

The Contribution of Using Communicative Approach in Improving Speaking Skills among EFL Learners

(A case study of secondary level students El Fasher Locality)

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the contribution of using Communicative Approach in improving speaking skills among EFL learners. The researcher adopted a mixed method: experimental and the descriptive analytical methods. The researcher conducted speaking ability test (Pretest and post test) for students and a questionnaire for English language teachers for collecting data from the participants in secondary level. The participants were 34 students and 67 teachers of English language in the secondary level. The results of the study showed that, communicative language teaching approach improves EFL learners' speaking skills. For example students' achievement in pronunciation: (excellent) in Post=04.41%, Pre=0% and Difference=4.41%; (very good) in Post= 14.47%, Pre= 0% and Difference=14.47%; (medium) in Post=26.47%, Pre=4.41% and Difference=22.06%; (weak) in Post=50%, Pre= 83.83% and Difference=33.83% finally (very weak) in Post=4.41%, Pre=11.77% and Difference= 7.36%. Results also showed that communicative language teaching motivates students, develops good attitude on students towards English language learning and reduces shyness of students. Finally, the study has come out with important recommendations for improving speaking skills in the secondary level.

Keywords: EFL, communicative approach, speaking skills, communicative activities.

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching and learning have the aim of enabling students to use English for communication and as a tool for going further in their studies. Nonetheless, learners in EFL context do not use the language in authentic situations. Consequently, they are unable to communicate appropriately and correctly. However, in foreign language teaching and learning, the ability to speak is the most essential because it is basic for communication, (Oradee, 2012). Many language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. They regard speaking as the most important skill, that they can acquire, and they assess their progress in terms of their achievements in spoken communication. However, students do not get any chance either in the class room or outside to speak English. Speaking is not a part of our examinations. Learning to speak also demands a lot of practice and attention, (Bashir et al., 2012). Cannel and Swain (1980) confirmed that, unless communicative approach is adopted for the classroom, there is little reason to expect that students acquire even basic communication skills in the second language. According to Basta (2011) “the basis of this popular approach to language teaching (CLT) is that it differentiates between knowing various grammatical rules and being able to use these rules effectively when communicating.” Amengual-Pizarro (2007) stated that, Communicative methodology has recently influenced second language education greatly. This pedagogical orientation recognizes the importance of classroom communication and discussion. Therefore, the ability to communicate in the second language has become the explicit goal of most teaching programmes.

Despite the main aim of learning English language is to speak it, the majority of the students in the secondary level schools in North Darfur State- El Fasher Locality are unable to speak and use English language properly neither in the classroom nor in the real life situations. On the other hand, the teachers are still use the old methods in teaching English in their classrooms such as grammar translation and audio-lingual, which do not expose the students to natural use of language. Thus, the researcher has tried to investigate the contribution of Communicative Approach in improving speaking

skills among EFL learners in the secondary level schools in North
Darfur State- El Fasher Locality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Skills

Speaking is considered naturally the most important of all the four language skills because it can distinguish the correctness and language errors that a language learner makes, (Khamkhien, 2010). The mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second language or foreign language learners. So, learners often measure their success in language learning and the effectiveness of their English course on the idea of how much they feel they have progressed in their spoken language proficiency (Richards, 2008). Many linguistics and ESL/EFL teachers agree on that students learn to speak in the second language by interacting in it, (Shrouf, 2001).

History of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

According to Oxford et al. (1989), the failure of the Audio-lingual Method and the Grammar Translation Method to foster real communication skills caused language instruction specialists to search for more effective ways to teach. This search led to the development of the communicative approach in Britain in the 1970s. This approach, which has since spread to many parts of the world, focuses on actively developing competence in understanding and communicating meaning.

CLT Implications for Methodology

Richards (2006, pp.12-13) briefed that, since the inception of CLT rethinking not only included syllabuses but also included methodology. It claimed that learners learn a language via process of communication in it, and that communication is meaningful to the learner to provide him with the better opportunity for learning than the grammar-based approach. The principles of the communicative language teaching methodology are summarized as below:

- 1- Make real communication the focus of language learning.

- 2- Provide opportunities for learner to experiment and try what they know.
- 3- Be tolerant of learner`s errors as they indicate that learner is building up his/her communicative competence.
- 4- Provide opportunities for learners to develop fluency and accuracy.
- 5- Link skills such as reading, speaking and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world.
- 6- Let students induce or discover grammar rules.

Teaching Speaking within a Communicative Competence Framework

Richards (2008) summarized that, approaches to teaching speaking in ELT have been more strongly influenced by fads and innovations rather than teaching listening. “Speaking” in traditional methodologies usually meant repeating after the teacher, memorizing a dialogue, or responding to drills, all of which reflect the sentence-based view of proficiency spread in the audio-lingual and other drill-based or repetition based methodologies of the 1970s. The emergence of communicative language teaching in the 1980s led to changed views of syllabuses and methodology, which are continuing to shape approaches to teaching speaking skills today. Grammar based syllabuses were replaced by communicative ones built around notions, functions, skills, tasks, and other non-grammatical units of organization. Fluency became a goal for speaking courses and this could be developed through the use of information-gap and other tasks that required learners to try real communication, in spite of their limited proficiency in English. Enhancing that, learners should develop communication strategies and participate in negotiation of meaning, both of which were considered crucial to the development of oral skills.

According to Banciu & Jireghie (2012), communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that evoke communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. Unlike the audio-lingual method of language teaching, which relies on repetition and drills, the communicative approach can leave students in expectation to the outcome of a class exercise, which

will vary according to their reactions and responses. The real-life simulations change from day to day. So, students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics. Harmer (1991) as cited in (O'sullivan, 2001) explained that, the approach is based on the assumption that students can more easily develop language skills if the language has relevance for their lives and if they are given enough opportunity to practice those skills with their peers. The focus is on language as a means of communication' and 'great emphasis is placed on training students to use language for communication.

Communicative Activities for Developing Speaking Skills

Communicative language teaching uses various types of classroom activities with the purpose of developing learners speaking skills. Banci and Jieghie (2012) indicated that, Classroom activities maximize opportunities for learners to use the target language in a communicative way for meaningful activities. The emphasis lies on "meaning" (messages they are creating or task that they are completing) rather than "form" (correctness of language and language structure) - as in first language acquisition. Here are some activities:

Games

The main purpose of using games in English classes is to practise students' different skills, especially their communicative ability. Zhu (2012) summarized eight types of games discussed below:

1. Guessing Games

Guessing games are generally liked by students of all ages because they combine language practice with fun and excitement. The basic rule of guessing games is that one person knows something that another one wants to find out, (Zhu, 2012).

1.1. Picture Games:

Picture games include several types, (Zhu, 2012):

- 1- Comparing and contrasting pictures;
- 2- Considering differences or similarities;

- 3- Considering possible relationships between pictures, such as narrative sequence;
- 4- Describing key features so that someone else may identify them or represent them in a similar way;

1.2. Making a Story According to the Given Picture

Most of these picture games involve the learners in the relatively free use of all the language at their command and at the same time give them the opportunity to practice their speaking and listening, (Zhu, 2012).

1.3. Sound Games

Sound effects of people, places and actions impress listeners' minds. Listeners are demanded to contribute through the imagination, because it leads to individual interpretations which mean that the listeners can exchange their view points and express opinions and ideas. This kind of games can stimulate students' imagination and thinking, and offer them a chance to practise their listening and speaking. Students can make guess at the object described by sound, or make dialogue or a story, (Zhu, 2012).

1.4. Mime

Mimes can be done in pairs, groups or even by the whole class. One side has to perform the mimes for the other side so that the answer can be found. Miming trains the students' skill of observation and improvisation. It emphasizes the importance of gesture and facial expression in communication, (Zhu, 2012).

1.5. Fact-finding Games

This mainly deals with general knowledge and is a very practical exercise. There is something important happening every day, so the students can be asked what happened on a day in history. Then further details can be asked. The students can discuss in pairs or groups in order to find much more information. So, the students have had a chance to really think about what they know about that day, (Zhu, 2012).

1.6. Debates

In this activity, there are two sides, one supports the idea and the other opposes it for a given topic. Then, they argue giving their evidence. The aim of this activity is to get the students to talk and stimulate their interest and competitive spirit. Such activities make the students think about their values and priorities and improve their conversation and enhance fluency, (Zhu, 2012).

1.7. Jigsaw Games

Each participant in a jigsaw task has one part of a solution, which may be a story, a factual text or a picture. They are equally important. They should work together to fit their pieces together to find the solution. This game enhances co-operation and mutual acceptance within the group. Participants in this game have to do a lot of talking before they are able to fit the pieces together in the right way, (Zhu, 2012).

1.8. Role plays

Role plays often consist of short scenes, which can be realistic or imaginative. One easily-obtained role play is from the text, which may be actual role play material. After learning the text, students can be asked to perform it. This game can improve students` oral performance and help them understand what they have learned easily. Furthermore, role plays are useful for generating free expression and the feeling of spontaneity in the language classroom, (Zhu, 2012).

2. Using Dialogues

Ahmed and Alfaki (2007) confirm that, dialogues are certainly the most natural form of language practice. This is because most real communication tasks are practiced orally, in the form of conversation between two or more people. So, dialogues provide meaningful communicative situations and can be used in all stages of a lesson.

3. Discussion

Shrouf (2001) explains that, a discussion can be held for various reasons: arrive to conclusion, share ideas about an event or find

solutions in discussion groups. The teacher should choose easy, understandable, interesting, authentic and essential topics that students can discuss or talk about especially in the target language. The teacher has to set the purpose of the discussion in advance.

4. Simulations

Shrouf (2001) argues that simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more detailed. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she or he brings a microphone to sing and so on.

5. Information Gap

Shrouf (2001) illustrates that, in this activity, students work in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.

6. Brainstorming

Shrouf (2001) highlights that; students can produce ideas on a given topic in a limited time. The brainstorming is effective whether it is individual or group brainstorming and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good features of brainstorming are that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to share new ideas.

7. Storytelling

Shrouf (2001) posits that, students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each class session, the

teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening.

8. Interviews

Shrouf (2001) explains that, Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various characters. The teacher provides the student with the rubrics and types of questions they can ask, but the students prepare their own questions of the interview. Interviews help the students practise speaking inside and outside the classroom. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Finally, students can interview each other and "introduce" his or her partner to the class.

9. Story Completion

Shrouf (2001) indicated that, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine before coming to class, and then they report to their friends what they have found as the most interesting news in the classroom. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class.

10. Picture Narration

Shrouf (2001) indicated that, this activity is based on several sequential pictures. Students are asked to tell the story depending on the sequential pictures the rubrics provided by the teacher. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use while narrating.

11. Picture Description

Ahmed and Alfaki (2007) claimed that, pictures offer a fertile source of speculation, anticipation and oral discussion. They encourage students to initiate the language and use it for themselves to make their own suggestions, reactions, rejections and personal comments. Students are asked to identify the unknown aspects of the picture which are implied but not seen.

12. The Use of Music

Failoni (1993) claims, “the use of music in the foreign language classroom offers a unique approach to enhance students` awareness of another culture, and also can aid in the practice of communication skills”. Paquette and Rieg (2008) argue that, music can transfer classrooms into positive learning atmosphere where children progress academically, socially, and emotionally.

Fisher (2001) states that, Literacy achievement data suggests music had a positive effect on oral language and reading scores.

13. Songs

Paquette and Rieg (2008) argue that, songs may be used for the presentation and/or practice phase of language lessons. They can be used to teach a variety of language skills, such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, and parts of speech. Stress, rhythm, and intonation can be presented through songs as well. Songs can be used to practice and reinforce consonant sounds. Songs for pronunciation include Mary Had a Little Lamb to practice on the /l/ sound or Row, Row, Row, Your Boat to practice the /r/ sound.

14. The Use of Audiovisual (aids)

Katamadze (2017) argues that, developments in information technology have impacted all fields of our life within the first quarter of the 21st century and this has also apparent influence on education and led to innovations in English language teaching and learning process. The technology is important because it encourages and motivates students to use the language orally and develop their foreign language speaking skills.

Materials and Methods

Method

The researcher used a mixed method to conduct this study. So, he adopted the descriptive analytical and experimental methods to conduct this study.

The Sample of the Study

The sample of this study was 101 subjects: 34 secondary- school students and 67 teachers of English language in the secondary level.

The sample from the students was 34 EFL grade three secondary level students, who were selected randomly from two classrooms (17 students from each class) at El fajr Secondary school for boys (a public school). However, the sample from teachers of English was 67 teachers of English language (47 male and 20 female) with different experience. They were chosen from 23 secondary schools (4 private 19 public) from North Darfur State- El fasher Locality to rate the questionnaire.

Procedures of Data Collection

The researcher conducted Speaking Ability Test (pre-test and post-test) for grade three secondary students in order to identify the speaking mistakes they made and the contribution of Communicative Approach to their speaking skills. The pupils did the test in pairs using a role-play technique. The students played the roles using rubrics which told each one what to do at any phase of the conversation. The researcher recorded the conversations so that it should be analyzed and scored later. The test was scored by using rrating scores of oral test by Higgs and Clifford (1982), which depends on the five components of speaking proficiency: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension and fluency.

Tools of the Study

Test scoring

The test was scored by the researcher and an inter-rater, who was ELT expert. So, there will be the average of the scoring of the pretest and posttest by the researcher and inter-rater.

The researcher also administered a questionnaire for teachers of English language in the secondary level. The questionnaire composed of 30 items that were divided into two sections: Section one items from 1 to 15 dealt with teachers` awareness of the implementation of CLT features, whereas section two (items 16 to 30) dealt with the potential problems that faced them to implement CLT.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze and the data that have been collected for this study by Speaking Ability Test and teachers` questionnaire.

Results

The results of the data collected from the speaking ability test (pretest and post test) are presented below:

Table (1): Pretest average results

Table (1) shows students` average scores in the pretest as rated by the researcher and inter-rater. The number of the students was 34 as follows:

component	excellent	Very good	medium	weak	Very weak
pronunciation	0%	0%	4.41%	83.83%	11.77%
grammar	0%	0%	2.94%	82.36%	14.71%
vocabulary	0%	0%	4.41%	85.30%	10.30%
comprehension	0%	0%	8.82%	73.53%	17.65%
fluency	0%	0%	2.94%	67.88%	29.41%

Table (2): Post test average results analysis

Table (2) shows students` average scores in the post test as rated by the researcher and inter-rater as follows:

component	excellent	Very good	medium	weak	Very weak
pronunciation	04.41%	14.71%	26.47%	50%	4.41%
grammar	2.94%	10.30%	29.41%	51.47%	5.88%
vocabulary	2.94%	22.06%	23.53%	45.59%	5.88%
comprehension	7.35%	14.72%	26.47%	45.59%	5.88%
fluency	2.94%	5.88%	32.35%	52.94%	5.88%

The Question of the study

Q.1-What is the contribution of the Communicative Approach to speaking skills of EFL learners in the secondary level schools?

The “Only” Hypothesis of the study

H.1-The communicative approach improves EFL learners` speaking skills at schools of secondary level.

The results of the pretest and post test are interpreted below:

1. Pronunciation

The average percentage of excellent students in the pretest was 0% increased to 4.41% in the post test the difference was 4.41%.

The average percentage of very good students in the pretest was 0% increased to 14.47 % in the post test the difference was 14.47 %.

The average percentage of medium students in the pretest was 4.41 % increased to 26.47% in the post test the difference was 22.06%.

The average percentage of weak students in the pretest was 83.83% reduced to 50 % in the post test the difference was 33.83 %.

The average percentage of very weak students in the pretest was 11.77% reduced to 4.41% in the post test the difference was 7.36 %.

The result interpreted above has proved that teaching student speaking skills using communicative language teaching approach improves students` performance in pronunciation.

2. Grammar

The average percentage of excellent students in the pretest was 0% increased to 2.94% in the post test the difference was 2.94%.

The average percentage of very good students in the pretest was 0% increased to 10.30% in the post test the difference was 10.30%.

The average percentage of medium students in the pretest was 2.94% increased to 29.41% in the post test the difference was 26.47%.

The average percentage of weak students in the pretest was 82.36 % reduced to 51.47% in the post test the difference was 33.83 %.

The average percentage of very weak students in the pretest was 14.71 % reduced to 5.88% in the post test the difference was 8.83 %.

As explained above that students performance in grammar has improved due to teaching them through communicative language teaching approach.

3. Vocabulary

The average percentage of excellent students in the pretest was 0% increased to 2.94% in the post test the difference was 2.94%.

The average percentage of very good students in the pretest was 0% increased to 22.06% in the post test the difference was 22.06%.

The average percentage of medium students in the pretest was 4.41 % increased to 23.53 % in the post test the difference was 19.12 %.

The average percentage of weak students in the pretest was 85.30 % reduced to 45.59 % in the post test the difference was 39.71 %.

The average percentage of very weak students in the pretest was 10.30 % reduced to 5.88 % in the post test the difference was 4.42 %.

The result of the students illustrated earlier has assured that there is improvement in their vocabulary as a result of teaching them through communicative language teaching approach.

4. Comprehension

The average percentage of excellent students in the pretest was 0% increased to 7.35% in the post test the difference was 7.35%.

The average percentage of very good students in the pretest was 0% increased to 14.72% in the post test the difference was 14.72 %.

The average percentage of medium students in the pretest was 8.82% increased to 26.47% in the post test the difference was 17.65%.

The average percentage of weak students in the pretest was 73.53% reduced to 45.59% in the post test the difference was 27.59.

The average percentage of very weak students in the pretest was 17.65% reduced to 5.88% in the post test the difference was 11.77 %.

The result of students in the pretest and the post test indicated that they their comprehension has increased in the post test resulting from teaching the students by using communicative language teaching approach.

5. Fluency

The average percentage of excellent students in the pretest was 0% increased to 2.94% in the post test the difference was 2.94%.

The average percentage of very good students in the pretest was 0% increased to 5.88% in the post test the difference was 5.88%.

The average percentage of medium students in the pretest was 2.94% increased to 32.35% in the post test the difference was 29.41%.

The average percentage of weak students in the pretest was 67.88% reduced to 52.94 % in the post test the difference was 14.94 %.

The average percentage of very weak students in the pretest was 29.41 % reduced to 5.88 % in the post test the difference was 23.53 %.

Based on the result of the pretest and the post test the students` ability in fluency has become better in the post test after teaching them using communicative language teaching approach.

Accordingly using communicative language teaching approach in teaching speaking skills in the secondary level improves pupils` Speaking ability.

Previous studies

Oradee (2012) investigated developing speaking skills using three communicative activities (Discussion, Problem-Solving and Role-Playing). The sample group consisted of 49 students at a secondary school in Udon Thani. The design of the research was a mixed method. The research instruments were 8 lesson plans, an English speaking ability test and an attitude questionnaire. The results showed that, students` English speaking abilities after using the three communicative activities were significantly higher than before using the three communicative activities.

Nurhyati (2011) studied teaching speaking skills through Communicative language teaching. The study aimed at improving speaking skills through communicative language teaching. The method used for the study was experiment. The subjects were 50 students chosen randomly. The instruments administered were observation and test .Results show that there was improvement in the students` speaking skills by using communicative language teaching approach.

Osman (2002) conducted a study entitled “Stimulation of Oral Communication in EFL: A study of English Language Majors in Four Sudanese Universities.” The sample of the study consisted of 203 students in four Sudanese universities and 50 teachers. Five instruments were used for data collection: students` and teachers` questionnaire, oral interview, classroom observation and English language syllabi. The findings showed that students` reluctance was due to the following reasons: 1- Lack of proper stimulation based on interesting authentic auditory and visual contexts. 2- Poor interactive linguistic input. 3- Lack of task-based, brain- storming and out of

class activities.4- Large classes and teacher centered model of instruction.5- lack of language laboratories and integrated syllabi.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that communicative language teaching approach is an effective approach to solve the dilemma of deficiency in speaking skills, which the secondary level students have been suffering from. This approach also, solves many problems related to students` such as: lack of motivation, negative attitude towards English language learning and hesitation in using the language inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, communicative language teaching approach has its own syllabus that provides the students with the required speaking inputs that help hem develop and enrich their vocabulary, improve their pronunciation, comprehension and fluency by exposing them to the different types of communication strategies.

Recommendations

- 1- Communicative language teaching approach should be adopted in secondary level schools to improve students` speaking skills.
- 2- Teachers of English language in the secondary level should be trained on communicative language teaching approach methodology.
- 3- The current secondary level syllabus should be supplemented to satisfy the requirements of communicative language teaching approach to provide enough input to improve students` speaking ability.
- 4- Schools should be provided with aids and authentic materials that help teachers use communicative language teaching approach.
- 5- There should be language laboratory as to enrich linguistic environment for students in schools.

Suggestions for further studies

Based on the results of the study, the researcher suggests the following studies to be conducted in the future to solve the current problems:

- 1- Teaching other language skills through communicative approach.
- 2- The impact of effective teaching on students` achievement in English Language.
- 3- Investigating the use of technology in enriching the linguistic environment to EFL learners.
- 4- The significance of curriculum on providing linguistic input EFL learners.
- 5- The impact of EFL teachers` training to upgrade their performance and enhancing students` achievement.

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