

## WHICH METHOD SHOULD WE CHOOSE IN ELT: A REAL CHALLENGE !

Necdet Osam

*Middle East Technical University*

### INTRODUCTION

Recently a very hot debate is going on among the teachers of English at Turkish State High Schools. They are discussing the reasons for the failure of having an efficient English language teaching in these schools despite a six-year-long education. After having studied English for six years at the secondary and high schools, the majority of high school graduates, except very few rare cases, are far from uttering a few words in English, let alone communicate with foreigners when needed. Although these teachers from time to time complain about the low level of motivation students have, they mostly diagnose the method, which has been applied in these state schools since 1970, as the first and the most important barrier in their teaching. In other words, they put all the blame on the good old Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) without considering the other factors which do contribute to the low level of efficiency in English language teaching and learning. Needless to say, methodologies (in language teaching) play a great role; yet, as Stern (1983) points out, one cannot ignore the significance of other crucial elements such as the aim of instruction, the needs of the students, and personal artistry of the instructor. Similarly, Vancı (1991:14) links the success of teaching with the quality and ability of the students, the needs and the interests of the students, and finally the instructor's educational background.

These days the teachers who are not happy with the ALM in their classes talk about the Communicative Language Teaching in such a way that all the problems related to English language teaching in state high schools will be overcome by the proper application of the Communicative Approach. They wholeheartedly believe that the failure will leave its place to success if this magical approach (CLT) is applied.

### PROBLEM

According to Littlewood (1981), Rivers (1983) and Larsen-Freeman (1986), the main goal in language teaching is to enable students to become communicatively competent in that foreign language. However, the students who are taking six years of formal English language teaching in Turkish State high schools cannot be considered successful in using the language neither in spoken nor in written mode.

As stated above, the complaints of the English language teachers in these high schools were, in fact, related with the nature of the method applied in the language classroom (Celce-Murcia, McIntosh 1974:7, Chastain 1976:107-108). These teachers were actually taking example of other institutions such as Anatolian and private high schools, which were applying the Communicative Approach and having better results. It is true that the students of these institutions have a reasonable degree of proficiency in English language use; however, the educational facilities of these high schools are quite different from the State high schools in terms of class environment, selection of materials, time allotted to teaching and others.

### HYPOTHESIS

In this study it was hypothesized that the students who were taught English at state high schools according to the principles of the Communicative Approach would be more successful at expressing themselves both in written and spoken forms. In other words, they would have higher grades than those who were taught the same subject according to the principles of the Audio-Lingual Method.

During the conduct of this research, whether or not variables such as environment, socio-economic background, family or peer group, or individual factors like aptitude, motivation, or willingness to learn would have an effect on learners' performance was not focused on at all.

### METHOD

First of all, a state high school was designated in order to conduct the procedures of the research. Two different groups of second year students in that school with the same level of English proficiency were chosen. This careful selection was carried out through a tried-out pre-test. Then, while one of the groups (the Control Group) continued English language learning in Audio-Lingual Method, the other group (the Experimental Group) carried on learning English in the Communicative Approach.

The research was designed for four weeks. At the end of the scheduled time, a post - test was given to both of the groups, and in light of the results we were able to analyze the degree of learning achieved by the students in each group and thus the effectiveness of the methods in question.

### MATERIALS

Since this study was conducted in a state high school, we had to use the main course book *An English Course For Turks*, which has been used in those schools for many years. This course book has been prepared by an authorized commission according to the principles of the Audio-Lingual Method. During the research, both the Control Group and the Experimental Group studied the same units of the same course book, but only in the Experimental Group the techniques to teach the related

units were conducted within the principles of the Communicative Approach. In other words, for the Experimental Group the units were modified in line with the Communicative Approach.

## METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

### *Data Collection*

Among the four research traditions in language classroom cited by Nunan (1979) as Psychometric Research Technique, Interaction Analysis, Discourse Analysis and Ethnography, the Psychometric Research Technique was chosen to be applied from the beginning to the end of this study. As it is known, in psychometric studies the researcher investigates the effectiveness of particular methods, activities and techniques by measuring language gain on proficiency tests.

In this study, then, following the required procedures of a psychometric study, the test scores of both groups were analyzed using a range of inferential statistical tools in order to determine whether differences were due to the variable in question or a matter of chance. In other words, the ALM and CLT were compared in terms of effectiveness in language gain within the framework of psychometric research tradition.

### *Subjects*

Having applied a tried-out pre-test at Bahçelievler High School, Ankara, two classes (Class 2-İ and Class 2-G) were chosen to be designated either as Control or Experimental Group. In each of these classes, there were 55 students, 29 (59.8%) of whom were male and 26 (47.2%) of whom were female. The majority of the students (96%) were at the age of 12, and few of the others (only 4%) ranged between 11 and 15 years old.

### *Pre-Test*

In order to prepare the pre-test to be applied at the beginning of the study, first of all the exercises in the course book (*An English Course for Turks*) and the workbook were analyzed carefully. Also, the previous examination questions prepared by the class teacher were studied. The pre-test for both classes was designed according to the principles of Audio-Lingual Method. This test included parts as *Fill in the Banks*, *Transformations* and *Sentence Completion*. The pre-test results of both classes can be seen clearly in Table I below:

Table 1 : Results of Pre-Tests

GROUPS	MEAN	SD	n	t	P
Class 2-İ	39. 2128	24.509	55	-0.46	.647
Class 2-G	41. 2963	22.685	55	-0.46	.647

t\*-t: -46, P< .647

All the values in Table 1 indicate that the level of proficiency was almost the same in both groups. In other words, there was not a significant difference between the mean scores of each group.

As for the SD (standard deviation) figures, it can be said that the SD of Class 2-İ was wider than that of Class 2-G, which meant that the pre-test scores were more varied in Class 2-İ than in Class 2-G. As a result, Class 2-G was more homogeneous than Class 2-İ in terms of the spread out of the scores. Despite all these slight differences, it would be appropriate to say that the pre-entry level of Class 2-İ and Class 2-G was insignificant. Therefore, relying on these figures shown in Table I, Class 2-İ was designated as the Control Group, and Class 2-G as the Experimental Group.

In both classes a simplified questionnaire was delivered, too, in order to find out the attitude of the students towards learning English and the materials they had been using. It was a highly structured questionnaire with two choices of answers as *Yes* and *No*. The questionnaire had three parts as (a) question items related to general information, (b) items related to the Audio-Lingual Method, and (c) items related to the Communicative Language Teaching.

#### *Procedure and Materials*

The research continued for four weeks and at the end of this period, a post-test, which was prepared in collaboration with the class teacher, was administered.

As for the primary source, the course book *An English Course For Turks* was used. The research started while the students were studying the second lesson in Unit Three, page 40. The main aim of this unit was to teach the students the use of 'much, more, a lot of, many' in the mechanical structures, dialogues and in a reading passage.

In accordance with the school's weekly scheduled programme, Class 2-İ (the Control Group) continued studying the lessons in the Audio-Lingual Method whereas Class 2-G (the Experimental Group) was taught the same subject in Communicative Language Teaching with the modifications that the nature of the Communicative Approach required. For example, the students in the Control Group (Class 2-İ) were introduced the quantity adverbs with countable and uncountable nouns by following the steps and procedures offered in their course book. However, in the Experimental Group (Class 2-G), students studied the same lesson by means of role plays, games and problem solving tasks. Therefore, the groups were not taught anything different from each other in order not to create any difficulty neither for the students nor for the teacher and the administrators of the school.

There is no doubt that teacher is the most important variable in the field of education. In order to minimize the teacher variable and increase the reliability of the research, it would be appropriate to have a single teacher to teach in both classes, and luckily we had this arrangement. Also, in order to guarantee the application of

the CLT and to ease the class teacher's load, the lesson plans to be applied in the experimental group were prepared by the researcher himself and handed in the class teacher earlier enough. Since the proficiency level of the groups was fairly low and since the students had been taught English in a highly controlled way up to that grade, it was decided to apply the highly structured version of the communicative approach in this research ( Littlewood 1981 and Howatt 1984).

#### *Post-Test*

As for the post-test, while the Control Group (Class 2-I) was given a test similar to the pre-test, the Experimental Group (Class 2-G) was given one designed within the framework of the Communicative Language Teaching. Here, mainly *True-False*, *Comprehension Questions*, *Controlled Dialogue Completion* and *Cloze Test* formed the basis of the post-test.

### EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

#### *Preliminaries*

In order to test the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of the study, descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used. The evaluation of the data obtained in the research was done through the statistical package SPSS programme implemented in the computer center at the Middle East Technical University.

#### *The Significance of The Questionnaire Results*

The results obtained from both groups (n=110 variables) showed very clearly that they were not happy in the way they were taught English. The question items in (b) received 24% percent of the positive answers whereas the items in (c) had 76% percent of the positive answers. This was a clear indication that the majority of the students (84 students out of 110) disfavored the Audio-Lingual Method. However, the overall attitude of the students who answered the questionnaire was quite promising. In Class 2-I, for example, 97.5% of the students expressed the importance of learning English language while in Class 2-G this percentage was 89.1. By looking at these high percentages, it can be said that the students in this State high school had no negative attitude towards English language learning at all.

#### *The Evaluation of The Post-Test Results*

As mentioned earlier, the application of the pre-test to both the Control and the Experimental Groups has shown that there was no significant change in their English proficiency level (see Table I). At this point, it would be necessary to compare and contrast each group's pre and post-test results to see if any significant change took place at the end of the four-week study. First, the results of the control group, Class 2-I, were analyzed.

Table 2: Results of Pre and Post-Tests of Class 2-I

GROUP	TEST TYPE	MEAN	SD	n	t	P
Class 2-I	Pre-Test	39. 2128	24.509	55	-0.46	.647 >.05
Class 2-I	Post-test	35. 0909	22.837	55	1.82	.075 > .05

The values in Table II explicitly indicate that no significant change was achieved at the end of the scheduled period. The Mean, SD and the P values did not change significantly, which was an expected result. In other words, the hypothesis  $H_0 = \mu \text{ pre-test} = \mu \text{ post-test}$  ( $\mu^*$  average) was validated.

The Experimental Group, Class 2-G, was administered the post-test which was designed in accordance with the communicative approach since that group had been taught according to the principles and procedures of Communicative Language Teaching. The alternative hypothesis put forward at the beginning of the research for the experimental group was:

$$H_1 = \mu \text{ pre-test} < \mu \text{ post-test} \quad (\mu^* \text{ average})$$

When Table 3 is analyzed, it can easily be seen that the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$  was validated for Class 2-G (the Experimental Group).

Table 3: Results of Pre and Post-Tests of Class 2-G

GROUP	TEST TYPE	MEAN	SD	n	t	P
Class 2-G	Pre-Test	41. 2963	22.650	55	-0.46	.647 > .05
Class 2-G	Post-test	57. 5185	16.876	55	6.17	.0001 < .05

According to the figures in Table III, there was a change between the pre- and post-test results in Class 2-G, which was the Experimental Group. The mean of the post-test was quite high at the end of the fourth week. When the SD was analyzed, again a significant change was observed. At the post-test the SD became much smaller, which meant that a higher degree of uniformity and homogeneity towards the mean was achieved. Above all, the P value .0001 indicated a very significant change when compared with the P value of the Pre-Test.

## CONCLUSION

The results obtained at the end of the research have shown that the students in the experimental group ( Class 2-G), who were taught the scheduled chapters within the principles of the Communicative Approach, achieved more in English language learning. They earned fairly high grades in the post-test given at the end of the research. On the other hand, the control group ( Class 2-I ), which was taught the

same chapters in the Audio-Lingual Method, showed no progress in terms of average.

During the conduct of this research, a wide range of difficulties and limitations were faced. The major ones were related to classroom size, environment, the course book, materials and the teacher.

First of all, the number of the students (n=55) was a big obstacle in the application of the Communicative Approach. Besides its largeness, the classroom organization was not suitable for the activities of the Communicative Language Teaching. Another difficulty was with the course book, which was written in the ALM. It caused a great difficulty for the researcher in its modifications to the Communicative Approach. Finally, the teacher variable was a big problem. As the class teacher was not familiar with the principles and procedures of the Communicative Approach, the researcher had to go through every detail with her before she applied the lesson plans prepared by the researcher.

In spite of the difficulties encountered, the application of the CLT in that particular state high school has been fairly productive and successful. However, I would like to emphasize the fact that we cannot make a final statement about the function of the Communicative Approach in State high schools since this research has been realized with a limited number of cases (total n=110). Due to this point, it would not be appropriate to make a wide range of generalizations as this would not be regarded scientific.

In addition, I would like to point out that the teachers should have flexibility in their teaching. In other words, they should not tightly stick to one method in the presentation of the subject. Instead, they should try to use a large variety of methods and techniques in different stages of the lesson. Of course, although this may be fairly difficult at the beginning, in the course of time they will have their own way of combining all these bits and pieces of different methods and techniques in a more comprehensible and unique way. This requires time and patience, which are the basic elements of education.

Finally, the recent studies show that learning styles of students may vary from culture to culture. In order to decide about the most appropriate method for Turkish learners, we need to know about the learning styles and learning strategies that Turkish learners prefer in learning a foreign language. Only then we can comment on the efficiency of different methods.

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