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Article

Pedagogical Conditions For Developing Communicative Competence Through a Reflexive Approach in Primary EFL Education

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Abstract: Developing communicative competence is one of the main aims of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in primary education. At the same time, young learners often need structured support to understand how they participate in speaking tasks, how they respond to peers, and how they can improve their own language use. This article develops and substantiates a reflexive approach to strengthening communicative competence in primary school EFL classrooms. Rather than treating reflection as an additional post-lesson ritual, the paper conceptualizes it as a brief and age-appropriate pedagogical mechanism embedded in communicative tasks, teacher scaffolding, peer interaction, and self-assessment. The study is based on a qualitative-analytical design that combines a review of recent international research, comparative analysis of reflexive and communicative teaching practices, and the construction of a classroom implementation model suitable for young learners. The paper argues that a reflexive approach improves communicative development by making learners more aware of goals, speech choices, difficulties, and progress. The article contributes a practical model for integrating reflection, formative feedback, and communicative language teaching in ways that are developmentally appropriate for primary school learners and relevant to digital didactics.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, Reflexive Approach, Primary Education, EFL Teaching, Reflection, Young Learners, Communicative Language Teaching, Formative Assessment, Digital Didactics

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1. Introduction

Communicative competence has long been treated as a central objective of language education, but in primary school English classrooms it remains difficult to translate this broad objective into everyday teaching practice. Young learners may memorize lexical units and repeat model sentences, yet still hesitate when they need to ask, answer, negotiate meaning, respond to classmates, or speak with even limited spontaneity. For this reason, contemporary EFL pedagogy increasingly emphasizes communication as active classroom participation rather than the passive reproduction of language forms. The CEFR Companion Volume reinforces this view by framing language use through reception, production, interaction, mediation, and online interaction, thereby moving the focus from isolated knowledge to purposeful communicative action[1].

In primary education, communicative competence should be interpreted in a developmentally appropriate way. It does not require long or highly sophisticated speech; instead, it involves clear responses, simple question–answer exchange, contextual

vocabulary use, listening and reacting to others, confidence in participation, and the growing ability to monitor one's own performance. Recent studies on primary school EFL teachers show that the quality of English learning for young learners depends not only on curriculum design but also on teacher confidence, school support, and classroom conditions that make language use possible and meaningful. The formation of foreign language communicative competence has been extensively examined in the field of language education, with numerous scholars contributing to its conceptualization and methodological development.

Communicative competence has been widely conceptualized in foreign language education as a multidimensional construct involving both linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions. Early interpretations describe it as learners' readiness to participate in interaction with native speakers while simultaneously gaining insight into the cultural context of the target language, which contributes to the development of their own cultural awareness .

This perspective is further extended by later studies, which define communicative competence as the ability to effectively engage in socially and interculturally appropriate communication across various contexts. In addition, scholars highlight that communicative competence includes not only the ability but also the willingness to communicate, emphasizing the importance of adhering to socio-cultural norms in diverse communicative situations[2] .

In recent years, research has increasingly shifted toward practical strategies for enhancing communicative competence in language classrooms. For instance, blended learning environments have been shown to improve communicative outcomes by combining traditional instruction with digital tools. Similarly, digital educational resources are considered effective in supporting language development and facilitating learners' engagement in communication. Furthermore, learner motivation has been identified as a key factor influencing the successful development of communicative competence, particularly in foreign language contexts .

However, despite the diversity of existing approaches, a significant gap remains in the literature. Most studies tend to prioritize communicative practice, technological integration, or motivational aspects, while reflection is often treated as a supplementary rather than a central pedagogical component. Consequently, the potential of reflection as a systematic mechanism for enhancing communicative competence, especially among primary school learners, remains insufficiently explored.

This study addresses this gap by proposing a reflexive approach as an integrative framework, in which communicative activity and reflection are not separated but interconnected within the learning process. Unlike previous models, the reflexive approach positions reflection as a continuous, structured, and age-appropriate process that enables learners to become aware of their communicative actions, regulate their participation, and gradually improve their performance[3].

In other words, communicative competence grows when learners are provided with supportive pedagogical structures that help them participate, notice, and improve. A reflexive approach offers such a structure. Reflection in education is often interpreted too narrowly as an abstract intellectual exercise intended for adults or teacher training. However, in language education reflection can be redefined for children as short, guided, concrete thinking about what was said, what was understood, what felt difficult, and what should be tried next. This aligns with research on young learners' metacognitive knowledge, which shows that even children can reveal meaningful awareness of learning processes when tasks and prompts are adapted to their age and communicative experience.

Broader evidence from learning-oriented assessment research indicates that self-assessment, classroom climate, and academic engagement are interrelated, and that supportive assessment cultures help learners become more active and self-aware

participants in learning. These findings suggest that communicative growth is strongest when children are not only asked to perform language but are also helped to evaluate and regulate their own participation.

The communicative dimension of reflection is closely connected with willingness to communicate, a construct that has gained renewed attention in second language research. Willingness to communicate is affected not only by linguistic proficiency but also by confidence, autonomy support, classroom relationships, and perceived safety in interaction .

From this perspective, reflection is valuable because it reduces the threat of error and reframes speaking as a process of trial, feedback, and improvement. If a learner understands that speaking is not judged only in terms of correctness but also in terms of effort, participation, and progress, classroom communication becomes more accessible. This is particularly important for primary school learners, who are often highly sensitive to evaluation and comparison.

The rise of digital didactics adds another important layer to this discussion. Digital tools do not automatically improve language learning, but they can support communication and reflection when they are used with clear pedagogical purposes. Recent studies show that clustered digital materials can improve engagement in language skills work, while digital storytelling and related multimodal practices may encourage willingness to communicate[4] .

This article aims to preserve the pedagogical focus on communicative competence while showing how a reflexive approach can strengthen it in primary school EFL classrooms. The paper is guided by three research questions: (1) What theoretical and pedagogical arguments justify the integration of reflexive practices into communicative language teaching for young learners? (2) Which classroom components of communicative competence can be strengthened through reflection and formative feedback? (3) How can an age-appropriate and digitally supported reflexive model be organized for use in primary EFL lessons? The novelty of the article lies in the development of a structured but practical model that links communicative tasks, guided reflection, formative assessment, and simple digital support within one coherent framework. Communicative competence is widely recognized as a central goal of language education, particularly in EFL contexts. At the same time, reflection has been identified as an essential component of effective learning processes.

Reflection has been widely recognized as a key component of learning, while communicative competence is emphasized in the CEFR framework. Recent studies confirm that reflective practices can significantly enhance young learners' communicative development.

However, despite these theoretical connections, the integration of reflection into communicative language teaching in primary education remains insufficiently explored.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative-analytical design with a controlled empirical intervention. The research was conducted in three stages. First, a conceptual review was performed to define the reflexive framework for primary EFL. Second, a pedagogical model was designed, integrating short oral tasks with structured reflection prompts. Third, to validate the model, an empirical study was conducted involving 567 primary school learners (Grades 1–4) across several EFL classrooms.

The selection criteria were as follows: relevance to English language education, relevance to young or school-age learners, explicit discussion of reflection, self-assessment, engagement, communicative participation, or willingness to communicate, and practical implications for classroom methodology. The reviewed sources were compared

thematically, and recurring categories were identified: learner self-awareness, communicative participation, formative feedback, teacher scaffolding, classroom climate, digital mediation, and developmental appropriateness.

The analytical procedure followed three consecutive stages. First, a conceptual review was conducted to clarify how communicative competence is framed in recent EFL research and policy documents. Second, reflexive and assessment-related studies were examined to determine what kinds of reflective support can realistically be transferred into primary classrooms. Third, the findings were transformed into a pedagogical model consisting of instructional stages, classroom tools, and observable indicators. This model was designed specifically for the context of primary EFL lessons in which learners engage in short oral tasks such as pair dialogues, picture-based speaking, mini-presentations, guessing games, situational role-play, or question-and-answer interaction.

In methodological terms, the article combines elements of conceptual modeling and pedagogical design. The output is not a general theory of reflection, but an applied framework showing how reflection can be embedded in communicative work before, during, and after oral interaction. To maintain consistency with conference requirements on practical relevance, the model includes a sequence of teacher actions, learner reflection prompts, a digital option for post-task self-checking, and a compact table of indicators that can be used in lesson observation or classroom-based action research. The procedure is therefore replicable and may be adapted for future empirical testing in primary school settings.

3. Results and Discussion

Why a reflexive approach matters for communicative competence

The first result of the analysis is conceptual: communicative competence in primary EFL should be treated as both a performance outcome and a learning process. Traditional speaking tasks often measure the final product of communication whether the learner answered correctly, used the expected structure, or completed the task. A reflexive approach adds another dimension: it enables the learner to think about the process of communication. This is important because young learners do not automatically notice why a speaking task went well or badly. Without guidance, they may simply remember that they were “right” or “wrong.” Reflection helps convert a one-time communicative event into accumulated communicative experience[5].

From the reviewed literature, four components emerge as especially relevant. First, reflection strengthens awareness of the communicative goal: learners understand what they are trying to do with language, not merely what sentence they are expected to repeat. Second, it increases self-monitoring of participation: learners begin to notice whether they asked a question, answered clearly, listened to a partner, or used a new word. Third, it supports emotional regulation: children who are allowed to speak about difficulty and effort become less afraid of making mistakes. Fourth, reflection contributes to transfer: learners who identify what helped them communicate in one task are more likely to apply the same strategy in the next task. This process corresponds to current work on metacognitive knowledge in young learners and to learning-oriented assessment perspectives that emphasize awareness, agency, and purposeful feedback.

The practical implication is that communicative competence should not be reduced to speaking volume or grammatical correctness. In primary classrooms, a communicatively developing learner is one who increasingly participates, takes risks, responds more appropriately, and can name at least one thing that improved or remained difficult. Such development is modest but educationally significant. A reflexive approach makes these gains visible and pedagogically manageable[6].

The Reflexive Model for Primary EFL

The first significant result of this study is the development of a cyclic classroom model where reflection is embedded directly into communicative tasks. Unlike traditional models that treat reflection as a post-lesson ritual, this approach positions it as a "pedagogical mechanism". The model consists of five components: communicative task design, teacher scaffolding, guided self-assessment, peer feedback, and strategy transfer.

The first component is communicative task design. The lesson must begin with a short but purposeful speaking activity appropriate to the developmental level of the class. Examples include introducing oneself, asking about favorite toys or gadgets, describing classroom objects, expressing feelings, or role-playing simple daily situations. The task should require actual response and interaction, even if the language is controlled. A reflexive approach does not replace communicative activity; it depends on it.

The second component is teacher scaffolding. Before or during the task, the teacher clarifies the goal in child-friendly language: “Today we will ask and answer clearly,” “Today we will try to use two new words,” or “Today we will listen and respond to our partner.” Such micro-goals make reflection possible because children need to know what to notice. The review of current studies on primary EFL teaching suggests that teacher beliefs, self-efficacy, and the classroom environment have strong effects on how communicative lessons are enacted. Therefore, teacher guidance remains a core element of any reflexive design [7].

The third component is guided self-assessment. After the task, learners respond to one or two structured prompts. For younger children, these may be visual or oral: “Was I brave?” “Did I ask?” “Did I answer?” “What word did I use?” Older primary learners may complete simple sentence stems such as “Today I spoke about…,” “It was difficult to…,” or “Next time I will try to….” Research on primary school EFL self-assessment shows that teachers value such practices but need workable formats; therefore, the model deliberately keeps the reflection brief and concrete[8] .

The fourth component is peer feedback. At the primary level, peer response should not become a complex rubric exercise. It is more effective when limited to simple supportive frames: “My friend answered clearly,” “My friend used a new word,” “My friend needs to speak louder,” or “I liked the question.” Such statements build interactional responsibility and classroom listening. They also reinforce the idea that communication involves responsiveness, not only individual performance[9].

The fifth component is strategy transfer. Reflection has value only if it influences subsequent action. The teacher therefore closes the loop by inviting learners to carry one strategy into the next activity: speak louder, use a target word, wait for a partner’s answer, or ask one more question. This converts reflection from description into forward movement, which is one of the most important features of formative pedagogy.

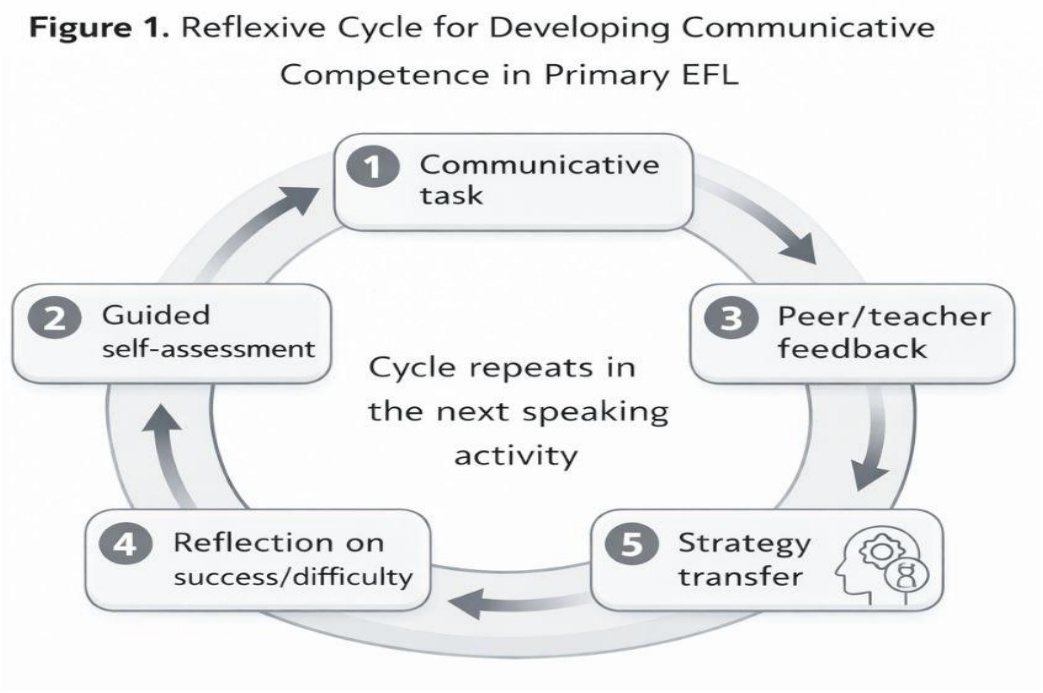

Figure 1. The model illustrates a cyclic process in which communicative activity is continuously supported by reflection and feedback, leading to gradual improvement in learners' communicative competence and operationalized in Table 1.

Table 1. Analytical framework of the reflexive intervention.

Component	Reflexive tool	Observable classroom indicator
Speaking confidence	Post-task self-rating / smiley scale	Learner volunteers answers more frequently and with less hesitation
Interaction	Pair reflection/peer feedback	Learner listens, takes turns, and responds more actively
Vocabulary use	"Words I used today" checklist	More target expressions appear in learner speech
Self-awareness	Guided reflection prompt	Learner identifies one strength and one difficulty
Strategy transfer	Next-step pledge / digital self-check	Learner carries one improvement target into the next task

Reflexive routines and digital support

The third result concerns digital didactics. The literature reviewed for this article suggests that digital tools are most effective when they support, rather than overshadow, pedagogy. In the context of primary EFL, this means that digital reflection should remain short, accessible, and purposeful. Google Forms-based self-checks are particularly useful because they allow teachers to collect structured responses quickly after a lesson or communicative task. A form can include pictorial scales, yes/no items, or one open prompt. For example, learners may answer: "I asked a question today," "I used a new word," "I need help with pronunciation," or "I want more speaking practice."

This digital option offers several pedagogical advantages. First, it helps the teacher see patterns across the class without requiring lengthy written reflection from children. Second, it creates a visible record of learner awareness over time. Third, it supports shy learners who may prefer responding digitally to speaking publicly about their difficulties[10]. Fourth, it strengthens the connection between communicative teaching and digital awareness, which is relevant for conference themes focused on digital didactics. However, digital tools should remain supplementary. In primary education, reflection is

most powerful when it is first modeled orally and socially, then optionally recorded digitally.

Recent research on digital materials and digital storytelling demonstrates that technology can support language engagement and willingness to communicate when tasks remain interactive and communicatively meaningful .

Furthermore, the integration of simple digital tools enhances the effectiveness of reflexive practices by making reflection more structured and accessible for young learners. Digital platforms such as interactive forms, QR-based tasks, and short feedback applications allow teachers to collect immediate responses and monitor learners' progress more efficiently. Importantly, digital reflection does not replace traditional classroom interaction but complements it. When used appropriately, digital tools support learner engagement, promote autonomy, and provide opportunities for individualized feedback. For example, learners who are less confident in oral communication may benefit from digital self-assessment formats, which reduce anxiety and encourage honest reflection[11].

This confirms that digital mediation should not be understood as screen time alone; its value lies in how it extends feedback, participation, and multimodal expression. Accordingly, the proposed model does not advocate for replacing classroom dialogue with digital forms. Instead, it recommends combining face-to-face reflection with light digital follow-up, especially when teachers need a manageable tool for self-assessment and progress monitoring.

Pedagogical effects expected from the model

Although this article does not fabricate statistical outcomes, the pedagogical effects predicted by the reviewed evidence are clear and coherent. A reflexive approach is expected to strengthen at least four aspects of communicative competence in primary EFL classrooms.

The first is speaking confidence. Research on willingness to communicate shows that learners speak more readily in classrooms where participation is supported by autonomy, trust, and constructive interaction .

Reflection helps build such an environment because it normalizes partial success and positions mistakes as part of learning. Children who can say "I tried," "I asked," or "I forgot one word" are already participating in a healthier communicative culture than those who receive only right/wrong judgments[12].

The second is interactional participation. When learners are encouraged to notice whether they listened to a partner, responded appropriately, or used a follow-up question, communication becomes reciprocal. This is especially important in early language learning because communicative competence includes turn-taking, attention to others, and relevance of response, not only vocabulary recall. The CEFR Companion Volume's emphasis on interaction and mediation supports this broader view of communication.

The third is learner self-awareness. Young learners who engage in age-appropriate reflection begin to identify not just their errors but also their strategies and progress. This aligns with evidence that metacognitive knowledge can be meaningfully elicited from children when assessment tools are adapted to their developmental level.

Such awareness is valuable beyond immediate speaking tasks because it contributes to the learner's growing sense of agency[13].

The fourth is formative coherence in the lesson. Reflection ties together objective, task, feedback, and next-step planning. In many classrooms these stages remain disconnected: the teacher states a goal, learners perform an activity, and the lesson ends. A reflexive approach creates continuity by asking learners to revisit the goal and by enabling the teacher to connect one lesson to the next. Studies on formative assessment and self-assessment indicate that such coherence can improve engagement, motivation, and learning quality. Thus, the model is not only communicative but also structurally formative.

Conditions, limitations, and implementation considerations

The final result of the analysis concerns the conditions under which a reflexive approach can work productively. First, reflection must remain developmentally appropriate. Teachers should avoid abstract or overly evaluative language. Prompts must be short, concrete, and linked to visible classroom action. Second, the classroom climate must be supportive. Reflection becomes harmful if learners feel exposed, compared, or publicly corrected. Third, teachers need practical routines rather than extensive theory; the reviewed literature repeatedly shows that positive attitudes toward self-assessment do not automatically translate into confident implementation For this reason, the model is intentionally simple.

Several limitations also need to be acknowledged. A reflexive approach does not solve all communicative difficulties, especially those caused by limited exposure, large class sizes, or insufficient teaching resources. Nor should reflection become a daily burden that reduces speaking time. In addition, digital tools may not be equally accessible in all school contexts. Consequently, the model should be adapted flexibly. In resource-limited settings, oral reflection circles, traffic-light cards, smiley scales, or paper exit slips may be more practical than online forms[14].

Despite these limitations, the analysis strongly suggests that reflection deserves a more central place in primary EFL methodology. Earlier theoretical work on reflexive pedagogy in teacher education remains useful as a conceptual background, especially where it links reflection with professional growth and metacognitive development.

Taken together, the results of this study support a simple but important conclusion: when reflection is brief, purposeful, and integrated into communicative activity, it becomes a practical mechanism for developing learners' communicative competence rather than an abstract theoretical add-on. This is the main pedagogical contribution of the proposed model[15].

4. Conclusion

This article has argued that communicative competence in primary EFL education can be effectively strengthened through a reflexive approach that is practical, developmentally appropriate, and compatible with contemporary digital didactics. Drawing on recent international research, the study demonstrates that reflection should not be treated as an optional afterthought but as an integral pedagogical mechanism that enables young learners to identify learning goals, monitor their participation, interpret difficulties, and plan further improvement. The proposed model integrates communicative tasks, teacher scaffolding, guided self-assessment, peer feedback, and strategy transfer within a coherent instructional cycle.

The analysis further indicates that the value of reflection lies not in abstract introspection but in structured awareness of communication. For primary school learners, this awareness is expressed through small yet meaningful actions, such as recognizing that they asked a question, used a new word, responded more clearly, or need to speak more confidently in subsequent tasks. When such awareness is supported by formative feedback and simple, age-appropriate reflection tools such as smiley scales, traffic-light techniques, oral reflection, or exit cards-communicative teaching becomes more visible, continuous, and learner-centered.

The theoretical significance of the study lies in establishing a connection between communicative language teaching, reflexive pedagogy, and developmentally appropriate support for young learners. Its practical contribution consists in offering teachers a model that can be implemented without reliance on complex technology or excessive administrative workload. Future research may empirically test this framework in primary school contexts, compare different reflection formats (oral, visual, and task-based), and investigate how reflexive routines influence learners' speaking confidence, interactional participation, and willingness to communicate over time.

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