

## Communicative English Language Teaching and Learning: An Evolution in Revolution

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### Abstract

The teaching and learning of English have undergone a significant transformation in response to changing social, academic, and global communication needs. The conventional methods of teaching English Language placed much emphasis on grammatical correctness, memorisation and teacher-centred teaching and learning, which in most cases did not help learners in being able to interact in the real-life context. With the gradual development of the English language into a world language, the focus turned not on the teaching of formulas of linguistic knowledge but on communicative competence and the use of the language in practise. This shift is a revolution in a revolution in the English language education profession.

This paper examines the evolution of Communicative English Language Teaching and Learning as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than as a single methodological change. It examines the development of communicative practise during language learning in English that manifested via historical, theoretical, and pedagogical change in the context of learner centred, interaction-focused, and context-constrained strategies of learning. Although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is considered an important step in this development, the study puts it in a larger context of communicative learning of the English language and incorporation of functional language use, the real world and the active involvement of the learner. The paper also brings out the transforming roles between teachers and learners, the significance of meaningful interaction, and the applicability of communicative learning of English in modern teaching and work.

**Keywords:** Communicative English Learning, English Language Teaching Evolution, Communication-Based Learning, Learner-Centred Pedagogy, Global English.

### 1. Introduction

In the modern world, English is used as a universal language of communication in the spheres of academia, professional, social, and digital. The increased need of effective communication in English has basic changed the objectives of the education of English language. Previously dominating models of English Language Teaching were more focused on grammatical knowledge, translation and memorisation and focused on treating language as a fixed system

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as opposed to a living system of communication. Though these methods allowed learners to gain formal knowledge about the English language, they hardly helped them to be equipped to use the language confidently and in the most suitable context in real life.

As the global communication requirements and demands grew it was becoming clearer to everyone that it was not enough to teach only English without addressing to the same level English learning. This transformation comprised a change in the teacher-centred teaching towards a learner-centred and communication-based teaching. English started being perceived as not something to be learned but something to be acquired by interaction, use and through meaningful engagement. The distinction between teaching and learning gained prominence, highlighting the importance of learner participation, autonomy, and experiential learning in language development.

The rise of communicative approaches was a shift in this change. Rather than prioritising isolated linguistic forms, communicative English teaching and learning emphasised meaning, context, and social interaction. Classroom activities were more geared towards real-life communication, group work, and the use of functional language. This shift was not sudden, rather, it was developed over time, by means of theoretical understandings, pedagogical trial and error, and the shifting priorities in education. Therefore, the communicative English learning can be viewed as a revolution and evolution in English language learning; continuity and change at the same time.

This paper aims to examine communicative English language teaching and learning as a broader educational movement rather than a single methodological framework. It examines the historical development, theoretical basis and pedagogical implications of the learning of Communicative English and places Communicative Language Teaching in an important context of the broader development. Considering communication as the key goal of learning English, the paper aims at pointing to the timeless applicability of the communicative practises in meeting the current global communication needs.

## **2. English Language Teaching vs English Language Learning**

English Language Teaching and English Language Learning has become one of the main points of focus and thus the reason behind the movement to communicative teaching in English education. Conventionally, English language teaching was mostly instructional in nature, with the instructor determining the content, the speed and the course of the instruction. Within these environments, students were supposed to internalise the rules of grammar, lists of vocabulary and many given texts, with little to no chance of practising the language. It is a model that placed more emphasis on instruction rather than interaction and knowledge rather than application.

ELL, however, puts the learner in the centre of the learning process. It considers the process of language acquisition to be active, experience-based and socially mediated and it is achieved through use and not explanation. In this view, learning does not entail merely the outcome of the teaching process; rather, it is an outcome of the meaningful interaction with the language under communicative conditions. By listening, speaking, negotiating meaning, and responding

to genuine situations or simulated situations which are real life language use, learners become proficient.

The process of teaching transforming into learning also indicates change of school philosophy. Whereas the teaching-based models are more about impartation of knowledge, learning-based approaches are about building the sense. Learners in communicative learning of the English language are urged to play around with things and make mistakes and perfect through the process of interaction. This is achieved because it increases autonomy, confidence, and effectiveness of communication, since learners are no longer passive learners, but active participants.

Moreover, the differentiation points out the difference between learning the language and the ability to perform the language. English Language Teaching tends to focus on form, e.g. grammar, syntax, and pronunciation, whereas English Language Learning does not put this first priority but rather on use and function. The gap is closed through communicative learning environments which involve combining form and meaning in purposeful activities where the learner can gain both accuracy and fluency.

### **3. Historical Evolution of English Language Teaching**

The development of the English Language Teaching (ELT) in history is an indicator of the shift in the attitudes towards the language, learning process, and the role of a school. Each stage in this evolution emerged in response to the social, academic, and communicative needs of its time, gradually paving the way for a communicative orientation in English teaching and learning.

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was the most common method in ELT in the early days of the field especially in the nineteenth century. This approach considered language as a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary which are to be memorised and translated. The training principles were based on the teaching of classical readings, translation, and accuracy of grammar and the insignificance of speaking or listening. Even though GTM was able to assist learners in building their written language knowledge, it did not focus on the application of the English language practically in communicating (Howatt, 1984).

The disconsideration of the grammar-based teaching resulted in more speech-oriented teaching methods in the early twentieth century. The Direct Method was the other innovation, which promoted the target language in the classroom and focused on oral communication. Nevertheless, it was poorly structured and required native-like teacher competence that inhibited its broad use (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

In the middle of the twentieth century, the Alpha-Linguistic Method (ALM) was popular, especially in the United States. This approach was influenced by structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology and assumed that language is learned as a habit. Students were practised by means of repetition, drills, and practising patterns, the accuracy and pronunciation were given the first priority. Mistakes were not welcomed, because they were thought to disturb the establishment of habits. In as much as ALM enhanced the listening and speaking proficiency of the learners to a certain degree, it frequently led to the use of mechanical

language and failed to equip the learners to make spontaneous communication (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

By the 1960s, the developments in the theory of linguistics and social theory started to criticise the purely structural concepts of language. The use of the language came to be recognised by more and more scholars as influenced by social context and purpose of communication. Dell Hymes coined the notion of communicative competence which carries the view that learning a language means learning not just the rules of the grammar, but also learning how to use the language in various social context (Hymes, 1972). This understanding was the turning point in ELT where the focus was not on the form but the function.

This change was further stimulated by the increasing amount of functional English usage in all areas of education and employment, and international communication. Consequently, communicative approaches started to arise at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, especially in Britain. These methods stressed on meaning, interaction and real-life language use and were opposed to the shortcomings of form-based methods. CLT as a structured movement emerged in this wider communicative movement later (Richards, 2006).

Throughout the years, ELT kept on developing and incorporating ideas of communicative principles with the findings of the second language acquisition studies and classroom lessons. Task-based learning, learner-driven pedagogy, and working with authentic materials became the extensions of communicative thinking instead of the total methodological alternatives. This gradual change proves that the development of the English Language Teaching was continuous and transformative.

#### **4. Theoretical Foundations of Communicative English Learning**

The theoretical perspectives on which the Communicative English Learning is based consider the language as the social system, functional system and as a system of meaning-making. These theories focus on the way learners learn English by use, interaction, and contextualised communication as opposed to memorisation of rules only. The theoretical foundation of learning communicative English is a combination of knowledge of sociolinguistics, functional linguistics and second language acquisition that are all involved in the perception of language learning as personal and active process.

One of the most significant theoretical frameworks of the learning of communicative English is the notion of communicative competence. This view reinvents language proficiency as the capacity to utilise language in a suitable and effective manner in social situations. Language learning, hence, is not only the knowledge of grammar but also a knowledge of context, purpose and audience. This change in theory brings English learning out of accuracy-centred teaching and puts the emphasis on real life communication, with meaning and the suitability being the key elements (Hymes, 1972).

The other significant basis is the functional perspective of language which takes language as a means of expressing meanings and carrying out social operations. In this view, English is acquired by application in the achievement of communicative objectives which are the requesting of information, the expression of opinions, convincing others and the maintenance

of social relationships. Learning takes place when the learners approach language as a means to action instead of a system. This perception favours communicative learning contexts where the learners will exercise English in practical and meaningful circumstances (Halliday, 1978).

Theories of second language acquisition also play a role in the teaching and learning of communicative English, especially those theories that emphasise the significance of meaningful input and interaction. The process of language acquisition is regarded as a natural one, which manifests itself when learners hear and read comprehensible and relevant language at low-anxiety levels. Interaction enables the negotiating of meaning and the clarification of the misunderstanding and perfection of language use which in turn makes the learning deeper. This theoretical perspective leads to classroom instruction that emphasises discussion, collaboration and experiential learning (Krashen, 1981).

Also, the theory of learning by use forms the basis of communicative English learning. Learners form proficiency through the active use of English according to this perspective and not by acquiring forms and structures. Communication per se is the engine of learning since through participation and reflection learners build knowledge. This view is marked by the importance of learner autonomous and active participation in the language acquisition process (Littlewood, 2013).

## **5. Principles of Communicative English Teaching and Learning**

The emergence of communicative English teaching and learning marks a decisive turning point in the history of English language education. This change is commonly referred to as an evolutionary revolution since although it embodied radical changes regarding purposes, procedures, and classroom activities, it did not happen suddenly. Rather, it evolved slowly with the evolving needs of communication, theoretical understanding, and facts of education.

The shift towards communicative English teaching and learning was revolutionary because it challenged the long-established belief that mastery of grammar and vocabulary alone constituted language proficiency. Traditional methods tended to explain English as an academic phenomenon that has to be studied, but communicative methods re-explained English as a living language that should be used. It shifted to getting students to learn how to use language to convey meaning and to express it in a proper way in the real life. This reorientation transformed the purpose of English education, placing communication at the centre of both teaching and learning.

Communicative English learning was developed over the years despite its revolutionary influence on the previous learning practises. Aspects of structural teaching, vocabulary and accuracy teaching were not completely abandoned but they became re-construed in the context of communication. The interactions, learner involvement and the use of real language started to be incorporated in the classroom practises with time. Such a slow development provided an opportunity to adjust communicative principles to various learning environments and needs of learners, which led to their sustainability in the long-term.

A defining feature of this evolutionary revolution is the integration of communication into every aspect of teaching and learning. Communication is no longer regarded as a final product

of language teaching but the major path of learning process. The learners get competence through discussion, problem-solving activities, role-playing, and group activities which resemble the actual use of the language in the real world. Increasing the learning process of language through such practises, makes it more experiential, interactive and meaningful; it bridges the gap between classroom learning and the real-life communication.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a framework is part of this larger movement and not the defining paradigm. CLT systematised principles of communicative and offered a pedagogical organisation to communicative learning of English. However, communicative English teaching and learning extends beyond CLT by incorporating flexible, context-sensitive practises that respond to learners' communicative needs. Therefore, CLT is a major step in the broader process of evolution of communicative English education.

At the heart of communicative English teaching and learning lie several interrelated principles. The most important one is the emphasis on meaning preceding form, in which the learners work on trying to communicate and interpret meaning instead of creating the language that is free of errors. Intimately connected to this is the fluency-functional accuracy balance such that the learners will be able to communicate with a lot of certainty and perfect the rightness in the context of meaning.

The other principle is that of interaction-based learning that considers language development as a social process supported by interaction between the learner and learner, and learner and teacher. Communication activities will prompt the learners to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas and attend to others, which enhances communicative competence. Also, the study of communicative English puts more focus on contextual and situational use of language because it acknowledges that language is different depending on the purpose, audience and context. The learners are thus exposed to real communicative situations which equip them with the real language use.

Finally, communicative English teaching and learning promotes the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are also not taught separately but rather are taught collectively in activities that come close to real-life communication where several skills are applied at the same time. This course is a combination of the holistic approach to language and the pragmatic emphasis of English learning.

## **6. Role of Communication in English Language Learning**

Communication is very much an essential component in English language learning as it is the ultimate purpose of teaching the language and it is also the major instrument by which learning occurs. Language acquisition in communicative learning of English context takes place by active engagement, interaction and purposeful engagement instead of passive receipt of rules and structure. This view acknowledges communication as the force that facilitates learners to gain both the linguistic and the practical language skills.

Real-life communication is one of the most important components of communicative English learning as the input of learning. Students acquire language in the real-life scenario of its natural usage in social, academic, and the professional world. Real world communicative are authentic

situations like discussions, problem solving activities as well as role plays which give the learners meaningful input in which the use of the language is applicable in the real world. In this manner, learners acquire knowledge of the way language works in various situations, such as tone, register, and purport differences.

The communicative method also makes the classroom a communicative one. It is no more a setting where language is examined in a vacuum, but a classroom where English is practised as a means of communication. Students do pair and group activities, collaborative activities, and interactive activities, which stimulate spontaneous language use. This change creates a dynamic learning environment where there is constant and intentional communication that is similar to language use outside the school.

The other important aspect is the bargaining of sense that takes place when the learners communicate to them to help them understand, solve misunderstandings, and express intended messages. Negotiation allows the learners to alter their language, seek clarification, and give feedback to each other. This interactive course facilitates further language learning, because learners will be more conscious of linguistic structures and meanings in their attempts to communicate.

English language learning communication also plays a major role in achievement of confidence and competence. The ability to communicate frequently helps the learners to get rid of the anxiety and fear of erring. As students are able to share meaning and engage in communications, they are able to get confidence in the skills they have to communicate using English. In the long run, the confidence has resulted in greater fluency, accuracy and more sense of communicative competence.

## **7. Role of Teacher and Learner in Communicative English Learning**

The learning of communicative English leads to a paradigm change in the conventional teacher-learner roles. Communicative learning of English encourages the interactive and learner-centred environment as opposed to the teacher-centred model where the teacher transmits knowledge to the student, in which the communication is the focus of learning. Such redefinition of roles is necessary to designing meaningful learning experiences as well as the development of communicative competence in the English language.

Engaging in teaching communicative learning of English, the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator and organiser of communication instead of the one of an exclusive authority or source of information. The main role of the teacher is to make meaningful interaction possible, through designing communicative tasks, activities, and the learning situations that allow the learners to use English in a meaningful way. This involves setting up of discussions, role-plays, simulations, and problem-solving activities which are real-life communicative requirement. The teacher also mentors the learners, supports them when needed and makes the learning environment conducive and accommodative.

The learner takes the role of an active communicator and a participant in the learning process. Students are stimulated to speak English to express their ideas, give their opinions and interact with other people. Active participation helps the learners go beyond their passive learning and

is also involved directly with the construction of meaning. It is an active language use that enables the learners to gain fluency, confidence, and practical communicative skills.

Collaborative learning and peer interaction is another factor that is of great importance in learning communicative English. Group and pair activities enable learners to engage each other, negotiate meaning and learn through other perspectives. The interaction with peers presents the learners with more language exposure and allows them to get feedback and support one another. Group work activities are also useful in enabling learners to acquire social and strategic communication skills that are critical in the actual use of language.

Lastly, communicative learning of English highly facilitates the attainment of learner autonomy. Students are made to be responsible towards their learning through introspection, recognising the aspects that they should improve on, and employing effective techniques of learning. Learners acquire the ability to speak English outside of the classroom in academic, professional and social situations as their confidence and independence increases.

## **8. Learner-Centred Pedagogy in Communicative English Learning**

Learner-centred pedagogy is one of the fundamental aspects of communicative learning in English and is a strategic move towards abandoning traditional teacher-centred instruction. This method of pedagogy accepts learners as being active participants in the learning process and places attention on participation, interaction, and learning by experience. During communicative English teaching, the knowledge is not taught passively, but developed through human and significant interaction with words and the social environment.

Learning through participation is a major characteristic of learner-centred pedagogy. Students learn English through using it and not through learning its rules. Engaging in communicative activities enables the students to test their language, represent thoughts and practise to polish their learning. Such practical participation contributes to the improvement of fluency and communicative competence since the learners get to learn through doing.

Group work, discussion and role-play are widely used in learner-centred communicative classrooms. Such activities provide the means of real communication and cooperation between learners. Group activities foster the exchange of ideas and views whereas discussions foster critical thinking and the use of meaningful language. Role-play activities are simulations of life situations, as a result of which, learners can practise such language functions as requesting, negotiating, and problem-solving under the conditions of a supportive setting.

The other significant theme of learner-centre pedagogy is the elimination of language anxiety. Communicative activities, in particular, peer interaction activities, assist in developing a non-threatening learning environment. The fear of errors is lowered when the learners are made to work as a team instead of working individually in front of the teacher. This conducive atmosphere fosters risk taking which is crucial in language development.

Motivation and engagement are also improved greatly through learner- centred pedagogy. Learners find it interesting and meaningful to learn through meaningful tasks, interactive and real-life relevance. The motivation of the learners goes up as they perceive the practicality of

the English language and they feel successful in the field of communication. The increased involvement results in the extended involvement and more efficient learning of a language.

## 9. Conclusion

The practise of communicative English learning is an ongoing development of the English language teaching, and not a definite or terminal methodological phase. With the demands of global communication also evolving, English learning has increasingly become less form-oriented and more communication-oriented, which puts more emphasis on meaning, communication, and application of language in reality. This current development underscores the dynamic aspect of the English language education and its ability to address the social, academic and professional demands.

In this wider trend in communicative, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has a significant but not exclusive role to play. CLT offered a systematic pedagogical structure which organised communicative principles and helped them to be applied in the classrooms. Nonetheless, the communicative learning of English goes beyond CLT, whereby it enforces flexible, learner-centred and context-sensitive learning practises which adjust themselves to different learning contexts. Therefore, we can consider CLT as a pivotal point in a broader communicative development as opposed to the only defining methodology.

Communication based English teaching is significant as it will equip students with a real-life use of the language. Through interaction, functional use of language and meaningful engagement, learners gain confidence, fluency, and communicative competence through communicative learning of English. Such an emphasis makes sure that English is not just studied as a subject of learning but actually as a means of social communication, academic interaction and professional communication.

Looking ahead, the future directions of English teaching and learning are likely to further strengthen communicative principles through innovation and adaptation. The developments in digital technology, online learning environments, and connectivity in the global world are providing new opportunities to learn and act in an authentic way and to learn in a collaborative manner. Meanwhile, the further relation to learner autonomy, intercultural awareness, and lifelong learning will determine the next step of communicative English education. In this regard, the communicative learning of English will continue to be a crucial and dynamic phenomenon that will make English language instruction pertinent, significant and adaptable to the pressures and challenges of a fast-changing world.

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