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BUSINESS GAMES IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Annotation. *This article proposes a theoretically grounded and classroom-oriented framework for using business games to develop communicative competence in secondary-school English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching. Business games (BGs) are conceptualised as structured, role-based communicative tasks with defined rules, constraints, and an expected interactional outcome, distinguishing them from open-ended role plays, broader serious games, and simulations that may not require an explicit communicative product. The study integrates Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence with Nikolayeva's Ukrainian methodological structure and situates BGs within Task-Based Language Teaching and Kolb's experiential learning cycle to justify the pedagogical importance of post-game reflection and feedback. On this basis, a four-category typology is proposed—role-play scenarios, conflict-resolution simulations, negotiation/mediation games, and case-based problem-solving—showing*

how each format imposes distinct communicative demands and activates different competence components. Two classroom modules illustrate complementary pathways for developing linguistic, speech, linguosociocultural, and learning-strategic competence. The article concludes that BGs complement form-focused instruction by providing authentic, goal-directed interaction supported by structured reflection.

Key words: *business game; communicative competence; English as a foreign language teaching; high school students.*

Анотація. Уточнено сутність поняття «ділова гра» та запропоновано теоретично обґрунтовану й практично орієнтовану основу її використання для розвитку комунікативної компетентності у процесі навчання англійської мови як іноземної в старшій школі. На підставі аналізу дефініцій підсумовано, що ділові ігри репрезентують структуровані комунікативні завдання з рольовим розподілом, визначеними правилами, обмеженнями та очікуваним результатом взаємодії, що відрізняє їх від рольових ігор відкритого типу, серйозних ігор у ширшому розумінні та ігор-симуляцій, які можуть не передбачати конкретного комунікативного продукту. Обґрунтовано доцільність поєднання моделі комунікативної компетентності М. Канейла і М. Свейна та структури іншомовної комунікативної компетентності С. Ніколаєвої з положеннями навчання на основі завдань і моделі навчання через досвід за Д. Колбом, що підтверджує педагогічну необхідність післяігрової рефлексії та зворотного зв'язку. Окреслено чотирикатегорійну типологію (рольові сценарії, симуляції розв'язання конфліктів, ігри переговорів і медіації, кейс-орієнтовані завдання з розв'язання проблем), яка розкриває комунікативні вимоги кожного формату та відповідні компоненти компетентності, що ним активуються. Спроектовано два практичні модулі, які ілюструють взаємодоповнювальні шляхи розвитку мовної, мовленнєвої, лінгвосоціокультурної та навчально-стратегічної компетентностей учнів старшої школи, а також демонструють потенціал ділових ігор у

забезпеченні автентичної, цілеспрямованої взаємодії, підкріпленої структурованою рефлексією.

***Ключові слова:** ділова гра; комунікативна компетентність; англійська мова як іноземна; учні старшої школи.*

Introduction. A central aim of contemporary foreign language education is to develop learners' ability to use language purposefully in authentic communicative situations. Grammar-focused approaches alone are insufficient for this purpose; interactive, task-oriented pedagogies are needed to immerse learners in meaningful communicative practice [6; 16]. Business games—structured communicative simulations in which learners assume roles and solve realistic problems within defined rules—represent one such approach. In the secondary school context, they model real-world decision-making, negotiation, and conflict resolution rather than commercial activity [2; 8], and have been associated with heightened learner engagement and purposeful language use [11; 15; 18]. Unlike open-ended role plays, gameplay-focused games, and broader simulations lacking role-based interaction, BGs are structured, role-based classroom tasks with defined rules, constraints, and an expected communicative outcome.

The main goal of this article is to provide a theoretically grounded and practically oriented framework for using BGs to develop communicative competence (CC) in secondary-school EFL teaching. This is pursued through three objectives: 1) grounding the concept of CC in its established theoretical foundations; 2) proposing a typology of four classroom BG varieties, each mapped to linguistic, speech, linguosociocultural, and learning-strategic competence components, to guide principled game selection; 3) illustrating the approach through two classroom modules that demonstrate how different game types engage CC in complementary combinations.

In this article, Canale and Swain's model is used as an internationally established framework for describing core components of CC, while Nikolayeva's model is adopted

as the methodological structure that guides instructional design decisions and the selection of classroom activities. This dual framing allows the proposed typology to remain internationally interpretable while staying aligned with nationally grounded pedagogical categories.

Presentation of the main material. Hymes introduced CC to capture the sociocultural knowledge governing language use beyond grammatical rules [9]. Canale and Swain's influential four-component model identifies: 1) grammatical competence—knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; 2) sociolinguistic competence—sociocultural appropriateness; 3) discourse competence—coherence in spoken and written texts; and 4) strategic competence—verbal and non-verbal strategies for managing communication [3]. CC in this sense encompasses far more than correctness, extending to the sociopragmatic ability to select contextually appropriate language [10]. Later frameworks have refined these categories but share the founding insight that competence is irreducibly multi-dimensional [1; 4; 5]. Developing it requires environments that afford goal-directed interaction across multiple competence components simultaneously [6], which practitioner accounts confirm BGs can provide [17].

S. Yu. Nikolayeva proposed a complementary four-part structure of foreign-language CC: linguistic (knowledge of language norms and their use in speech, encompassing phonetic, lexical, and grammatical sub-competences); speech (the ability to speak, listen, read, and write in monologic and dialogic modes); linguosociocultural (the ability to select language forms appropriately for a situation alongside knowledge of target-culture customs, etiquette, and behavioural norms); and learning-strategic (mastery of learning and communicative strategies and their application in language use) [14]. This framework highlights CC's multidimensionality and links it to classroom activity design. Here, Canale and Swain guide analysis of performance, while Nikolayeva supports pedagogical mapping of BG types to competence goals.

Task-Based Language Teaching provides a principled framework for understanding BGs as unfocused tasks—activities that engage learners in deploying all available

linguistic resources towards a communicative goal rather than targeting a specific linguistic feature. This research consistently shows that tasks generating genuine information gaps produce more negotiation of meaning than form-focused activities, and that this negotiation drives language acquisition [6; 13].

Experiential learning theory provides a complementary foundation. BGs map onto Kolb's four-stage cycle: the game constitutes concrete experience; post-game reflection and feedback promote reflective observation; teacher feedback supports abstract conceptualisation; and subsequent tasks allow active experimentation [11]. This explains why structured post-game reflection and feedback are pedagogically essential rather than optional—without it, the concrete experience remains under-processed.

In existing literature, 'business games' are often considered as a unitary category, obscuring significant differences in structure, communication requirements, and educational objectives. Drawing on prior works [2; 7; 8; 14], this article proposes a four-category typology for teaching EFL in secondary school.

The first type is *the role-play scenario*: a brief, focused encounter (two to four participants) in which learners adopt defined identities and pursue a specified interpersonal goal—persuading, complaining, or negotiating one-to-one. Its predictable linguistic demands make it well suited to lower-proficiency learners and the targeted practice of specific communicative functions, with primary emphasis on sociolinguistic and strategic competence [3].

The second type is the *conflict-resolution simulation*. Groups of four to six learners represent stakeholder positions within a social or institutional conflict and negotiate towards a collectively acceptable resolution, drawing on school-relevant themes such as bullying or resource disputes. More demanding than role-plays, these simulations require sustained interaction, competing-agenda management, and argumentation, engaging all four Canale and Swain components with particular emphasis on discourse and strategic competence.

The third type is the *negotiation game*, in which groups representing parties with competing interests must reach agreement through several rounds of proposing, counter-proposing, and conceding. This type foregrounds hedging, conditionals, and polite disagreement, developing pragmatic and discourse competence. A closely related subtype is the *mediation game*, where one participant takes a neutral facilitator role rather than a personal position. The core architecture—defined roles, constrained interaction, required outcome—is retained, but the asymmetric role structure shifts the communicative emphasis towards facilitative strategies: active listening, paraphrasing, and de-escalation.

The fourth type is the *case-based problem-solving task*. Learners receive a case document, analyse the problem, evaluate options, and present a reasoned proposal. Unlike the preceding types, it integrates reading, collaborative discussion, and formal oral presentation, demanding synthesis and justification in a more academic register.

These categories are not mutually exclusive and serve as an analytical tool for teacher decision-making: game type should be selected according to learners' proficiency, the target competence component, and lesson objectives. The generic function list in the literature (motivational, communicative, developmental, social, educational) is best understood as differentially applicable across types rather than uniformly relevant to all.

Scenarios must be realistic enough to generate communicative engagement, constrained enough to make linguistic demands manageable, and socially familiar enough for learners to draw on real-world interactional knowledge [12]. They should present genuine communicative challenges—information gaps, conflicting interests, contested interpretations—since these drive the negotiation of meaning central to language development [13].

The first module illustrates the conflict-resolution simulation type at an intermediate level (B1–B2). It primarily develops discourse and strategic competence, with a secondary focus on sociolinguistic competence.

Scenario: A student at a local school has been subjected to persistent bullying both on school premises and via social media. The situation has affected the student's emotional well-being and academic performance, and the school administration has asked a student advisory team to develop a concrete, realistic action plan. Groups of four to five learners each constitute one advisory team, with role cards assigning the positions of student representative, pastoral care coordinator, class teacher, and community liaison officer; a fifth role (team facilitator) may be added in larger groups. Because school resources are limited, each team must prioritise one primary anti-bullying response (or a clearly prioritised integrated plan), such as disciplinary measures, mediation, psychological support, awareness work, or stricter school rules, and justify its choice in terms of feasibility, likely impact, and long-term effectiveness.

Language input for this module focuses on the functional language of structured group discussion: phrases for introducing a proposal (e.g., *I would suggest that we..., One approach might be to...*), phrases for expressing qualified agreement or disagreement (*That's a valid point, though I'm concerned that...*), and phrases for building on another speaker's contribution (*Following on from what X said..., That links to...*).

During the planning stage, each team discusses the situation from its stakeholders' perspectives and begins to draft a proposal. During enactment, teams engage in an internal decision-making discussion to finalise one prioritised action plan. In the presentation phase, each team presents its plan (approximately three minutes), after which other teams pose questions, challenge assumptions, and offer alternative perspectives. This inter-group exchange extends the negotiation of meaning beyond each individual team and creates additional opportunities for argumentation and spontaneous response. At the end of the activity, the class (or the teacher, using agreed criteria) selects the most convincing and practical solution.

Recommended group size is 4–5 (one advisory team per group). Approximate timing for a 45–60-minute lesson: 10–12 min language input and role briefing, 15–20

min for planning, 12–15 min for enactment, 6–10 min for presentations/questions, 8–10 min for post-game reflection and feedback. Success is evidenced by a clearly structured advisory action plan and its coherent three-minute presentation; feedback is primarily teacher-led with brief peer comments.

Post-game feedback focuses on turn-taking management, use of hedging and modality in proposal language, and strategies deployed when consensus was difficult to reach. Learners are invited to identify one exchange they found particularly effective and explain why. This reflection stage is essential to consolidating the communicative development achieved during the game. This module supports speech competence (extended dialogic and monologic production), linguosociocultural competence (role-appropriate language and social positioning), and learning-strategic competence (adaptive use of communicative strategies during collaborative problem-solving).

The second module illustrates the negotiation game type at an upper-intermediate level (B2). It is designed to develop learning-strategic competence through structured mediation practice, with a secondary focus on sociolinguistic competence in the management of emotionally charged communicative situations.

Scenario: Two students in the same class have a serious ongoing disagreement that has escalated into open conflict, affecting the atmosphere of the group. The school counsellor has invited a peer mediation team to help both parties reach a mutually acceptable resolution. Groups of four to five learners are assigned the following roles: the mediator (a neutral peer responsible for facilitating the conversation and ensuring both sides are heard), Party A (a student who feels unfairly treated and has strong grievances), Party B (the other student, who has a different account of events and feels misunderstood), and one or two observers (who monitor the process and contribute to post-session feedback). The mediator does not judge or impose a solution; the task is to guide the parties towards voluntary agreement through active listening, questioning, and reframing.

Language input for this module centres on the communicative functions specific to mediation. The mediator's language set includes phrases for opening the session and establishing ground rules (e.g., *I'd like us to agree on a few guidelines before we begin...*), phrases for inviting each party to speak without interruption (*Could you tell us, in your own words, what happened from your perspective?*), phrases for paraphrasing and checking understanding (*So if I understand correctly, you feel that..., Would that be a fair summary?*), and phrases for moving towards resolution (*Is there anything the other person could do that would help you feel this situation has been addressed?*). Party A and Party B practise language for expressing grievances constructively (*What concerned me most was...*), acknowledging the other party's perspective (*I can see why that might have seemed...*), and proposing or accepting terms (*One thing I'd be willing to do is...*).

During the planning stage, the mediator reviews their role card and prepares opening questions; Party A and Party B independently prepare their accounts and identify one or two concrete changes they would like to see. During enactment, the session unfolds in three phases: an opening phase in which the mediator sets ground rules and each party gives their account without interruption; an exploration phase in which the mediator asks clarifying questions, paraphrases each position back, and helps parties identify shared interests beneath stated positions; and a resolution phase in which parties negotiate specific agreements. The observers note which mediation strategies proved most effective and where communication broke down. In the closing phase, the mediator briefly summarises the outcome reached, and observers offer structured feedback on the process.

Recommended group size is 4–5 (mediator, Party A, Party B, plus 1–2 observers). Approximate timing for a 45–60-minute lesson: 10–12 min mediation language input, 8–10 min individual preparation, 15–20 min enactment, 5–8 min outcome summary, 10–12 min post-game reflection and feedback. Success is evidenced by a mutually acceptable written or oral agreement statement and an accurate mediator summary; the reflection-

and-feedback stage is peer-led by observers using a checklist, followed by brief teacher consolidation.

Post-game feedback focuses on the mediator's use of open questions and paraphrasing, both parties' ability to express grievances without blame language, and the degree to which all participants deployed hedging and conditional structures to soften positions and invite compromise. Learners reflect on which moment in the mediation session represented the key communicative turning point and why. This reflection stage is particularly productive in this module because the mediator role makes the mechanics of communicative strategy unusually visible to all participants.

This module particularly engages strategic and discourse competence through structured mediation talk, as well as strongly develops learning-strategic competence and linguosociocultural competence, while also engaging speech competence through sustained interaction and summary production. Compared with the bullying scenario, this module places greater communicative responsibility on a single participant (the mediator) and is therefore especially suitable for learners who are ready to practise sustained facilitative interaction rather than positional argumentation.

BGs are well suited to developing precisely the competence components identified as central to foreign language CC: linguosociocultural (calibrating language to social context and cultural knowledge), learning-strategic (deploying communicative strategies adaptively), and speech (sustained authentic production across all four skills). The four-category typology makes explicit that different game formats impose different communicative demands and engage different competence components with different emphases; it gives teachers a principled basis for game selection.

Conclusion. This article has argued that BGs represent an effective and theoretically grounded approach to developing CC in secondary EFL instruction. On the basis of the proposed typology, the role-play scenario develops linguosociocultural competence (social etiquette and appropriate language for the relationship between roles); the conflict-resolution simulation enhances speech competence (sustained

monologic and dialogic production across extended multi-party interaction); the negotiation game develops linguistic competence (precise use of hedging, conditionals, and the vocabulary of concession under real-time pressure); and, particularly, the mediation game strengthens learning-strategic competence (deliberate management of communicative strategies, reformulation, and de-escalation of tension); whereas case-based problem-solving increases speech competence in its integrative sense, as it is the only type that develops all four speech modes simultaneously (reading, discussion, listening, and formal oral presentation). The two classroom modules presented illustrate how different game types engage CC in complementary combinations. Further research should include empirical studies to determine which types of games are most effective at which levels of language proficiency and under which learning conditions.

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