Msc. Brisida SEFA\textsuperscript{1}

**THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING\textsuperscript{2}**

**Abstract**

This abstract deals with the main characteristics of communicative approach in English language teaching and some problems that may appear. Firstly, it takes into consideration that it is a student focused method, the teacher’s position in the class has changed significantly. There are some new concepts that can be encountered like “time management” or “time consuming”, “restricted practice” and “free practice” or “students’ performance”.

Secondly, it explores that teaching English as a foreign language has noticed some changes in pedagogical methods and continues to do so. The most important aspect is that the focus has shifted from teacher-centered classes to student-centered classes. There are new “rules” and attitudes, especially for the teacher. Furthermore, the new pedagogy has understood that the class is a balanced two-ways relationship between the one who teaches and the one who learns. Both teacher and students “negotiate” their importance in the class, in the sense that, for a better learning activity the one who teaches should become more or less dynamic or implicated. He is the one who knows, the one who eventually puts things into order and understands the best attitude towards his partner. The most important job of the teacher is to create the conditions in which learning can take place. Teachers should set the environment in which the best learning can take place, in order to obtain the most profitable results. This way, communicative method seems to be an appropriate attitude towards this objective. Finally, it deals with classroom interaction as an important pedagogical principle.

The study was carried out with 30 English Teachers. The data collected from the questionnaire were analysed on a five-point Likert-scale, from Strongly

\textsuperscript{1} Universiteti “Aleksandër Moisiu”; Email: brsefa@yahoo.com.au; Tel: 069 641 5036

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Disagree to Strongly Agree to show that this method is more appropriate than those asking students to only solve exercises with fixed pattern and in which imagination and the capacity of speaking is not challenged, therefore, not improved. The participants were also asked to describe their teaching habits. These descriptions were analysed by categorising and illustrating them using Excel. The data collected from questionnaire were analysed through descriptive statistics. The findings demonstrated that challenging speaking abilities – both fluency and accuracy – is eventually the aim of communicative method as it focuses on student and on the student’s linguistic needs, meeting clear-cut objectives set by the trainer after the student’s needs analysis.

**Keywords:** communicative approach, teacher-centered classes, student-centered classes, classroom interaction, pedagogy.

**Introduction**

Language teaching has always had a long but difficult history in which a discussion on teaching methods has evolved over the last years. The different teaching methods are Grammar-translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, Communicative Teaching Method and so on and so forth. According to different language teaching theories, the origin of these methods is partly from social, economic, political, or educational circumstances and partly from theoretical consideration which involve new changes in language theories and new psychological perspective on language learning, as well as partly from practical experience, intuition, and inventiveness. However, they represent a combination of language teaching beliefs, but it is evident that they are characterized by the over-emphasis on single aspects as the central issue of language teaching and learning.

**Effectiveness of the Communicative Method**

Under the influence of British applied linguists (such as John Firth, M.A.K. Halliday, who stressed the functional and communicative potential of language), sociolinguistics works (Dell Hyms, and W. Labov) and some philosophy work (J. Austin and J. Searle), the communicative method was advocated in language teaching. It saw the need to focus on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastering of structures.

The communicative teaching method aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching, and develops procedures for teaching the four skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. It
encourages activities that involve real communication and carry out meaningful tasks. It believes that language is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. Language learners are expected to be negotiators, teachers to be an organizer, a guide, an analyst, a counselor, or a group process manager.

It is no doubt that the communicative method developed quite fast, it dominates language teaching in many countries because it not only makes language learning more interesting, but helps learners develop linguistic competence as well as communicative competence.

It is also very important for the learner to listen to and to speak with the teacher, as the latter is the one who may and can decide whether the required level of accuracy has been achieved. The students always look up at the person teaching them, as a person who has the necessary skills to observe, understand and most important correct the mistakes. But this is not always the best way to learn, especially when it comes to a foreign language. Alongside with presentation or practice (as part of the lesson approaches) there is the part of production.

The student learns a lot from what he hears from the teacher or from a tape, but is more important to become the one who can eventually produce language. One of the problems in teaching a foreign language lies not only in the process of input, of providing information – that is uttering the words and explaining their meaning. It is also the problem of output, of what the student is capable of uttering.

Taking into account that the student absorbs the correct picture of the language (or of a certain vocabulary) by listening to the teacher, we may easily fall into the mistake of dominating the lesson to the exclusion of any other participant. Thus, one should constantly acknowledge that by interacting with the teacher, a student is learning to interact with a competent user of the language. Again, if the only conversation practice learners get is one-to-one with the teacher, they will get very little time to speak at all (especially if there is, for example, a 25-people class). An essential lesson that every new teacher needs to learn is that “talking at” the learners does not necessarily mean that learning is taking place; in many cases, teacher talking time is actually time when the learners are not doing very much and are not very involved. So, in order to assure a better acquisition, the teacher should manage talking time as it will become most profitable for the students.

Weaknesses of Communicative Method

However, problems also arose in the initial wave enthusiasm about it, such as: Can this method be applied at all levels in teaching? How such an
The role of the teacher in communicative learning

In communicative learning the teacher acts like a facilitator, controller or a mentor. There are certain misinterpretation of communicative learning. One of them is that in communicative learning takes place naturally. If we try to go for a better understanding of this statement it means that for learning through communicative method a teacher is not required. But this is not true. The important roles of teacher in such a class are:

- planning and designing the tasks in the class, act as a controller.
- Assigning proper seatings in the class to avoid chaos and confusion.
- Choosing proper topics for roleplay and group discussions so that the main objective behind communicative language acquisition can be acquired.

There are new roles in the classroom for the teachers and learners. Learners now have to participate in classroom activities that are based on cooperative learning rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students have to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher as a model. The students are expected to take on more responsibility for their own learning. And teachers now have to assume the role of facilitator and monitor, rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error free sentences.

Students should interact among themselves as much as possible. Whether this is done by the way they are sitting, or especially by the way they communicate one to another, their speaking time should increase compared to that of the teacher. The latter may as well be only a mediator between them, a facilitator of students’ language production. One of the most important distinctions that can be drawn here is that between the teacher as a controller and the teacher as a participant, as these two concepts represent limits of teacher behaviour. A controller stands in front of the class and stands out as the person who governs everything from teaching to the student’s possible reactions. He is like a “puppet-master” observing and deciding whether a certain gesture should be made. On the other hand, the participant involves not only communicatively but sometimes even physically in the class, maintaining a low profile in order to allow students to achieve their best from an individual or group task.
When learning English students are *receiving* language – as language is in some way “put into” the students (whether they want to receive it or not). But this is not enough: the teacher also needs to provide opportunities for the students to activate this knowledge and to “produce” language. Controller teachers should know when and how long they need to allow students to talk because language production implies rehearsing whilst receiving feedback (from the teacher or from the students). So, it is clearly that there is a great need for communicative *output* from the students and also of a feedback. If teachers forget to “get out” from controllerposition, the students can no longer practice language therefore their talking skills may suffer greatly. When talking about *input* one should notice that “finely-tuned *input*” is often according Jeremy Harmer in *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman, 1995, “the focus of the presentation of new language where repetition, teacher correction, discussion and/or discovery techniques are frequently used to promote cognitive strategies. […] During the presentation stage teachers tend to act as controllers, both selecting the language the students are to use and asking for the accurate reproduction of new language items. They will want to correct the mistakes they hear and see at this stage fairly rigorously – in marked contrast to the kind of correction that is generally offered in practice and communicative activities. [p.41]”

In order to get the best results in a student-centred class one should make sure that he gets to them, that he can get their attention. An important reason why learners may not successfully follow activity instructions (or understand teacher’s explanations of something) is that they didn’t actually hear them, perhaps because they weren’t fully paying attention when they were given. Sometimes, as the teacher invests energy in finding the best way to give the instruction, he may overlook the necessity of getting students’ attention before the instruction is even given. If the students are chattering, or not paying attention, nevertheless how well the instruction is given, it will have little chances of fulfilment. That is why the teacher should take into account few tips in order to really focus the activity upon students. First of all, he has to make eye-contact as much and with as many students as possible. Then the teacher might have established a gesture that means he wants to talk (for example holding the hand up or even a word).

It is very important for the teacher to know what his role in the class is, especially in pair or group activities. Jim Scrivener in *Learning Teaching*, Macmillan Books for Teachers, Oxford, 2005 has said that “Immediately after you have given the instruction for a task and students start doing it, there is often an immediate need to check to make sure that students are doing the activity that you asked them to do and have understood the basic instructions
and the mechanics of the activity. You could do this by quietly and relatively inconspicuous wandering around the room, listening in briefly to snatches from many groups and assuring yourself that students are doing what they are supposed to. We could call this monitoring to check the mechanics.” [p. 93]

In most activities, the aim is that the learners get to work on their own as much as possible; to speak fluently with the least interference from the teacher. The presence of the teacher may sometimes be perceived as interference. Let us explain: if the teacher is “too present”, then the student will look to him for guidance, correction or vocabulary help, whereas it might be more useful for them to struggle a little and learn to make use of their own resources. Thus, the teacher’s behaviour may vary from monitoring discreetly to vanishing completely to form the activity. Yet, in some tasks, especially in those in which the students need advice, input or support, the teacher may become more implicated in the activity and his role gets more and more active. In these cases, the best options for a teacher are to monitor actively or to participate.

To monitor discreetly means to maintain a certain presence of yourself as a teacher in the classroom, but not to offer help or to interfere every time something seems wrong. The students should know that the teacher is there, but that he will not interrupt them. The teacher is there watching and listening carefully, but unless there is a significant problem or mistake he need not to intervene. This way, the students will not feel tempted to report every time to the teacher and they will do the task themselves, producing and using language as much as possible. Even if they ask for the teacher’s help, he should do this swiftly and effectively and then return to the monitoring position.

Nevertheless, there are cases when the teacher risks to impose his presence too much by helping the learners and thus to diminish the work that is supposed to be done. Once more, according to Jim Scrivener in Learning Teaching, Macmillan Books for Teachers, Oxford, 2005 “Sometimes the best option for you is to vanish, i.e. get out of the immediate eyeshot. You could go into a corner of the room and sit quietly. […] You need to keep a small percentage of attention on the room, in order to know when the activity is reaching an end or a crisis point, but otherwise restrain yourself from doing too much. Relax and stop being a teacher for a while. In a few specific cases, you might want to emphasise the point that students need to work without your help, and in such cases even leaving the room for a few minutes may be an option.” [p. 94]

There is also the case when, if the teacher leaves the room for a few minutes, the students – as they are involved in solving the task – may not even notice his absence. Monitoring actively is more visible for students and allows them to be more aware of the teacher’s presence and of the possibility of asking help from
him. A teacher who is actively monitoring will be walking around, viewing and listening in to many different groups and frequently offering spontaneous advice and corrections, as well as responding to requests and questions from students. This method may easily change into participation when the teacher sits down and joins a group (temporarily or for the whole task). He may be part of that group, but, at the same time offering help, ideas or even asking questions.

The communicative method resorts to different techniques of teaching students. On one hand, there is the part of restricted practice, and on the other hand is that of free practice. When talking about restricted task, we aim at exercises (written or oral) which focus on certain language topics or grammar problems. For example, we can use a written exercise of the “fill in the blanks” type so that the students can learn new vocabulary or new grammatical items.

At the same time, an oral exercise may have as the main target the words used in a certain communicational situation (e.g. booking a room in a hotel or taking part in an interview for a certain job or position in a company). These types of activities tend to be easier than free practice, as they limit the students’ options to certain topics. When it comes to free practice one should understand the capacity of the learner to make up a discourse and to sustain logical statements. Generally, this is a communicative activity which demands from the student the capacity of dialogue, of responding and asking questions. It comes as a general truth that for a communicative purpose, this method is more appropriate than those asking students to only solve exercises with fixed pattern and in which imagination and the capacity of speaking is not challenged, therefore, not improved.

Challenging speaking abilities – both fluency and accuracy – is eventually the aim of communicative method as it focuses on student and on the student’s linguistic needs, meeting clear-cut objectives set by the trainer after the student’s needs analysis.

Study Methodology

Purpose of the research: To determine the importance of this method that is more appropriate than those asking students to only solve exercises with fixed pattern and in which imagination and the capacity of speaking is not challenged, therefore, not improved.

Subjects: The participants in this study were 30 English language teachers, teaching at the intermediate secondary level. The sample population was both from public and private schools. The participants were given the questionnaires personally, and they were given enough time to complete and return them to the
researcher. A semi-structured questionnaire with two parts was developed for the survey study. The questionnaire comprised on a Likert scale and each item had five options, i.e. Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The statements in the Likert scale dealt with the teachers’ understanding of the use of the Communicative Method in teaching English and their perceived difficulties in its application.

Results: The data obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed using a percentage for every item. The themes covered under this study were:
(i) Teachers’ perceptions of the theory and practice of the Communicative approach
(ii) Teachers’ perceived difficulties in applying the Communicative approach in the area of Teachers, Students, The education system and The theory and practice of the Communicative approach.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the data discussed above that the communicative approach is far better than the traditional method in teaching English at the higher secondary level. The experimental study included in this research proved the fact that, if provided with suitable conditions, the learners can increase their communicative ability. The use of the communicative approach has shown to increase motivation for learning.

The survey study also signifies the possibility of implementing the Communicative approach. The respondent teachers showed their willingness to incorporate communicative activities in classrooms. They have a good understanding of the use of this approach. The identified impediments in applying the communicative approach are teacher training, students’ hesitation in the use of target language, over-crowded class rooms, grammar-based examinations, and the lack of appropriate materials. However, the teachers in this study were found to be enthusiastic to apply the communicative approach in the classroom. They appeared hopeful that the problems associated with the implementation of the communicative approach can be overcome.
References: