



The Communicative Approach To English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The **Communicative Approach** to English Language Teaching (ELT) is a methodology that emphasizes real-life communication and interaction as the primary goals of language learning. It was developed in the 1970s as a response to traditional grammar-focused teaching methods, which were often criticized for failing to produce fluent and confident speakers.

KEY WORDS: Communication, Language, Skills, Sub-Skills, Socialization, Teaching/Learning Process, Procedure, Activity

INTRODUCTION

The **Communicative Approach** (also known as Communicative Language Teaching or CLT) is a method of teaching English that prioritizes communication and interaction over rote memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary. Developed in response to traditional language teaching methods, it focuses on helping students use language meaningfully in real-life situations. This approach emerged in the 1970s as language educators realized that learners often struggled to apply their classroom knowledge in actual conversations. CLT shifts the emphasis from passive learning to active engagement, ensuring that students gain fluency and confidence in using the English language.

Key Principles of the Communicative Approach

1. Focus on Meaningful Communication

Unlike traditional approaches that focus on grammatical accuracy, CLT emphasizes the ability to communicate effectively. Instead of simply memorizing rules and vocabulary, learners practice using language in contexts that mirror real-world communication. The goal is for students to understand and be understood, even if they make errors. This principle helps build confidence and encourages language use in practical situations.

2. Use of Real-Life Situations

Lessons in the communicative approach are designed around real-life scenarios such as ordering food at a restaurant, asking for directions, or making a phone call. This ensures that students can use the language outside the classroom. Authentic materials such as news articles, videos, and social media posts may also be used to expose learners to understand how English is used in everyday contexts.

3. Interaction and Socialization

A core principle of CLT is that language learning happens best through interaction. Pair work, group discussions, and role-playing activities are commonly used to encourage active student participation. Through conversations and collaborative tasks, students practice listening, speaking, and responding in a natural way. This also helps them develop confidence in using the language in social and professional settings.

4. Emphasis on Fluency over Accuracy

While grammar and accuracy are important, CLT prioritizes fluency. This means that students are encouraged to speak freely without worrying too much about making mistakes. The idea is that fluency comes first, and accuracy can be improved over time through continuous exposure and practice. Teachers provide feedback but avoid excessive corrections that might discourage students from speaking.

5. Task-Based Learning

CLT often employs **task-based learning**, where students complete communicative tasks that require them to use language in meaningful ways. Examples of tasks include solving a problem, sharing opinions, writing emails, conducting interviews, or planning an event. These activities mirror real-life communication and help students develop the ability to express naturally.

6. Student-Centred Learning

Unlike teacher-centred methods where instructors dominate the lesson, CLT is student-centred. The teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding students through activities rather than directly delivering information. This encourages learners to take an active role in their learning process, engage in discussions, and develop critical thinking skills.

7. Integration of All Language Skills

In CLT, the four key language skills—**speaking, listening, reading, and writing**—are taught in an interconnected way rather than separately. For example, students might listen to a conversation, discuss its meaning, read a related article, and then write a response. This reflects how language is used in real life, where different skills are combined naturally in communication.

Advantages of the Communicative Approach

1. Encourages Confidence and Fluency

Since CLT emphasizes real-life communication, students gain confidence in expressing themselves. The focus on fluency helps them become comfortable, thus enabling them speak without the fear of making mistakes, which is crucial for real-world interactions.

2. Makes Learning Engaging and Interactive

The use of group work, role-plays, and problem-solving activities makes learning dynamic and enjoyable. Instead of passively listening to lectures, students actively participate in conversations and collaborate with peers, which helps retain their interest and motivation.

3. Helps Students Develop Practical Language Skills

By practising language in realistic contexts, students acquire practical skills that they can use in daily life, whether in personal, social, or professional settings. This makes the learning experience more meaningful and relevant to their needs.

4. Promotes Collaborative Learning and Social Interaction

Since students often work in pairs or groups, they not only develop communication skills in English but also teamwork and cooperation. This prepares them for future situations where effective interaction is essential, such as workplaces or international settings.

Challenges of the Communicative Approach

1. Requires More Classroom Management

Because CLT involves interactive and student-centred activities, teachers must manage discussions, group work, and classroom dynamics effectively. Ensuring that all students participate and stay focused can be challenging, especially in larger classes.

2. Can Be Difficult for Shy or Introvert Students

Some students, particularly those who are shy or lack confidence, may struggle to participate actively in communicative activities. Teachers need to create a supportive environment and use techniques to encourage hesitant learners to engage in conversations.

3. Teachers Need Specialized Training

CLT requires teachers to act as facilitators rather than just instructors, which means they must be skilled in designing communicative activities, managing classroom discussions, and providing constructive feedback. Teachers who are unfamiliar with this approach may need additional training to implement it effectively.

4. Potential Lack of Focus on Formal Grammar

Since CLT prioritizes fluency, there is a risk that students may not develop a strong understanding of grammar and writing conventions. To balance fluency and accuracy, teachers can incorporate grammar-focused activities without compromising communication-based learning.

Classroom Strategies and Lesson Plan Examples for the Communicative Approach

To effectively implement the **Communicative Approach** in English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers need to use interactive activities that promote real-world communication. Below are practical **classroom strategies** followed by **lesson plan examples** that align with CLT principles.

Classroom Strategies for the Communicative Approach

1. Role-Playing and Simulations

Students take on roles and act out real-life scenarios such as:

- Ordering food at a restaurant
- Booking a hotel room
- Attending a job interview
- Asking for directions

This method helps students practice spontaneous speech, gain confidence, and learn context-based vocabulary.

2. Information Gap Activities

Students work in pairs or groups, where each person has different information, and they must communicate to complete a task. Examples include:

- One student has a train schedule, and the other asks for departure times.
- A "detective" must ask questions to solve a mystery.
- One student describes a picture while another draws it.

3. Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Students complete meaningful tasks that require communication, such as:

- Planning a weekend trip using maps and schedules
- Creating a survey and interviewing classmates
- Writing and presenting a news report

These activities allow students to practice grammar, vocabulary, and fluency naturally.

4. Group Discussions and Debates

Students discuss topics, express opinions, and engage in debates. Examples:

- **Beginner level:** Talking about favourite hobbies, describing a city.
- **Intermediate level:** Discussing social media effects, environmental issues.
- **Advanced level:** Debating topics like "Is AI a threat to jobs?"

5. Storytelling and Picture Descriptions

Students narrate personal experiences, retell a short story, or describe a picture. This helps develop speaking and listening skills while encouraging creativity.

6. Authentic Materials

Using real-world materials enhances exposure to practical language. Examples:

- Watching news clips or YouTube videos and summarizing them
- Reading and discussing online articles, menus, or advertisements
- Listening to podcasts and answering comprehension questions

7. Interactive Games

- **Find Someone Who...** (Students ask classmates questions to find someone who matches a given description)
- **20 Questions** (One student thinks of an object, and others ask yes/no questions to guess what it is)
- **Charades** (Students act out words or phrases while others guess)

Lesson Plan Examples for the Communicative Approach: These strategies and lesson plans ensure engagement, fluency, and real-life application of English.

Lesson Plan 1: Ordering Food at a Restaurant (Beginner Level)

Objective: Students will practice ordering food in a restaurant setting.

Materials: Menu printouts role-play cards

Activities:

1. **Warm-up:** Discuss favourite foods (5 min).
 2. **Vocabulary Introduction:** Teach common restaurant phrases (e.g., "I'd like to order...") (10 min).
 3. **Role-play:** Students take turns being the customer and waiter (20 min).
 4. **Feedback and Discussion:** Teacher provides feedback; students reflect (10 min).
- Assessment:** Participation and use of correct phrases.

Lesson Plan 2: Planning a Trip (Intermediate Level)

Objective: Students will use travel-related vocabulary to plan a trip.

Materials: Travel brochures, maps, online booking websites

Activities:

1. **Discussion:** Students share dream destinations (10 min).
 2. **Group Task:** Each group plans a 3-day trip, deciding transportation, accommodation, and activities (20 min).
 3. **Presentation:** Groups present their travel plan (15 min).
 4. **Q&A Session:** Class asks follow-up questions (10 min).
- Assessment:** Ability to describe plans clearly and answer questions.

Lesson Plan 3: Debate on Social Media (Advanced Level)

Objective: Students will discuss the pros and cons of social media.

Materials: News articles on social media

Activities:

1. **Reading Activity:** Students read an article on social media impact (15 min).
 2. **Group Discussion:** Groups list advantages and disadvantages (15 min).
 3. **Debate:** Teams argue for or against social media (20 min).
 4. **Reflection:** Students write a short opinion piece (10 min).
- Assessment:** Clarity of arguments, participation, and written reflection.

Conclusion

The Communicative Approach has revolutionized English language teaching by making it more dynamic and learner-centred rather than rote memorization. By prioritizing real-life communication, it equips learners with the practical language skills they need to succeed in everyday interactions. While it comes with challenges, such as the need for classroom management and teacher training, its benefits make it one of the most effective and widely used language teaching methodologies today.

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