

Problems of Teaching English Conversation by Using the Communicative Approach among Secondary School Teachers in Kirkuk Province

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ABSTRACT

The Issues that Kirkuk Secondary School Students Encounter when Learning Conversation in English using the Communicative Approach (A method that emphasizes teaching communication as opposed to rote learning grammatical structures and vocabulary), and what Communicative Teaching is Capable of achieving, is the Focus of this Paper. To communicate is the main aim of communicative language teaching. During the teaching process, students should communicate with one another as well as with the teacher in order to ensure that they have the capacity to communicate effectively and with certainty in the real world. The ultimate goal of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) is to orient students to the community and teach them a new language that they can use to communicate with the community. The objective of this particular research study, however, is to provide students with the ability to speak English fluently and without fear of making mistakes. The research study was carried out in the Kirkuk Secondary Schools in Northern Iraq with a target group of 16 male and female teachers. To English language teachers, an eleven-item questionnaire was also administered to pinpoint the problems encountered. The difficulties pinpointed in the questionnaire were acknowledged as significant for the lack of teaching by those sixteen teachers.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Communicative Approach (CA)

INTRODUCTION

One of the pedagogical approaches to teaching English is the Communicative Approach, which highlights the importance of communication rather than the mere acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical rules. At the same time, Savignon (1997) claims that the rise of the C. A. in England and America is followed by simultaneous improvements. Furthermore, C. A. has emerged partly because of the opinions of some linguists. For example, Widdowson (1978), observed that learners trapped in the pedagogical dilemma of traditional methods like Situational Language Teaching, the Audio-lingual or Grammar Translation methods (which, as described by Thamarana, 2015:92, focus on language structure and ignore communicative competence), do not know how to function in the communities of the languages they have learned. It promotes meaningful, purposeful communication in the classroom and is particularly useful for students at the beginning levels of language learning who need functional communication skills. Students build the confidence needed to communicate in English in the classroom by participating in activities such as role playing, discussion, and problem solving. It fosters a positive environment in which

students gain the cultural knowledge to communicate in a second language.

In a country such as Iraq, where English is not the primary language, this method is exceptionally advantageous as it allows learners to communicate with individuals of a diverse cultural background, which is an important necessity in the current globalized society.

In this specific context, the communicative approach to teaching conversation to Iraqi students focuses not only on communication but also on the integration of language skills. Students will enhance their speaking and listening skills, as well as their reading and writing skills. By participating in authentic, meaningful conversations, students are also exposed to various forms of writing, including but not limited to: dialogues, stories, and articles, which aids in the development of their reading comprehension. Moreover, the method fosters the expression of ideas and thoughts in writing in order to enhance the communication of ideas in written form. This all-encompassing approach to language learning will provide students in Iraq with the ability to communicate proficiently in English across a multitude of different scenarios.

In Iraqi schools, the communicative approach used when teaching English conversations includes quite a bit more than basic conversation skills and cultural comprehension. It also includes the teaching and development of higher-order thinking skills and the ability to engage in and resolve complex problem situations. Through the teaching strategies of student engagement in activities and the use of pedagogical simulations of real-world situations, the approach fosters and trains the participants in analytical and creative thinking. By doing so, the approach provides the students with language skills that will be of use in a variety of situations in the globalizing world. Moreover, the approach fosters learner independence, responsibility, and the habits of autonomous lifelong learning. By promoting and encouraging a positive and supportive pedagogical atmosphere, this approach allows the students to become not just fluent in English, but also confident, adaptable, and empowered.

While the teaching of conversation skills is extremely challenging, the approach developed so far has been very useful. One of the most recognized of these is in the category of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which advocates the teaching of real-world language use and/or communication. However, in spite of meeting the standards of communicative competence, CLT still has numerous challenges when used to teach conversational English.

Although CLT has its advantages in helping students learn conversational English, it is not without drawbacks. The technique is grounded in the idea that learners are willing, able, and ready to engage in various forms of active communication. Some learners, however, might not have adequate linguistic skills required to participate in a meaningful conversation, or they might be too reserved. Consequently, such learners are likely to fall behind in the course and grow frustration, as well as a lack of motivation in their studies. Some difficulties that Iraqi teachers are experiencing are akin to those faced by teachers in other Arab countries and non-Arab nations. Nonetheless, a number of challenges that Iraqi educators engage with are more likely to be the result of a combination of unique issues surrounding security, along with the diverse languages spoken in the region. This includes Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish in Kirkuk. A related problem is the lack of suitable materials to support the teaching focus on conversations in classes designed around a CLT framework.

In summation, while it is true that the Communicative Language Teaching method is positive because it promotes genuine interaction and exploitation of language, it is not without its perils as an approach to English conversation teaching. Problems to be encountered include student characteristics, materials, and methods of assessing conversation skills. When addressing these problems, teachers should take the students' interests into consideration, tailor teaching and learning materials to them, and explore different modes of assessment to see which ones capture oral proficiency the best. In other words, the

example paper is concluded by addressing these problems, and it is from these cases how educators approach these problems for more efficient CLT in the teaching of English conversation.

PROBLEMS OF THE STUDY

A plethora of researchers in the field of English language pedagogy have built upon the early works of the first teacher of English in Iraq, John van Ess, and have focused on the innovative teaching approach of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). A great deal of research work has been completed on the integration of CLT into the English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching context. Hence, the current study seeks to explore the understandings of university English language pedagogy instructors with respect to the teaching of English for conversation to secondary school children, in particular, the issues and the barriers they encounter while attempting to employ the principles of CLT within the context of Iraq.

Hypotheses of the Study

There are no barriers to the teaching of conversation using the communicative approach to secondary school teachers in Kirkuk province. There is a lack of awareness regarding the challenges and barriers that exist when attempting to employ the principles of the CLT framework in the teaching of English conversation and the means to address such barriers.

Aims of the Study

- Examining the challenges that are experienced in the teaching of conversation in English in the secondary schools of Kirkuk.
- Investigating the extent to which CLT could be beneficial in the teaching conversation in English in the secondary schools of Kirkuk.

The Significance of the Study

- To motivate the teacher to conceive of CLT when teaching language conversation.
- To facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the notion of communicative competence.
- To provide an opportunity for a constructive critique of the communicative teaching techniques.

Background of the Study

As a dominant global language, English is taught in schools and used in various domains in many countries. In Arab States, English is taught and learned at schools from early stages of education as it was the official language of the colonizing power that occupied these countries for many years. The instruction of English language in Iraq started in 1921, during the British Mandate (Saeed, 2015). Like many colonizing countries, the British sought to control the language and culture of the Iraqi people, thus making the instruction of English a priority. However, there are many obstacles and challenges to the instruction of English in Iraq, most of which relate to the context, security issues, and the condition of the education system.

Along with its problems, Iraq has not been spared from neglect as well. Iraq was one of the countries to recognize its need to address the literacy problems and the challenges of teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) as well. Several attempts have been made to improve the quality of output in TEFL to

become more than mediocre. Teaching English as a foreign language at this time did occur in the Iraqi government schools fifth to twelfth grades. Since 2003, and after the declaration that Iraq had been under English became a compulsory subject from the first grade. Within the past two decades, communities in Iraq have been affected by the wars and conflicts. Children and adolescents have been out of school for reasons such as displacement and fragile security, degraded learning environments, and loss of family income (Saad, 2015).

There is a multitude of research about the issues of English teaching, and there are various perspectives in the Arab World and Western Countries. The teaching of English in the Arab World, and particularly in Iraq, has a number of issues that affect the ability of teachers to do their professional job. Challenges that other teachers around the world are experiencing affect Iraqi teachers, but in addition to this, some of the challenges that Iraqi teachers encounter are of a particular kind, such as security and political strife (Ibid).

There are increasing and dire requirements for effective English language communication, which has resulted in a global demand for English language teaching. The Communicative Approach (CA), as reported in Nunan (2003), and Dörnyei (2009) has been the rage and the dominant method of teaching in the 21st century and has been incorporated in a number of countries in their English language teaching textbooks.

In most instances, CLT has been defined within the limits of an approach (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). In the West, communicative language teaching (CLT) has started being viewed as a paradigm shift and the most predominant approach to teaching English as a foreign language. CLT is also being introduced in many Arab countries, and there is an emerging shift toward the integration of communicative language teaching in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy (Al-Khafaji, 2015). Notwithstanding the approach's rich theoretical framework, challenges and difficulties continue to surface in the use of the approach in English language contexts.

Several studies in the field describe this focus as the two practices and goals in an educational context. The focus of CLT is on advancing the students' Communicative Competence. Due to the overwhelming need for English language teaching and the global spread of the language, this technique has been embraced in numerous different countries to eliminate the old ways of teaching and provide students with more chances to acquire languages. According to Richards (2004), an approach is viewed as the set of assumptions concerning the aims of teaching a language. The aim of teaching a language with this approach is to enable the students to achieve Communicative Competence to an extent that they will be able to use the target language for communication. To do this, the students need to interact and practice in a variety of authentic situations for the teachers to focus on communication during the language class.

The communicative approach to foreign language teaching assumes that target language learners can practice and develop their language proficiency by integrating their skills and using the language for real-life situations. Richards and Rodgers (2001) explain that this definition is in part the basis for their description of communicative language teaching as an approach. First, learners learn (any) language by communicating. Second, the implementation of classroom activities is aimed toward achieving the ultimate goals of having activities that are real and meaningful, and while they are aimed toward achieving accuracy (for the target language), activities and (i.e., does) language use that is present (through conversation) and coordinates (accurately) is they are indeed. Therefore, teaching English conversation should be the backbone of English teaching within the classroom.

According to Islam (2016), theoretical literature on the implementation of CLT does not match with practical literature. In other words, what is on the books is not what is practiced in CLT teaching. This might explain why, in many countries, English Language Teachers (ELTs) are still practicing teaching

English using the so-called traditional method. Hiep (2005) points out that teachers who do not have an adequate grasp of CLT are unable to make the necessary changes in their practice to suit the context, hence they return to the classical method of teaching.

The solution for this particular problem is explained by Hiep (2005) when stating that language

teachers need pre-service or in-service training focused on what CLT is and how it can be implemented in the classroom. Hence, in-service CLT training can be a way to fill this gap and ease the burden of teaching, whereby classroom activities will transform from being more teacher-centered to more student-centered.

Certainly, to be able to implement a communicative methodology is not a straightforward task, especially since students are expected to use the language both productively and receptively, and in real-life unpracticed situations, in a communicative classroom (Demir et al. 2015). Therefore, the need for a study on this matter is crucial in order to understand the teaching activities of teachers. Moreover, such studies can enable teachers to use the principles of CLT more frequently during classroom teaching.

The lack of results and outcomes from teaching English conversation in Kirkuk is an observable phenomenon. It is assumed that the level of intermediate students is lower than that of students from other classes. This is an issue that needs exploring and unpacking to understand the underlying reasons for this issue and to suggest possible appropriate solutions. Factors contributing to this weakness, from the teachers' perspectives, are abundant. Hence, this current study seeks to understand the problems that make teaching such demanding tasks, for teachers, so difficult.

Statement of Problem

Teaching methodologies applied to the teaching of English conversation still face issues due to educators' insufficient training in the methodology and a lack of understanding of the methodology. In the classrooms, the involvement and interaction of pupils is a fascinating goal, but it requires a thorough comprehension of the various theories, methods, and activities surrounding language acquisition in order to implement it successfully. Insufficient teacher training may explain the gaps and/or ineffectiveness. There is also the problem of a lack of educational realia that allows for meaningful communication practice. Moreover, the lack of large classrooms and short time frames does not help to establish the interaction needed to each learner in order to enhance the interaction. In general terms, the issues identified above should serve as a base for the construction of a thorough teacher training program designed to impart the knowledge and skills required to successfully apply a communicative approach for teaching English conversation. Continuing the thread of the first issue, the lack of opportunities for real-world language practice outside of the classroom. This remains another challenge for teachers using a communicative method in English conversation classrooms.

Educational opportunities in the Kirkuk region have been greatly affected by four specific challenges that all revolve around the lack of opportunity for students to practice their English. First, while classroom exercises do provide an environment to learn English, it is imperative that students also have opportunities to learn it in real-world, project-based, or task-oriented environments. Second, students do not have access to English-speaking groups. Third, even in places where students have access to English-speaking groups, they do not have access to English-speaking practice settings. Kirkuk City is one of those places. And finally, Kirkuk has an even more complicated context where people communicate in more than three mother languages (Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkmen), which makes it even more complicated for teachers to teach in English. All of these challenges restrict the students' opportunities to utilize what they have learned in the classroom context and put it into practice in real-life situations. Nevertheless, these challenges can be mitigated and even compensated. Educators can make use

of the technology that is available to them to provide students with virtual language immersion experiences. Technologies such as language exchange, interactive language learning applications, and artificial intelligence language learning applications can be used. The use of these technologies provides students with the opportunity to take part in real-world situations where they can practice authentic dialogue with other learners and even native speakers.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study are English language educators who are teaching at public secondary schools affiliated with the General Directorate of Education in Kirkuk City, Iraq. Given the fewer number of English educators, the study includes only 16 teachers (both male and female). Participants in this research are of various ethnicities (Arab, Kurdish, and Turkmen), which allows for a greater diversity of perspectives and hence, more precise conclusions. Therefore, all English language teachers were considered the subjects of the study.

Surveys were created in order to analyze the issues pertaining to the English Conversation Teaching using the Communicative Approach.

The responses from the teachers in this research will address the issues of the educators in employing the communicative approach in English conversation instruction by using the foundational tenets of communicative language teaching. Participants are pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Iraq. The observation checklist mainly focuses on shortcomings regarding the implementation of CLT on three major criteria: the teacher's role, materials and activities, and the teaching procedure. This model seeks to assist the researchers in determining the extent to which teachers implement the critical and distinctive features of teaching a communicative language.

Procedures

Both Selinger and Shohamy (1989) describe the methodologies of data collection, where sequential procedures are integrated seamlessly, where one piece of data is collected into the next. In this study, data collection was exercised in the form of administering questionnaires.

The collection of data began in April of the year 2024, where a survey based upon a 5-point Likert-scale metric was distributed to EFL secondary school teachers in the country of Iraq. Considerations of the study and requirements posed upon the participants were described to the volunteers. A verbal description of the study and requirements was given in order to assist the researcher in collecting the data. Teachers were prompted to read the questionnaires after questioning. It was pointed out to the teachers that it was not necessary to write additional favorable comments, but simply to indicate a point upon the scale. Respondents were able to complete the survey, provide their input, and finish the questionnaires in a time frame between 15 and 20 minutes on average.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the issues that occur in the instruction of English conversational skills using the Communicative Approach has been the focus of the study. It generates quantitative values through the analyzed instruments of the administered surveys. For the Likert scales answered by the participants, the values provided in the survey questionnaires are analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The result of dividing the data obtained by the total count of disposed questionnaires is obtained in percentage form. These values are not difficult to analyze. In addition, means and standard deviations are also calculated for each item to give an overall image of how respondents deal with the problem questions in the study.

| Items | Statistics | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------|----------------|-----------------|
| | SD | D | N | A | SD | Mean | Std. Deviation | Decision |
| There is a lack of using authentic materials to teach oral English skills. | - | 1 (6%) | 3 (18%) | 9 (56%) | 3 (18%) | 3,88 | .806 | High Perception |
| The traditional teaching methods is unsupportive to teach oral English skills. | - | 4 (25%) | 1 (6%) | 6 (37%) | 5 (31%) | 3,75 | 1,183 | High Perception |
| It is difficult to teach oral English communication skill because of large classes. | - | 2 (12%) | 1 (6%) | 10 (62%) | 3 (18%) | 3,88 | .885 | High Perception |
| There are laboratories in my school | 5 (31%) | 8 (50%) | - | 2 (12%) | 1 (6%) | 2,13 | 1,204 | Low Perception |
| The students are egoistic to speak among them in English in class. | - | 1 (6%) | 10 (62%) | 5 (31%) | - | 3,25 | .577 | Low Perception |
| It is difficult to motivate students to speak English | 1 (6%) | 6 (37%) | 2 (12%) | 7 (43%) | - | 2,94 | 1,063 | Low Perception |
| There is a lack of vocabulary | 2 (12%) | 5 (31%) | 6 (37%) | 2 (12%) | 1 (6%) | 2,69 | 1,078 | Low Perception |
| It is difficult to understand the conversation because of the fast speaking. | - | 4 (25%) | 1 (6%) | 10 (62%) | 1 (6%) | 3,50 | .966 | High Perception |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------|-------|-----------------|
| It is difficult to interpret words | - | 5 (31%) | 7 (43%) | 4 (25%) | - | 2,94 | ,772 | Low Perception |
| The time is short to understand the conversation well | - | 7 (43%) | 1 (6%) | 3 (18%) | 5 (31%) | 3,38 | 1,360 | High Perception |
| There is a large amount of vocabulary with less confidence is expressing themselves | - | 2 (12%) | 2 (12%) | 7 (43%) | 5 (31%) | 3,94 | ,998 | High Perception |

Table; (1) Analysis of Questionnaires

Note: N. = 11, SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.
Weighted Average: $36,28/11 = 3,29$

Considering the above, the result of the data analysis indicates that most participants are suggesting a deficiency of authentic materials for teaching oral English skills. Respondents also expressed that the conventional teaching approaches did not accommodate the needs of teaching oral English skills. Teaching oral communicative skills was perceived as a challenge due to the big class size. A considerable number of respondents perceived that even if the discussion was well articulated, understanding the conversation was somehow challenging because the speaker was fast and time was limited. They had a strong perception that a lot of vocabulary were held by students, but they lacked the confidence to verbalize it.

Conversely, most participants had a lukewarm perception of the school laboratories. They also held a low perception that students are self-centered in not using English communicatively among themselves in the classroom. However, respondents perceived that students have the potential to be prompted to speak English, but they may not have the impetus to engage in communicative tasks, particularly if they are hesitant or lack self-assurance in their language proficiency. (Melrose, 1991).

CONCLUSION

The Communicative Approach involves student-centered pedagogy and focuses on the function and application of language in real-world situations. This Teaching Methodology Benefits Iraqi Students Since It Focuses on the Interrelationship of the Four Dimensions of Language Skills and the Utilization of Real-Life Situations and Activities.

When using the Communicative Approach to Teaching English Conversations, Creating a Communicative Classroom Atmosphere Focusing on Interactivity, Students and Activities through the Use of Real-Life Situations. Teachers need to incorporate various interactive and stimulating pedagogy using techniques like group and pair work, role play, simulations, and games to facilitate practice in speaking and listening. Focusing on appropriate authentic materials like news stories and engaging films, videos, and audio podcasts helps learners work with real language and learn in context, introducing them to cultural aspects of language use. The Communicative Approach has numerous challenges and issues, such as

insufficient materials and resources, a reluctance to move away from traditional methods of instruction, and adding culturally appropriate materials for language instruction. While a teacher might learn new methods, the materials can be adapted to the context, and the problem of sustainable open educational resources can also be used.

The Communicative Approach can only be successfully implemented when teachers create a communicative classroom environment, encourage students to participate and interact, integrate technology to facilitate language learning and communication, and consider the students' cultural backgrounds.

If teachers in Iraq deploy these ideas and recommendations, they will be able to provide a safe and inclusive environment, so all students can learn and participate in the diversity of the classroom. Overall, the Communicative Approach has the potential to be a very dynamic and fun method for teaching learners the English language in a conversational setting. The implementation of this approach, however, requires teachers to have continual and ongoing professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In understanding how to eliminate or mitigate these barriers, instructors may incorporate the use of the communicative method to teach English conversation, language learning, and communication skills. Instructors may use their time more efficiently during the time in between classes by attending to communicative activities centered around the language skills that are most important to the students. To be more time-efficient, instructors could combine communicative tasks with other language learning activities. With the use of social media and the internet, instructors can help students use the language in an authentic way by providing authentic materials. Instructors may also want to create and/or adapt materials to better fit their students' needs. Setting realistic goals, creating a positive learning atmosphere, and providing constructive feedback are motivational strategies that may be used to promote students' participation in the communicative activities that instructors want to accomplish.

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