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COMPARISON OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Abstract. *If the target of foreign language teaching is to use the language, communicative language teaching (CLT) seems to be an ideal teaching model. The goal of teaching with this method is to use the language as a medium of communication. The application of the communicative approach in teaching English as a foreign language, however, is associated with some problems that can cause the method turn out not to be so much successful and the learning outcome not to be efficient enough. This paper mainly intended to evaluate the problems that may lead to the failure of communicative language teaching in EFL contexts and some possible solutions for such problems. Awareness of these problems and the possible remedies can be helpful for both EFL teachers and learners, providing them with insightful ideas about how to manage their teaching and learning activities for the successful implementation of this method.*

Keywords: *communicative approach; foreign language teaching; EFL contexts; remedies; Teaching Model.*

In the field of second language acquisition, there are many theories about the most effective way for language learners to acquire new language forms. Recently more language teachers have noticed the failure of form focusing approach in developing learners' communicative ability in real-life situations and have shifted to adopt the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. The CLT approach highlights learners' communicative competence (Hymes, 1972), which is defined as learners' ability to efficiently express what they mean in the target language and successfully achieve communications in real-life situations. In order to do so, learners not only need to acquire the linguistic but pragmatic knowledge of the target language (Hedgcock, 2002).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a cover term for a number of approaches that developed in the 1970s in critical reaction to audio-lingual teaching methods and their unsatisfactory results. They all criticize the mechanistic nature of audio-lingual pattern drills which fail to prepare learners for a productive use of the target language in the many different communicative situations of everyday life. The common goal of communicative approaches is communicative competence.

Since the emergence of CLT the only group of people having difficulty using it are not the teachers. Students are also to be taken into account in this case. An important question to ask is doing EFL students need to speak English and communicate in this language. In a setting where English is a foreign language, students usually learn with low intrinsic motivation; English may be deemed ir-

relevant with students' needs because the language is not part of their everyday life. On the other hand, in a setting where English is a second language, students have high intrinsic motivation because the language is a part of everyday life. By living in a second language environment, students have a higher chance to use the language whether to communicate with others or for professional needs, as in searching for a job.

Without an English-speaking environment, motivation becomes more a product of curricular demands, pressure from exams, and academic and professional success, instead of demand for communication. The English language teaching that takes communicative competence as the invariable goal doesn't fit in the EFL contexts where learners' engagement in social interaction with native English speakers is minimal.

Stern (1992) argued that one of the most difficult problems in making classroom learning communicative is the absence of native speakers. Apparently, CLT are more successful in English as a Second Language (ESL) context because students have the motivation to work on oral English because they need it in their lives. In contrast, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, due to some physical limitations, such as the purpose of learning English, learning environments, teachers' English proficiency, and the availability of authentic English materials, CLT meets much more difficulties during its application.

Sano and Harmer (2001) for instance, point out that the Japanese students they studied generally did not feel pressing need to use English, therefore the goal of

communicative competence seemed too distant for them. Unlike ESL learners who need to use the TL in everyday life for surviving in the target culture, EFL learners generally do not have adequate access to the TL outside of the classrooms and normally return to the real world speaking their mother tongue as soon as they leave the classroom.

Without a clearly established need or goal, students without a specific personal interest in speaking English will lack motivation. While there are long-range needs for the students — from abstract ones such as the broadening of one's social perspective and more concrete ones such as English for business purposes — students are not likely to be conscious of these needs, especially with the more pressing need of passing entrance exams, and when this need evaporates after entering university, so will the motivation to maintain the skill and to expand upon it.

Teachers have a constructive role in the development of better curricula. The precondition for this effective participation is to have dynamic teacher training courses which would help teachers learn the 'how' of change in progress. Awareness rising is an important issue in any process of change or innovation. Teacher training courses have an important role in creating situations to facilitate reflection and contemplation for the teachers as important agents of change. Teachers in many EFL classes are typically not required to have any special TESOL certification or training in linguistics. In-service teacher training courses along with conferences, workshops and seminars can be quite effective in promoting the awareness of teachers. Through involving teachers in teaching practice activities, they could learn the realities directly from the context.

One problem is that these in-service training courses are few in number in many EFL contexts or the teachers do not have enough opportunity to attend them. Moreover, the theory-transmitting nature of these courses in some EFL contexts prevents teachers to practically experience teaching in the new program: In-service training courses bombard the teachers with theories mostly adopted from western status quo knowledge of the practice. They do not come down to the realities of the particular EFL context. Therefore, it demands the change initiators to mediate the methodologies derived from the western societies and philosophical paradigms according to the realities of the context they aim to create change.

EFL teachers are usually reluctant to accept the communicative approach because of the heavy demands made on them. As stated by Medgyes (1986), CLT places greater demands on the teacher than certain other widely-used approaches. Because it is a student-centered approach and not a teacher-centered approach, the teacher has to accept extra responsibilities both before and during the class. Lessons tend to be less predictable; teachers have to be ready to listen to what learners say and not just how they say it, and to interact with them in as 'natural' a way as possible; they have to use a wider range of management skills than in the traditional teacher-dominated classroom.

In addition, non-native speakers of English probably need a higher level of language proficiency or rather, a different balance of proficiency skills — to be able to communicate with ease, and to cope with discussing a broader range of facts about language use than they are accustomed to. Non-native teachers may be already immersed in the audio-lingual approach, a system which is set in such a consolidated state that it is very difficult to free themselves from the constraints, thus making the problem and the sense of burden all the more palpable.

All and all compared with other methods and approaches communicative language teaching in EFL activities are more difficult to design and implement and place greater burden on EFL teachers. Not only the implementation, but also the assessment of this method seems to be difficult for EFL teachers who are usually used to clear-cut assessment procedures. Considering the perceived difficulties in utilizing CLT demands and what the EFL situation in many countries allows, it can be concluded that such problems need to be resolved if CLT is to be successfully implemented in EFL contexts. Awareness of such problems can provide EFL teachers and learners with insightful ideas about how to manage and, if required, to change their teaching and learning activities for the successful implementation of this method.

This study, like almost all studies done in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, is not free of limitations. There exist of course some other problems and possible remedies that have not been mentioned in this article. Basically, due to the eluding nature of CLT which is defined differently by different people one cannot claim to come to an absolute conclusion about the problems associated with using CLT in EFL contexts.

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