



**COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH: A
RESEARCH-BASED PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract: This article examines the communicative approach in teaching English as a foreign language, focusing on its theoretical foundations, core principles, and practical applications in contemporary educational contexts. The findings indicate that the communicative approach significantly enhances learners ability to use English effectively in real-life situations by promoting interaction, fluency, and learner autonomy.

Key words: communicative approach, communicative competence, English language teaching (ELT).

The evolution of English language teaching methodologies reflects wide-ranging shifts in linguistic theory, educational philosophy and socio-cultural demands. Traditional approaches such as Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual methods were primarily concerned with the formal properties of language, emphasizing accuracy, memorization, and structural drills. However, these approaches often failed to equip learners with the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. The emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) marked a significant paradigm shift. As Jack C. Richards states that language teaching should focus on the functional and communicative potential of language rather than its structural features . Theodore S. Rodgers suggests that effective language learning occurs when learners are engaged in meaningful interaction rather than passive reception of knowledge.

This approach aligns with the increasing demand for communicative competence in a globalized world, where English functions as an international lingua franca. The communicative approach is grounded in the concept of communicative competence. Dell Hymes argues that linguistic competence alone is insufficient, and that speakers must also understand how to use



language appropriately in different social contexts. This perspective fundamentally challenged earlier structuralist views of language. Expanding on this, Michael Halliday suggests that language is a social semiotic system and that meaning is constructed through interaction. Halliday emphasizes that language functions such as expressing needs, maintaining relationships, and conveying information should be central to teaching practices.

Michael Canale and Merrill Swain propose that “communicative competence consists of multiple components, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences”⁶¹. Their model remains one of the most influential frameworks in applied linguistics. From a cognitive perspective, Stephen Krashen suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in low-anxiety environments. He argues that meaningful communication, rather than explicit grammar instruction, plays a crucial role in language development.

Lev Vygotsky emphasizes “the importance of social interaction in learning, proposing that knowledge is co-constructed through collaborative activity”⁶². This idea strongly supports communicative classroom practices such as pair and group work. The principles of CLT are derived from these theoretical foundations and are widely supported in the literature. David Nunan states that “communicative tasks should involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, and producing language while focusing on meaning rather than form. He further suggests that authentic communication should be the primary goal of classroom activities”⁶³.

H. Douglas Brown argues that “fluency and accuracy are complementary goals, but fluency should be prioritized in the early stages of learning”⁶⁴.

⁶¹ Canale, Michael; Swain, Merrill. *Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing*. -Oxford: Oxford University Press -1980 -p. 1-47

⁶² Vygotsky, Lev S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. -Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press -1978 -p. 79-91

⁶³ Nunan, David. *Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers*. -London: Prentice Hall -1991 -p. 279-305

⁶⁴ Brown, H. Douglas *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. -White Plains, NY: Pearson



Brown emphasizes that learners must be encouraged to take risks and experiment with language. Jeremy Harmer suggests that “effective communicative teaching requires a balance between controlled practice and free production, allowing learners to gradually develop both accuracy and fluency”⁶⁵.

The practical implementation of CLT is characterized by interactive, task-based activities. Rod Ellis suggests that “task-based interaction promotes deeper language processing and enhances acquisition”⁶⁶. According to Ellis, tasks should have a clear outcome and require learners to use language meaningfully. Jane Willis states that tasks create opportunities for authentic language use and encourage learners to focus on meaning rather than form. She emphasizes the importance of pre-task, task, and post-task stages in lesson design.

Examples of communicative activities include:

8. Role-plays simulating real-life situations
9. Information gap tasks requiring negotiation of meaning
10. Group discussions and debates
11. Problem-solving and decision-making tasks

These activities reflect real-world communication and foster learner engagement. The communicative approach redefines traditional classroom roles. Littlewood William states that “the teacher’s role shifts from knowledge transmitter to facilitator of communication”⁶⁷. The teacher creates conditions for interaction and guides learners in the learning process. At the same time, learners are expected to take active responsibility for their learning. Breen Michael suggests “that learners should be seen as active participants who

Education -2007 -p. 241-278

⁶⁵ Harmer, Jeremy. How to Teach English -Harlow: Pearson Longman. -2007 -p. 69-98

⁶⁶ Ellis, Rod. Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching. -Oxford: Oxford University Press -2003 -p. 3-35

⁶⁷ Littlewood, William. Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction. -Cambridge: Cambridge University Press -1981 -p. 1-20



negotiate meaning and collaborate with others”⁶⁸.

Numerous scholars highlight the effectiveness of CLT. Scott Thornbury suggests that “communicative practice enhances fluency and helps learners develop automaticity in language use”⁶⁹. He argues that frequent interaction leads to greater confidence and spontaneity. Paul Nation states that “meaningful communication supports vocabulary retention and language development more effectively than isolated memorization”⁷⁰.

CLT promotes:

8. Fluency and confidence
9. Real-life communication skills
10. Learner autonomy
11. Interactive learning environments

Despite its advantages, CLT has been subject to criticism. Alan Swan argues that “excessive focus on fluency may lead to fossilization of errors if not balanced with form-focused instruction”⁷¹. Large class sizes, limited resources, and exam-oriented systems may hinder effective implementation. The communicative approach represents a major advancement in English language teaching, shifting the focus from form to meaning and from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered interaction. As Jack C. Richards suggests, “effective language teaching must prepare learners for real communication rather than abstract knowledge of language systems”⁷².

The analysis demonstrates that CLT is supported by a strong theoretical

⁶⁸ Breen, Michael P. *Learner Contributions to Task Design*. -Lancaster: Lancaster University Press -1987 -p. 23-46

⁶⁹ Thornbury, Scott. *How to Teach Speaking*. -Harlow: Longman -2005 -p. 13-39

⁷⁰ Nation, I.S.P. *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. -Cambridge: Cambridge University Press -2001 -p. 1-25

⁷¹ Swan, Michael. *Practical English Usage*. -Oxford: Oxford University Press -2005 -p. 10-28

⁷² Richards, Jack C. *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. -Cambridge: Cambridge University Press -2006 -p. 1-45



foundation and extensive empirical research. While it has certain limitations, its benefits in developing communicative competence make it an essential component of modern language education. To conclude the communicative approach remains highly relevant in today's globalized world, where the ability to communicate effectively in English is a crucial skill.

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