

THE USE OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE BY TEACHERS OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN BENGKALIS

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Abstract: *This study aimed to find out to what extent the use of communicative approach in the teaching of English as a foreign language and the hindrances to the use of the approach by teachers of senior high schools in Bengkalis. Descriptive research design was used in this study. This study was done to see the phenomenon of lack of communication skill in English at the number of senior high school graduation. It might be caused of inappropriate approach applied at senior high school. This study found that most teachers strongly agreed that their role is as a facilitator. Furthermore, most teachers indicated that their class is more student centered than teacher- centered, the teacher is just as a facilitator in the classroom. This study could be used as empirical data for further research and as a review for the stockholders in making decision. Finally, this study could contribute to improve the senior high school graduation ability in English.*

Key words: *Communicative Approach, Language Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

English language has unmistakably achieved status as the world's lingua franca through globalization. English is now the official or dominant language for two billion people in at least 75 countries. According to the British Council, speakers of English as a second language probably outnumber those who speak it as a first language, and around 750 million people are believed to speak English as a foreign language. English is the most common language to communicate scientific,

technological, academic, and international trade information. English is clearly the world's lingua franca, but how did it get that way? Part of the reason is the feedback loop driving its history - a dynamic which may serve to illustrate how globalization often is the result of a natural course of events: before English infiltrated the world, many of the world's languages infiltrated English (Kelly2004).

In Indonesia, English language is a compulsory subject taught at secondary schools, *Sekolah Menengah Tingkat Pertama* and *Sekolah Menengah Tingkat*

Atas. How English was chosen as the main foreign language taught in secondary school has a long history. During the period of the country's independence in 1945, education escaped the central government's attention, including foreign language education. In 1950, Indonesia's political situation was relatively more stable and steady and thus the government was also ready to choose a foreign language to be taught in schools. Even though many people were more familiar with Dutch, English was eventually selected as the first foreign language because Dutch was considered as the language of the colonialist and because it did not have the international status. (Dardjowidjojo, 2000).

Based on the observation at the Polytechnic of Bengkalis, most of the students who graduated from Senior High Schools seem to experience difficulty in English, both in oral and written English. Despite efforts to improve the quality of English instruction and the relatively better educational facilities, the general picture of formal English language teaching in Indonesia is rather discouraging. Practitioners, language experts and policy makers alike concur that the teaching of English in Indonesia schools "has not been a

success". With the exception of a select few, the majority of high school graduates are not able to comprehend even simple texts written in English, let alone use the language orally for authentic communication purposes.

Mustafa (2001) added factors that contributed the unsuccessful English language teaching are the teachers' degree of confidence in using the language before their own students, the time constraint which practically precludes the teachers to design an instructional sessions that requires learners to get involved in social communication in the classroom, coupled with crowded curriculum, focus on the exam dominated by questions which are form- focused and presented in a multiple-choice format which does not allow divergent thinking.

This research try to examine how CA is implemented in the teaching of English as a foreign language specifically in speaking and listening skill, is used in several senior high school, and to know the teachers' levels of understanding of CA and the problems using it in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Communicative Approach to

Language Teaching And Learning

According to Nunan (1991), is the study of the practices and procedures used in teaching, and principles and beliefs which underlie them.

If language learners are to achieve the goal of language learning, that is, to be able to communicate in the target language, a second or foreign language teacher should implement appropriate methodology for the Communicative Approach. The teacher should design teaching and learning activities suitable for communicative purposes as well. Activities in language teaching and learning, according to Celce (1991), are equated with 'tasks'.

Brown (1994) defines 'tasks' as a special form of technique. In addition, Brown says that technique is synonymous with other terms including task, activity, procedure, practice, behavior, exercise, and even strategy, which are used in language classrooms for realizing lesson objectives.

In line with the task provided for students in language classroom, Brown (1994) gives us five characteristic of a task-based approach to language teaching:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.

2. The introduction of authentic text into learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on a language, but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside classroom

Referring back to the goal of language learning, this is learners who are able to communicate in the target language, Stevick (1988) states that to have learned a language means, language learners are able to understand and produce the language. Emmitt and Pollock (1995) argue that learning is natural and easy if learners are in control of what is to be learned and how it is to be learned, if they are actively engaged in and are interested in the task, and can see the purposes of the task and understand its relevance for them.

Learning will be difficult if the learning is forced, if the information is broken into meaningless bits and pieces, and if someone else is in control. Klippel (1994) agrees that learning is more effective if learners are actively involved in the process.

Therefore, tasks provided for students must meet students' interest. The task given should be able to maximize students' learning potential. Classroom techniques (tasks) according to Brown (1994) have a greater chance for success if they are self-rewarding in the perception of the learner. The learners perform the task because it is fun, interesting, useful or challenging.

However, whatever method (technique or task) is chosen, the teacher according to Klippel (1993) should be careful not to correct the students' errors too frequently. Being interrupted and corrected makes the students hesitant and insecure in their speech when they should really be practicing communication.

Teachers' And Students' Roles in Communicative Approach

According to Gray (2001), "the specific modern languages focus center upon classroom use of target language and the development of communication with and between pupils". Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, CA is based on inmates and interactions theories of language learning and emphasizes the communication of meaning both between teacher and students and among the students

themselves (Lightbown and Spada 2000). In other words, CA proposes that students should be active negotiators, communicators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information (Hu 2002).

According to Mangubhi et al. (2004), in CA teachers serve more as facilitators and participants rather than being in a traditional didactic position; and students are actively involved in interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning. In that sense, teacher is a need analyst and task designer whereas the students are improvisers and negotiators (Rodgers 2001). Thus, "the students learn how to learn, and as a result, they take responsibility for their own learning (Rodgers 2001).

Deckert (2004) said based on student centeredness, CA requires low profile teacher roles, constant pair work or small group problem solving, students responding to authentic texts, extended exchanges on versatile topics, and the implementation of the four basic skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. CA discourages teacher centeredness, quizzing of memorized material, and detailed commentary on forms of English.

In consequence, CA implementations often demand teachers

to use less teacher-centered classroom management skills. Furthermore, teachers are responsible for organizing the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities (Richards and Rodgers 1986). In addition, CA activities have shifted language classrooms' focus from form to function and from teacher to learner (Pica 2002).

From that point of view, unlike traditional and teacher-centered approaches, CA is against the teacher dominance in the classroom and supports a more equal relationship among the teachers and the students (Hu 2002).

Communicative Approach in EFL and ESL Settings

A study conducted by Yang and Cheung (2003) in Hong Kong secondary school EFL setting showed that many constraints have deterred secondary school English teachers from using CA in their classes. These include large classroom size, lack of training in communicative techniques, and mistaking any group work for communicative teaching.

Another crucial study was carried out by Li (1998) in order to investigate South Korean teachers' perception of CA in EFL environments. The study

was conducted in Canadian university with 18 South Korean secondary English teachers, who were at a training program in Canada. The participants were given a questionnaire. Furthermore, 10 participants were also interviewed by Li (1998). As a result of the study, he pointed out that there was a contradiction between what CA demanded and what the EFL conditions in many countries, such as South Korea, allowed.

In addition, he also emphasized that crowded classrooms caused many problems in terms of teachers' authority and classroom management. Therefore, it significantly prevented teachers from implementing CA in a successful way in South Korean secondary schools. Moreover, Li (1998) also expressed that all 18 participants of the study revealed that although they had the theoretical notion of CA, they had no practical experiences in terms of methodological issues of CA.

A two-phase project was conducted by Mangubhai, Dashwood, Berthold, Flores, and Dale (1998) with 39 participants in Australia in order to evaluate teachers' understanding and beliefs about CA. In the first phase of the study, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire. In the second

phase, follow-up interviews were conducted. The findings showed that teachers' understanding and beliefs about some crucial characteristics of CA differed from those appearing in the literature on CA (Mangubhaiet al.2004).

Sato and Kleinsasser's (1999) research showed us that there is a contradiction between teachers' perceptions of Communicative Approach and their actual in class practices in Australia. They figured out that the teachers mostly practiced grammar-based approaches rather than communicative ones. Furthermore, they emphasized that teacher' perception of CA could be characterized under four main headings:

1. CA is about learning to communicate in the second language.
2. CA uses mainly speaking and listening.
3. CA involves little grammar instruction.
4. CA uses activities that are time consuming.

Consequently, teachers had fragmented knowledge of CA, and their beliefs about language teaching and learning were based on their own second language learning and teaching experiences as opposed to formal

knowledge.

Furthermore, observations explained that few classes were genuinely communicative. Most of the classes were teacher-centered with few interactions among pupils. Grammatical structures were explained deductively and mechanically. Interview data revealed the constraints these teachers faced in their efforts to apply CA. These constraints were divided into two main types: CA challenges and organizational challenges. CA constraints included the teacher's role in context, integrating language skills, and evaluating them.

The organizational constraints comprised lack of school support, preparation time, materials, or in-service programmers, as well as difficulty with classroom management (Sato2002).

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive research design was used in this study.

The Setting of the Study

This study conducted at seven Senior High School in Bengkalis, The participants' respond to the questionnaires were also presented in a table.

The Sample of the Study

The participants of this study are 22 English language teachers teaching at Senior High Schools 1 in Bengkalis, Riau (SMAN 1, SMAN 2, SMAN 3, MAN, MAS YPPI, SMKN 1 and SMKN 2 Bengkalis).

All English language teachers at these schools became the focus of my research. Population in a research according to Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) is a group of persons (students, teachers, or other individuals) who possess certain characteristic. For the purpose of my study, these characteristics are their employment as English language teachers of the institution.

Research Instruments

The data for this study were elicited through the use of questionnaire. The questionnaire has two sections. The first section, asking for the biographical information, is quite long, but the information is necessary, since it identifies the individual in terms of classifying variables for the analysis (Wiersma, 2001). The second section deals with the elements of the Communicative Approach and with possible hindrances. The questionnaires used are in the form of a Likert Scale.

Procedures of Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaires from the participants' responses is presented descriptively. The data collection through questioner about to what extent the teachers of English use CA in the teaching of English as a foreign language, specifically in speaking and listening, how is the teachers' understanding of language teaching and learning which inform this approach, and the barriers the teachers face in implementing approaches to language teaching based on this approach, were transcribed and synthesized into coherent descriptions, identifying patterns which are common across the responses.

3. FINDINGS

Analysis of Aspects of Communication Approach

To determine to what extent the Communicative Approach is being used, statements directly pertaining to the features of the approach were used. Various statements about each element of the approach were devised to test consistency in response. The frequency of the answers on the Likert scale was calculated on a frequent basis. In the following analysis, item numbers from the second part of the questionnaire

appear in brackets after each subject heading.

Summary: Aspects of CA

Most of the tenets of the Communicative Approach are supported. It is evident that the teachers believe that conveying meaning is an important goal in teaching English. Teachers who are facilitators help students actively use the target language to convey meaning. Most teachers strongly agreed that their role is as a facilitator. Furthermore, most teachers indicated that their class is more student centered than teacher-centered, the teacher is just as a facilitator in the classroom. Most of the teachers are emphasizing not only grammar but also communicative competence through the use of pairs and small groups.

Authentic materials are being used, and cultural aspects of the target language are viewed as important in the learning process. There may be a tendency by some teachers to over-emphasize pronunciation, but this is not directly preventing the Communicative Approach from being used. Role-play is utilized by the teachers as a great deal in their class.

Analysis of Teachers' Hindrances

To determine some of the hindrances to the Communicative Approach, statements asking for the teachers' opinions were used. The frequency of the answers to items on the Likert scale was calculated on a percent basis. In the following analysis, item numbers from the second part of the questionnaire appear in brackets after each subject heading.

Summary: Hindrances

As with any approach to teaching English as a foreign language, there are some aspects of the Communicative Approach that work well and some that do not function as well as they could. Most of the Indonesian teachers of English feel they have adequate speaking ability. As this is the case, "native speaking ability is not prohibiting the Communicative Approach.

The teachers, as a whole, did not indicate that the Communicative Approach is limited by grammar instruction. Additionally, current textbooks and proficiency tests do not detract from the Communicative Approach. The teachers indicated that class sizes are too large, but there is no determination that large class sizes are

directly inhibiting the approach. Smaller class sizes would be helpful but barring that the teachers' choices of activities appropriate to large groups are important.

The largest challenge the teachers seem to face is the students' reactions and attitudes, specifically during pair and small group work. The teachers help the students learn, but the students also play large roles in the classroom. The students need to accept an active role in order for the classroom experience to be meaningful. The teachers believe that the students are embarrassed to make mistakes.

Furthermore, the approach and pair and small group work are limited because students either do not have opinions or are unwilling to express them for fear of offending others or for fear of being considered wrong. The teachers perceive the first hear students to lack confidence in speaking English, which is another hindrance to pair work and to the Communicative Approach. Finally, the teachers noted that students do not actively participate in class by asking questions and by creating new dialogues. This passivity is limiting the effectiveness of the Communicative Approach. By

helping students to overcome these problems, when possible, the teachers will increase the effectiveness of Communicative Approach-oriented classes.

In addition, if anything that impedes learning can be avoided or circumvented, the learners will benefit. Although this study has uncovered several hindrances to the Communicative Approach, this list can never be all- inclusive.

4. DISCUSSION

The Obstacles the Teachers Face in Implementing CA

The obstacles, which the teachers have when the approaches compatible with CA want to be implemented, are with respect to the final examination regulated by the Ministry of Education. The exam is followed the last grade of Junior High Schools students (grade 9) and the last grade of Senior High School students (grade 12). What concerns the teachers is the exams mismatch with the goal of CA outlined in the curriculum.

The exams stress much on language sub-skills such as grammar and vocabulary rather than language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. From this perspective, it seems that the national political and

educational policy makers still base their decisions on traditional language teaching. Lightbown and Spada (1993) maintain that the teacher's goal in traditional language teaching is provide students with vocabulary and grammatical rules of the target language and the goal of the learners is to pass an examination rather than to use the language for communicative purposes.

Size and time allocation

It is widely known that the number of students in one class in most schools in Indonesia is forty to fifty students and the very limited time of forty-five minutes during one session makes it difficult for the teachers to carry out approaches suitable to communicative activities. According to Brown (1994), the ideal class size for a communicative language classroom is twelve or according to Richards (2001) not more than fifteen students.

Teaching facilities and resources

Another obstacle that the teachers face in the class is lack of teaching facilities and resources. Real use of the target language in the classrooms as typical CA requires language teachers to model how

English native speakers use English through various teaching aids.

Brown (1993) maintain that, as many non-native English speaking teachers are not very proficient in the use of authentic language necessary in CA, they must be equipped with the aid of technology such as films, videos, television, audio tapes and computer software. Following this argument, none of these teachers could apply appropriate approaches pertinent to CA as such facilities and resources are not available in the schools where they teach.

Students' lack of basic knowledge and motivation

Motivation is badly needed to do something. Without good motivation a purpose cannot be achieved successfully. The teachers affirmed that their students lacked motivation to learn the target language. As a result these teachers felt they were unable to teach English effectively based on CA. The implementation of CA requires learners with good motivation to learn the language.

One of the characteristics of classroom teaching based on CA, according to Taylor (1987), is that students can feel free to take communicating initiative and are motivated to do so. However, student

motivation is high in learning the target language when they feel a pressing need of the language (Taylor, 1987). It seems from the comments of these teachers that their students are not aware of any 'pressing need' to learn English.

Environment

It is believed that environment plays an important aspect of the success of language learning. The environment, that is, the exposure to the target language impacted on their ability to adopt approaches based on CA. The target language to which the students are exposed to is only during class hours, unluckily at certain time students speak mother tongue or Indonesian language.

They commonly cannot use the target language outside of the classroom or they have very limited opportunities to use or experience the target language. Brumfit (1985) notes that there is two important conditions for successful language acquisition. They are first exposure (either systematic or rich) to the target language; and the second, opportunities to use the target language for as genuine as possible communication, in conversation, or reading and writing, or listening. According to Brum fit (1985),

it is possible to conceive of effective language teaching without these conditions.

5. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

This study addresses two main issues. The first is how extensively the Communicative Approach is used by teachers of 7 senior high schools in Bengkalis, Riau, specifically in speaking and listening courses. On average, the teachers supported principles of the Communicative Approach.

Most of the elements of the Communicative Approach are being utilized by a majority of the teachers. Role-playing, however, needs to be implemented more often by more teachers. Furthermore, a minority of the teachers has not implemented a few of the tenets of the Communicative Approach, such as the use of pair and small group activities.

Secondly, the study discovers some of the hindrances to the use of the Communicative Approach in these institutions. The awareness of problems is the first step to improvement. Of course, these students are not consciously attempting to do this.

Unfortunately, several of these obstacles are based on cultural values,

and they will be quite difficult to overcome. As motivation varies between students, the teachers must determine what motivates their students and use learning opportunities the students create. By doing so, the teachers can work to overcome obstacles, such as a lack of confidence and the fear of making mistakes, so that the students become more active participants in the learning process.

Different teachers have different experiences, and there is no definitive answer as to how to make the Communicative Approach more effective in every situation. Furthermore, as human beings, nothing can be 100 percent effective. Teachers may need to persevere for a period of time before the students accept the Communicative Approach, accepting the fact that their teaching will not be as smooth as might be desired. Perhaps more than anything else, adaptability to various groups of students is required to effectively use the Communicative Approach.

SUGGESTION

If CA is to be introduced successfully in Indonesia, changes will need to be made especially concerning with the points which are related to the

variables involved in the language teaching.

In Indonesia, the general education aims is to develop Indonesian people's intellectual capability. The goal of English language teaching at Senior High School levels is to foster the general educational aim in which the graduates of Senior High Schools are able to communicate in both oral and written English. As English is not the official language in this country, it is taught as a foreign language.

Class size in Indonesian school consists of forty to fifty students in one class. English is taught compulsory within a five-time session a week 0 each session last forty-five minutes. English language teachers must follow the syllabuses in the national curriculum and adjust them with textbooks that the teachers must use. Teachers also rely on the use of a single textbook for their language teaching and have to adapt their language teaching for the success of their students for the national language exams.

Senior high school students' aptitude for English language in Indonesia may vary as they have learned English since they were in Junior high schools. However, many Indonesian students find it difficult to acquire

English as its linguistic system are different from Indonesian especially pronunciation and structures. Indonesian words are pronounced how they are spelled; most English words are pronounced as they are spelled. Nouns precede adjectives in Indonesian structures. In contrast, adjective precede nouns in English structures. Students' attitude to English may also vary. Those students who do not feel forced to learn it have positive attitudes and are motivated to learn and vice versa. Students' positive and negative attitudes towards English language are caused by their previous experience of language learning. Not all students in Indonesia are introduced to English at primary school levels.

English language teachers in Indonesia are not all very proficient in all English skills, especially spoken English. Their attitude and motivation to teaching may also vary; it depends on their devotion to their teaching professionalism. They are seldom given opportunities to update their professional knowledge and skills of language teaching.

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