

# Implementation of Communicative Approach

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## Abstract

In the contemporary age of high professional requirements such as excellent communicative skills, the need for successful learning of communicative skills of English language suggests communicative ability to be the goal of language teaching. In other words, to teach English language using communicative approach becomes essential. Studies to measure teachers' classroom behavior indicate that the implementation of communicative approach in the classroom is rare. Although teachers claim to be following a communicative approach, in practice they seem to be following traditional approaches. The proposed study was undertaken to assess the existing situation with regard to the use of communicative approach in the teaching of English language at the secondary level in different schools of Delhi following the curriculum of Central Board of School Examination (CBSE), New Delhi. A Likert-type attitude scale was developed to understand the teachers attitudes towards the communicative approach.

**Keywords:** classroom behaviour, communicative, ESL, implementation, language, teaching

## 1. Introduction

In India English is no longer considered as a foreign language, rather as a second language. English language has deeply penetrated inside the various strata of the society. It is no longer considered as a language learnt for communicating with its native speakers. Rather, it has become a key for professional success (Snow, Cortes, & Pron, 1998). The importance and status of English language cannot be over emphasized further today. In the Indian context one would assume that no Indian language could be an alternative to the English language in terms of importance and wide acceptability. One of the main reasons is that the English language is learnt not only for learning the language per se but its knowledge is used as a vehicle for other learnings. In the contemporary age of high professional requirements such as excellent communicative skills, the pressure on the learners to develop their communicative skills of English is rather imperative. The need for successful learning of communicative skills of English language suggests communicative ability to be the goal of language teaching. In other words, to teach English language using communicative approach becomes essential.

Communicative approach is considered as the most effective theoretical model in English language teaching since early 1970s. The underlying concept of this approach is that language carries not only functional meaning, it carries social meaning as well. So, it is not only important to learn the linguistic forms but also to understand their potential communicative functions and social meanings. That is to say, the learners should be able to relate the linguistic forms to appropriate non-linguistic knowledge in order to interpret the specific functional meaning intended by the speaker (Littlewood, 1981). 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, combining these units into a more fully communicative view (Littlewood, 1981).

Communicative language teaching is based on Hymes's (1966) concept of communicative competence which is an extension of Chomsky's (1965) concepts of linguistic competence and performance. Hymes pointed out that linguistic or grammatical competence alone is not enough to be able to use language in a given cultural social set up. Thus, the situation in which language has to be used becomes relevant for language teaching. He further emphasized that a normal child's acquisition of knowledge of sentences is not only grammatical but also appropriate because of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972).

It is important to mention here that communicative language teaching is strongly associated with a number of

activities such as group work, pair work, open or cued dialogues, role playing, etc. These activities are called communicative activities and are designed by the teachers to provide an opportunity for learners to use language that they have already learnt in different situations.

## 2. Literature Survey

Many scholars like Littlewood (1981), Richards and Rodgers (2001) have attempted to identify characteristic features of communicative language teaching. Several research works have been done in this direction that has led to the growth and expansion of communicative language teaching. Besides, scholars like Guthrie (1984), Long and Sato (1983), Nunan (1987), Karavas (1996) have also carried out studies to understand the implementation of communicative approach by teachers in a classroom situation. They have tried to measure teachers' classroom behavior and the extent of the implementation of communicative approach in their classrooms. Most of these studies indicate that the implementation of communicative approach in the classroom is rare. The instructors seem to be following traditional approaches in their classrooms, contrary to their assertion of following a communicative approach. The communicative approach has apparently brought innovation more on the level of theory than on the level of teachers' actual classroom practices (Karavas, 1996).

The present study is inspired as well as based on the work done by Karavas on Greek EFL classrooms (1996). According to Karavas, the classroom practices of the teachers who were observed (with very few exceptions) did not conform to the principles of the communicative approach. However, the disparities between teachers' classroom behavior and their expressed attitudes have not been identified by this study only. As mentioned earlier, there are other studies also indicating the same type of disparity.

## 3. Objective of the Study

The proposed study was selected with an objective to assess:

- 1) Attitude of the teachers towards communicative approach.
- 2) Existing gap, if any, between communicative language teaching theories and their actual implementation in the classroom.
- 3) Factors leading to the gap.

## 4. Methodology

To meet the objectives of the study, a mix of pilot survey, sample survey, participant observation and interview was undertaken.

Four different types of schools of Delhi following the curriculum of Central Board of School Examination (CBSE), New Delhi selected for the study was:

- 1) Government Schools (Run by State Government of Delhi)
- 2) Navyug Vidyalayas (Run by New Delhi Municipal Corporation, an autonomous body of Delhi)
- 3) Central Schools or Kendriya Vidyalayas (Run by Central Government of Delhi)
- 4) Private Schools of Delhi (Run by Private Organizations)

The study focused on the degree of implementation of communicative approach in the ESL classrooms at the secondary level (VI to X). This is because the teaching of the language using communicative activities is supposed to be carried out mainly at this level. Whereas at the primary levels mostly the teaching of vocabulary and structure practice is to be done to feed the students the basic knowledge of the language first and then to enable them to participate later (at secondary level) in communicative activities. By the time the students reach tertiary level, which is an advanced level, they become well versed or fluent in the language. So, they do not need such activities any more.

One significant point in reference is that CBSE offers two types of courses for English Language which are classified as Course A and Course B. Furthermore, the CBSE coursework (whether course A or course B) is common in all schools for classes IX and X. However, for lower classes (from Class I to VIII), the schools are free to have their own set of books from their own choice of publishers.

The English language curriculum of the schools of Delhi and other places in India was revised by CBSE to incorporate communicative language teaching. CBSE implemented communicative language teaching in its Course A for English language at IX and X level from academic session 1993-94. As a result the textbooks in various schools of India underwent significant changes to incorporate the communicative approach. The ultimate aim of the new curriculum and textbooks was to develop skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking and to

extend vocabulary to enable a student to enjoy and appreciate fiction, poetry and drama. It was hoped that the new course materials would instill a sense of confidence among students and heighten their proficiency in learning English as a second language. Under the new plans a series of textbooks which include a main course book, a literature reader, a workbook, long reading text and audio cassettes were introduced. The suggested exercises were to hold group discussions among students, planned projects etc. The board earnestly wished that all schools connected with the new course A adopted the new course plan. Though ignored to a great extent, Course B curriculum is now being modified on the principles of communicative approach. Yet the learning materials and the prescribed text for Course B are largely structure and lexicon oriented (Agarwal, 2004).

All Government Schools offer Course B to their students and do not teach English at the primary level. The students of Navayug Vidyalayas have a choice to opt either of the two courses. The survey revealed that the number of the students desiring to opt for Course A is very small who are also discouraged because of the need for extra resources. The Navayug Vidyalayas, unlike the Government Schools, teach English at the primary level also but without any serious attention. A student failing to obtain the minimum marks in English is not detained in the same class.

Although Central Schools have adopted Course A for English language, they use National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) books (instead of main course books) for classes VI, VII and VIII which are not designed in line with the communicative approach. This has given rise to a very peculiar situation creating inconsistency between the teaching materials for classes IX and X and what the students are taught in the lower classes. Though Central Schools teach English at the primary level, again a student is not required to pass in English to be promoted to the upper class. This means that students keep on moving to upper classes without a sound base of English language. The Private Schools, on the other hand, follow Course A for English language and teach main course books even in lower classes. These main course books from private publishers contain extensive communicative language teaching materials.

The above factors observed are likely to reflect greatly in the teaching as well as learning of English in the various Senior Secondary Schools of Delhi. These factors point to a possible gap between theory and practice. How communicative is the English language classroom has to be ascertained by adopting a sound survey procedure.

#### *4.1 Interview*

The interview with the ESL teachers was conducted in several phases. First phase was restricted to developing rapport with the teachers and holding general discussions regarding the teaching methods used in the classrooms, attitude and behavior of their students, problems faced by them etc. In the subsequent phases more in-depth interviews with the teachers were conducted. Also, questionnaires were given to them and their responses taken. For a more authentic assessment of the gap between the theory and practice of communicative language teaching, it was essential to understand the views and attitudes of students as well. An interview with twenty students was conducted and their responses noted.

#### *4.2 Classroom Observation*

The observations in classrooms revolved around teaching methodology, communicative activities, use of first language in the teaching of second language, correction work, teacher's role, students participation, etc.

#### *4.3 Survey and Development of Attitude Scale*

A well structured questionnaire was designed to measure the attitude of teachers towards the communicative approach. The rating scale adopted in the questionnaire was based on the Likert technique of scale construction which is widely used method. The first job done was to frame the statements in such a way that favorable and unfavorable attitudes were distinguishable. The attitude statements were drafted after an elaborate research of the communicative approach as well as the interviews with the teachers and observations of their classrooms.

The first questionnaire consisted of 54 statements of which 32 were favorable and 22 unfavorable. Many statements having the same content were rephrased to determine which statement was the best in measuring the attitude. The statements were randomly sequenced.

Thirty English language teachers, who were non native speakers of English and working at different secondary schools of Delhi, were given the initial 54 statement scale. However, the responses were obtained from only 25 teachers. This was followed by an item analysis and calculation of correlations. To compute correlation, each respondent's score on each item was correlated with his/ her total score minus the score for the item in question. Afterwards, only those items which had the strongest correlations ( $r > 0.30$ ) were selected. On the basis of this criterion, 22 favorable statements and 19 unfavorable statements were identified having correlations over 0.30.

Finally, the 22 favorable statements were selected because of their small number. These statements fell into 6 groups of different thematic contents. From within these groups unfavorable statements with strong correlations were then selected. Amongst these 14 were favorable and 8 were unfavorable statements rendering a scale of 22 statements.

- 1) Teaching methodology used by the teachers (3 statements)
- 2) Group work/pair work (4 statements)
- 3) Quality and quantity of error correction (3 statements)
- 4) The role and contribution of learners in the learning process (7 statements)
- 5) The role of the teachers in the classroom (2 statements)
- 6) Place/importance of grammar (3 statements)

The next step was to determine the reliability of the study's attitude scale with the help of split-half method. The scale i.e. 22 statements was divided into two matched halves (11 statements each) and scores based on the initial sample's responses (30 respondents) of each half was correlated. The correlated split-half reliability was  $rw = 0.82$ .

The attitude scale was also distributed to 25 more English language teachers of different schools of Delhi. The split-half method was applied to their responses. The split-half reliability coefficient was  $rw = 0.87$ .

The scale's high level of internal consistency was established by 0.87 split-half reliability coefficient, since researchers such as Oppenheim (1966, 1992) have pointed out that most Likert scales achieve a reliability of 0.85. After discussions regarding the wordings of the statements with the Delhi teachers of English language, the 22 statements were selected to form the final version of the questionnaire. The second questionnaire with these 22 statements was canvassed again among 25 ESL teachers. In all, questionnaires were canvassed among fifty teachers and responses obtained from 50 teachers.

## 5. Findings

The findings which are based on the analysis of the questionnaire, observations and several rounds of formal and informal interviews with the teachers as well as the students are not distinct from the hypothesis "there is a likely gap between theory and practice of communicative language teaching". The survey has established that there are obvious discrepancies between how the teachers responded to the questionnaire and their classroom practice. These discrepancies were actually found out by close observations of the investigator within the classrooms.

### 5.1 Beliefs

The teachers hold different beliefs with regard to teaching methods of English. While most of the teachers interviewed expressed favorable attitude towards communicative approach, some of them were found to be stronger supporter of this method. Though the number of such supporters is small, their view on the method is that it is the only method for English language teaching and should be implemented universally. However, majority of the teachers opined that instead of using a common method of teaching, there should be freedom in using any method for a (section) of students which the teacher thinks is the most suitable method for that particular set (section) of students. One of the views expressed by many teachers is that unnecessary emphasis has been put on communicative language teaching and it should be used to a limited extent only. Further they opined that there should be a combination of other accepted methods of language teaching especially with Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). These teachers hold traditional views on language teaching method and they argue favorably for the grammar-translation method.

One interesting finding is that the teachers of Government Schools and Navayug Vidyalayas believe that language teaching should be done only through communicative approach and that this is the most effective approach. It is worthwhile remembering here that the implementation of communicative language teaching in these schools is minimal. These teachers say that despite their willingness to adopt communicative approach they cannot do it due to constraints like inadequate syllabus or teaching materials, students' lack of prerequisite proficiency or minimal level of language proficiency needed for communicative approach. Owing to these reasons, the teachers of these schools feel that communicative language teaching cannot be carried out well nor it can be effective. Rather it may prove to be counterproductive. No activities like pair work, group work, discussions in the classrooms are done by the teachers of these schools. Traditional grammar is taught through translation in the classrooms. The argument of the teachers is that mother tongue can be used in ESL classrooms because otherwise lot of time is wasted in explaining something which the students clearly do not comprehend. In such situation even the meaning of difficult words can be explained more easily by resorting to one or two

vernacular words. There are some teachers using communicative language teaching who if given a chance would like to teach grammar through translation.

As far as emphasis on grammar is concerned there are two opposite views. One group holds the view that grammar is not essential and language learning can take place through interaction without knowing the grammar. The other group, on the contrary, feels that grammar should not be left alone nor it should be taught in isolation. Rather grammar and interaction should go side by side. The role of grammar in learning of the language cannot be disregarded.

Teachers feel that it is better to do correction on individual basis with clearly defined criteria provided there is enough time which is not possible because of time constraints. They feel that they are responsible for their students' performance which depends a lot on the correction work done on individual basis. They feel that it is very difficult for a teacher not to correct a mistake on the spot during an activity. Still correction is rarely done at the time of group activity as it can affect the students' fluency which is the main purpose of the activity. One more thing that the teachers find difficult to handle is to stop the students from using their mother tongue during an activity. A vast majority of the teachers feel that oral communicative activities cannot be done regularly due to heavy amount of writing work to be completed in stipulated time. They would like the amount of written work to be reduced as it hampers the group activity, etc.

There are examples of teachers not practicing communicative language teaching in their classroom but holding favorable expressed attitude towards communicative approach. Teachers who teach English adopting the same old traditional ways of language teaching, i.e. teaching of structure, lexicon instruction, pattern drill, etc. and have little idea about communicative approach, also hold favorable expressed attitude towards it. Some other teachers who neither use nor see any need for using audio-visual aids in ESL classrooms also have a favorable expressed attitude towards it.

The survey brought to fore some apparently opposing views. Certain earlier studies also experienced such contradictions in views. For instance, the one done by Karavas (1996) says that a teacher may concur with two apparently contravening statements based on the opposing instructional concepts of teacher-directed and student-centred methods. But, this agreement may not be due to an absence of comprehension or an inconsistent attitude on their part, rather may be due to a consideration of teaching contexts in which both teacher-directed and student-centred practices have an important role to play (Karavas, 1996). However, we feel that the views like communicative language teaching deprived individual student and it is a complete failure prevail most likely due to the lack of understanding of the teachers for communicative language teaching.

In some schools teacher omit activities like pair work, group work fearing such activities may lead to the noisy scenes in the class. If at all they do these activities, it is done with an instruction to the students to work on their own without working in pair or a group. This may also be due to lack of time or lack of awareness of the importance of the activity.

## 6. Conclusion

Common experience is that any change in age old trends and traditions generates mixed reactions. Some look at it with suspicion, some feel apprehensive and uncomfortable, some become critical of it, some are indifferent towards it while some accept it wholeheartedly. There are some people who try to find a midway between established systems and the newly introduced systems. This is exactly the experience with regard to communicative language teaching which has been implemented in India.

Group activities which are one of the important activities of communicative language teaching are not commonly conducted even in schools where communicative language teaching is implemented. In most cases teachers rarely conduct group work or other communicative activities up to Class VII. Whatever activities are taken up, are mostly done at the higher levels (VIII to X) although there also mostly pair work is done as teachers find it to be more convenient because of the seating arrangement. The group activities are also avoided because the size of the classrooms is quite large and to conduct group activities or to monitor the class during this becomes a difficult task for the class teacher. Moreover, it creates noisy scenes within the classroom leading to discipline problems.

There are factors like students' level of proficiency, heavy amount of writing work, time constraint and teachers' fluency that cause hindrance to the implementation of communicative language teaching. The awareness of teachers with regard to communicative language teaching was also found to be low, although several workshops on communicative approach are organized per year for all schools which follow the communicative activities.

## 7. Suggestions and Recommendations

The most important finding of the survey is that there is obvious gap between theory and practice with regard to communicative language teaching. Hence the most important effort should be to reduce this gap and eventually fill the gap. It is therefore essential to identify various aspects of these gaps. The investigator has attempted to address this concern and put forth the following suggestions which could narrow the gaps.

- 1) One of the significant findings is that CLT coursework has not been adopted by all schools. Efforts must be made to implement CLT at all schools
- 2) In most cases the actual CLT courses are taught in class IX and X only. At the lower levels there is no uniformity with regard to the CLT curriculum. In such a situation, the learner as well as the teacher is faced with difficulties when CLT is suddenly introduced to them at the IX and X level. It is strongly advisable that this transition should be smoother and gradual. This could require introducing CLT from the lower levels
- 3) Barring a few, ESL teachers lack in training to impart CLT in the right spirit. This inadvertently inhibits the teachers from conducting the CLT activities in all prescribed ways. It is highly desirable that regular workshops on the job training courses are organized to keep the ESL teachers in tune with the latest developments, teaching methods etc. Regular workshops and seminars would be a constructive step in this direction. This may also entail budgetary provisions in all schools so that the teachers can participate in such activities
- 4) Presently the size of the classroom is quite large. This also is one of the deterrants in the implementation of CLT. The teachers tend to avoid conducting various communicative activities as it creates noisy scenes. To optimize the CLT teaching, it is necessary to scale down the size of the classes to such numbers which can be easily handled by the teachers. This will prove beneficial for the students as they will get the required attention of the teacher. It is understandable that bringing down the size of the classroom is not an easy proposition. However, our feeling is that due consideration must be given towards this issue
- 5) Presently the students are overburdened with heavy amount of writing work in stipulated time. This also creates problems for teachers to efficiently evaluate the writing work of each student affecting the overall quality of CLT. It is highly recommended to curtail such heavy writing work to such a level which can be efficiently managed by the teachers and optimally learned by the students.

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