

COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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The communicative approach, also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), is one of the most influential methodologies in modern language education. This approach focuses on developing learners' communicative competence through real-life communication and interactive tasks. The main goal is to help learners use language meaningfully and appropriately rather than merely mastering grammar rules. This paper discusses the theoretical background of CLT, its principles, classroom applications, and its impact on modern foreign language teaching. The research highlights the balance between fluency and accuracy, emphasizing the learner-centered nature of the communicative approach.

Keywords: communicative competence, communicative approach, foreign language teaching, interactive learning, fluency, learner-centered instruction.

Introduction

The rapid globalization of the 20th and 21st centuries has made communication across cultures and languages a vital skill. Traditional methods of foreign language teaching — such as the Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual methods — often failed to equip learners with the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. As a response to these limitations, the Communicative Approach, also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emerged in the 1970s and revolutionized the field of language education. The communicative approach focuses on the concept of communicative competence, first introduced by Dell Hymes (1972), who argued that knowing a language means being able to use it appropriately in social contexts. Later, Canale and Swain (1980) expanded this idea by dividing communicative competence into four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Unlike older approaches that emphasized grammatical accuracy, CLT prioritizes meaningful interaction, fluency, and learner participation.

Discussion

In the communicative classroom, the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a lecturer. The focus shifts from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered interaction. Students participate in pair work, group discussions, role plays, and problem-solving tasks, which simulate real-life communication situations. According

to Richards and Rodgers (2001)¹, CLT encourages students to “negotiate meaning” and to use language creatively, even if errors occur.

Authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, audio recordings, and online content play an important role in CLT. These materials expose learners to natural language use and cultural nuances, fostering both linguistic and sociocultural competence. Moreover, modern technology — including digital platforms, video conferencing, and language learning applications — supports communicative teaching by providing interactive opportunities beyond the classroom.

A distinctive feature of the communicative approach is the integration of the four language skills — listening, speaking, reading, and writing — within communicative contexts. Instead of teaching each skill separately, tasks are designed to develop multiple skills simultaneously. For example, students may read an article, discuss its ideas, and write a reflection, thus engaging all four language abilities.

The communicative approach has reshaped the philosophy of foreign language education by shifting the emphasis from knowledge about the language to the ability to use the language effectively in authentic contexts. Unlike traditional approaches, which viewed language learning as a linear accumulation of grammatical structures, the communicative approach treats language as a social tool for interaction and negotiation of meaning. According to Richards (2006)², successful communication involves not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic and sociocultural awareness.

One of the key strengths of the communicative approach lies in its learner-centered orientation. Learners are no longer passive recipients of information but active participants in constructing meaning. This aligns with constructivist theories of learning, which state that knowledge is best acquired through active engagement and social collaboration. Through pair work, group discussions, and task-based learning, students develop confidence, fluency, and the ability to think in the target language rather than translate from their mother tongue.

Moreover, CLT promotes authenticity in learning materials and activities. By integrating real-life resources such as news articles, videos, interviews, and digital media, learners are exposed to natural language patterns and cultural norms. This authenticity bridges the gap between classroom instruction and real-world communication. Nunan (1991)³ emphasizes that using authentic materials helps learners see the practical value of language, thereby increasing motivation and retention.

Another crucial feature is task-based instruction, a practical extension of the communicative approach. In this model, language learning occurs through meaningful

tasks such as planning a trip, conducting an interview, or solving a problem collaboratively. These tasks encourage both linguistic output and critical thinking. Willis and Willis (2007) ⁴argue that task-based learning allows students to use language purposefully, leading to deeper cognitive and linguistic development.

However, the communicative approach also presents certain challenges. In contexts where large class sizes, exam-oriented systems, or limited exposure to authentic materials exist, full implementation can be difficult. Teachers may struggle to balance fluency with grammatical accuracy or to design communicative tasks suitable for different proficiency levels. As Savignon (2002) ⁵suggests, flexibility and teacher training are essential for successful application of CLT principles.

Furthermore, recent developments in technology-enhanced learning have expanded the scope of communicative language teaching. Online platforms, virtual exchanges, and digital games now provide new opportunities for interactive practice and cross-cultural communication. These innovations make CLT even more relevant in the 21st century, where digital literacy and global collaboration are vital skills.

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