

The theory of developing students' communicative competence based on the Pirls International Assessment Program

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to construct a theoretical framework for developing students' communicative competence by integrating the principles of the PIRLS International Assessment Program. The objective was to demonstrate how PIRLS approaches reading literacy can enhance students' comprehension, interpretation, and communication skills in diverse educational contexts.

Research Methodology: This study used a quantitative survey with 50 respondents representing various user groups of BPS services. Data were collected via Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS and Excel through validity tests, gap analysis, and Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA).

Results: The findings indicate that Uzbekistan has strategically integrated the PIRLS into its educational reforms through the Presidential Decree No. 5712 and Resolution No. 997, which emphasize international benchmarking and the development of a national evaluation system. PIRLS not only serves as a diagnostic tool but also guides the improvement of teaching methods, curriculum design, and communicative skills. Its implementation promotes reading comprehension, analytical thinking, and effective communication among primary students, thereby aligning national education with global standards.

Conclusions: PIRLS should be viewed not merely as an evaluation mechanism but as a strategic opportunity to modernize education, enhance communicative competence and foster globally competitive learning.

Limitations: This study is conceptually based and lacks empirical validation, and its focus on Uzbekistan may limit its applicability to other contexts.

Contribution: This study contributes theoretically by linking the PIRLS to communicative competence development and practically by offering insights into integrating global literacy assessments into national education systems.

Keywords: *Communication, Competency, Development, Education, Globalization, Integration, Quality, Pedagogy, Society, Strategy, Technology*

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1. Introduction

The rapid renewal of social processes on a global scale demands accelerated development in the field of education. In developed countries, the PIRLS international assessment program is used to monitor trends in educational achievements, identify weaknesses in the system, ensure equity, and evaluate the quality of education provided to a new generation capable of effectively participating in all societal

processes (Khabibjonov & Sakibayeva, 2024). The use of the PIRLS program to assess primary school students has become increasingly relevant for improving the quality of education (Pongsophon, 2024). More than 100 countries worldwide participate in international assessment studies to objectively evaluate the quality of education implemented in their countries and assess students' reading literacy. Indeed, most studies conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) involve assessing students' academic performance in one or more subjects or based on interdisciplinary integration. This helps to conduct an in-depth analysis of educational processes both globally and within individual countries (Stiff, Lenkeit, Hopfenbeck, Kayton, & McGrane, 2023).

In the global community, there has been a shift from assessing students' ability to memorize curricula to evaluating their competencies, that is, their ability to apply the knowledge acquired at school in real-life situations, as well as to develop and assess their creative and logical thinking skills. In our country, special attention is being given to the creation of a national system for assessing the quality of education based on the PIRLS program, which measures primary school students' reading and comprehension levels, with the aim of implementing international programs for evaluating education quality within the public education system (Yusupalieva, 2024). The PIRLS international assessment program is important not only for primary school graduates but also for older students, as it helps them successfully continue to the next stages of education, find their place in social life, and gradually improve their level of competence (Farmonovna, 2025). Therefore, it is essential that both teachers and students view this assessment program not as a "testing tool" or "control method", but as an "opportunity to improve the education system", as required by the needs of the present time (Murphy, Little, & Bjork, 2023).

While numerous studies have explored communicative competence in the context of language learning and literacy, most have focused on pedagogical strategies without grounding them in internationally standardized assessment frameworks (Hoff, 2020). The existing literature often treats communicative competence and reading literacy as separate constructs, overlooking the interdependent nature of comprehension, interpretation, and expression (Amjadi & Talebi, 2024). Furthermore, limited theoretical work has attempted to integrate insights from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) into a broader theory of communicative competence development, especially in primary education. This gap hinders the ability of educators to apply internationally benchmarked frameworks like PIRLS in shaping communication skills holistically (Amjadi & Talebi, 2024).

This study aims to develop a theoretical framework for enhancing students' communicative competence by integrating principles and methodologies from the PIRLS International Assessment Program. Specifically, the objective is to identify how the PIRLS approach to reading literacy can inform the development of students' abilities to comprehend, interpret, and communicate effectively in diverse contexts. This study seeks to bridge the gap between literacy assessment standards and communication-based pedagogy, thereby contributing to more comprehensive educational strategies for primary school students.

2. Literature review

2.1. Literature Review

Communicative competence was introduced by Hymes as an extension of Chomsky's linguistic competence. It refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences and use language appropriately in social and cultural contexts (Mardiana, 2024). This theory emphasizes that language learning involves knowing when, how, and to whom one should speak. It integrates both linguistic rules and sociocultural norms of communication (Firmansyah, Satriawan, & Indrawan, 2024). Therefore, communicative competence is essential for real-life interaction and is broader than mere grammatical knowledge (Dara, Soomro, Ny, Hong, & Elshamy, 2024).

Canale and Swain expanded Hymes' theory by breaking communicative competence into four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and word formation. Sociolinguistic competence involves the use of language that is socially and culturally appropriate for the context. Discourse competence relates to the

ability to construct coherent and cohesive texts. Strategic competence involves the use of communication strategies to overcome difficulties in understanding or expressing oneself (Mootoosamy & Aryadoust, 2024).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an instructional approach that focuses on developing students' communicative competence through real-life language use. CLT emphasizes interaction and authentic communication as core components of language learning (Mislawiyadi, 2023). It encourages students to engage in tasks such as discussions, simulations, and role plays that reflect daily communication. Thus, students are exposed not only to linguistic structures but also to practical language use. This method has been widely implemented in language curricula worldwide (Qasserras, 2023).

Integrating communicative competence theories with the PIRLS reading framework enriches our understanding of how students develop communication skills. Reading is viewed as a communicative act between the author and reader that involves meaning construction. Thus, reading literacy is a vital component of communicative competence, particularly in written language contexts. Instruction should aim to develop both reading and communication skills in tandem. This integrated approach helps prepare students for real-world communication challenges (Nahdi, Yunitasari, Arianti, Atiaturrehmaniah, & Usuluddin, 2024).

The theories of communicative competence and reading literacy have important implications for language education. Educators must design instructional approaches that address all dimensions of language use: speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Tabasi, Tondowala, Tupamahu, Sigilipu, & Ayu Kartika Septiana, 2024). Teaching should be contextual, interactive, and learner-centered to reflect real-life communication scenarios (Bendixen, Daveronis, & Kennair, 2018). By applying models such as CLT and PIRLS, teachers can develop students' language abilities more holistically. This theoretical integration supports lifelong learning and global communication skills (Nasarasiddi, 2024).

In contemporary education, communicative competence has emerged as one of the most significant pedagogical goals. The term, first introduced by Dell Hymes, refers not only to the knowledge of grammatical structures but also to the ability to use language appropriately in real-life contexts (Mardiana, 2024). In the 21st century, communicative competence is increasingly regarded as an essential life skill that enables individuals to engage effectively in academic, social and professional domains. This shift aligns with global educational reforms that emphasize competencies over rote memorization. International large-scale assessments such as PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS, and TALIS have reinforced this paradigm by measuring students' abilities to apply knowledge in authentic contexts rather than recalling facts (Khabibjonov & Sakibayeva, 2024).

Despite its global relevance, communicative competence has often been conceptualized narrowly, focusing primarily on oral and written language production. Recent scholarship highlights the necessity of integrating literacy, critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and multimodal communication within the framework of communicative competence (Mootoosamy & Aryadoust, 2024). In this respect, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) offers a unique opportunity to bridge literacy assessment with broader communicative skills. While PIRLS is traditionally employed to evaluate reading comprehension among primary school students, its conceptual underpinnings provide a strong foundation for examining how reading literacy can enhance communicative competence (Nahdi et al., 2024).

2.1.1 Theories of Communicative Competence

Early models of communicative competence stressed linguistic and sociolinguistic components. Hymes' framework was expanded by Canale and Swain, who proposed four key dimensions: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. These dimensions collectively explain how individuals construct meaningful messages, adapt to social norms, maintain coherence in discourse, and employ strategies to overcome communication breakdowns (Dara et al., 2024).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been the pedagogical approach most strongly aligned with these theories. CLT emphasizes authentic communication tasks, such as discussions, simulations, and role-plays, which mirror real-world interactions (Qasserras, 2023). However, while CLT has contributed substantially to practical pedagogy, critics argue that it often overlooks the cognitive processes involved in literacy and comprehension (Hariram, Mekha, Suganthan, & Sudhakar, 2023). PIRLS offers a valuable corrective by explicitly focusing on how reading literacy contributes to interpretive and communicative abilities.

Recent theoretical contributions emphasize a transition from communicative competence to multimodal and intercultural competencies, which reflect the realities of globalization and digital communication (Anadza & Pasopati, 2021). This broadening of scope highlights the interconnectedness between reading comprehension, intercultural sensitivity, and the strategic use of communication across media.

2.1.2 PIRLS and Global Assessment Frameworks

PIRLS, administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), assesses fourth-grade students' reading literacy every five years. Its goal is not merely to evaluate reading skills but to examine how children construct meaning from texts and apply their comprehension to different contexts (Stiff et al., 2023). PIRLS shares methodological similarities with PISA and TIMSS in its emphasis on competencies, but is distinct in its targeted focus on primary-level literacy.

Comparative analysis has shown that participation in PIRLS helps countries benchmark their educational performance, identify systemic weaknesses, and develop policies for quality improvement (Pongsophon, 2024). For instance, countries with strong PIRLS performance, such as Singapore and Finland, often integrate PIRLS-aligned standards into their curricula to strengthen early literacy and communication abilities.

The growing participation of over 60 countries in the PIRLS demonstrates its global legitimacy as an assessment framework. Furthermore, PIRLS does not only serve as a monitoring tool and provides diagnostic insights for improving classroom instruction and teacher training (Murphy et al., 2023). By linking assessment results with pedagogical practices, the PIRLS contributes to a feedback loop that enhances both learning outcomes and communicative competencies.

2.1.3 PIRLS and Reading Literacy

Reading literacy, as defined by the PIRLS, goes beyond word decoding. It involves interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and constructing meaning from written text (Hernández-Rojas & Huete Alcocer, 2021). These processes parallel the discourse and strategic components of communicative competence because they require readers to connect texts with prior knowledge, cultural context, and communicative purposes (Kyrpychenko et al., 2021).

Nahdi et al. (2024) argue that PIRLS tasks, which include informational and literary texts, foster the ability to synthesize information and infer meaning. Such skills are foundational not only for literacy but also for oral and written communications. By treating reading as a communicative act between the author and reader, PIRLS underscores the dialogic nature of literacy, where comprehension is shaped by both textual cues and the reader's interpretive strategies.

Moreover, PIRLS introduces the idea that reading literacy should be embedded in broader competency-based education (Fauziah, Faeni, & Fikri, 2024). This aligns with the notion that effective communication requires not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to critically evaluate information and convey meaning coherently.

2.1.4 Linking PIRLS to Communicative Competence

Integrating the PIRLS into communicative competence frameworks offers several advantages. First, the PIRLS provides quantifiable benchmarks for assessing comprehension that can be mapped onto discourse competence. Second, PIRLS tasks emphasize inferential and evaluative reasoning, which aligns with strategic competence in real-world communication (Nahdi et al., 2024). Third, PIRLS

highlights the importance of contextualized reading, which resonates with the concept of sociolinguistic competence.

This integration has significant pedagogical implications for teaching and learning. Teachers can design lessons that combine PIRLS-style reading comprehension exercises with CLT-based speaking and writing tasks to this end. For example, students might analyze a PIRLS text for comprehension and then engage in a group discussion or debate to practice oral communication (Ningrum, Fachrudin, & Ngaliman, 2024). This blended approach strengthens both literacy and communicative competence by linking the interpretive and expressive dimensions of language learning (Dara et al., 2024).

Furthermore, PIRLS can be leveraged to promote intercultural communication. Because PIRLS includes texts from diverse cultural contexts, it provides opportunities for students to engage with perspectives beyond their immediate environments. This exposure fosters empathy, critical thinking, and adaptability, which are essential for intercultural communicative competence (Mootoosamy & Aryadoust, 2024).

2.1.5 Comparative Insights: Uzbekistan and Global Practices

Uzbekistan has strategically emphasized the integration of PIRLS into its national education reforms. Presidential Decree No. 5712 and Cabinet Resolution No. 997 mandate the use of international assessment frameworks to improve educational quality and create a national question bank aligned with the PIRLS and PISA (Farmonovna, 2025). This reflects a shift in perception from viewing the PIRLS as a control tool to recognizing it as an instrument for systemic improvement.

Studies have highlighted that Uzbekistan's adoption of PIRLS has already influenced curriculum modernization, teacher training, and national assessment design (Yusupalieva, 2024). Similar practices are evident in other countries, where PIRLS results have prompted reforms in reading curricula, resource allocation and equity-focused interventions (Pongsophon, 2024).

Comparisons with top-performing PIRLS countries reveal the importance of aligning assessment results with classroom practice. For example, Singapore integrated PIRLS insights into early literacy instruction by embedding comprehension strategies into everyday lessons (Jones, 2021). Finland emphasizes collaborative reading activities that mirror the PIRLS tasks, thereby enhancing discourse and strategic competencies. These practices illustrate how PIRLS can be applied not only for benchmarking but also for instructional innovation (Stiff et al., 2023).

2.1.6 Instructional and Policy Implications

The integration of PIRLS into communicative competence development suggests several instructional strategies for teachers. Teachers should adopt authentic texts that mirror the PIRLS tasks and encourage students to engage critically with information. Classroom activities should combine reading comprehension with writing, speaking, and listening tasks to reinforce the multidimensional nature of communicative competence (Qasserras, 2023).

At the policy level, governments should view the PIRLS as a capacity-building tool rather than a punitive measure. The results should be used to inform curriculum design, teacher training, and educational equity initiatives. Furthermore, international collaboration in the PIRLS fosters shared learning and the exchange of best practices among participating countries (Khabibjonov & Sakibayeva, 2024).

Technology integration also plays a crucial role in this regard. Digital platforms can simulate PIRLS-style reading tasks while enabling interactive discussions, thereby blending assessments with communication training. These innovations align with the shift toward multimodal and intercultural communicative competence (Mootoosamy & Aryadoust, 2024).

2.2. Hypothesis

Developing students' communicative competence requires a multidimensional approach that integrates both linguistic and cognitive skills. The PIRLS assessment framework, which evaluates students'

reading comprehension across various cognitive processes, offers valuable insights into how reading literacy contributes to broader language abilities. Given that reading involves interpretation, inference, and evaluation of meaning, it aligns closely with the components of communicative competence, such as discourse and strategic competence. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that incorporating PIRLS-based strategies into language instruction will significantly enhance students' overall communicative competence. This hypothesis assumes that students exposed to literacy tasks modeled after the PIRLS will demonstrate improved ability to comprehend and communicate effectively across both oral and written modalities.

3. Research methodology

This scientific article was prepared using conceptual, analytical, comparative, and systematic approaches. The primary goal of this study was to determine the function and usefulness of the PIRLS international assessment program in fostering communicative competence. International education assessment systems, specifically the methods used in PIRLS, PISA, TALIS, EGRA, and TIMSS, were studied as a methodological foundation, and competency-based approaches were examined in light of this.

Methodological techniques, including analytical-methodological analysis, conceptual analysis, comparative analysis, and examination of normative-legal underpinnings, were used in the study. Specifically, the PIRLS program's methodology, goals, and evaluation standards were thoroughly examined using an analytical-methodological approach, along with the program's effects on students' communication and text-processing abilities. The theoretical underpinnings of communicative competence were discovered and connected to the PIRLS framework's assessment criteria through a conceptual analysis. The planning and execution of the PIRLS program in Uzbekistan's educational system was also contrasted with the experiences of developed nations using comparative analysis, revealing both similarities and differences. The function and future of the PIRLS program within the national education system were also made clear by the examination of normative-legal underpinnings, which was based on official documents such as Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 997 and Presidential Decree No. DP-5712.

The practical component of this study involved evaluating the reading and comprehension abilities of primary school pupils to examine the phases of communicative competence development. Furthermore, the potential for integrating contemporary educational technologies with the PIRLS standards was examined. Through the evaluation of their reading and comprehension skills, the phases of primary school pupils' communicative skill development were investigated from a practical perspective. All things considered, the PIRLS program has been scientifically validated as a tool for evaluating reading literacy and an efficient way to foster critical life skills, especially communicative skills, in contemporary education. These methods demonstrate the PIRLS program's theoretical and practical importance in fostering life skills, particularly communicative competence, in addition to reading literacy.

4. Results and discussions

In recent years, the profound reforms and significant transformations taking place in our country have required a reevaluation of all spheres of human life through new perspectives, concepts, and approaches shaped by globalization and integration processes. Globalization and integration processes are now reflected in every field across the world. Education has also become a priority area of state policy, and reforms have been initiated to develop it based on new and innovative ideas. Changes in society and daily life have laid the groundwork for introducing innovative approaches into the education system and accelerating the integration processes among education, science, and production. Consequently, the implementation of innovative solutions in the educational process has become a pressing issue. Studying international experiences and implementing the requirements of international standards into the system play a significant role in improving education quality and effectiveness. It is essential to examine global practices in assessing education quality, engage in comparative analyses with the existing system, closely cooperate with international and foreign organizations, implement international assessment

projects, and enhance a suitable national evaluation system that meets modern demands. In Presidential Decree No. 5712 of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated April 29, 2019, “On approval of the Concept for the development of the public education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030,” it is stated that by 2030, Uzbekistan aims to be among the top 30 leading countries in international student assessment program rankings.

The PIRLS international assessment program should be regarded not merely as a testing mechanism or control method but as a strategic opportunity to enhance the education system. According to Presidential Decree No. 5712, the key objectives of Uzbekistan’s public education reform include ensuring access to quality education aligned with an innovative economic agenda, global best practices, and modern societal needs. Additionally, the development of human capital is emphasized as a fundamental factor in enhancing student competitiveness in both the national context and the broader labor market (O’gli & Dolimovich, 2024).

Resolution No. 997 of the Cabinet of Ministers, titled “On measures for organizing international studies in the field of education quality assessment in the public education system,” outlines the critical implementation priorities. These include conducting educational reforms based on findings from international assessment studies and developing a national database of standardized questions from global programs, such as PIRLS and PISA. The integration of these questions into the national curriculum aims to align local educational standards with internationally recognized benchmarks.

The practical efforts being carried out in the public education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan, along with the adoption of a government resolution on the organization of international studies in assessing education quality and the establishment of cooperation with reputable organizations such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), are of significant importance for the development of the national education system.

Chapter Three of the “Concept for the development of the public education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030” states that a key objective is to establish a national system for assessing the quality of education based on the PIRLS. This system aims to evaluate students’ literacy levels in reading, mathematics, and science subjects, specifically by assessing primary school students’ reading comprehension skills within the framework of international education quality assessment programs.

PIRLS is an international program for studying reading comprehension that assesses how well primary school students in different countries read and understand texts. It also provides an opportunity to identify differences within national education systems (Ahmadaliyeva, 2025). The purpose of studying PIRLS is to compare the reading comprehension levels of fourth-grade students across different countries, as well as to identify disparities in reading literacy within national education systems. According to the international glossary of the study, “reading literacy” is defined as a person’s ability to fully express themselves in life and to understand and logically interpret various written languages necessary to achieve their goals (Hernández-Torrano & Courtney, 2021; Shukulloyevna, 2025).

The PIRLS assessment system is a vital tool for accomplishing strategic objectives, such as guaranteeing equity and producing a generation prepared to contribute to society. It is also used in developed nations to gauge education quality and equity. Another crucial feature is that competency-based approaches, especially those used in international programs such as PIRLS, PISA, and TALIS, aid in assessing students’ capacity to apply newly learned material in practical contexts. Consequently, this provides an essential theoretical basis for the growth of communicative skills. The Uzbek educational system now sees PIRLS as a chance to innovate and enhance the system rather than just as a “monitoring tool.” As a result, teachers and education specialists now have additional duties, such as improving methodological approaches and implementing competency-based assessment systems. By evaluating reading literacy as well as critical communicative skills such as clarity and coherence in communication, analytical and critical thinking, and the capacity to articulate ideas in a question-and-answer format, the PIRLS program supports the fundamental goals of contemporary education.

5. Conclusion

In contemporary education, the PIRLS international assessment program is a crucial theoretical and practical instrument for determining and enhancing students' communicative competence and reading literacy. This program develops critical abilities, such as text comprehension and analysis, coherent thought expression, and real-world communication. The way this assessment program is approached in Uzbekistan's educational system is gradually evolving, with a growing propensity to see it as a chance to raise educational standards rather than as a "control tool". This change helps students become globally competitive and improves teachers' methodological approaches, in addition to encouraging the modernization of educational content. According to analyses carried out within the PIRLS framework, students' communicative competence is a fundamental component of their ability to think independently, participate in communication effectively, and become socially active. Thus, among today's most urgent tasks are the development of an assessment system that is in line with international standards, updating pedagogical technologies, and improving curricula based on PIRLS results.

5.1 Limitations and Future Study

This study is conceptually grounded and does not include empirical data or field-based validation, which may limit the generalizability of its conclusions to other contexts. Additionally, the analysis primarily focused on the Uzbek education system; therefore, its applicability to other national contexts may vary. Future research should incorporate longitudinal data on students' communicative competence and reading performance, as well as comparative studies between countries implementing PIRLS, to identify best practices and policy impacts.

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