesizes key perspectives from sociocultural theory, activity theory, communicative-pragmatic approaches, dialogism, social learning theory, and competence-based education. The results propose a coherent model in which pedagogical communication competence is understood as a dynamic configuration of knowledge, skills, values, and self-regulation capacities realized through teacher talk, classroom discourse management, and ethically grounded interaction. The discussion argues that effective development depends on aligning theoretical constructs with training design, including reflective practice, guided microteaching, discourse-based feedback, and progressive practice in authentic settings. The conclusion emphasizes that theoretically informed communication training improves instructional clarity, classroom climate, learner agency, and professional identity formation.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical communication competence; future teachers; teacher talk; classroom discourse; sociocultural theory; pragmatics; reflective practice; teacher education.

**Introduction:** Pedagogical communication is not an accessory to teaching; it is the medium through which teaching becomes intelligible, motivating, and socially legitimate. In classrooms, teachers communicate content, but they also communicate expectations, norms, evaluations, and recognition. Through speech, gesture, gaze, and interactional timing, teachers regulate participation, support learners' self-esteem, negotiate meaning, and construct a climate in which learning can occur. For future teachers, however, pedagogical communication often remains an under-theorized area of training. It is frequently assumed that good communication will "emerge" with experience, or that general public speaking skills can be transferred into educational contexts without specialized preparation. Such assumptions ignore the fact that

classroom communication is a complex professional practice with unique constraints: asymmetrical roles, continuous real-time decision-making, heterogeneous learners, and institutional accountability.

Within competence-based education frameworks, communication is typically listed among key professional competences. Yet the theoretical foundations of pedagogical communication competence are not always made explicit, and training activities may focus on superficial behaviors rather than on underlying interactional principles. This gap produces a familiar pattern in early teaching: future teachers can prepare lesson content but struggle to orchestrate dialogue, respond to learner misunderstandings, handle conflict, give feedback without discouraging students, or maintain an inclusive

tone under pressure. These difficulties are not merely personal weaknesses; they reflect the absence of systematic conceptual models that connect teacher education to the linguistic and social mechanisms of classroom life.

This article addresses that need by examining theoretical foundations for developing pedagogical communication competence in future teachers. The guiding questions are: how should pedagogical communication competence be defined as a professional construct; what theoretical traditions explain the mechanisms through which it develops; and how can these theories be translated into a coherent logic for teacher education? The purpose is not to prescribe a single method but to provide an integrated theoretical map that can guide curriculum design, assessment rubrics, and reflective practice in teacher preparation programs.

The study uses a conceptual-analytical methodology based on qualitative synthesis of major theoretical approaches relevant to teacher communication. The analysis proceeds by selecting frameworks that (a) explain language-in-use in educational contexts, (b) account for learning and development through interaction, and (c) clarify the competence concept as an integration of cognitive, behavioral, and value-based components. Key traditions include sociocultural theory and the zone of proximal development, activity theory, dialogism and discourse theory, pragmatics and speech act perspectives, social learning theory, and competence-based approaches to professional education.

The procedure involved identifying core concepts within each tradition and examining their implications for pedagogical communication. These concepts were then compared along four parameters: the unit of analysis (utterance, discourse move, activity system), the role of context (institutional norms, classroom roles, cultural expectations), the development mechanism (scaffolding, modeling, reflection), and the ethical dimension (recognition, respect, responsibility). Finally, an integrative model was derived that frames pedagogical communication competence as a dynamic configuration of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and self-regulation, realized through classroom discourse practices.

A synthesis of the literature supports defining pedagogical communication competence as a teacher's capacity to use language and interaction strategically, ethically, and adaptively to achieve instructional, developmental, and relational goals in a specific educational context. This competence is not limited to clarity of explanation or correctness of language. It includes the ability to initiate and sustain dialogue, ask pedagogically productive questions, interpret learner responses, provide formative feedback, manage classroom norms, resolve interactional tensions, and maintain a respectful communicative climate. It also includes meta-communicative awareness: the teacher's ability to monitor how their words and interactional choices shape learners' motivation and participation.

The theoretical foundations contributing to this construct can be organized into six interrelated pillars. First, sociocultural theory explains why communication is a developmental tool rather than a mere channel. Learning is mediated through signs and social interaction, and the teacher's communicative moves can scaffold learners toward higher levels of reasoning. In this view, pedagogical communication competence includes the ability to create "guided participation" through prompts, revoicing, modeling of academic language, and structured dialogue. The zone of proximal development provides a precise developmental logic: the teacher's communication is effective when it targets what learners can achieve with support and gradually transfers responsibility to them.

Second, activity theory clarifies the systemic nature of classroom communication. Teacher talk is not a sequence of isolated utterances; it is embedded in an activity system defined by objectives, roles, tools, rules, and community expectations. Communication competence therefore involves aligning discourse with the lesson's object, managing contradictions that arise between competing demands, and selecting communicative tools appropriate for the task. For example, "explaining" serves different functions depending on whether the objective is procedural fluency, conceptual understanding, or collaborative inquiry. Activity theory highlights that communication competence is partly the capacity to recognize which activity is currently unfolding in the classroom and to adjust discourse accordingly.

Third, dialogism and discourse perspectives emphasize

that classroom meaning is co-constructed. Teacher language always anticipates responses; it positions learners as competent or deficient, as passive recipients or active contributors. From a dialogic perspective, competence includes the ability to open interactional space for learner voice and to treat student contributions as resources for joint thinking. Such competence is visible in practices like reformulating student answers to clarify meaning without undermining agency, using uptake questions that build on prior turns, and maintaining epistemic humility when encouraging inquiry. Dialogism also underscores that the teacher's "voice" is never neutral; it carries institutional authority and moral weight. Therefore, pedagogical communication competence includes a reflective stance toward how authority is enacted through discourse.

Fourth, pragmatics and speech act theory contribute an action-oriented account of teacher communication. In classrooms, teachers continuously perform acts such as requesting, inviting, directing, evaluating, warning, encouraging, and apologizing. The effectiveness of these acts depends on pragmatic conditions such as politeness, face management, presuppositions, and implicatures. For future teachers, a critical component of competence is learning to align pragmatic force with pedagogical intent. A correction can be framed as humiliation or as support, depending on language choices and timing. A directive can be perceived as authoritarian or as protective. Pragmatic competence in teaching includes using language that maintains learners' dignity while preserving instructional demands.

Fifth, social learning theory provides a mechanism for how communicative behavior is acquired. Future teachers learn not only through abstract instruction but through observation, imitation, and feedback. They internalize models of teacher talk from their own schooling and from mentor teachers, sometimes reproducing ineffective patterns such as excessive monologue, rhetorical questions that suppress thinking, or evaluative comments that narrow participation. Social learning theory suggests that competence development requires explicit modeling of desirable communicative practices, opportunities to rehearse them, and reinforcement through structured feedback. It also implies that self-efficacy is central: future

teachers must believe they can manage interaction under uncertainty, or they will revert to rigid control strategies.

Sixth, competence-based education frameworks clarify the internal structure of pedagogical communication competence. Competence is not only knowledge about communication; it is an integrated ability to act effectively in context. This integration includes conceptual knowledge about discourse and learning, procedural skills in interaction, values and ethical commitments, and self-regulation capacities such as reflection, emotional control, and adaptive decision-making. The synthesis supports treating competence as a dynamic configuration rather than a checklist. In practice, this means that teacher education should assess not only what future teachers say about communication but how they communicate in simulated and authentic pedagogical situations.

Across these pillars, the synthesis yields an integrative model with four mutually reinforcing components. The cognitive component includes knowledge of classroom discourse patterns, questioning strategies, feedback principles, learner language development, and cultural norms. The operational component includes skills in structuring explanations, facilitating dialogue, using wait-time, managing turn-taking, and responding to misunderstandings. The axiological component includes respect for learners, commitment to inclusion, and ethical awareness of authority and power in teacher talk. The reflective-regulatory component includes the ability to monitor one's communicative impact, manage emotions, and revise interactional strategies based on evidence. Together, these components explain why pedagogical communication competence is both teachable and assessable, provided that training engages not only technique but also theory-guided reflection.

The theoretical synthesis implies that developing pedagogical communication competence is fundamentally a developmental process rather than a quick acquisition of rhetorical tricks. Future teachers must build interactional sensitivity: the ability to notice what learners understand, how they feel, and how participation is distributed, then make communicative choices that shape the next moment of learning. Sociocultural theory frames this as learning to scaffold; dialogism frames it as learning to co-construct meaning;

pragmatics frames it as learning to perform pedagogical acts with appropriate force; and activity theory frames it as learning to act within a system of goals and constraints. These perspectives converge on a crucial point: competence emerges from repeated cycles of practice, feedback, and reflection under conditions that gradually approximate real classroom complexity.

One practical implication is that teacher education should treat classroom discourse as a legitimate object of study, not only as a by-product of teaching practice. When future teachers analyze transcripts or recordings of lessons, they begin to see communication as structured and consequential. They can identify how questions either open thinking or close it, how feedback encourages elaboration or triggers silence, and how teacher talk positions students within the moral order of the classroom. Such analysis operationalizes the theoretical pillars. For example, a dialogic lens reveals whether teacher moves invite student reasoning; a pragmatic lens reveals whether corrections threaten face; an activity lens reveals whether discourse aligns with the lesson's object.

Another implication concerns professional identity formation. Communication is one of the primary ways teachers experience themselves as teachers. Through their voice, teachers enact authority, care, and competence. Future teachers often struggle with balancing firmness and warmth, especially in multi-level classrooms or in settings where discipline is emphasized. Theories of discourse and pragmatics suggest that authority is not a fixed personality trait but an interactional achievement. It is constructed through consistent norms, transparent reasoning, respectful address, and predictable consequences. Therefore, pedagogical communication competence includes learning to enact authority ethically, avoiding both coercive dominance and permissive uncertainty.

The synthesis also highlights the importance of emotional and moral dimensions. Classroom communication is saturated with evaluation, and evaluation can either support or damage learners' motivation. Pragmatics and face theory help explain why minor phrasing choices may have large motivational effects. A teacher who publicly labels a student as "weak" communicates a stable identity; a teacher who describes a response as "not yet clear" communicates developmental potential. Sociocultural

theory reinforces that language mediates self-concept; learners internalize the social meanings attached to them. Consequently, competence includes an ethical commitment to communication that promotes dignity and growth, especially for students at risk of marginalization.

A further implication is that competence development must address inherited communicative scripts. Many future teachers replicate monologic patterns because they associate teacher authority with uninterrupted explanation. Yet research in classroom discourse shows that learning is enhanced when students have opportunities to articulate reasoning and receive feedback that builds understanding. Dialogic teaching does not eliminate teacher explanation; it reconfigures it as part of an interactional rhythm that alternates explanation with elicitation, probing, and synthesis. The theoretical foundations presented here justify such a rhythm as an optimal alignment between cognitive development and social participation.

Finally, the synthesis suggests criteria for assessing pedagogical communication competence in teacher education. Assessment should capture adaptivity: whether the future teacher can shift strategies when learners do not understand, whether feedback is specific and constructive, whether classroom discourse includes equitable participation, and whether interactional climate supports inquiry. Such assessment is not merely technical; it is grounded in the theoretical claim that competence is context-sensitive action. Without this theoretical grounding, assessment risks becoming superficial, focusing on fluency or confidence while ignoring the deeper pedagogical functions of communication.

Pedagogical communication competence is a foundational professional capacity for future teachers because it integrates instruction, relationship-building, classroom management, and inclusion within one interactional practice. The theoretical foundations synthesized in this article demonstrate that communication in teaching is not an optional "soft skill" but a mediated, systemic, dialogic, pragmatic, and ethical activity. Sociocultural theory explains how teacher talk scaffolds learning; activity theory explains how discourse functions within goal-oriented classroom systems; dialogism explains how meaning and identity are co-constructed; pragmatics explains how

pedagogical acts achieve force while protecting learners' dignity; social learning theory explains how communication behaviors are acquired through modeling and feedback; competence-based education clarifies that communication competence is an integrated configuration of knowledge, skills, values, and self-regulation.

A theoretically informed approach to teacher education should therefore treat communication as an explicit curriculum component supported by reflective analysis and guided practice. When future teachers learn to analyze classroom discourse, rehearse interactional strategies, and regulate their communicative impact, they develop a stable professional voice capable of sustaining learning and social trust. Future empirical studies can operationalize the integrative model proposed here by measuring changes in teacher talk patterns, learner participation, and classroom climate across staged practicum experiences.

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