



# THE PRINCIPAL METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FORMATION OF DISCOURSE COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*This article highlights the importance of developing discourse competence in students, particularly in the field of international relations. The article discusses the challenges that may arise during the process of developing discourse competence, such as the diversity of academic backgrounds and language proficiency levels among students, the lack of motivation among some students to engage actively in the learning process, and the complexity and diversity of international relations topics that may make it challenging for students to comprehend and communicate effectively. The article suggests several solutions to these challenges, such as providing individualized support to students, using technology and multimedia resources, incorporating more interactive and collaborative learning activities, and creating opportunities for practical application of language and discourse skills outside the classroom setting. Overall, the article emphasizes the importance of addressing these challenges and providing effective support to students to promote the development of discourse competence in higher education.*

**KEY TERMS:** *Discourse, competence, proficiency, communication, immersion, evaluate, analyse, synthesize*

## INTRODUCTION

Discourse competence is a key component of communication skills, especially in the field of international relations. It refers to the ability to use language effectively in a variety of contexts, including academic, professional, and social settings. In order to develop discourse competence, students need to have a strong foundation in language skills, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. This article explores some of the principal methodological aspects of formation of discourse competence of students in the field of international relations.

## METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FORMATION OF DISCOURSE COMPETENCE

### *Language proficiency*

One of the most important methodological aspects of formation of discourse competence is language proficiency, as effective communication in international relations often requires fluency in more than one language. According to Phipps and Guilherme (2004), language proficiency is a crucial component of intercultural communication, as it enables individuals to understand and communicate effectively with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Proficiency in a foreign language is essential for students to understand and engage with other cultures and nations.

Students must have a good command of the language they are studying in order to be able to use it effectively in different contexts. In their study, Myles, Cheng, and Hou (2018) found that incorporating language learning strategies into international relations courses can significantly improve students' language proficiency. This requires a strong focus on

grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, as well as an understanding of the cultural nuances of the language, such as how to address individuals in different social settings or how to use appropriate language in professional settings. For example, in some cultures, using a first name to address someone may be considered impolite or disrespectful, while in other cultures it may be perfectly acceptable. Similarly, using slang or informal language in a professional setting may be considered inappropriate in some cultures.

In the context of international relations, students may need to develop proficiency in languages that are commonly spoken in different regions of the world. For example, proficiency in Chinese or Russian may be necessary for those who want to work in areas related to trade or diplomacy with China or Russia. Similarly, proficiency in Arabic or Farsi may be important for those interested in working in the Middle East.

Language proficiency can be developed through various methods, including classroom instruction, self-study, and immersion in a native-speaking environment. Classroom instruction may involve traditional language instruction, such as grammar and vocabulary exercises, as well as more interactive methods, such as role-playing, simulations, and debates. Self-study methods can include reading books, watching movies, and listening to music in the target language, while immersion in a native-speaking environment can involve study abroad programs, language immersion programs, or living in a foreign country.

### *Critical thinking*

Another key aspect of formation of discourse competence in the field of international relations is critical thinking. Ennis



(2011) emphasizes the importance of developing students' critical thinking skills in the context of international relations, stating that "the ability to think critically is an essential skill for understanding and engaging with complex issues in the global arena". Critical thinking skills are necessary for effective communication and decision-making in international relations, where complex issues require careful consideration and analysis. Students must be able to analyze, evaluate and synthesize information in order to form opinions, make decisions and solve problems. This requires the ability to ask questions, identify assumptions, and consider different perspectives. Critical thinking can be developed through activities such as debates, discussions, and case studies.

In international relations, critical thinking requires an understanding of the historical, cultural, and political context of the issue at hand, as well as an ability to navigate and evaluate different sources of information. One way to develop critical thinking skills is through classroom instruction that incorporates activities such as debates, discussions, and case studies. These activities require students to analyze and evaluate information from different sources, consider different perspectives, and draw conclusions based on evidence. They also provide opportunities for students to practice effective communication skills, including the ability to articulate their ideas clearly and persuasively.

Another way to develop critical thinking skills is through exposure to different cultures and worldviews. Exposure to different cultures can help students understand and appreciate different perspectives on complex issues. This can be achieved through study abroad programs, cultural immersion programs, or exposure to different cultural events.

Finally, critical thinking skills can be developed through self-study and independent research. This requires a strong foundation in research methods, including the ability to identify credible sources of information, evaluate the reliability of those sources, and synthesize information from multiple sources.

### **Cultural awareness**

In addition to language proficiency and critical thinking, cultural awareness is also an important methodological aspect of formation of discourse competence. Students must be able to understand and appreciate the cultural differences that exist between different countries and regions. This requires an understanding of the history, customs, and values of different cultures. Cultural awareness can be developed through activities such as cultural immersion programs, travel, and exposure to different cultural events.

Cultural awareness is a critical aspect of formation of discourse competence, as effective communication in international relations requires an understanding of the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of different societies. It involves recognizing and respecting cultural differences, as well as being able to adapt communication styles and behaviors to different cultural contexts. In order to effectively engage in discourse with individuals from other cultures,

students must be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences. This requires an understanding of the different cultural values and beliefs that underpin the behavior of individuals from other cultures. For example, in some cultures, direct communication is valued, while in other cultures, indirect communication is preferred. Understanding these cultural differences can help students avoid misunderstandings and effectively communicate with individuals from other cultures.

In the context of international relations, cultural awareness is essential for students to be able to communicate effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to Gudykunst and Kim (1997), cultural awareness is "the ability to recognize, understand, and appreciate the differences in values, beliefs, and customs of others". By developing cultural awareness, students can avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations that can occur when communication styles clash.

One method for developing cultural awareness is through cross-cultural training, which involves educating students about the cultural norms and values of different societies. Cross-cultural training can involve classroom instruction, experiential learning, and intercultural dialogue (Henderson & Bevan, 2015). By engaging in cross-cultural training, students can develop a deeper understanding of the perspectives and beliefs of individuals from different cultures, and learn how to adapt their communication styles and behaviors to different cultural contexts.

In addition to cross-cultural training, exposure to diverse cultural experiences can also enhance cultural awareness. This can involve studying abroad, participating in international internships, or engaging in multicultural community service projects. By exposing themselves to different cultures and experiences, students can broaden their perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances of communication in international relations.

Cultural awareness also involves an understanding of the historical, political, and economic factors that shape different cultures. For example, understanding the history of colonialism can provide insight into the cultural values and beliefs of post-colonial societies. Similarly, understanding the economic conditions of a particular region can provide insight into the cultural practices and customs of that region.

### **Use of technology**

The use of technology is also an important methodological aspect of formation of discourse competence in the field of international relations. Technology can provide students with opportunities to engage with authentic materials in the target language, communicate with native speakers, and collaborate with peers from different parts of the world. Students must be able to use technology effectively in order to communicate with others and access information. This requires a strong foundation in digital literacy skills, including the ability to use social media, online research tools, and communication platforms. The use of technology can be incorporated into



classroom instruction through activities such as online discussions and collaborative projects.

One example of technology that can be used to develop discourse competence is computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Li and Ranalli (2010) found that the use of computer-assisted language learning programs can lead to improved language proficiency and greater motivation to learn among students of foreign languages. CALL programs can provide students with access to interactive materials that allow them to practice their language skills in a variety of contexts. For example, students can use CALL programs to practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the target language. CALL programs can also provide students with instant feedback on their performance, allowing them to identify areas where they need to improve.

Another example of technology that can be used to develop discourse competence is videoconferencing. Kelm and Bónk (2002) found that videoconferencing can provide students with valuable opportunities to practice their language skills in a natural setting and to learn about the culture of the target language from native speakers. Videoconferencing allows students to communicate with native speakers of the target language in real time. This can provide students with valuable opportunities to practice their language skills in a natural setting and to learn about the culture of the target language from native speakers.

Online discussion forums are one more example of technology that can be used to develop discourse competence. These forums provide a platform for students to engage in dialogue with their peers and instructors about a wide range of topics related to international relations. Lee and Kim (2014) argue that the use of technology, such as online language learning platforms, can be an effective way to enhance language proficiency among students in the field of international relations. Through these discussions, students can learn how to express their opinions and ideas clearly and effectively, while also developing their critical thinking skills as they engage with diverse perspectives.

Social media platforms can also be used to develop discourse competence. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn can be used to connect with individuals and organizations from different countries and cultures, enabling students to learn about different perspectives and experiences. In addition, social media can be used to share information and resources, and to engage in discussions about current events, global issues or other topics related to international relations. According to Kirschner and De Bruyckere (2017), technology can be a powerful tool for promoting critical thinking skills by providing students with access to diverse perspectives and enabling them to engage in dialogue and debate with others. Social media can also be used to share authentic materials, such as news articles or videos, that provide students with exposure to the target language and culture.

In addition to these examples, there are many other technologies that can be used to develop discourse

competence in the field of international relations, including online research databases, interactive simulations and games, and multimedia resources such as podcasts and videos.

In conclusion, the formation of discourse competence of students in the field of international relations requires a combination of language proficiency, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and the use of technology. These methodological aspects can be incorporated into classroom instruction and other learning activities to help students develop the skills they need to communicate effectively in different contexts. By focusing on these key areas, educators can help prepare students for success in their academic, professional, and social lives.

### **Challenges that arise in the process of developing discourse competence**

There can be several challenges that arise in the process of developing discourse competence of students in the field of international relations. One of the main challenges is the diversity of academic backgrounds and levels of language proficiency among students, which can create difficulties in understanding and participation in class discussions. Another challenge is the lack of motivation among some students to engage in the learning process actively. Additionally, the complexity and diversity of international relations topics may make it challenging for students to comprehend and communicate effectively. Finally, the lack of opportunities for practical application of language and discourse skills outside the classroom setting may limit the development of discourse competence. Overcoming these challenges requires a systematic approach that integrates various pedagogical techniques and technologies that can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and language skills.

### ***Diversity of academic backgrounds and levels of language proficiency***

The diversity of academic backgrounds and levels of language proficiency among students can pose several challenges in the process of formation of discourse competence. For example, some students may come from different academic backgrounds such as political science, history, or economics, which may affect their prior knowledge of international relations topics and concepts. Similarly, some students may have better language skills than others, which may make it difficult for them to express themselves effectively in academic discussions and debates.

Moreover, differences in cultural and social backgrounds may also lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications during class discussions. Students may have different perspectives and approaches to international relations topics based on their cultural and social backgrounds, which can lead to conflicting views and opinions. This can hinder the formation of discourse competence as students may not be able to effectively engage in constructive dialogue and exchange of ideas.

Therefore, it is important for instructors to address these differences and create a supportive learning environment that



promotes effective communication and understanding among students. This can involve providing additional language support for students with lower language proficiency, using a variety of teaching methods and materials to accommodate different academic backgrounds, and encouraging respect and tolerance for diverse perspectives and opinions.

#### **Lack of motivation**

This is a common problem in any learning process, and it can have various causes, such as a lack of interest in the subject matter, personal or academic problems, or a sense of disconnect between the learning environment and the real world. In the context of developing discourse competence in international relations, some students may not see the practical value of the skills they are learning or may feel that the topics covered are too abstract or detached from their everyday lives.

To address this issue, instructors can try to connect the course content with real-world examples and current events, showing students how the skills they are learning can be applied to contemporary issues. Additionally, instructors can create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions and ideas, allowing them to see the relevance and value of their contributions to class discussions. Lastly, instructors can also provide feedback and recognition for students who actively engage in the learning process, which can motivate other students to participate as well.

#### **Complexity and diversity of international relations topics**

It is a valid point that the complexity and diversity of international relations topics can make it challenging for students to comprehend and communicate effectively. The field of international relations covers a wide range of topics, including history, politics, economics, culture, and language. Therefore, it requires students to have a broad knowledge base and critical thinking skills to analyze and evaluate the information effectively. Additionally, the use of specialized terminology and jargon in international relations can be intimidating and confusing for students who are not familiar with them. However, with the appropriate teaching strategies and the use of various resources such as multimedia materials, case studies, and simulations, students can improve their comprehension and communication skills in the field of international relations.

To address the challenge of complex and diverse international relations topics, several solutions can be employed. First, teachers can provide students with a clear and structured curriculum that breaks down complex topics into more manageable components. This can involve providing background information and context, as well as using examples and case studies to illustrate key concepts. Second, teachers can incorporate various teaching methods and materials to cater to students' diverse learning styles and interests. This can include visual aids, interactive activities, and multimedia resources such as videos and podcasts. Third, teachers can encourage active learning and critical thinking by engaging students in discussions and debates that promote reflection and analysis. They can also provide opportunities

for students to practice their language and communication skills through group projects, presentations, and writing assignments. Finally, it is important to foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages students to feel comfortable expressing their ideas and asking questions. This can involve creating opportunities for peer feedback and collaboration, as well as providing individualized support and guidance where needed.

#### **Lack of opportunities for practical application of language and discourse skills**

The lack of opportunities for practical application of language and discourse skills outside the classroom setting is a common issue that may limit the development of discourse competence. Students may have limited exposure to the target language and may not have many opportunities to practice their language and discourse skills in real-life situations. To address this issue, educators can incorporate more opportunities for practical application of language and discourse skills into the curriculum. This could include activities such as language exchange programs, internships, and participation in academic conferences or debates. Additionally, educators can encourage students to engage with authentic materials such as news articles, podcasts, and videos in the target language to improve their understanding of international relations topics and enhance their language proficiency.

### **CONCLUSION**

The process of forming discourse competence of students in the field of international relations is complex and challenging. Students may face various issues, such as the diversity of academic backgrounds and language proficiency levels, the lack of motivation, the complexity and diversity of international relations topics, and the limited opportunities for practical application of language and discourse skills. To address these challenges, various solutions can be employed, including differentiated instruction, the use of real-world examples, the incorporation of technology, and the promotion of extracurricular activities. Despite the difficulties, the development of discourse competence is crucial for students' success in the field of international relations, as effective communication is necessary for understanding and analyzing complex issues and for building relationships with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

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