

Developing Compensatory Competence in Speaking for Future EFL Teachers

Gavkhar Tojjeva

Uzbekistan National Pedagogical University named after Nizami, Uzbekistan

Received: 12 February 2026; **Accepted:** 08 March 2026; **Published:** 31 March 2026

Abstract: This conceptual article proposes a CEFR-oriented framework for developing compensatory competence in speaking among first- and second-year students in pedagogical linguistic universities. The article is situated in foreign language teacher education, where student teachers are expected to progress within a B2-to-C1-oriented proficiency trajectory and become not only successful language users but also future instructors of strategic speaking. Drawing on the communicative competence tradition and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), the article argues that compensatory competence in speaking should be treated as both a communicative and a professional-pedagogical construct. It synthesizes theoretical perspectives on strategic competence, compensatory communication, repair, clarification, discourse regulation, and mediation, and applies them to a stage-based model of teacher preparation. The article proposes that first-year students should develop local communication-maintenance strategies, whereas second-year students should develop discourse-regulating and mediation-oriented strategies. The resulting framework offers a pedagogically relevant model for sequencing, teaching, and assessing compensatory competence in speaking in the education of future teachers of English.

Keywords: CEFR Companion Volume, compensatory competence, future EFL teachers, speaking, strategic competence.

Introduction: In foreign language teacher education, the development of speaking cannot be reduced to vocabulary growth, grammatical control, and fluency practice alone. Student teachers may possess substantial linguistic knowledge and still experience communication breakdowns in real-time oral interaction because they cannot retrieve a needed expression, reformulate an idea, sustain a topic, clarify misunderstanding, soften a claim, or repair an utterance under pressure. This issue is especially important in pedagogical linguistic universities, where students are not only language learners but future teachers of English as a foreign language. In such contexts, compensatory competence should be treated not as a marginal survival mechanism, but as a central component of communicative and professional preparation.

The relevance of this issue is heightened by the qualification context in which future teachers of English are trained. In the context relevant to this article, student teachers are educated within a proficiency trajectory broadly oriented from approximately B2-level entry performance toward stronger C1-level outcomes by graduation. This makes strategic speaking development particularly significant, since future teachers must not only communicate successfully themselves but also later model, explain, and teach strategic language use to others. In this respect, compensatory competence has a dual status: it is both a means of oral performance and an object of emerging pedagogical expertise.

Although the importance of strategic competence has long been recognized, compensatory speaking is still often treated too generally in higher education.

Research on pre-service EFL teachers shows that oral proficiency may remain lower than expected because of grammar- and testing-oriented prior instruction, insufficient focus on speaking, limited opportunities for oral interaction, and high speaking anxiety (Koşar, 2020). More recent work also indicates that communication-strategy training can improve speaking-task performance when strategies are taught explicitly rather than left implicit (Milliner & Dimoski, 2024). These findings suggest that speaking development in teacher education requires more than exposure and practice; it requires purposeful work on strategic performance.

At the same time, not all strategic needs are the same across the early years of university education. First-year students who are still stabilizing spontaneous speech under pressure do not face the same communicative demands as second-year students who increasingly need to justify views, manage collaborative talk, and facilitate understanding for others. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) is particularly useful here because it offers a descriptor system that includes compensating, monitoring and repair, asking for clarification, co-operating, and mediation. These descriptor families make it possible to justify a developmental distinction between local communication-maintenance strategies and more advanced discourse-regulating and mediation-oriented strategies.

This article addresses that gap by proposing a stage-based framework for the development of compensatory competence in speaking among future EFL teachers. It argues that first-year students should primarily develop strategies that ensure immediate maintenance of communication under lexical and structural difficulty, while second-year students should increasingly develop strategies that support discourse management, interaction regulation, and mediation. The key issue discussed in this article is therefore how compensatory competence in speaking can be theoretically grounded and pedagogically differentiated across the first two years of pedagogical university education.

Theory

Strategic Competence and Compensatory Competence

The theoretical basis of compensatory competence lies in the development of communicative competence theory. In communicative approaches to language ability, successful language use involves more than grammatical correctness; it also includes the ability to mobilize linguistic and strategic resources under real communicative conditions. Canale and Swain (1980) identified strategic competence as a core component of communicative competence and linked it to the use of verbal and non-verbal strategies that help overcome breakdowns in communication. Their framework remains foundational because it positioned strategy use inside communication rather than outside it.

Bachman (1990) broadened this perspective by conceptualizing strategic competence as a general capacity involved in communicative language use through assessment, planning, and execution. From this perspective, compensation is not merely a last-minute repair mechanism, but part of a larger system of communicative regulation. This broader interpretation is highly relevant to the present study because it allows compensatory behavior in speaking to be understood not merely as emergency repair, but as purposeful management of communication under real-time conditions.

Later scholarship on communication strategies further reinforced the systematic nature of such behavior. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) showed that communication strategies are not random conversational tricks, but structured resources used to cope with communicative problems. More recent classroom evidence has strengthened the pedagogical value of this perspective. Milliner and Dimoski (2024), for example, found that pre-teaching communication strategies before an information-gap speaking task improved speaking-task performance, suggesting that strategy use is teachable and instructionally productive rather than incidental.

Within this article, compensatory competence is therefore understood as a speaking-oriented manifestation of strategic competence. It refers to the learner's ability to maintain communication, bridge lexical and structural gaps, regulate breakdowns, and preserve interactional continuity under conditions of difficulty. However, in the context of future EFL

teachers, compensatory competence acquires an additional dimension. It becomes not only a communicative resource, but also a professional-pedagogical resource that must later be recognized, modeled, and taught.

CEFR Companion Volume and Strategic Speaking

For the purposes of this article, the principal contemporary framework is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). The Companion Volume explicitly states that it presents the updated CEFR descriptors in a form useful for learning, teaching, and assessment, and that teachers and teacher educators can use it as an updated framework. This makes it especially appropriate for research located in teacher education rather than in general language learning alone.

A major strength of the Companion Volume is that it treats communicative language use as strategic, interactive, and socially situated. Its descriptor system includes Compensating under production strategies, Monitoring and Repair and Asking for Clarification within interactional management, and an expanded domain of Mediation, which includes adapting language, breaking down complex information, and facilitating understanding. This architecture is crucial because it allows compensatory competence to be viewed not as a narrow lexical workaround but as part of a broader strategic system linking production, interaction, and mediation.

The descriptor for compensating is central to the present argument because it explicitly defines compensation as a strategy for maintaining communication when one cannot think of the appropriate expression. It includes defining the missing concept, using imprecise wording and qualifying it, and employing paraphrase or circumlocution. This provides a direct theoretical basis for including such strategies as circumlocution, paraphrase, generalization, approximation, and synonymic substitution in the development of speaking. The Companion Volume also emphasizes that repair is developmental: at lower levels it may be effortful and visible, whereas at higher levels speakers can backtrack and restructure around difficulty more smoothly.

The broadened treatment of mediation is especially

important for future EFL teachers. North and Piccardo (2016) showed that mediation deserved fuller descriptor development within the CEFR because language users do more than express their own meaning: they also facilitate understanding, support collaborative learning, and help others construct meaning. Later discussions of the CEFR Companion Volume similarly emphasized mediation, plurilingualism, and collaborative learning as part of a broadened view of language education (Goodier et al., 2019; Piccardo et al., 2019). This matters directly for teacher education because future teachers must often explain difficult ideas, restate others' contributions, simplify input, and negotiate shared understanding rather than merely deliver their own speech.

Compensatory Competence in Future EFL Teacher Education

In future EFL teacher education, compensatory competence should be treated as both a communicative and a professional-pedagogical construct. A learner may succeed communicatively without being able to name the strategy used, but a teacher must eventually be able to distinguish circumlocution from paraphrase, repair from reformulation, and clarification request from mediation-oriented prompting. Without such awareness, strategy instruction risks becoming impressionistic and unsystematic. This is why a stage-based model is especially appropriate in pedagogical universities: it helps student teachers move gradually from intuitive strategy use toward conscious strategic awareness.

Recent research on pre-service teachers supports this concern. Koşar (2020) found that pre-service EFL teachers' oral proficiency could be constrained by prior grammar-dominated learning and limited speaking practice, while newer studies have pointed to the value of role-play, project-based speaking, and digitally supported speaking practice for developing communicative competence in pre-service teachers (Kuzembayeva et al., 2023; Risdayani et al., 2024). Together, such findings suggest that speaking development in teacher education benefits from purposeful, context-rich, and explicitly strategic practice. This supports the present article's claim that compensatory competence should be sequenced developmentally rather than handled as a single

undifferentiated set of tactics.

Theory Application

First-Year Strategy Cluster as Communication-Maintenance Repertoire

For first-year students, the most appropriate strategies are those that are local, transparent, and immediately useful in preserving communication. Even when learners begin from a B2-oriented trajectory, spontaneous oral production often reveals uneven control: lexical knowledge may exceed lexical retrieval, grammar may be stronger in writing than in real-time speaking, and communicative pressure may expose hesitations that do not appear in more controlled tasks. In such conditions, the priority is continuity of communication rather than discourse-oriented sophisticated performance.

This is why first-year students should primarily develop circumlocution, paraphrase, generalization, approximation, synonymic substitution, clarification request, appeal for assistance, and common patterns of self-repair. Circumlocution and paraphrase allow learners to restate meaning when precise wording is unavailable. Generalization, approximation, and synonymic substitution help prevent communicative collapse by making broader or near-equivalent wording available. Clarification request and appeal for assistance preserve interaction by mobilizing support from the interlocutor, while self-repair encourages learners to continue rather than withdraw after a breakdown. The CEFR's compensating and asking-for-clarification descriptors directly support this grouping (Council of Europe, 2020).

This first-year cluster may therefore be described as a communication-maintenance repertoire. Its pedagogical function is to help students stay in the interaction, keep meaning moving, and build confidence in handling communicative difficulty. Classroom evidence also suggests that explicit strategy training can improve performance on speaking tasks, which strengthens the pedagogical case for teaching such strategies directly at this stage (Milliner & Dimoski, 2024). At the first-year level, students are primarily learning to use strategies successfully. Their performance may still be visible and effortful, but that is developmentally appropriate. The main objective is not yet elegant discourse, but communicative

resilience.

Second-Year Strategy Cluster as Discourse-Regulating and Mediation-Oriented Repertoire

By the second year of study, future EFL teachers increasingly engage in speaking tasks that demand more than local lexical rescue. They are expected to explain, justify, sustain opinions, collaborate in discussion, and adapt their language to audience and task. Accordingly, compensatory competence should expand from local maintenance toward discourse-level and interaction-regulating strategy use.

This is why second-year students should increasingly develop discourse restructuring, topic maintenance, argument support under lexical difficulty, register transformation, stance softening, hedging, mediation, complex clarification request, self-repair, peer-repair, and reformulation. Discourse restructuring helps the speaker reorganize speech when a formulation path becomes ineffective. Topic maintenance preserves coherence across longer stretches of interaction. Argument support under lexical difficulty enables the speaker to continue developing a viewpoint even when exact vocabulary is lacking. Register transformation, stance softening, and hedging reflect growing pragmatic control and audience awareness.

Mediation, however, is the clearest marker of developmental expansion here, because it requires the student not only to preserve personal communication but also to facilitate the understanding of others. That shift matters greatly for future teachers, whose professional speaking often consists precisely in explaining, reframing, simplifying, and guiding understanding. Complex clarification request, peer-repair, and reformulation likewise indicate a more advanced level of collaborative and reflective speaking.

This second-year cluster may therefore be described as a discourse-regulating and mediation-oriented repertoire. Its pedagogical aim is to help students move from merely surviving in speech to shaping meaning strategically in ways that already resemble their future professional role. Recent work on speaking and interaction supports the value of this orientation. Studies on communication strategies, collaborative speaking tasks, and digitally mediated speaking suggest that learners benefit when oral tasks require not only speech output but negotiation, adaptation, and

support of mutual understanding (Chou, 2024; Tran et al., 2024). At this stage, students are learning not only to use strategies, but to distinguish, control, and increasingly explain them.

Pedagogical Implications for Strategy Instruction and Assessment

The stage-based framework proposed here has direct implications for pedagogy. First, compensatory competence should be taught explicitly rather than left to emerge accidentally. For first-year students, instruction should prioritize modelling, guided practice, and simple reflection through tasks such as picture description, information-gap speaking, lexical avoidance activities, and explanation tasks that naturally provoke lexical difficulty. The aim is to help learners experience compensation as a normal and teachable part of communication rather than as evidence of failure.

For second-year students, instruction should become more discursive and professionally oriented. Problem-solving discussion, mini-debate, collaborative planning, peer explanation, and microteaching tasks are especially useful because they require students not merely to keep talking, but to sustain a line of thought, manage collaborative interaction, and adapt meaning for others. At this level, students should be encouraged not only to use strategies, but compare them, name them, observe them in peers' speech, and explain why certain strategic choices are more suitable in particular contexts.

Assessment should also reflect this developmental model. Strategic behavior should not automatically be penalized as disfluency. Instead, teachers should distinguish between breakdown that leads to communicative failure and strategic compensation that preserves meaning and interaction. First-year assessment should focus mainly on continuity of communication, whereas second-year assessment should additionally consider discourse coherence, argument support, interactional balance, and mediation. This is particularly important in teacher education because it helps future teachers internalize a more professional understanding of speaking performance – one that they may later carry into their own classrooms.

At the curriculum level, the proposed framework

suggests that compensatory competence should not be left implicit in isolated speaking classes. It should be embedded progressively across oral communication, methodology, classroom discourse, and microteaching. In this way, the development of compensatory competence becomes a continuous line connecting language proficiency, communicative maturity, and pedagogical expertise.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that compensatory competence in speaking should be understood as a central component of future EFL teacher education rather than as a marginal or purely remedial aspect of language learning. Drawing on the communicative competence tradition and especially on the CEFR Companion Volume, it has shown that strategic speaking includes not only lexical compensation, but also repair, clarification, discourse management, collaborative interaction, and mediation.

The main contribution of the article lies in proposing a stage-based framework for differentiating compensatory strategy development across the first two years of pedagogical university study. First-year students should primarily develop a communication-maintenance repertoire consisting of local and immediately functional strategies. Second-year students should increasingly develop a discourse-regulating and mediation-oriented repertoire that reflects more advanced communicative and professional demands.

This differentiation is especially relevant in the education of future teachers of English, because they must eventually progress from strategy use to strategy awareness and, later, to strategy instruction. Therefore, compensatory competence should be taught, sequenced, and assessed as a visible and meaningful part of speaking development. The framework proposed in this article offers a conceptual basis for doing so and may serve as a foundation for future curriculum design, classroom practice, and empirical investigation.

REFERENCES

1. Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford University Press.
2. Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language*

- teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47.
3. Chou, M.H. (2024). Communication strategies, difficulties, and speaking tasks in foreign language learning. *SAGE Open*, 14(3). DOI: 10.1177/21582440241266324
 4. Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing.
 5. Dooly M, Vinagre M. (2022) Research into practice: Virtual exchange in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching*. 55(3):392-406. DOI:10.1017/S0261444821000069
 6. Dörnyei, Z. and Scott, M.L. (1997), *Communication Strategies in a Second Language: Definitions and Taxonomies*. *Language Learning*, 47: 173-210. DOI: 10.1111/0023-8333.51997005
 7. Fathi, J., Rahimi M., & Derakhshan, A. (2024). Improving EFL learners' speaking skills and willingness to communicate via artificial intelligence-mediated interactions. *System*, Volume 121, 103254. DOI:10.1016/j.system.2024.103254
 8. Garcia-Ponce, E. E., & Tagg, C. (2020). Role of EFL teachers' beliefs in speaking practice. *System*, 95, 102376.
 9. Woreta Haile, K., Gebremariam Olamo, T., & Abera Yemiru, M. (2024). English as a foreign language instructors' questioning behaviors and strategy uses for reflective learning facilitation. *Cogent Education*, 11(1). DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2024.2380632
 10. Hofer, B., & Jessner, U. (2025). Research agenda: From monolingual to multilingual norms in multilingual classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 1–16. DOI: 10.1017/S0261444825000023
 11. Huang, X. H. & Naerssen, M. (1987). Learning strategies for oral communication. *Applied Linguistics*, 8(3), 287–307.
 12. Koşar, G. (2020). Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Low-Level of Oral Proficiency and Suggestions for Enhancing It. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 14 (1), 39-51.
 13. Kuzembayeva, G., Kuanysbayeva, G., Maydangalieva Zh. & Spulber D. (2023). Fostering pre-service EFL teachers' communicative competence through role-playing games. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research*, 10(2), 278–284.
 14. Milliner, B., & Dimoski, B. (2024). The effects of communication strategy training on speaking task performance. *RELC Journal*, 55(2), 344–363. DOI: 0.1177/00336882221085781
 15. North, B. (2021). The CEFR Companion Volume - What's new and what might it imply for teaching/learning and for assessment? *CEFR Journal - Practice and Research*, Volume 4. 5-24. DOI: 10.37546/JALTSIG.CEFR4-1
 16. North B. and Piccardo E. (2016), "Developing illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the CEFR", Education Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg. <https://rm.coe.int/168073ff31>
 17. O'zbekiston Respublikasi Oliy ta'lim, fan va innovatsiyalar vazirligi, & O'zbekiston Respublikasi Maktabgacha va maktab ta'limi vazirligi. (2024, May 29). Xorijiy tillar va umumta'lim fanlarini bilish darajasini baholovchi milliy va xalqaro tan olingan sertifikatlar ro'yxatini tasdiqlash to'g'risida (No. 3515).
 18. Piccardo, E., North, B., & Goodier, T. (2019). Broadening the scope of language education: Mediation, plurilingualism, and collaborative learning: The CEFR Companion Volume. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*, 15(1), 17–36. DOI: 10.20368/1971-8829/1612
 19. Pu, P., & Chang, D. Y.-S. (2023). Effects of different input modes on blended EFL speaking instruction: a quasi-experimental study. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*. Advance online publication. DOI: 10.1080/09588221.2023.2273853
 20. Quvanch, Z., Shah Qasemi, A., & Si Na, K. (2024) Analyzing levels, factors and coping strategies of speaking anxiety among EFL undergraduates in Afghanistan, *Cogent Education*, 11:1, 2413225, DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2024.2413225
 21. Risdayani, N., Limbong, E., & Sunggingwati, D. (2024). EFL pre-service teachers' experiences in speaking through digital storytelling project. *Jambura Journal of English Teaching and Literature*,

5(1), 25–38. DOI: 10.37905/jetl.v5i1.24667

22. Russell, M. (2023). Communicating effectively: A competency framework for CEFR (2020) mediation skills in use. *e-TEALS*, 15, 109–137.
23. Tran, N., Hoang, D. T. N., Gillespie, R., Yen, T. T. H., & Phung, H. (2024). Enhancing EFL learners' speaking and listening skills through authentic online conversations with video conferencing tools. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1–11. DOI: 10.1080/17501229.2024.2334809
24. Tsai, K. J. (2025). Fostering 'talk to learn' in an EFL classroom. *Cogent Education*, 12(1). DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2025.2516389
25. Wang W, Rezaei YM, Izadpanah S. (2024) Speaking accuracy and fluency among EFL learners: The role of creative thinking, emotional intelligence, and academic enthusiasm. *Heliyon*. Sep 12;10(18):e37620. DOI: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e37620
26. Zadorozhnyy, A., & Lee J. (2025). Informal digital learning of English and willingness to communicate in second language: self-efficacy beliefs as mediator, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 38(4), 669-689. DOI: 10.1080/09588221.2023.2215279