TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Neda Radosavlevikj

South East European University, North Macedonia
n.radosavleviq@seeu.edu.mk

Abstract. *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the fundamental teaching methods that focus on developing learners' communicative competence. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions and challenges in Communicative language teaching as well as students' communicative competences. The participants were 10 the teachers from the Language Centre and the Faculty of Languages and Communication teaching English as a foreign language and 27 students enrolled at their first year studying different levels of English (Basic English skills Levels 2,3 and 4 as well as 5 students studying English as their major at South East European University. Majority of the students were between 18-20 years old, coming from different ethnical groups: mostly Albanian, Turks and Macedonian, enrolled at International Communication studies, Business administration, Business and economics and Computer Sciences studies. The questionnaire was held between both students and teachers and it covers (role of students/teachers, pair and group activities, the use of native language and error and correction). The results obtained throughout this study held positive beliefs towards CLT, especially taking in consideration the roles of teachers and students, pair and group work used by teachers as main strategies to help students develop communicative competencies.*

Key Words: *CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), communicative competences, communicative activities, perceptions, challenges*

1. INTRODUCTION

English language has been recognized all over the world and it has impacted the English language teaching worldwide. English language has gone through rapid change of transition from grammar translation method to direct and then to an audiolingualism and to other variations (Leung, 2005). Furthermore, the transition has taken place and there are many different beliefs about teaching and learning that are known by different names for instance, communicative methodology, communicative language teaching, and communicative approach (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).

Communicative language teaching (CLT), or the communicative approach, is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes on the use of language interaction (student-teacher, student-student) both in class and outside of class. According to CLT, in contrast to previous views in which top priority was given to grammatical competence, the focus on language education is to focus on communication in the target language.

The linguistic theory behind Communicative Approach is Dell Hymes' communicative competence (1972), that deals with both knowledge (usage) and use. Dell Hymes in 1966

in reaction to Noam Chomsky's (1965) notion of "linguistic competence' believed that Chomsky's 'linguistic competence' was too limited. Linguistic competence doesn't justify social and functional rules of the language.

Hymes, 1972 theory is the base of CLT and it means the use of language (communicative competence) to know how and when to use the language (appropriateness) and not only knowing a set of rules. The communicative competence is developed by L2 learners when they communicate actively by doing the tasks in a meaningful way. Communicative competence is the intuitive functional knowledge and controls the principles of language usage. Hymes observes: "…a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others" (Hymes 1972, p.277).

Littlewood (1981) sees the combination of structural and functional language important because it shows that the structure of the language can serve as catalyst for the functional activities. Richards (2006, p. 2) redefined CLT as a set of principles which include "the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom".

In diverse settings the implementation of CLT and teachers' and students' beliefs are considered very important. Moreover, there is a lack of research into whether teachers and students hold the same beliefs toward the use of CLT in the ELT classroom. It is very useful to know whether teachers' and learners' share the same views regarding the activities of the learning process being used in the classroom. Tasks or activities used in the classroom have significant impacts on learners' interest in learning in Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) research. The study answers the following questions:

1. What are teachers' and students' beliefs about communicative language teaching method? What is the role of teachers, students, grammar, pair/group activities, use of native language and error and correction?
2. What is the difference between teachers' and students' beliefs about CLT?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The role of the teachers and students in communicative activities

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been accepted as the best practice in English language teaching (ELT) because it enables students to develop and improve their communicative competences (Power, 2003). According to Nunan (1999) "Communicative language teaching has brought the most significant change into the practice of English language teaching". It is a fact that many Language institutions have adopted this approach into their English language teaching practices. In CLT the teacher is a facilitator and guide who coordinates and leads the group activities Littlewood (1981). According to Richards and Rogers (1986) the role of the teacher is an autonomous member when teaching a foreign language. However, there are some negative perceptions in teacher's communication with the students. The first one is that students come from different background settings and some students feel confident to engage and communicate in a foreign language while others may need more attention and guidance from the teacher, especially taking in consideration a class with mix-abilities. Teachers may help students in communication, encourage students and facilitate interaction but should not expect students to construct meaning

automatically. The second negative perception is that students should be instructed and the lessons should be designed to make the atmosphere in the classroom positive and cheerful. However, it is important teacher to guide the students and help them construct meaning through interaction such as group or pair activities. In addition, students that come from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds should be instructed and stimulated to become independent, autonomous and construct their own meaning through communication with others.

In a communicative language teaching classroom teachers and students play the most important roles in constructing knowledge. Richards (2006) defines the teacher as co-learner in the learning process and sometimes students are given freedom to choose the content of the lesson which gives them control over their language learning. According to the studies Ngos and Iwashita (2012) in Vietnam reported that teachers are seen as co-communicator, facilitator of the learning process, a friend, motivator and a knowledge provider. Teachers are expected to provide knowledge and at the same time establish interaction that will help students communicate with each other and take control of the learning process. On the other side, Coskun's (2011) study in Turkey showed that there are opposite views of what teachers did in the classroom. The studies confirmed that both in theory and practice the roles of teachers and students are not consistent with each other. The teachers spent more time lecturing not providing opportunities for student's interactions. That's why it is very important for the teacher to develop appropriate activities which build trust and help group learn how to communicate and collaborate.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATIVE MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES

Teachers need to create a meaningful communication among the students and provide authentic materials that can be used in the classroom. In this way, interaction plays important role in delivering an effective communication between the students. Richards (2001) points out that materials are of vital importance and should be carefully selected by the teacher, whether they are textbooks, materials from the institution or materials made from the teacher itself. On the other side, Schiffrin (1996) states that traditional books lack sufficient content and fail to give students appropriate communicative feedback. In order to create a climate for effective communication according to Swaffar and Vlatten (1997) students' need to be exposed to variety of authentic materials such as video, so they can practice listening to variety of authentic voices and dialects, and learn structures in a clear, direct way. According to Yukselir and Komur (2017) students' communication and interaction is stimulated when using online videos because it helps students develop communication competence and easily transmit the messages. In addition, the use of authentic materials motivates students to learn a foreign language.

In communicative language teaching according to Richards and Rodgers (2014) it is very important to discuss the three elements of communicative learning theory. The first element is *communicative principle* that refers to activities that are used for real life situations, the second is the *task principle* focus is given on the language and the tasks that are meaningful, and the third one is the *meaningfulness principle* in which the language should be meaningful for the student. Richards (2006) proposed two methodologies in CLT: CBI (content based instruction) favours the acquisition of language through the use of content and helps develop language skills and TBI (task-based instruction) where students are exposed to real life activities and communication and are involved in meaningful activities.

All these activities are designed to facilitate students learning process and help them develop communicative language competence. In CBI the activities are interactive but not necessarily connected with real-world situations, while in TBI the activities are designed to help students in active interaction and use authentic materials such as problem-solving tasks, listening tasks, comparing, sharing personal experiences. Communicative language teaching approach is also supported by the use of games, role-plays, simulations and task-based activities which the best resources for effective communication (Richards and Rogers, 2014). According to Abe (2013) group and pair interaction, discussions in class, presentations are very useful when applying Communicative language approach. The use of the target language improves students' language skills but the teacher must be prepared to find a solution if by any reason the students do not understand the instruction or they lack the necessary skills to interact.

3.1. The use of pair and group activities

In CLT approach pair and group activities are very important because they help in the interaction as well as stimulate students to activate the language and negotiate the meaning (Richards 2006). Learning a language should not be in isolation and students should be avoided to memorize grammatical patterns and vocabulary but use the language through engagement involving in social and cognitive processes (Nunan 2004).

There are different views about the use of CLT and the role of pair/group activities applied in the foreign language classroom. According to (Rahimi and Naderi, 2014) teachers' beliefs and students' beliefs (Durrani, 2016, Khatib and Tootkaboni, 2017) found positive aspects towards using pair/group work. Chen (2015) conducted a study that showed students are satisfied with CLT in class and the use of mother tongue reduced anxiety and made them more self-confident. Students were stimulated by the use of L1, visual aids like pictures, short videos, role-plays and the results showed student's positive attitudes towards CLT. The results of the study that was conducted by Bruner, Sinwongsuwat and Radic-Bojanic (2015) showed that CLT help students improve oral English proficiency and foster communicative competences by using meaningful communicative collaborative activities that encourage students to use English in authentic real life situations. Moreover, feedback was given in order to help improve communication competences and errors if not interfered with the meaning were tolerated. Another study Muslem, Mustafa, Usman and Rahman (2017) showed that video clips helped improve speaking skills in group work more than on the students that were working on the activities individually.

Nunan (1987) used communicative activities that included jigsaw listening task, a map reading exercise, discussion based on recordings of casual conversations, interviews with students, and a comprehension class based on magazines and radio adverts. This classroom lacked communicative interaction (Toro, Minuche, Pinza-Tapia, Parades, 2019, p.113). In addition, Rao's study (2002) in China showed that students preferred non-communicative activities more than communicative as well as Leo (2014) students might not be able to do well on the exam if CLT is used because it lacks explanation of grammatical patterns and reading skills and focuses only on listening and speaking activities. All these studies that lead to negative view of CLT demonstrated a misconception of the role of group and pair work in the language classroom.

3.2. The use of grammar in CLT

The role of grammar is very important and as Littlewood (1981) suggests teaching grammatical structures is a basic concept for communicative activities proposing a methodology of pre-communicative activities where students will learn the linguistic structures which will help them practice their communicative abilities. Students should activate their language skills and communicate in a meaningful way.

According to Krashen (1982) the role of grammar plays a very important part in acquiring the language and students could not learn the language subconsciously just by providing some input. Students should be stimulated to speak and use the language subconsciously; making mistakes and at the same time conscious learning should motivate students to concentrate and apply the linguistic competences and their communicative competences and interact in a meaningful purposeful way. Chung and Huang (2009) found out that explanation of grammatical structures, memorization and translation help students in examinations. Some studies also lead to the misconception that grammar is not introduced in CLT and this lead to favour of grammar translation method. The study of Ahmad and Rao (2013) showed that teachers did not want to use CLT because grammar was not used. Coskun's (2011) study in Turkey also showed that despite the fact that teachers teach grammar through the use of communicative activities they always focus on teaching grammatical structures in the classroom. In a conclusion, there are still many misconceptions about the balanced use of CLT taking in consideration the role of the grammar and the communicative activities.

3.3. The use of the native language

The use of the native language in the classroom has gone through many debates and according to Atkinson (1987) it is beneficial to use students' native language for eliciting ideas, giving instructions in activities or tests, checking comprehension questions or facilitating the process of learning a foreign language. According to (Sert, 2005) the code switching in ESL classroom can help the teacher in giving explanation and in clarifying meaning.

Khatib and Tootkaboni (2017) made a research on the Iranian students and their perceptions toward CLT were that thoughtful use of native language is very useful and effective, especially when teacher needs to give instruction about activities or assignments. On the contrary, some teachers believed that translation will negatively contribute and will decrease students' enthusiasm for learning. According to Richards (2006) CLT should stimulate students to use their linguistic competences in the best way, interacting through pair and group work and this does not mean that students' native language should be avoided in the classroom.

3.4. The use of errors and corrections

Errors and Correction are very important in communicative language practice and in achieving adequate communicative competences. Some studies have shown that accuracy is more important than fluency. Moreover, in DoddiNejad et al. (2011) study, the linguistic features (structures, reading, vocabulary) were taught and evaluated separately. Hamer (2007) shows that non-communicative activities like worksheets (grammar, vocabulary, reading activities) are created to evaluate students' progress accurately by giving points. Communication activities such as discussions, presentations, role plays should be carefully

evaluated because these activities help students practice fluency and not accuracy. That's why errors in accuracy should be tolerated. Some studies have shown that students have negative views about errors and correction. In Ngoc and Iwashita (2012) students have negative views and teachers' positive views toward error correction. In addition, teachers believed that errors should be tolerated and evaluation should not be that strict in correcting errors while students did not share the same opinion. Coskun (2011) in his study found out that teachers corrected students immediately after their communicative output. Furthermore, Khatib and Tootkaboni (2017) found that students asked to be corrected regularly.

4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions and challenges in Communicative language teaching and students' communicative competences in English as a second language. This study was conducted at the Language Center as well as the Faculty of Languages and Communication at the South East European University in Skopje with 32 students, age between18-20, enrolled at their first year of study coming from culturally different ethnical groups mostly Albanian, Turks and Macedonian. The reason why the study was conducted at this particular center and the Faculty of Language and Communication is because they represent a central part of every SEEU student's academic career, where students can select both required subjects and optional elective courses. The University's mission is to promote a multilingual approach to learning, stressing both the importance of local and international languages. For this purpose, The Language Center offers classes in English starting from the basic skills up (Levels 1-4) to English for specific purposes in fields such as law, computer sciences, public administration and business administration.

This particular research was carried out during fall 2019 semester with students of mixed classes such as at International Communication studies, Business administration, Business and economics and Computer Sciences studies. In order to measure the quantitative results a Likert scale quantitative questionnaire was prepared on Google forms and distributed electronically to students and teachers during class as well as outside the class. A total number of 32 students have responded to the questionnaire and their answers certainly reflect the very positive attitudes towards Communicative language teaching. In addition 10 teachers from the Language Centre and the Faculty of Languages and Communications completed the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, both students and teachers had to answer questions related to communicative language practice in class, as well as the use and effect of communicative language teaching.

Communicative language teaching (CLT), or the communicative approach, is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes on the use of language interaction (student-teacher, student-student) both in class and outside of class. In CLT the teacher is a facilitator and guide who coordinates and leads the group activities Littlewood (1981) and help students engage and communicate especially those students that come from different background settings. In addition, English teachers at the Language Center were also asked to fill in the questionnaire regarding the use and the benefit of Communicative language teaching in their classes.

Based on the survey results, 50% of the teachers and 53.7% of the students agreed that students play main part in the process of learning and communication, 30% of the teachers are neutral and only 17% of the students, while 10% of the teachers strongly disagree. Students should use their personal experiences when practicing the target language, 70% of the teachers and 53.7% of the students agreed, while 20% of the teachers and 17% of

the students are neutral. Students are expected to interact with each other, through pair and group work or in writing, 50% of the teachers and 53.7% of the students strongly agree, 7.4% of the students are neutral and only 2.4% of the teachers disagree. Students should be able to suggest what the content of the lesson should be and what activities are useful for him/her, 20% of the teachers and 36.6% of the students agree, 60% of the teachers and 19.5% of the students are neutral while only 10% of the teachers disagree and only 7.3% of the students strongly disagree. When evaluating learners' progress in communication, vocabulary and structural knowledge should be assessed, 50% of the teachers and 26.8% of the students agreed, 20% of the teachers and 41.5% of the students are neutral while only 10% of the teachers and 4.9% of the students disagree.

Students' performance should be evaluated through communicative based activities such as role-plays, 40% of the teachers and 39% of the students agreed, 40% of the teachers and 24.4% of the students are neutral, 9.8% of the students disagree. Errors are seen as a natural outcome of the development of the communication skill and are therefore tolerated, 60% of the teachers and 19.5% of the students agreed, 36.6% of the students are neutral and 10% of the teachers, 7.3% of the students disagree. Students should be allowed to correct each other, 60% of the teachers, 29.3% of the students agreed, 19.5% of the students are neutral, 20% of the teachers and 7.3% of the students disagree. The teacher should correct students when there is a communication breakdown, 70% of the teachers and 43.9% of the students agreed, 10% of the teachers and 4.9% of the students are neutral. Language forms should be practiced within a communicative context and not in isolation, 50% of the teachers and 39% of the students agreed and 19.5% of the students are neutral while 2.4% of the students disagree.

Students focus best in grammar when they use it for communicative purposes and experiences, 50% of the teachers and 29.3% of the students agreed, 20% of the teachers and 26.8% of the students are neutral while 20% of the teachers and 7.3% of the students disagree. The main role of the teacher in the classroom is to facilitate communication and motivate students to speak, 60% of the teachers, 39% of the students agreed, 10% of the teachers and 2.4% of the students disagree. The teacher should set an environment that is interactive and more emphasis should be given to active and effective modes of learning such as pair or group work, 70% of the teachers and 39% of the students agreed, 10% of the students and 9.8% of the teachers are neutral. Group and pair work activities can lead to more effective communication, 40% of the teachers and 22% of the students agreed, 40% of the teachers and 5% of the students are neutral while 5% of the students disagree.

Formal instruction can never be replaced by group/pair work, 20% of the teachers and 29.3% of the students agreed, 50% of the teachers and 41.5% of the students are neutral while 30% of the teachers and 12.2% of the students disagree. Teachers should help students and if necessary use students' native language when giving instructions, providing directions for homework or test directions, 50% of the teachers and 31.7% of the students agreed, 30% of the teachers and 24.4% of the students are neutral and 10% of the teachers and 2.4% of the students disagree. Students' native language should be used for communication in language classrooms, 10% of the teachers and 34% of the students agree, 60% of the teachers and 31.7% of the students are neutral, 30% of the teachers and 22% of the students disagree.

5. Conclusion

In a conclusion, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been accepted as the best practice because it enables students to develop and improve their communicative competences (Power, 2003). It is a fact that many Language institutions have adopted this approach into their English language teaching practices. In CLT the teacher is a facilitator and guide who coordinates and leads the group activities Littlewood (1981).

The role of the teacher in communicative language teaching is an autonomous member that helps students communicate and facilitate interaction especially in a class of mix abilities and students that come from diverse cultural and educational background. Moreover, according to the results from the questionnaire, 50% of the teachers and 53.7% of the students agreed that students play main part in the process of learning and communication. 70% of the teachers and 53.7% of the students agreed that students should use their personal experiences when practicing the target language.

In a communicative language teaching classroom teachers and students play the most important roles in constructing knowledge. Richards (2006) defines the teacher as co-learner in the learning process and students are given freedom to choose the content of the lesson which gives them control over their language learning. According to the results, 60% of the teachers, 39% of the students agreed that the main role of the teacher in the classroom is to facilitate communication and motivate students to speak, 70% of the teachers and 39% of the students agreed that the teacher should set an environment that is interactive and use more effective modes of learning such as pair or group work. 40% of the teachers and 22% of the students agreed that the group and pair work activities can lead to more effective communication.

In addition, 50% of the teachers and 31.7% of the students agreed that the teachers should help students and if necessary use students' native language when giving instructions, providing directions for homework or test directions. Communicative language teaching is definitely a method that can stimulate students and motivate them to interact and the teacher is seen as co-communicator, facilitator of the process and a motivator.

Overall, in communicative language teaching teachers are expected to provide knowledge and at the same time establish interaction that will help students communicate with each other and take control of the learning process.

References

Beale, J. 2002. Is communicative language teaching a thing of the past? *TESOL,*37 (1), 12-16.
Brown, H.D. 2000. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching.* (4th ed.). New
York: Pearson Education.
Brown, H.D. 2001. *Teaching by Principles: An interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*
    (2nd Ed.). New York: Pearson Education.
Brown, R.S., & Nation, P. 1997. *Teaching Speaking: Suggestions for the Classroom.* Retrieved
    June 10, 2013 from http://jaltpublications.org/tlt/files/97/jan/speaking.html
Brumfit, C.1984. *Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching.* New York: Cambridge
    University Press.
Larsen-Freeman, D. 2000. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching.* (2nd ed.). UK:
    Oxford University Press.

Leung, C. 2005. "Convivial communication: recontextualizing communicative competence". *International Journal of Applied Linguistic,* 15 (2), 119-143.

Liao, X. 1996. *Tradition and Innovation: A New Way to Explore a TESOL Method*. U.S: Office of Education Research and Improvement.

Littlewood, W. 1981. *Communicative Language Teaching.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D. 1999. *Second Language Teaching & Learning.* Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Power, T. 2003. *The Appeal and Poverty of CLT*. Retrieved June 11, 2013, from http://www.btinternet.com/~ted.power/esl0404.html

Richards, J.C., & Rodgers, T.S. 1986. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching.* USA: Cambridge University Press.

Sato, K., & Kleinsasser, R.C. 1999. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Practical Understandings. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83 (4), 494-515.

Thomson, G. 1996. "Some misconceptions about communicative language teaching". *ELT Journal*, 50 (1), 9-15.

APPENDIX

Notes: T - teachers, S - students All figures are in percentages %	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
1. Students play the main role in the process of learning and communication.	19%	29.3%	50%	53.7%	30%	17%	10%	0%	10%	0%
2. Students should use their personal experiences when practicing the target language.	10%	26.8%	70%	53.7%	20%	17%	2.4%	0%	2.4%	0%
3. Students are expected to interact with each other, through pair and group work or in writing.	50%	53.7%	50%	36.6%	0%	7.3%	0%	0%	2.4%	0%
4. Students should be able to suggest what the content of the lesson should be and what activities are useful for him/her.	10%	36.6%	20%	36.6%	60%	19.5%	10%	0%	0%	7.3%
5. For evaluating learners' progress in communication, vocabulary and structural knowledge should be assessed.	20%	26.8%	50%	26.8%	20%	41.5%	10%	4.9%	0%	0%
6. Students performance should be evaluated through communicative based activities such as role-plays.	20%	24.4%	40%	39%	40%	24.4%	0%	9.8%	0%	2.4%
7. Errors are seen as a natural outcome of the development of the communication skill and are therefore tolerated.	30%	36.6%	60%	19.5%	0%	36.6%	10%	7.3%	0%	0%
8. Students should be allowed to correct each other.	20%	39%	60%	29.3%	0%	19.5%	20%	7.3%	0%	4.9%
9. The teacher should correct students when there is a communication breakdown.	20%	51.2%	70%	43.9%	10%	4.9%	0%	0%	0%	0%
10. Language forms should be practiced within a communicative context and not in isolation.	50%	39%	50%	39%	0%	19.5%	0%	0%	0%	2.4%

Notes: T - teachers, S - students All figures are in percentages %	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
11. Students focus best in grammar when they use it for communicative purposes and experiences	10%	34%	50%	29.3%	20%	26.8%	20%	7.3%	0%	2.4%
12. The main role of the teacher in the classroom is to facilitate communication and motivate students to speak.	30%	56%	60%	39%	0%	2.4%	10%	2.4%	0%	0%
13. The teacher should set an environment that is interactive and more emphasis should be given to active and effective modes of learning such as pair or group work.	20%	51.2%	70%	39%	10%	9.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%
14. Group and pair work activities can lead to more effective communication	20%	63.3%	40%	22%	40%	5%	0%	0%	0%	5%
15. Formal instruction can never be replaced by group/pair work.	0%	17%	20%	29.3%	50%	41.5%	30%	12.2%	0%	0%
16. Teachers should help students and if necessary use students native language when giving instructions, providing directions for homework or test directions	10%	41.5%	50%	31.7%	30%	24.4%	0%	0%	10%	2.4%
17. Students' native language should be used for communication in language classrooms	0%	9.8%	10%	34%	60%	31.7%	30%	22%	0%	2.4%