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COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH IN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract : The Communicative Approach or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes the importance of language functions rather than focuses on grammar and vocabulary. The top ten principles of CLT are communicative interaction, meaningful practice, active involvement, positive reinforcement, choice of suitable materials, changes of pace and activity, making the teaching process enjoyable, teaching English in English, realization that mistakes are natural and that even beginners can understand when taught in the target language.

Key words: The Communicative Approach, Communicative Language Teaching, Sociolinguistic competence, Competences.

In 1970 CLT was first proposed in England. This methodology was regarded as revolutionary since it placed an essential emphasis on communication in language learning classrooms. The apparent popularity of CLT in the last thirty years or so, as well as the feasibility of implementing CLT in EFL contexts has accentuated the significance of the local needs and the conditions of the particular EFL contexts, and the benefits of the traditional methods of language teaching. And also some others have taken a strong position for adopting CLT in Asian countries.

There is substantial debate as to the appropriate ways of defining CLT, and no single model of CLT is collectively accepted as authoritative (McGroarty, 1984; Markee, 1997). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop learners' communicative competence.

CLT views language as system for the expression of meaning where the main function of language is to permit interaction and communication (Richard, 2001). William Littlewoods stated that CLT means to pay systematic attention to both functional and structural aspects of language merging this into a communicative view. There are two aspects of CLT: what to teach and how to teach. The 'what to teach' aspects of this approach gives more importance on language functions rather than grammar and vocabulary. The second aspect of 'how to teach' states that there should be "plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunities to use it" for the development of a student's knowledge and skills. CLT wants to involve students in real or realistic communication through different activities. In this case the accuracy of target language is less important than successful achievement of the communicative task (Harmer, 2001) in "approaches and methods in language teaching".

Richards and Rodgers (2001) summarized the communicative view of language as: language is a system for the expression of meaning, the primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication, the structure of language reflect its functional and communicative uses, the primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning.

So the communicative approach views language as a system through which the meaning is expressed perfectly. Its main function is to permit interaction and communication; the primary elements of language are not only grammatical and structural features but also the functional and communicative meaning. According to Piepho (1981) the objectives of CLT are; an integrative and content level: language as a means of expressions, a linguistic and instrumental level: language as a semiotic system and an object of learning, an effective level of interpersonal relationships and conduct: language as a means of expressing values and judgments about oneself and others, a level of individuals learning needs: remedial

learning based on error analysis, a general level of extra-linguistic goals: language learning within the school curriculum (Richards, 2001).

Role of the Teachers in CLT. There are quite a few roles for teachers in CLT which are determined by the view of CLT. According to Breen and Candlin in article “The essentials of a communicative curriculum in language teaching” there are two main roles of a teacher in CLT classrooms. The first role is to facilitate the communication process among all the students in the classroom, and between the students and the different type of activities and texts. Secondly, a teacher has to act as an independent participant within the learning teaching groups. The teacher is also expected to act as a resource, an organizer of resources, a motivator, a counselor, a guide and a researcher (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The role of Learners in CLT. As the importance in communicative language teaching on the process of communication rather than mastery of language forms, there are different roles of learners in classroom. The main role of learners is negotiating. They negotiate among themselves, the learning process and the objective learning. Learners should contribute as much as they gain, and thereby learn in an independent way. They interact within the groups and within the classroom.

Practices CLT in Various Countries. CLT is considered an approach rather than a method as its principles reflect a communicative view of language learning. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been incorporated in the English language syllabus in many countries. The teachers create a situation and set an activity in motion, but it is the learners themselves who are responsible for conducting the interaction to its conclusion. They are responsible managers of their own learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Learners also have important monitoring role which they may apply subjectively to their own language. The learner can provide feedback to others concerning his own interaction of the specific purpose of the curriculum. In a CLT class room situation, learners get opportunity to express their individuality as well as share their ideas and opinions. CLT believes

that “learners first, learning second” (Richards, 2001). It means that the learners engagement is a priority.

In Germany, language teaching methodologists took the lead in developing classroom materials that encouraged learner choice (Candlin, 1978). This was the formulation of grammar exercises in relation to social aspects.

In this framework, along with the growing popularity of CLT in most EFL countries, there have been many studies conducted on the feasibility of CLT innovation and potential problems in its use in EFL contexts such as China, Greece, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Vietnam and so on.

Ellis (1994) examined the suitability of the communicative approach in the Vietnamese context. He found that one of the main problems in using a communicative approach in Vietnam was that teachers were dependent on the inherent traditional teaching practices. In a similar study, Karavas-Doukas (1996) investigated teachers’ attitudes toward the use of communicative approach in Greece. It was reported that although the English curriculum in Greece was based on the premises of communicative language teaching, teachers showed a tendency to carry on the traditional teacher-oriented instruction style. The findings of this study suggested that teachers either did not understand or were unable to see the practical implications of the CLT principles. In another significant study, Li (1998) looked into Korean teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of CLT. The results of Li’s study confirmed that the teachers encountered difficulties in using CLT practices in their classes. The difficulties reported by the Korean teachers were divided into the following four categories: Difficulties caused by teachers: Deficiency in spoken English, Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence, Lack of training in CLT, Few opportunities for retraining in CLT, Misconceptions about CLT, Little time for and expertise in material development. Difficulties caused by students: Low English proficiency, Little motivation for communicative competence, Resistance to class participation. Difficulties caused by the educational system: Large classes, Grammar-based examinations,

Insufficient funding, Lack of support. Difficulties caused by CLT itself: CLT's inadequate account of EFL teaching, Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments (Li, 1998, p. 687). According to Li (1998), teachers were reluctant to implement CLT in their language classrooms due to these problems listed above. He claimed that in order for teachers to be willing to make use of CLT in EFL contexts, many adjustments must be made.

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