

The Importance of Communicative Approach in Acquiring a Second Language

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Annotation: In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), “Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)” which is one of the most dominant and experienced foreign language teaching method in many current ELT applications, has been widely used in all countries in the world. Moreover, it is regarded as the most reliable and efficient way of teaching language not only for English but also for other languages. The aim of this article is to examine the role of approach. More specifically, it strives to identify how effective this approach is as a widely practiced English teaching method while teaching a second language. Besides, it also tries to answer the following:

- How students’ awareness of this approach effect their proficiency in SLA?

Key words: communicative approach, second language acquisition, communication skills.

INTRODUCTION.

The increasing demand of English language for meaningful communication produced an immense need for quality English language education and it became important for the people to equip their children with good knowledge of English. The role and duties of English language teachers in the current situation have increased for developing efficient communication skills.

As the goal of communicative language teaching is to develop students’ communicative competence in the target language, I wanted to do some research on this topic.

By this research, I intended to prove how important it is to use this approach during the acquiring a second language for teachers and learners as well. Till now, there many studies have been conducted on this topic by many well-known scholars. I hope that this case study will be beneficial both teachers and students. Additionally, it may help teachers to realize the importance of communicative approach as it is one of the crucial methods while teaching a target language in order to make learners gain enough skills in terms of speaking and pronunciation. While conducting the research it is crucial to consider the learner’s age, level, purpose and motivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

By conducting some research on Communicative approach in second language acquisition (SLA), I realized that using this method during the lesson is the best way to enhance learners’ communication skill and pronunciation as well.

To begin with, in the Western English speaking context, where immigrants learn English in order to conduct their present and future life in communication with native and other competent English speakers, the English language classroom operates on the principle of immersing learners in Anglo-

Saxon society. It is, thus, important in the Western classroom to establish what Holliday (1994: 54) calls “the learning group ideal” or “the optimum interactional parameters”, within which, learners, by interacting with each other on meaningful things, can best develop the communicative skills they immediately use in their real life. To facilitate this learning group ideal Brown (op. cit.) describes the practices to be used in the classroom such as:

- A significant amount of pair work and group work is conducted;
- Authentic language input in real life context is provided;
- Students are encouraged to produce language for genuine, meaningful communication.

Nunan (1989: 194) also stresses the use of activities which involve oral communication, carrying out meaningful tasks, using language which is meaningful to the learner and the use of materials that promote communicative language use as they are task-based and authentic.

However, when the above practices are used in Vietnam or China, a range of issues emerge, given that the socio-cultural, political, and physical conditions of these countries markedly differ from those in the UK or the USA. For example, in Vietnam, English language students share the same mother tongue and thus do not have the immediate need to use English in the classroom. Nor do many of them have this need outside the classroom.

Besides Larsen-Freeman explains that although students have knowledge of the target language’s forms, meanings and functions, if they cannot apply them in negotiation meaning, it is still inadequate. Therefore, practicing in context is more important than learning in classroom. This allows systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language to be the most characteristic feature of CLT.

Furthermore, CLT activities must engage students to interact and use the language form they learnt for meaningful communicative purpose. There are various types of teaching and learning activities in CLT. However, each type should involve students in the communicative process with information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction. It can include text-based materials which enact pair work or role play, task-based materials such as jigsaws, cue cards, activity cards, authentic materials (Richards and Rodgers, 2001), scrambled sentences, language games, and picture strip stories (Freeman & Anderson). Major activity types in CLT are differentiated between functional communication activities and social interaction activities. Functional communication activities are based on the principle that teachers should create situations in which students can practice how to deal with information gaps and problem solving. For instance, during my lessons I organize various debates such as “what is advantages and disadvantages of using mobile phone” or “Is it good for children to watch TV” to make my students exchange their ideas and experience. By this, they develop their problem-solving and speaking skill as well.

Students learn to communicate by communicating (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). I do agree that how much we speak, we learn the way of communication while learning a target language. Additionally,

Larsen-Freeman (2000) suggests that the activities should be organized in such a way that develops fluency and learners can produce meaningful, consistent and effective sentences, since communicative competence can be developed in students by using properly designed language games, problem-solving tasks, using picture stories and role-play methods. According to Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), CA is a student centered activity which develops confidence through a real communication, as interacting a lot, people improve their self-confidence and learn how to speak fluently as well.

According to Hymes (1972), language knowledge and communicative competence are essential elements for second language learners to be used in a variety of situations. The essence of language teaching lies in the notion of attaining proficiency in negotiation with target language speakers (East, 2012). The learners in second language acquisition (SLA) attain fluency and accuracy after much practice and by applying different evaluative techniques such as teacher's corrections or self-monitoring. Any individual learn something step by step, by making mistakes, practices and receiving feedbacks from their instructors, therefore I believe that in order to learn any second language learners need to communicate and practice.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

In order to do research for this article I have decided to choose one girl as a participant who has some difficulties in terms of learning English language. The subject is 20years old whose name is Husniya. She studies at the National University and her major is Uzbek language and literature.

Regarding her L1 Background, her native language is Uzbek, as she has grown up in Uzbek family. Even though her parents speak only in Uzbek, she is multilingual, since she can speak English and Arabian as well. Besides, she knows Russian, but cannot speak fluently.

In English her level is intermediate. Even though she started to learn English from her school times when she was in 4th grade, she still has some difficulties in using appropriate words while communicating in target language as she has not practiced a lot.

Actually she is really interested in learning this language and at the beginning of the learning she started watching funny cartoons in English even though she didn't understand fully. After that she learned some new words and did some exercises in order to enhance her vocabulary and she thought that improving vocabulary plays a crucial role in learning any language. Besides, she also used to use some books and handouts with pictures since she found it as an initial source in order to enter English atmosphere.

In terms of the method which she used while learning was grammar translation. With the help of her teacher she translated some small texts by using vocabulary which she learned. Actually her motivator also was her English teacher, she really liked the teacher's way of teaching and wanted to be like her. Regarding in what ways she learned this language, she usually watched movies and videos with their subtitles on the YouTube channels.

Although she listened and watched English videos, she is not good at speaking as she didn't communicate in this language a lot and her major also is Uzbek language and literature at the university. For this reason, I wanted to improve her speaking skill by using communicative approach.

RESEARCH DESIGN

At the very beginning of the research the participant was informed that the researcher was only interested in identifying the importance of Communicative Approach in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), more specifically, the effect of using communicative method while teaching a second language. Besides that the subject was introduced with Consent form and she signed it by realizing its importance in conducting research herself.

Researching the subject in a period of almost a month, some tests and methods were used in order to determine her level of knowledge, improvement and also the changes in her development on grammar, pronunciation and speaking skill as well.

Firstly, a test was taken which is on vocabulary and grammar in order to check her general background knowledge of knowing some words and simple rules in English for everyday use. Her results were satisfying enough. However, some extra tests and activities I needed to organize in order to enhance her communication skill. Therefore, I decided to give her making a speech about “Advantages and disadvantages of watching TV for children” as a task.

After listening to her speech that she prepared, I noticed some vocabulary mistakes which she could not use properly. Then I decided to work on her vocabulary skill as it is her weak point.

Having realized her weak point, the participant agreed to divide the activities which can help to improve her knowledge in terms of vocabulary and grammar.

We divided it into two parts:

1. In-class activities
2. Out-of-class activities

In order to organize some in-class activities to enhance participant’s knowledge, I decided to do activity on vocabulary, as building vocabulary involves memorizing their spellings and pronunciations and also requires understanding their usage in different contexts, especially, as some words have more than one meaning. Besides, all of these aspects of vocabulary building require a combination of rote learning and understanding the meaning of words. Therefore, I chose one of the effective activities which was called “Flashcards”. In this activity I used some flashcards as quizzing tools and wrote the word on one side of the card and its definition and pronunciation on the other. Then I showed the subject the side with the word and tested her on the definition and then vice-versa.

The participant found this activity very interesting and useful as it improved not only her vocabulary skill but also pronunciation as well. Additionally, by using flashcards I helped the subject to stick new words in her memory.

In terms of out-of-class activity which can develop speaking skill, I recommended her to write some simple phrases that are used for daily life on some stickers and stick them in different objects, which can always be visible to her at home (for ex, in the kitchen or entering hall of the house) and it can give her an opportunity to read and try to remember them as soon as possible, as she often visits the kitchen in order to prepare some meals and does cleaning in the entering hall or other rooms of the house.

Except from that I also suggested her recording some short speeches of native speakers on her cell phone and listening to them repeatedly, since this method improved her speaking skill and along with this, the subject also gained enough knowledge in pronouncing the words correctly.

All the rules of doing these kinds of activities which were suggested to do in order to expand her vocabulary, pronunciation and as well as speaking skill were clearly explained to the participant. Furthermore, she told me that she was really interested in completing the research, as the results of the study were not only beneficial, but also interesting to know.

DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

Data analysis is not a simple description of the data collected but a process by which the researcher can bring interpretation to the data (Pawney & Watts, 1987).

By adopting multidimensional qualitative research procedures, including pre-posttests, in-class and out-of-class activities, some skills (speaking, vocabulary, pronunciation) of the subject were developed due to using communicative approach in Second Language Acquiring (SLA).

At the beginning, the results of the test which she did regarding simple vocabulary of everyday use were not so bad, as she got enough knowledge during her school time with the help of her English teacher and by watching many tutorial and educational videos on YouTube channels. However, in terms of preparing some simple speeches according to the given topic, some weak points were noticed due to using appropriate vocabulary and wanted to improve this point by using various activities on communicative approach.

In terms of in-class activities, the participant could gain more improvements as one of the effective activities was used to enhance her vocabulary and pronunciation skills.

The usage of flashcards which was beneficial to memorize the definitions and spellings of the word helped her to enrich her vocabulary learning skills as well as pronunciation as she was really keen on doing this kind of activity with her group mates also.

Nevertheless, when it comes to other vocabularies that were not used during flashcards activities, she could not manage to remember almost half of them and did not use them in her speech appropriately while she was talking about the topic that I provided.

Regarding out-of-class activity improvements, the experiment that stickers with written words was not very successful at home atmosphere. The reason for this was she was disturbed by doing housework

while reading them. Even though she read them as soon as possible, she could not manage to store all the words and phrases in her mind as the human brain cannot function simultaneously.

However, the activity which I recommended as a beneficial one was that doing a record of native speakers' speech on her mobile phone really worked the participant's wonders. Since she could listen to them every time and every place, she could manage to remember and use them in her speech appropriately and improved her speaking and pronunciation skills as well.

Besides, she found all the activities interesting and beneficial as well that I used during a study, she also added that using such techniques and methods was really useful in order to enhance communication skill, especially recording and listening native speakers' speech was a best technique in terms of improving pronunciation and also made a learner be aware of using various vocabularies in a correct way.

As for a sample level test result which was given in order to evaluate the available English level of the student at the initial stage of the study comparing to the last one that was taken after a period of month study, it was found out that there was an improvement between them, as the student could achieve more knowledge in terms of using appropriate vocabulary (for ex, word combinations or synonym and antonyms of the words) and grammar rules such as prepositions and pronouns.

CONCLUSION

From overall perspective, after having studied the person who has got enough knowledge in terms of using simple vocabulary but can not use them appropriately while speaking, as she had not practiced enough in communication because of her atmosphere was completely Uzbek language, emerging findings showed that using the Communicative approach in acquiring a second language was the effective one. Since the results that were found in data collection illustrated enough improvements.

Besides, a theory of language as communication lies at the very core of the CLT. According to Chomsky the goal of language teaching was to develop "communicative competence", which implied acquiring both an ability and knowledge to use a language. In other words, communicative competence considers language as a tool used for communication. After looking through this theory I wanted to connect my findings to this as it shows that using this method in acquiring a second language is one of the effective ways in order to enhance one's communication skill.

In terms of the research suggestions, it suggests that the use of alternative communication techniques improves the participant's academic results and her motivation and attitude towards the subject. In regards to attitude, practically the student had a very positive one towards the activities that were used. And also she could accomplish her tasks properly. Through the observation process, it was observed that the subject tried to give her best to do the tasks, showing a great interest and motivation. Obviously, some of the activities worked better than others, but all of them had a general positive result.

However, I discovered some other factors to discuss while I was doing research such as age, home culture, the environment as well as the interest in LA and the feeling of responsibility can be in the list of significant factors of SLA. After research, I also realized that when one has interest to learn something he or she can achieve it and also should feel responsibility as well.

Overall, my first research based on the importance of communicative approach in acquiring a second language gave me indescribable experiences related to teaching. At the end of research, I also started to realize that using this method is really useful not only for teachers but also learners as well as it opens ways to improve communication skills in SLA.

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