



***Teaching through the Adoption of the Communicative Approach: EFL
Students' Reflections on the Experience***

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Abstract:

This study intends to provide a deeper understanding about recent English teaching methodologies and how they can be integrated in the educational sphere. More specifically, this research work focuses on issues and classroom practices in relation to the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) including: how it can be adopted in the EFL setting? and how EFL students reflect towards it? The data of this research was collected through the use of qualitative reflective reports from a sample 31 third year students at the department of English, Guelma University. The obtained results revealed interesting findings in terms of favorable reflective perceptions and reactions from students' perspective.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching; methodologies; perceptions; reflection*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the modern globalized world, there is a growing need to communicate appropriately and efficiently especially by the use of the English language i.e. international language used worldwide. Besides, communication is deemed as one amongst 21st century skills. However, university EFL students still fail to communicate effectively or to achieve mastery of communicative competence. They might be found memorizing long lists of grammatical rules but when it comes to practice, they find themselves unable to successfully apply them. In response to that issue, the contemporary EFL methodologies have witnessed a necessary shift towards more communicative based teaching instructions. This fact increased the responsibility of today's EFL teachers to explore new ways on how to implement CLT in EFL context to foster their students' communicative competences and skills. Therefore, the preliminary goal of this article is to gain more insights into EFL students' reflective reactions regarding the integration of CLT activities in the EFL setting.

1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The concept "Communicative Language Teaching" or what can be alternatively called "Communicative Approach" can be defined differently by different researchers. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the communicative approach to language teaching refers to "an approach that aims to (a) make competence the goal of foreign language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (p. 155). Besides, Brown (2007) has offered his definition of CLT as "an approach to language teaching methodology that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task based activities, and communication for the real world, meaningful purposes" (p.378). Furthermore, CLT is more specifically defined as "a generalized 'umbrella' term to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students' ability to communicate in contrast to teaching which is aimed more at learning bits of language just because they exist without focusing on their use in communication" (Harmer, 2007: 70). To sum up, CLT is a contemporary method of language teaching that primarily focuses active learning, authentic use of the language and its communicative aspects and skills than linguistic forms.

Communicative Competence was an essential concept of CLT. Hymes (1972) has introduced the notion of "communicative competence" as an extension of Chomsky's "competence" (1965). According to him, the traditional concept was restricted in its view and was purely grammatical. Instead, he has suggested "communicative competence" to broaden its scope by stressing the importance of the concrete context to produce comprehensive utterances and reach appropriate communications.

Thereafter, in their contribution, Canale and Swain (1980) have elaborated the concept communicative competence and have offered a model framework consisting of four subcategories:

- Grammatical competence (ability to create grammatically correct utterances),
- Sociolinguistic competence (ability to produce sociolinguistically appropriate utterances),
- Discourse competence (ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances), and
- Strategic competence (ability to solve communication problems as they arise).

In reference to the features of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the most recognized ones have been proposed by Nunan (1991, p. 279):

- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
- An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.

- An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching:

In terms of CLT principles, Berns (1990, p. 104) has pointed out to eight core principles as follows.

- Language teaching is based on a view of language as communication. That is, language is seen as a social tool that speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone for some purpose, either orally or in writing.
- Diversity is recognized and accepted as part of language development and use in second language learners and users, as it is with first language users.
- A learner's competence is considered in relative, not in absolute terms.
- More than one variety of language is recognized as a viable model for learning and teaching.
- Culture is recognized as instrumental in shaping speakers' communicative competence, in both their first and subsequent languages.
- No single methodology or fixed set of techniques is prescribed.
- Language use is recognized as serving ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions and is related to the development of learners' competence in each.
- It is essential that learners be engaged in doing things with language – that is, that they use language for a variety of purposes in all phases of learning.

II. Research Methodology:

The following research question has been raised in this study:

What are EFL students' reflective perceptions regarding CLT implementation in EFL setting?

The aim of the current research is to probe into EFL students' perceived reflections regarding the incorporation of CLT based activities in classroom sessions. Besides, it attempts to present some CLT activities as contributing suggestions for language teachers in order to maximize their students' communicative opportunities.

This research study was carried out through a qualitative approach with the use of five based items of reflective reports administered to 31 EFL students at Guelma University. The obtained data were then qualitatively displayed and analyzed to gain more comprehensive understanding about the tackled topic.

III. Results and Discussion :

Question 1: How do you feel about today's activities?

- *"I can describe today's course as the best course. It is really helpful because it helped me understand my lectures well"*
- *"I have positive feeling towards it. I feel happy, positive, comfortable when I study it. It is a perfect course"*
- *"Today's course was extremely motivating and I really loved it. It just made me exited doing one task then another"*
- *"It was fun there is a movement I really like it"*
- *"I enjoyed it very much"*
- *"Today's course is with so much fun and enjoyable. The activities helped me to understand more"*
- *"it is so good and I enjoyed it"*
- *"it is very exiting I feel active and very relaxed because we broke the routine"*
- *"it is active and enjoyable and I liked it"*
- *"the session was really interesting and useful"*
- *"the session was good I feel happy and amused with my classmate"*

- *"I found the activities very helpful and effective I had fun and I went back to my childhood"*
- *"I feel very active and satisfied about today's activities"*

In response to the first reflective question, almost all students agree that it was an interactive session and that the use of communicative based activities have offered a comfortable stimulating setting. Besides students have highlighted that the adopted CLT tasks has been found to be beneficial because it succeeded to provoke their attention, foster their active learning, enhance their motivation, promote their engagement, and facilitate their comprehension. The responses depict that our sample students have demonstrated positive feelings (enjoyment, fun, happiness, and relaxation, amusement) and high degree of appreciations and satisfaction. This can approve that CLT approach has met the levels of expectations of our sample students.

Question 2: What activity do you like most? Why?

- *"the activity I liked most is picture strip story because I like the stories that hold moral lessons that brings back my childhood memories"*
- *"Because it was funny and exiting"*

Based on the students' replies, the use of stories is prioritized over the other activities because they provoke their curiosity and excitement. Similarly, they help them to retrieve their childhood memories and they offer them with moral lessons that can benefit from them in their life journey.

- *"I liked the interviews and dialogues between me and my classmates activity because it gives more freedom to speak out your opinions"*
- *"Makes me more active and creative not passive it also helps me practice my pronunciation"*

It has been pinpointed that the use of interview and dialogues has been also privileged because they offers them with extra opportunities to practice their speaking skills and therefore to achieve more fluency. This reflects a great deal of students' awareness in relation to learner-centered paradigm.

- *"The activity I liked most is role playing because it gives you the ability to speak out and improve your communication skills"*
- *"role play is the activity I liked most because it is fun"*

Role-plays have been also chosen because they help to enhance communication skills and oral abilities. This can reflect students' awareness that oral mastery cannot be achieved without much practice. It is also cited that role-plays is considered as a funny entertaining activity. The justification for the latter claim can be correlated with the fact that role-plays can help students to overcome their psychological barriers such as anxiety and fears of language production and by that transform the negative feeling to positive ones.

- *"My favorite part is games because it helped me to overcome my fear of stage and facing the audience and I got entertained by the performance of other students"*
- *"I liked communicative games because they are fun and raised more competition"*

It is additionally admitted that the activity related to games is funny and entertaining and they raised a high degree of competition between students and their classmates.

- *"I liked the part of group work when we worked together in group, and each one memorizes a sentence from the paragraph then dictates it to the member of his group to write it. It was fun and useful. The funny part of the activity lies in the stress and competition and we used our memorization skills"*

In its turn, groups work dictation activity has received a great deal of appreciation from the part of learners. This can denote its role in the stimulation and the activation of memorization skills, as well as, learners' deep consideration for collaborative-based learning.

- *"I Liked them all because we can take advantages of them in our learning as students and we can benefit from them when we become future teachers"*

Many students have given a due attention to all activities. According to them, on the long run and at the level of their long-term goals they can take advantage of them in their future career when they will be teachers.

Question 3: What activity do you like least? Why?

- *"There is no part that I did not like course all of it was so enjoyable"*
- *"All in all were good and interesting"*
- *"In fact there is no bad activity"*

When dealing with the third reflective question and on the basis on the obtained qualitative data, students' dislikes can be grouped as the following:

a. Low performance in role-plays: This reflects that the learner conducted a type of self-assessment and evaluated his/her oral performance as being unsatisfactory or relatively low in achievement.

- *"The role play was the one I liked the least because I did not perform well on it. I regret that"*

b. Interview and role-play activity: this might denote a type of introvert students that might give much preference to individually- based learning tasks rather than pair and group work

- *"The activity of the interview because I felt myself passive with no creativity and the questions were regular"*
- *"The activity of the interview was less interesting than the others because I would prefer do it with the teacher rather than my classmate"*
- *"role play because I hate presenting in front of others"*

c. Spiral Reading Activity: Because it is purely based on grammar, the category of students who reported that they dislike it might suffer from Low grammatical proficiency and lack the mastery of grammatical competence.

- *"the circle paragraph because I hate grammar"*
- *"selecting verbs from the cycle because it was somehow difficult"*

d. Public speaking that might be perceived as a heavy burden especially for shy or introvert learners:

- *"role play because I hate presenting in front of others"*

e. Lack of openness and flexibility to all what is new in their learning might sound unusual and somehow frustrating:

- *"the spiral text" because it was hard to me to read it because of its unusual form"*

f. Consideration of age as a constraint factor for story based activities more appropriate for adult learners:

- *"I did not like the picture strip story because I did not like stories"*
- *"Picture Strip Story is the activity I liked the least because in my opinion it fits more young learners than adults"*

g. Resistance to learner-centered approaches and the aspect of Teacher dependence:

- *"The activity of the interview was less interesting than the others because I would prefer do it with the teacher rather than my classmate"*

By the end, it is worthy to point out that only few respondents answered that question and expressed their dislikes; however, the rest of them who constitute the majority of the students are still with and in favor to all the aforementioned CLT tasks and activities.

Question 4: What modifications or changes do you suggest for future lessons?

- *"I suggest nothing the session was perfect"*
- *"No everything is ok"*
- *"I am satisfied and I do not have additional comments or suggestions"*
- *"nothing seriously it was an amazing experience"*
- *"I suggest adding like such activities for future sessions to facilitate understanding"*
- *"I suggest to focus more on practice and activities after each theoretical lesson whether it has to do with this module or the others"*
- *"More activities like the ones of today"*
- *"I suggest to focus more on pair and group work because I like them"*
- *"I would change the group I worked with but the lesson itself was fine"*

In response to the fourth question, students have expressed their overall satisfaction. They have gone further to say that it was an amazing learning experience. Their perceptions were in favor to all the activities being selected and all the lesson procedures being followed by the teacher. all were according to their expectations. They suggest to keep the practical lesson as it is without making any change or modification. Others have reported for the generalization of such tasks over all the other modules. They stressed on giving more focus and much importance to the inclusion of practice along with pair and group work for each lecture.

Question 5: Do you have further comments or suggestions that you would like to add?

- *"I suggest using movies and comedies as well as discussions about literature and literary works to enhance learners' speaking and listening skills"*
- *"I like today's activities and I want to generalize it on all the other modules in the future"*
- *"I suggest to do like these activities and techniques with each lesson"*
- *"I suggest to switch between auditory and visual activities"*

As far as students' suggestions are concerned, our respondents have proposed to devote extra efforts and to shed more light on the following elements: (1) Integrating literature, literary works, resources and activities while teaching the other modules especially when it has to do with those which ultimate aim is to foster learners speaking and listening skills, (2) Involving extra activities and additional CLT based tasks in the coming session or even when teaching other university modules, (3) switching between auditory and visual activities so that to fulfill the needs of all learners.

IV. Conclusion:

This qualitative research study has illustrated students' perceived reflections towards the adoption of CLT. The research results revealed that students consider CLT as an effective instructional method that provided learners with opportunities to communicate appropriately and correctly in the target language. The study findings affirmed the students' favorable perceptions and positive reflections towards the communicative approach and the various communicative classroom activities including dialogues, stories, games, and roleplays. The majority of the students have realized that such activities succeeded in raising their interest and motivation, encouraging their participation and engagement, fostering their collaboration and cooperation, and enhancing the accuracy and fluency of their oral skills.

In light of the findings of this research, the following recommendations can be presented:

- EFL teachers and language educators should develop a solid conceptual understanding of the communicative approach including its importance, principles, and goals

- Raising learners awareness that CLT requires a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction to empower learners take responsibility for their learning
- Raising teachers awareness on how to practically improve their students' communicative competence and target communicative abilities
- Enhancing instructors communicative teaching skills with specialized in-service training programs
- The selection of the language content and the instructional activities should fit learners' needs, interests, and level
- it is recommended for teachers to use authentic materials as engaging resources to ensure CLT effective implementation
- Maximizing students' speaking opportunities by the use of various CLT techniques such as: debates, dialogues, role-plays, and games. In the following a sample of multiple CLT activities and techniques are presented:

Activity One: Competitive Dictation

(1) There are three reasons why I want to learn English. (2) One reason is that English has become an international language.(3) It is now used by most international companies, including the company where I work, for business communication.(4) Another reason why I want to learn English is so that I can travel to English-speaking countries. (5) The United States, England, Australia and many other countries all use English as their primary language. (6) Finally, I want to learn English because I plan to move to the U.S. in the future. (7) I will become a manager for my company soon. (8) For all these reasons, I am very excited about learning English.

- The paper is stuck on the teacher's desk or on the wall far away from the students
- The students have to work together as a team in order to memorize and transcribe the required paragraph correctly
- The paragraph is attached on the teacher's desk
- Each student must memorize one sentence to dictate for the rest of the team, if he can not remember it perfectly he must go back to read it again
- The first team to finish scores the best and they check it with the teacher by comparing their answer with the original paragraph. If there is no mistake and all is correct they will be the winning team.

Activity Two: Role-play

- Setting 1: A phone Call
- Characters: two friends
- Topic: inquiring about teacher's handouts and how to prepare for exams

- Setting 2: At a store
- Characters: mother & daughter
- Topic: shopping for a dress for a wedding party

- Setting 3: living room
- Characters: father & son
- Topic: advice for the son about the importance of the study

- Setting 4: At the restaurant
- Characters: waiter & customer
- Topic: asking for food

- Setting 5: At the classroom
- Characters: teacher & student

- Topic: student complaining about his/her mark

- Setting 6: A balcony
- Characters: two neighbors
- Topic: gossiping about their children and other neighbors

- Setting 7: At the hotel
- Characters: servant & customer
- Topic: booking a room

Activity Three: Picture Strip Story



