

Creating Positive English Language Learning Environment through Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract— Teaching Language is a little different from other branches of study in grasping the learners' interest. In the modern English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom, the role of the teachers becomes somewhat sensational in order to make the teaching atmosphere fresh. According to the Language Teachers from the Department of English (TU, Lashio), the common problem in ELT classroom is living up Equity among different types of learners during the teaching period. In other words, positive learning environment cannot be created as it is not easy to manage different levels of learners. This paper aims to give some effective teaching/learning styles using the Communicative Language Teaching method in order to get classroom environment alive.

Keywords— alive, effective, Equity, teaching atmosphere, types of learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, language teaching is the process whereby learners receive communicative competency or fluency and accuracy in a language, and a teacher of some kind facilitates language practice for the learners. Effective language teaching process is more than ending up being memorization application of vocabulary and grammar rules.

Actually, language teaching is a challenging process for both teachers and learners because it is thought to be socio-cognitive, meaning that language can be learned through the process of social interaction.

For an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, teaching English as a foreign language is a very challenging career choice, especially, for those who are the bilingual. And then, keeping students awake and interested during an ELT period is a little difficult for the classroom practitioner although it is the first and foremost job.

It is also important for the students to think the class that as a space where everyone has access to the same learning and to the optimal condition for nurturing intellectual curiosity.

In order to get the goal of supporting the students with learning, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending English, it is clear that one must not only teach, but inspire and empower.

Consequently, this research paper highlights the ways and the strategies of managing the ELT classroom alive. It is hoped that by means of the ways and strategies presented in this paper, the classroom practitioners can overcome the common problems they come across in the ELT classroom.

II. USING TEACHING STYLES OR METHODS IN THE CLASSROOM

A teaching method comprises the principles and methods used by teachers to enable student learning. These strategies are determined partly on subject matter to be taught and partly by the nature of the learner. For a particular teaching method to be appropriate and efficient it has to be in relation

with the characteristic of the learner and the type of learning it is supposed to bring about.

The teacher's primary role is to coach and facilitate student learning and overall comprehension of material. Student learning is measured through both formal and informal forms of assessment, including group projects, students portfolios, and class participation. Commonly used teaching methods may include participation, demonstration, recitation, memorization, or combinations of these.

Mirsha (2007) argues that there are three styles of teaching; discipline centred, instructor centred and student centred, although there are many more different teaching styles and theories suggested by different authors. The discipline centred style of teaching is very structured, not allowing for flexibility for what is taught and when it is taught. This style of teaching is as ineffective as it is impractical, as teaching must allow for flexibility to ensure that all pupils are learning and achieving in schools.

Instructor centred style of teaching focuses on the teacher as being the main source of knowledge for pupils. Everything that pupils learn may come from the teacher, without obtaining knowledge and information from other sources. Much like the discipline centred style of teaching, the instructor centred style is very limited and does not help learners develop, as pupils do not have to seek ways of finding out information themselves, but simply ask the teacher. It is also very limited as the teacher cannot be expected to be able to answer all of the questions the pupils may have, and may have limited knowledge in certain areas of the curriculum.

The third teaching style suggested by Mishra (2007) is the student centred style of teaching. This style is much more learner centred and is very much focused on the cognitive development of students. Through this teaching style, pupils are encouraged to learn through enquiry, and develop their own thinking skills obtain knowledge and solve problems. Unlike the other two styles suggested by Mirsha (2007), the student centred style of teaching also focuses more on the needs of individual learners. This style of teaching allows for pupils to learn in different ways as the teacher adapts their teaching style.

Amidst different approaches and theories on teaching styles, teachers should adapt the appropriate teaching styles so that everyone benefits an equal experience in education in the classroom.

III. PRACTISING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN ELT CLASSROOM

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was laid in the 1970s by linguists Michael Halliday, who studied how language functions are expressed through grammar, and Dell Hymes, who introduced the idea of a wider communicative competence instead of Chomsky's narrower linguistic competence. The rise of CLT in the 1970s and early 1980s was partly in response to the lack of success with traditional

language teaching methods and partly due to the increase in demand for language learning.

It is needed to explore pedagogical means for “real-life” communication in the classroom. Developing linguistic fluency and not just the accuracy that once consumed our predecessors is the major concern for the students in this modern era. Students need to be equipped with tools for generating unrehearsed language performance “out there” when they leave the womb of the classrooms. Classroom practitioners are concerned with how to facilitate lifelong language learning among the students, and not just with the immediate classroom task.

CLT aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the Communicative Approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication.

The following are suggested in order to portrait CLT in ELT classroom.

A *Heading to Learner-centred Approach Through Communicative Language Teaching*

Learner centred teaching is an approach that places the learner at the centre of the learning. This means that the learner or student is responsible for learning while the tutor is responsible for facilitating the learning. This is also known as student-centred learning. This idea of the teacher as the “facilitator” means that the focus of teaching shifts from the teacher to the student. This type of teaching should put learners’ interests first.

By contrast, traditional education is often “teacher centred”. This means that the teacher is in the “active” role while the learners are “passive”. Very few of us are good learners when we are in this kind of “passive” role in a teaching situation.

Practising Learner-centred approach in the classroom enables learners learn and work on their own. This means that it enables life-long learning and independent problem-solving. According to CLT, the goal of language education is the ability to communicate in the target language. This is in contrast to previous views in which grammatical competence was commonly given top priority. CLT also focuses on the teacher being a facilitator, rather than an instructor. To facilitate the students’ need, learner-centred approach should be practised in today’s ELT classroom.

B *The Very Necessary Elements for Successful Language Learning*

Classroom students need to be motivated, be exposed to language, and given chances to use it. The following three elements will help the students learn the language effectively.

Engage

This is the point in a teaching sequence where teachers try to arouse the students’ interest, thus involving their emotions.

Most people can remember lessons at school which were uninvolved and where they ‘switched off’ from what was being taught them. Frequently, this was because they were bored, because they were not emotionally engaged with what was going on. Such lessons can be contrasted with lessons where they were amused, moved, stimulated or challenged. It seems quite clear that lessons involved not only more ‘fun’ but also better learning.

Activities and materials which frequently *Engage* students include: games (depending on age and type), music,

discussions (when handled challengingly), stimulating pictures, dramatic stories, amusing anecdotes etc. But even where such materials and activities are not used, teachers need to ensure that their students *Engage* with the topic, exercise or language they are going to deal with.

Study

Study activities are those where the students are asked to focus in on language (or information) and how it is constructed. They range from the study and practice of a single sound to an investigation of how a writer achieves a particular effect in a long text; from an examination and practice of a verb tense to the study of a transcript of informal speech to discuss spoken style.

Students can study in a variety of different styles: the teacher can explain grammar, they can study language evidence to discover grammar for themselves and they can work in groups studying a reading text or vocabulary. But whatever the style, *Study* means any stage at which the construction of language is the main focus.

Successful language learning in a classroom depends on a judicious blend of subconscious language acquisition and the kind of *Study* activities.

Activate

This element describes exercises and activities which are designed to get students using language as freely and ‘communicatively’ as they can. The objective for the students is not to focus on language construction and/or practice specific bits of language (grammar patterns, particular vocabulary items or functions) but for them to use all and any language which may be appropriate for a given situation or topic.

Typical *Activate* exercises include role-plays, advertisement design, debates and discussion, ‘Describe and Draw’, story and poem writing, writing in groups etc.

If students do not have a chance to *Activate* their knowledge in the safety of a classroom, they may find transferring language acquisition and study into language use in the real world far more problematical.

These Engage, Study, Activation (ESA) elements need to be present in most lessons or teaching sequences. Whether the main focus of a lesson is a piece of grammar (in which case there will be opportunities for *Study* and *Activation*), or whether the focus is on reading (where there may be a lot of *Activation* of language knowledge in the processing of the text or the use of some language within it), students always need to be *Engaged*, if possible, so that they can get the maximum out of learning experience.

C. *Understanding Types of Learners*

To access to the purpose of the teaching/learning process, teachers need to be aware of types of learners. Typically, learners fall into two large groups – introverts and extroverts. We need to understand the importance of catering to all students, but how can you make sure to reach both introverts and extroverts? A good place to start is by understanding both groups and what motivates them to learn.

The first component of learning style dimensions is how learners interact with the outside world. Extroverted learners prefer working with others and bouncing ideas back and forth. Social and learning activities that benefit them include problem-solving with others, group projects, and learning through mimicking experiences.

Extroverted learners have the following characteristics:

- Very outgoing, they are “people” people
- Quite comfortable working in and being part of large crowds
- Have a wide base of friends, enjoy getting to know a lot of people
- Dive in without always thinking things through
- Feel sapped when spending too much time alone

Extroverted learners possess a social learning style. In addition, they have acute verbal learning styles as well, often communicating through stories or being the first to volunteer for assignments and projects.

Introverts generally have a shy nature, and students who are introverted have a solitary learning style, as they often prefer to solve problems on their own. Introverted learners like to brainstorm and seek theoretical exploration. They like to think out a problem and weigh options before moving forward.

Introverted learners have the following characteristics:

- Appear reflective or reserved
- Slow to take action – sometimes too slow
- Have a very small but close group of friends – preferring to get to know a few people really well
- Feel most comfortable doing things alone and prefer doing things that can be done alone
- Often likes the idea of things better than the actual thing
- Finds spending time in large crowds or groups to be exhausting

Teachers should exercise patience, especially when it comes to introverted students. If they are called upon in class to answer a problem, it may take them a bit longer as they are probably carefully assessing and evaluating their response.

IV. USING PROPER ACTIVITIES FOR SUSTAINING ELT CLASSROOM ALIVE

Activities are of great help to become the classroom alive. Studies show that meaningful classroom activities help students emotionally connect to things that they have already known. These connections then help them build even more connections that they can store in their brain. Students learn through their participation in the attainment of knowledge by gathering information and processing it by solving problems and articulating what they have discovered.

One of the most effective strategies for encouraging both introverts and extroverts at the same time is using interactive teaching activities. The following are the sample interactive activities which can be used in weaving into the fabric of effective teaching/learning environment.

i) Ice Breakers

Ice Breakers are low-stakes activities that get students to interact and talk to each other, and encourage subsequent classroom interactions. They can be useful at the beginning of the semester: for example, asking students to introduce themselves to each other and what they would like to learn in the course. Advantages of icebreakers include: participation of each student, the creation of a sense of community and focusing students' attention on material that will be covered during the class period.

ii) Group Works

In many classrooms, a large portion of the school day is centered on group activities. In order to provide a balance that suits both extroverted and introverted learners, teachers

can coordinate both small group and individual activities. It gets students talking to each other about their classwork and it helps them learn to listen to one another's ideas. Group work benefits the teacher, too. It helps you come up with meaningful, authentic lesson ideas that engage students in ways that are most beneficial to them. Group work ignites different parts of the brain and allows different types of learners to be successful. Group work gives you a way to assess both formal and informal language skills, as students work socially to complete something academic in nature. As the inspirational Helen Keller once said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

iii) Think–Pair–Share

This type of activity first asks students to consider a question on their own, and then provides an opportunity for students to discuss it in pairs, and finally together with the whole class. The success of these activities depends on the nature of the questions posed. This activity works ideally with questions to encourage deeper thinking, problem-solving, and/or critical analysis. The group discussions are critical as they allow students to articulate their thought processes.

The procedure is as follows:

1. Pose a question, usually by writing it on the board or projecting it.
2. Have students consider the question on their own (1 – 2 min).
3. Then allow the students form groups of 2-3 people.
4. Next, have students discuss the question with their partner and share their ideas and/or contrasting opinions (3 min).
5. Re-group as a whole class and solicit responses from some or all of the pairs (3 min).

Advantages of the think-pair-share include the engagement of all students in the classroom (particularly the opportunity to give voice to quieter students who might have difficulty sharing in a larger group), quick feedback for the instructor (e.g., the revelation of student misconceptions), encouragement and support for higher levels of thinking of the students.

iv) Interview or Role Play

Members of the class take the part or perspective of historical figures, authors, or other characters and must interact from their perspective. Breakdown the role play into specific tasks to keep students organized and to structure them so that the content you want to cover is addressed. Preparation work can be assigned for outside of class, so clearly communicating your expectations is essential. Advantages include motivation to solve a problem or to resolve a conflict for the character, providing a new perspective through which students can explore or understand an issue and the development of skills, such as writing, leadership, coordination, collaboration and research.

v) Jigsaw

A Jigsaw is a cooperative active learning exercise where students are grouped into teams to solve a problem or analyze a reading. These can be done in one of two ways – either each team works on completing a different portion of the assignment and then contributes their knowledge to the class as a whole, or within each group, one student is assigned to a portion of the assignment (the jigsaw comes from the

bringing together the various ideas at the end of the activity to produce a solution to the problem). In a jigsaw, the activity must be divided into several equal parts, each of which is necessary to solving a problem, or answering a question. Example activities include implementing experiments, small research projects, analyzing and comparing datasets, and working with professional literature. The advantages of the jigsaw include the ability to explore substantive problems or readings, the engagement of all students with the material and in the process of working together, learning from each other, and sharing and critical analyzing a diversity of ideas.

V. SAMPLE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT USING CLT

In the ELT classroom, it is needed not only to reduce Teacher Talking Time (TTT) but also to promote Students Talking Time (STT) to start practising Learner-centred approach. Teacher should be a facilitator and it is needed to facilitate students to elicit their language skills themselves such as knowledge sharing/exchanging through some kinds of activities.

Using warming up or Ice breaking questions like “Have you had a good breakfast?”, “What have you noticed on your way to school?” etc. is a proper way to start the teaching period. Lessons should be *Engaged* with pre tasks concerning with the topic. For example, for the topic “Natural Disaster”, the students should be engaged with some questions like “Have you ever heard Earthquake?”, “What would you do if you were in these situations? Etc.

Then, they have to be let to *Study* the lesson that follows up the topic whether they have already known or not. After that, students should be *Activated* with the language they have already learned through some exercises or tasks such as *narrative stories telling or writing*. Using ESA let learners get learning experiences and effective communication with the class.

Some kinds of activities are also very effective in ELT classroom. In order to cope with different types of learners, certain activities such as “group work, pair work, role play etc.” are very effective in ELT classroom of CLT method. In using CLT, Time management is also suggested for sustaining the classroom alive.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

According to the teachers from the Department of English (TU, Lashio), most of them are using Traditional ways of teaching methods such as Grammar Translation Method. As it is in the form of teacher-centred approach, most of the students are in “passive role”. As a consequence, all students do not involve in the teaching/learning process as learning environment is not active. As an alternative way, the author has found CLT as a proper way to create positive learning environment in language teaching. In the past, just 50% or less of a 40-student class was present in the ELT classroom. Once using CLT, 75% of this class size is present almost

every day. They enjoy doing activities, communicating with one another, sharing knowledge, using language in proper way and they become more interested in English Language Learning. Because of these results, the author suggests CLT as a very useful way in ELT classroom.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

With an effort as much as possible, some effective teaching/learning styles of managing classroom are suggested in this paper. Today’s classroom atmosphere is very challenging and the ELT teachers are inevitable some common problems in creating the positive teaching environment. It is also very difficult to build up Equity based on different levels of learners. If a teacher recognizes how to manage classroom effectively, the ELT classroom atmosphere can be created alive. With that expectation, the author suggests Communicative Language Teaching in this paper. It is hoped that this will be a bit handy for the classroom practitioners in the ELT classroom.

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