

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This present article aimed at investigating the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching. The descriptive, analytical method was adopted in this paper. The data of this study was collected by the use of a questionnaire which was administered to twelve universities EFL teachers. The respondents of this article were 12 English language teachers. The data obtained was analyzed by using (SPSS) program. The findings of the study showed that, communicative approach plays the most crucial part in English language teaching. The results also showed that, The communicative approach's strategies are the best strategies can be applied in teaching English language. The study recommended that, teachers should reflect the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching.

Keyword: Role of communicative approach, Teaching English language.

INTRODUCTION

The demand of using English language as a means of communication has increased exponentially around the world, particularly in the developing countries. Globalization is also reflected in the worldwide use of the English language. As a result, many countries, where English is taught as a foreign language, have shifted from a traditional teaching method towards communicative-focused instruction. This teaching method is called communicative language teaching (CLT) or communicative approach.

Communicative approach plays a crucial role in the teaching of the English language. It aims to improve students' ability to communicate. Role-play and simulation have become very popular in communicative language teaching, where learners simulate a television program or a scene at an airport or they might put together the simulated front page of a newspaper. Sometimes they have to solve a puzzle and can only do so by sharing information. Sometimes they have to write a poem or construct a story together. All these activities and others have a great role in English language teaching. Littlewood (1981) maintains that, communicative activities can be divided into two: functional communication and social interaction. Functional communication activities are designed for the learners to use whatever language they have at their disposal. Therefore, the success is measured primarily by their ability to cope with the given task, not by their grammatical accuracy and appropriateness of their choice of the language. Social interaction activities place emphasis also on choosing language which is acceptable according to the particular situation. Consequently, the success is measured according to both the functional effectiveness and correct language choice.

Investigating the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching, is the core aim of the current article as well as to fulfill the following objectives:

- 1- To identify the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching.

- 2- To try to provide effective methods, techniques, and strategies can be used in the teaching of the English language.

Statement of the problem

Once a communicative approach is the heart of mastering a foreign language and play the most crucial role in learning the English language. It was observed that the majority of ELF teachers do not have clear ideas about the role of the communicative approach in teaching of English language. Learners also lack the abilities to communicate effectively and actively. This can't be done without effective methods, techniques and strategies, and this is what the article is deeply going to investigate.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Q1: What is the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching?

Q2: What strategies can be used in teaching English language?

H1: Communicative approach plays the most crucial role in teaching of English language.

H2: There are effective strategies can be used in English language teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative approach

Harmer (2008) states that, communicative approach or communicative language teaching is the name which was given to a set of beliefs which included not only a re-examination of what aspects of language to teach, but also a shift in emphasis in how to teach. 'What to teach aspects' of the communicative approach stressed the significance of language functions rather focusing on grammar and vocabulary. A guiding principle was train students to use these language forms appropriately in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. The 'how to teach aspects' of communicative approach is closely related to the idea 'language learning will take care of itself' and that plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunities to use it are vitally important for the student's development of knowledge and skill. Activities in communicative language teaching involve learners in real or realistic communication, where the accuracy of the language they use is less important than the successful achievement of the communicative task they are performing.

What matters in communicative language teaching activities are that students should have a desire to communicate something. They should have a purpose for communicating (e.g. To make a point, to buy an airline ticket or write a letter to a newspaper). They should be focused on the content of what they are saying or writing rather than on a particular form. They should use a variety of languages rather than just one language structure. The teacher will not intervene to stop the activity; and the materials he or she relies on will not dictate what specific language forms the students use either. He also describes communicative and non-communicative activities as follows:

Non-communicative activities	Communicative activities
No communicative desire	A desire to communicate
No communicative purpose	A communicative purpose
Form not content	Content not form
One language item only	Variety of languages
Teacher intervention	No teacher intervention
Materials control	No materials control

Richard & Rodgers (2001) say that, communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach based on principles reflecting a communicative view of language and language learning, which underpins a wide variety of classroom procedures. Brown (1997) emphasizes that:

“Communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students’ eventual need to apply classroom learning heretofore unrehearsed contexts in the real world”. (p. 13).

Principles of the CLT

1. The main focus of the approach is to make the learners able to understand the intention and expression of the writers and speakers.
2. It is believed that communicative functions are more important than linguistic structures. *“One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combine these into a more fully communicative view”* (Littlewood, 1981:1). Each language has a limited number of sentence patterns. Mastering only those sentence patterns does not help the learners to communicate in the target language. The learner needs to learn the communication functions of those structures.
3. While using the CLT approach in teaching language, the target language is used in the classroom. The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study (Freeman (2000). Because if the learners continue to use their native languages, they are not able to communicate in the target language.
4. Appropriate use of language is emphasized rather than accuracy. Accuracy comes at the later stage. It is believed that when the learners learn to use the language appropriately accuracy comes automatically.
5. Language should be taught by integrating all language skills and not by only one skill. It means communication approach is not limited to only speaking skill; reading and writing skills should be developed.
6. Language cannot be learnt through rote memorization. It cannot be learnt in isolation. It should be learnt through social interaction. To communicate in the target language, there is a need to struggle with language.
7. While using this approach, the major focus is to make the learner able to communicate in the target language. Errors are tolerated by the teacher because what is more important is to make them able to speak in the target language. The teacher should not correct them during the activities in which they are using the target language. The teacher can note the errors of the learners and make it correct after the activities are over.
8. The CLT approach provides the opportunities to communicate in the target language to the learners. It encourages teacher-student and student – student interaction. It helps to encourage the co-operative relationship among students. The teacher should give work in groups or in pairs which give opportunities to share the information among them. It also helps to promote the communication among them. Richards & Rodgers (1986) state that students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings.
9. The CLT approach provides the opportunities to the learners not only about what to say and but also about how to say.
10. The teacher should create situations which help to promote communication. The teacher should teach them how language should be used in a social context. The teacher should give activities such as role play, which help the learners to learn the language in social context.
11. Language teaching techniques should be designed in such way that it encourages the learners to use the target language. Functional aspects of language should be given

importance. Dramas, role plays, games should be used in the classroom to promote the real communication.

12. Students should be given opportunities to listen to language as it is used in authentic communication. They may be coached on strategies for how to improve their comprehension (Freeman (2000)).

Advantages and disadvantages of communicative approach

The implementation of communicative approach has brought a lot of advantages for Teaching English as a foreign/second language. Unlike audio lingual and grammar-translation methods, Communicative teaching emphasis on, task-oriented, student-centered language teaching practice and it provides students with comprehensive use of the English language, for communication of opportunities.

A- It motivates students to improve their ability of using English by themselves since it emphasizes on fluency in the target language. Meaning that, it provides students with assignments that allow them to improve their own ideas about what they are going to talk and how they are going to express. This enables the learners to be more confident when interacting with other people and they also enjoy talking more (Brown, 2001).

B- CLT focuses on and aims at communicative competence. Thus, enabling the learners to use the language in a communicative situation to satisfy their needs in real-life communication is a priority in the CLT (Richards, 2006). It brings the real life situation of the native English into classroom activities such as role-play and simulation (Harmer, 2008).

C- The major portion of the learning process is not upon the teacher thus illustrating that CLT classes have moved from teacher-centered to learner-centered. In other words, much more time issued by the learner that the role of the teacher is just to facilitate the learning process. Thus, the learner should exercise and communicate enough in the CLT class to achieve communicative competence (Brown, 2001).

There have been various criticisms on the principles of the communicative approach to teaching and learning language:

A- the approach gives priority to the meanings and rules of use rather than to grammar and rules of structure. In other words, it is felt that there is not enough emphasis on the correction of pronunciation and grammar error. It is because too much focus on meaning at the expense of form. It is believed that with CLT, there is a danger of focusing too much on oral skills and less emphasis is given to reading and writing skills, (Al-Humaidi, as cited in Keithley, Kumm (2013)).

B- Communicative approach focuses on fluency, but not on accuracy, so communicative language teaching leads to the production of fluent but inaccurate learners. What is predicted to happen here is the danger of giving priority to fluency over accuracy in CLT classes, so communicative approach is great for intermediate students and advanced students, but for beginners, some controlled practice is needed Students with low levels of proficiency in the target language may find it difficult to participate in oral communicative activities and, if the exams used by any institution are grammar based, communicative fluency may not be appropriate.

C- Communicative approach is sometimes difficult to be implemented in an EFL classroom due to the lack of sources and equipments like authentic materials and native speaker teachers as well as the large size of the classes. In addition, suitable classrooms are not available that can allow for group work activities and for teaching aids and materials (Burnaby and Sun, 1989). The monitoring ability of the teacher must be very good. Despite teachers' best efforts, classroom activities are not actually real-life and it can be difficult to reproduce truly authentic language use and to facilitate genuine interaction.

METHODOLOGY

Method and design of the study

To fulfill the objective of the article, the descriptive, analytical, the quantitative and the experimental methods were used. The article design was structured and particularly prepared to explore the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching.

Subjects

The subjects of the current article are the teachers of English language from different universities in Sudan. A total of (12) EFL university teachers, males and females of different teaching experience ranged from (5) to (20) years; collaborated on this study with responding to the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

In this article the researcher used a questionnaire for the data collection. The questionnaire was designed for English language teachers. It was distributed to twelve (12) university EFL teachers, it reflects their views on the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching.

Procedure

The questionnaire was used as data collection tools. Particular procedures and steps were followed in collecting the data. To check the content validity of the questionnaire, the researcher ran a pilot study, where four copies of the questionnaire were distributed to some of EFL teachers, they filled in the questionnaire and wrote down their comments at the end of the questionnaire. According to their comments, the numbers of the statements were reduced from fourteen in the pilot questionnaire to ten (10) statements. Also, some of the statements were modified.

Table (1): Reliability of the Questionnaire

Test	Reliability	Validity	Interpretation
Value	0.634	0.796	Meaning full

The values of reliability are (0.634) and validity (0.796) this implies that the phases in the study are more consistency relating to the hypotheses of the study, which indicate that a questionnaire is characterized by high validity and high reliability. So, it achieves the purposes of the study and makes the statistical analysis fit and acceptable.

Results of data analysis

Table (2)

No	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	In English classes I prefer a teacher-centered approach.	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 8.3%	4 33.3%	7 58.3%
2	In English classes I prefer a student-centered approach.	9 75%	3 25%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
3	In English classes I use various communicative activities (pair work, role-play, language games etc...)	6 50%	6 50%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
4	I use authentic materials to prepare my students for real life situation.	3 25%	9 75%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
5	Working in small groups improves learners, communicative competence.	9 75%	2 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 8.3%
6	Classroom activities should be	6	5	1	0	0

	meaningful and involve real situation.	50%	41.7%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%
7	Creating different real life situations help learners to enhance their communicative competence	5 41.7%	7 58.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
8	Minor errors are not important in speaking a language.	3 25%	6 50%	3 25%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
9	Foreign language learning is often foreign culture learning.	3 25%	8 66.7%	1 8.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
10	Students should be given the opportunity to express their opinions.	8 66.7%	4 33.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

Table (2) above, indicates that, about (58.3%) of the participants strongly disagree with the item, in English classes, I prefer a teacher-centered approach. (33.3%) of the subjects disagree and only a small number (8.3%) of the participants remained neutral, whereas (0.0%) of the respondents agree with that. (92%) of the teachers disagree with using a teacher-centered approach in English classes. So this is a good result.

In English classes, I prefer a student-centered approach, (75%) of the participants strongly agree with this item and (25%) of them agree with it. It is clear that all of the subjects agree with this item. So from this result, it can be understood that using a student-centered approach in English classes is a good way to provide opportunities to learners to practice their language.

Regarding the item: in English classes, I use various communicative activities (pair work, role –play, language games, etc....). (50%) of the respondents strongly agree with this statement and (50%) of them agree with it. So, we can say that, (100%) of the participants agree with the statement. Using various communicative activities in English classes makes learning enjoyable.

The majority of the respondents (75%) agree with the item: I use authentic materials to prepare my students for real life situation. And (25%) of teachers strongly agree with that. (0.0%) of the subjects disagree and about the same number (0.0%) of those who remained neutral. All of the sample agree that, using authentic materials is one of the effective strategies can be applied to develop students' communicative competence. This result concurs with the previous results.

Working in small groups improves learners, communicative competence. (75%) of the participants strongly agree with that. (16.7%) of them agree with this item, and (0.0%) of the respondents were neutral. About the same number (0.0%) of those who disagree with that. Only (8.3%) of the participants strongly disagree with the statement.

Classroom activities should be meaningful and involve real situation. The subjects who strongly agree with this item represent (50%), while those who agree with the item represent (41.7%), the ones who disagree with this item represent (0.0%), following that (8.3%) of the participants were neutral. It is obviously most of the subjects agree with this item.

All of the respondents (100%) agree with this item. Creating different real life situations help learners to enhance their communicative competence. As shown in the table (4.2.29) above, (41.7%) of the subjects strongly agree with this statement, (58.3%) of them agree with it, (0.0%) were neutral, whereas (0.0%) of them disagree with the item. In addition to (0.0%) of the subjects strongly disagree with that.

Minor errors are not important in speaking a language. About (25%) of the respondents strongly agree with this statement, (50%) of them agree with it, and (25%) of the participants were neutral. Those who disagree with that represent (0.0%) and about the same number (0.0%) of the ones who strongly disagree with the item.

The table (2) above, shows that, (25%) of the participants strongly agree with this item, foreign language learning is often foreign culture learning. (66.7%) of them agree with it, whereas (8.3%) of the subjects were neutral, while (0.0%) of them disagree with the statement, and following that (0.0%) of the respondents strongly disagree with this item. Thus, these views assured that foreign culture is crucial in learning a language.

Students should be given the opportunity to express their opinions. Table (2) above, shows that, (66.7%) of the participants strongly agree with this item, about (33.3%) of them agree with it, while (0.0%) of them remained. (0.0%) of the subjects disagree with this item. In addition to (0.0%) of them strongly disagree with that. This fact denoted that, giving chances to the learners to express their opinion are helpful in developing their ideas and communicate effectively in English.

DISCUSSION

The statistics and the analysis results have shown that, communicative approach plays the most crucial part in English language teaching. The communicative approach's strategies, such as a student-centered approach, small groups work and activities (pair work, role-play, language games) are the best strategies can be applied in English language teaching.

CONCLUSION

Aforementioned, communicative approach stand as the best approach in teaching English language. It provides opportunities to learners to communicate the target language and the functional aspects of the language make them able to communicate in the target language in their day to day life. The activities which are used in communicative approach such as drama, role-play and games make learning enjoyable. The findings that obtained from the questionnaire led to very satisfying and valuable outcomes concerning the role of communicative competence in English language teaching. These results can be obtained as follows:

- Most of the teachers prefer a student-centered approach to a teacher-centered approach.
- The majority of the teachers agreed that using various communicative activities (pair work, role-play, language games) in English classes are very important in the process of learning.
- Working in small groups improves learners, communicative competence.
- Classroom activities should be meaningful and involve real situation.
- Creating different real life situations help learners to enhance their communicative competence
- Minor errors are not important in speaking a language.
- Students should be given the opportunity to express their opinions.

Eventually, the article recommended that, teachers should adopt the strategies of the communicative approach in the teaching process. The teachers also should reflect the role of the communicative approach in English language teaching.

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