

IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL) PRINCIPLES IN PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Abstract. *This study explores methodological approaches to developing professional and communicative competence of future English teachers based on Universal Design for Learning principles. It highlights inclusive strategies, competency-based training, and flexible instructional design to enhance teacher preparedness for diverse classrooms in modern higher education contexts.*

Keywords. *Universal Design for Learning; professional competence; communicative competence; pre-service English teachers; inclusive education; teacher training; competency-based approach.*

Introduction.

In the context of rapid educational transformation and increasing classroom diversity, the preparation of future English teachers requires innovative and inclusive methodological approaches. Modern schools include learners with different linguistic backgrounds, abilities, learning styles, and educational needs. Therefore, pre-service English teachers must be equipped not only with strong subject knowledge, but also with professional and communicative competence that enables them to teach effectively in inclusive environments. One promising framework that supports this goal is Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

UDL, developed by CAST, is based on three core principles: providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. These principles promote flexible teaching strategies that address learner variability and ensure equal access to education. Integrating UDL into pre-service English teacher training programs can strengthen future teachers' pedagogical skills, communicative competence, and ability to design inclusive lessons.

This thesis aims to explore methodological approaches for developing professional and communicative competence of future English teachers based on UDL

principles and to justify the effectiveness of their implementation in teacher education programs.

Literature Review.

The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emerged from research conducted by CAST in the 1990s. UDL is grounded in cognitive neuroscience and aims to improve teaching effectiveness by addressing learner variability. According to CAST (2018)¹, UDL is based on three core principles: providing multiple means of engagement (the “why” of learning), multiple means of representation (the “what” of learning), and multiple means of action and expression (the “how” of learning). These principles encourage flexible instructional methods, accessible materials, and differentiated assessment, making education more inclusive and equitable.

Scholars such as Meyer, Rose, and Gordon (2014)² argue that UDL shifts the focus from adapting students to the curriculum toward designing curricula that accommodate all learners from the outset. Research indicates that UDL implementation enhances student motivation, participation, and academic achievement, particularly in diverse and inclusive classrooms (Meyer et al., 2014; CAST, 2018). Therefore, UDL provides a strong theoretical and practical foundation for teacher education programs.

Professional competence of future English teachers includes pedagogical knowledge, methodological skills, classroom management, digital literacy, and reflective practice. Communicative competence, originally conceptualized by Dell Hymes (1972)³, emphasizes not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic and pragmatic appropriateness. In language education, communicative competence is closely linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

¹ CAST. (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. Wakefield, MA: Author. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

² Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2014). *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*. CAST Professional Publishing. <https://publishing.cast.org/catalog/books-products/universal-design-for-learning-meyer-rose-gordon>

³ Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics*. Penguin. <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=1198893>

(CEFR), which defines language proficiency in terms of communicative abilities across different contexts (Council of Europe, 2001)⁴.

Recent studies highlight the importance of integrating inclusive methodologies into pre-service teacher training to ensure readiness for diverse classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011)⁵. However, despite growing attention to inclusive education, systematic incorporation of UDL principles into English teacher preparation programs remains limited in many higher education institutions. Consequently, there is a need to develop methodological frameworks that combine UDL principles with competence-based teacher education to enhance both professional and communicative competence of future English teachers.

Proposed Model for Implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Pre-Service English Teacher Training.

The proposed model for implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in pre-service English teacher training is designed to systematically develop both professional and communicative competence. The model integrates UDL principles into methodological courses, teaching practice, and assessment procedures within higher education institutions.

1. Structural Components of the Model

The model consists of four interrelated components: **goals, content, methods, and assessment.**

Goals focus on preparing future English teachers who can design inclusive, flexible, and communicative lessons. The primary objective is to form pedagogical competence aligned with inclusive education standards and communicative language teaching approaches.

Content includes theoretical knowledge of UDL principles (multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression), communicative competence

⁴ Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge University Press. <https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>

⁵ Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(4), 495–510. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233121563_Exploring_inclusive_pedagogy

development, inclusive pedagogy, and digital instructional tools. Special emphasis is placed on aligning lesson objectives with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), ensuring that communicative outcomes are measurable and competency-based.

Methods involve interactive lectures, case studies, collaborative lesson planning, microteaching sessions, and reflective discussions. During methodology courses, students analyze traditional lesson plans and redesign them according to UDL principles. This approach promotes critical thinking and practical application of inclusive strategies.

Assessment is competency-based and formative. It includes portfolio assessment, observation of microteaching, peer feedback, and reflective journals. Assessment criteria evaluate flexibility of lesson design, inclusivity of materials, communicative effectiveness, and ability to address learner variability.

2. Stages of Implementation

The model is implemented through four progressive stages:

Stage 1: Awareness Stage.

Students are introduced to the theoretical foundations of UDL and inclusive pedagogy. Workshops and seminars explain how learner variability affects English language acquisition.

Stage 2: Training Stage.

Pre-service teachers practice designing UDL-based lesson plans. They incorporate multimedia materials, differentiated tasks, and alternative assessment methods to address diverse learners.

Stage 3: Practice Stage.

Students apply UDL principles during teaching practicum. They conduct microteaching sessions and real classroom lessons under supervision. Feedback from mentors focuses on inclusivity and communicative interaction.

Stage 4: Reflection Stage.

Students evaluate their teaching experiences through reflective journals and group discussions. Reflection strengthens professional self-awareness and supports continuous improvement.

3. Expected Outcomes

The implementation of this model is expected to produce several outcomes. First, future English teachers develop stronger professional competence, including methodological flexibility and inclusive classroom management skills. Second, communicative competence improves as teachers design interactive tasks that encourage authentic language use. Third, pre-service teachers gain confidence in addressing diverse learning needs.

Overall, integrating UDL into teacher education ensures that future English teachers are prepared for modern inclusive classrooms. The model promotes a shift from standardized instruction toward flexible, learner-centered pedagogy, enhancing both professional readiness and communicative effectiveness in English language teaching.

Discussion.

The integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into pre-service English teacher education offers significant pedagogical advantages. By embedding multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression into methodology courses, future teachers develop the flexibility required to address learner variability. This directly strengthens professional competence, particularly in lesson planning, assessment design, and classroom management. Furthermore, UDL supports communicative language teaching by encouraging interactive, student-centered activities aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), thereby enhancing communicative competence.

However, several challenges may hinder effective implementation. Teacher educators may lack sufficient training in inclusive methodologies, and institutional curricula may remain content-driven rather than competence-based. Additionally, limited technological resources can restrict the application of flexible instructional strategies.

To overcome these barriers, higher education institutions should provide targeted professional development for university instructors, revise curricula to integrate UDL systematically, and promote reflective practice during teaching practicums. Establishing clear assessment criteria aligned with UDL principles will further ensure consistency and quality. Overall, systematic integration of UDL contributes to preparing adaptive, reflective, and communicatively competent English teachers capable of meeting the demands of diverse modern classrooms.

Conclusion

The development of professional and communicative competence of future English teachers requires innovative and inclusive methodological approaches. The integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles into pre-service teacher training programs provides an effective framework for preparing educators to work in diverse classrooms. By applying multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, future teachers learn to design flexible, learner-centered lessons that promote active participation and equal access to learning.

The proposed model demonstrates that systematic incorporation of UDL into methodology courses and teaching practice enhances pedagogical flexibility, reflective skills, and communicative effectiveness. Although challenges such as limited resources and insufficient training may arise, strategic institutional support and curriculum revision can address these issues. Overall, UDL-based teacher education contributes to forming adaptable, competent, and inclusive English teachers capable of meeting contemporary educational demands and supporting diverse learners successfully.

References:

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