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The Effectiveness of Communicative Teaching Approach for Improving Speaking Skills of Business College Students

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Abstract

The current study investigated the effectiveness of applying the Communicative Language Approach (CLA) to enhance speaking ability of business administration students in Delta University for Science and Technology. A quantitative method was applied by using pre- and post- test to measure improvement of students. The participants were 40 students of freshmen students, who studied "English1" course in the fall semester of the academic year 2017\2018. The participants were divided into two equal groups with twenty students each, Control Group (CG) and Experimental Group (EG). To find out the improvement of students" speaking ability the researcher used pre-posttest and t-test. A semi-structured questionnaire also was administered to measure students' attitude towards using CLA in studying English and their difficulties within the business context. The results indicated that t- test was 2.042 (significant at 0.05). This indicated that by applying Communicative Language Approach, the students' achievement has been improved. The results of students' questionnaire showed positive attitude towards using CLA for improving their speaking skills. The pedagogical implications of the study were presented.

Key words: *Communicative Approach, Speaking Skills, English for Business*

1. Introduction

English is well known as the language of communication worldwide for different fields, such as science, technology and commerce. The efficiency of language skills is the crucial indicators of the learning quality at any institution nowadays. Students graduating from business colleges, private universities should be competitive in the labour market. The sufficient acquaintance of Business English becomes the prominent requirement today (Drgas, 2014), and being good in English is the essential skill for business graduates to acquire other related technical proficiencies in their field. Therefore, business college students have to pass ten credit hours of English courses to fulfill their requirements of graduation.

The content of English courses for business has been analyzed the required skills by selecting the language materials for teaching (Sampath& Zalipour, 2010). Communication skills become the basic part

of language learning content in college of business. Students' skill in expressing themselves is the most important outcome of studying English. Speaking is one way to communicate thoughts and ideas in an oral message (Efriza, 2012). According to Gert and Hans (2008), "speaking is speech with the purpose of having intention to be recognized by speaker and the receiver processes the statements in order to recognize their intentions"(p. 207). Brown and Yule (1999) reported that speaking is relating to the complication of the knowledge to be communicated. Rebecca (2006) affirmed that speaking is the first manner in which students achieve in a language; it is an element of the daily connection of people with language activities. It basically supplies the crucial information for realizing the language contact.

There are many strategies and approaches that have been conducted to enhance speaking skills for all bilingual students and for ESP students in particular. Communicative Language Approach (CLA) is being the common strategy for improving the speaking skills of college students. The term communicative approach in language teaching is related to the concept of talking in foreign language. In other words, the idea of teaching foreign language by using it in real life situations, as Pei-long (2011) reported "the successful language teaching is which focus on communicative proficiency rather than mastery of sentence structures" (p. 459). It means that language in use is the best approach for students to develop their speaking skills (Harmer, 1998).

During learning process of CLA, students' are pushed to communicate orally and practice all features of communicative activities. The role of teacher is to motivate, evaluate, and modify during students' discussion (Efriza, 2012).

2. Literature Review

There were many studies that have been conducted on the topic of how to improve the speaking skills of ESP students. The effects of communicative language teaching have been also tackled in terms of advantages, activities and students' role. For example; the study of Puspitasari (2012) investigated the enhancement of students" speaking skills through "Communicative Language Teaching". The study administered pretest and posttest and used t-test to analyse the data. It was based on three cycles; each cycle comprised one meeting and each meeting consist of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The mean score of pretest and post test showed improvement in students' speaking skill using this strategy. The study of Ahmed& Rao, (2013) compared the Grammar Translation Method and the Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT) approach in teaching English at the intermediate level. A pre-test, post-test group design was used to assess students' attitude and achievement. The second stage of this study was composed of a survey study to explore the Pakistani teachers' view of the CLT approach and its obstructions at the higher secondary stage through a semi-structured questionnaire.

Moreover, the paper of Sampath & Zalipour (2010) introduced a model of teaching Business English Communication to undergraduates in a Malaysian University. It attempted to share concepts, useful approaches and practical strategies that can be implemented in Business English Communication classroom. The methodology of teaching ESP for business was reviewed highlighting the usage of authentic materials, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools for teaching and learning, and continuous evaluation. The pedagogical implication of this paper indicated that students need to get involved in learning activities in the classroom in order to enhance their abilities to communicate effectively in the business world. In addition, the study of Vongxay, (2013) applied a case study to investigate teachers' perspective of CLT. English teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The study compared the literature of communicative English teaching with the results of data collected from these interviews. The results showed that the elements that affected on applying CLT include: misapprehensions of CLT, traditional grammar based teaching approach, teachers' English proficiency and lack of CLT training.

The study of Widodo (2007) attempted to give a practical and communicative model of business English materials that can be applied in the classroom. In this regard, the language learning abilities taught was speaking with the authentic business topics and function-based language focus (grammar). A communicative approach could be used for improving the course materials to assist students practicing the language in social contexts with peers. In addition, the study of Mennaai (2013) investigated the improvement of students' speaking ability through applying communicative language teaching approach (CLT). Two questionnaires were administered for teachers and students at the Department of English at the University of Biskra to find out their attitudes about the speaking skill and the communicative approach. The data collected of this study indicated that the communicative language teaching was effective approach to improve students' speaking skill.

From the above mentioned review, it is evident that enhancing students' speaking skills has played the basic rule for language learning proficiency. It is also clear that the CLA is a practical method of language speaking improvement that is based on using language in learning topics and in real life situations. It may give students the autonomy and self-confidence by using the target language in their field topics and issues. Finally, students can master their major skills that are related to English language, such as academic terms, language structure and communication idioms.

3. Context of the Problem

There are, at least, five English courses which are assigned for Business administration graduation requirements. This means that a graduate from Business Administration College at Delta University have to pass five English courses as compulsory courses. The traditional method of teaching is based mainly on the written sheets, assignments, and tests. However, students of business are in need for practicing English whether in their academic topics or in life situations. They have to practice different speaking skills such as; ordering, negotiating, interviewing, offering and inquiring. The researcher, as a lecturer in the faculty of business administration, notice that students rarely practice English speaking skills, even in general speaking with their teachers and their classmates. They used to speak in Arabic due to the lack of training and the confidence to speak fluently in English. So, the current study attempted to apply an approach that is used for improving this skill and creating the suitable situation for practicing English language speaking among business college students.

4. Research Questions

The study problem can be summarized in the following questions:
1. What is the effect of communicative language approach in improving students' speaking achievement of business administration students at Delta University?
2. What are students' attitudes towards using the communicative language approach for improving students' speaking skills?

5. Importance of the Study

- Shedding the light on developing speaking skills among business administration students.
- Exploring different activities that may improve students' speaking skills such as role playing, discussion groups, and teacher talks.

- Encouraging students to use English language in their field topics and real life situations.
- Focusing on the personal and academic factors that may face students while practicing language speaking.
- Modifying English course materials that are given to business college students, by paying more attention for language speaking skills.

6. Delimitations

1. Business Administration freshmen Students, at Delta University.
2. The academic year 2017-2018- Fall semester.
3. English1 course.
4. Speaking sub- skills (vocabulary- general speaking- idioms- comprehension- business topics).

7. The Hypothesis

Based on the context of the problem above, the following hypothesis could be stated: there is improvement of the students" speaking ability by using Communicative Language Approach (CLA) among Business Administration freshmen Students, at Delta University, in the academic year 2017/2018.

8. Methodology

The main aim of the current study was to examine the effectiveness of applying CLA in teaching English for business college students. The study adopted Watanabe, et al (1984) experimental model of a pre-test/post-test group. This type of experimental treatment was adopted by assigned two equivalent groups from the participants. The achievement of two groups in pre-test and post-test was compared and analyzed with each other to answer the first study question. In addition, attitude of the students before treatment and after treatment was assessed by using questionnaire to give answer to the second question.

A. Participants

A sample of 40 students of Business freshmen students, who studied "English1" course in fall semester of the academic year 2017-2018 were selected. They were divided into two equivalent groups with twenty students each, presenting the Control Group (CG) and the Experimental Group (EG).

B. Instruments

The current study made use of the following instruments:

1. The Pre and Posttest

The purpose of applying the pretest was to identify students' speaking skills before the experiment. The pretest was an oral test which consists of five questions. These questions covered the following topics:

1. Telling personal data   2. Talking about their major
3. Asking and giving opinion   4. Giving inquiries and negotiation
5. Asking and giving information

The posttest was administered after the experiment by teaching speaking using CLA. It is similar form with the pretest, and scoring was applied in the same criteria. The validity of pre-test and post-test was measured by the judgment of two expert English professors and administering this attitude scale on 20 students not included in the treatment. The reliability of pre-test and posttest on Cronbach's Alpha was 0.81.

In the pre-test and posttest, the participants were tested for the literal comprehension of the spoken language (10 marks), giving relevant vocabulary (10 marks), using suitable phrases and idioms (10 marks), and speaking (20 marks). There were two parts for the speaking section of the test: part A was dealing with their performance in group discussions on topics that were related to general situations; while part B was dealing with their achievement and communicative skills with topics that were related to the business contexts (syllabus).

2. Students' questionnaire

It is composed of 20 questions to measure their attitude towards CLA. It also contains questions about the classroom atmosphere, the types of activities and their perception of speaking skills. This questionnaire was comprised on a Likert scale and each item had five options, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The statements in the Likert scale dealt with students' realization of CLA in studying English and their attitudes towards the application. The questionnaire was administered before and after the experiment to measure the differences of the attitudes of the two groups towards the application of CLA. (Appendix A)

C. The treatment

The two groups were taught separately by two teachers who used the traditional approach and (CLA) for each group, in the academic fall semester. The researcher administered a pre-test to measure the levels of English proficiency of the two groups. The post-test was administered,

same in difficulty level with that of the pre-test, to evaluate the performance of two groups. The aim was to investigate the variances in the achievement of both groups taught with different approaches. The attitudes of the two groups were assessed before the period of the treatment, and after it. The purpose was to get any expected differences in attitude as a result of the experiment.

9. Data Analysis and Results

The data obtained from performing pre- and post-tests of the experimental group was analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and T test. In pre-test, the mean scores were 22.52. While the post-test, mean scores 21.76.

Table 1: Overall performance in pre- post-tests by the groups.

Test	Group	N	M.	S.D	Se (D)	t value	Sig.
Pre-test	CG	20	22.52	5.33	1.63	.38	.694
	EG	20	21.76	5.04			
Post-test	CG	20	23.11	3.09	.98	-3.5	.002
	EG	20	27.64	3.04			

The above table shows that the variance between the two mean scores was 0.70, which was greater than 0.05 level alpha. So, no significant statistical difference was found between the two means obtained by CG and EG. This result indicated that the two groups were nearly at the same level in English language before the experiment. In the post-test, mean scores obtained by CG and EG were 23.15 and 26.45 correspondingly. The difference between the two mean scores was 0.002 which was less than 0.05 level alpha. This indicated that a significant statistical difference was found between the two means. This difference might refer to an improvement in the achievement of EG after the period of the experiment.

Table 2. Detailed achievement in Pre-test by the two groups

Parts of test	Group	N.	M.	S.D	SE (D)	T value	Sig.
General speaking	CG	20	4.51	2.21	.32	.91	.361
	EG	20	4.36	2.01			
Vocabulary	CG	20	2.22	.70	.36	.75	.469
	EG	20	2.45	.61			
business topics	CG	20	5.61	.64	.48	-.22	.832

Parts of test	Group	N.	M.	S.D	SE (D)	T value	Sig.
	EG	20	6.72	.86			
idioms	CG	20	3.21	1.45	.65	-.09	.943
	EG	20	4.51	1.48			
comprehension	CG	20	2.91	.95	.23	.61	.531
	EG	20	3.78	1.10			

The above table2 showed the detailed segmental pre-test results of the two groups, which indicated that the CG and EG were nearly at the same level in English proficiency and there was no statistically significant variance shown between the achievements of the two groups in any part of the test items, while the standard of significance was 0.05 at alpha.

Table 3. Detailed achievement in Post-test by the two groups

Parts of test	Group	N.	M.	S.D	SE (D)	T value	Sig.
General speaking	CG	20	4.44	.68	.22	-4.01	.000
	EG	20	4.32	.65			
Vocabulary	CG	20	2.54	.75	.23	.47	.659
	EG	20	2.43	.61			
business topics	CG	20	3.56	.69	.21	-4.39	.000
	EG	20	4.47	.60			
idioms	CG	20	3.21	1.21	.33	-3.82	.001
	EG	20	4.51	.93			
comprehension	CG	20	4.73	.78	.29	-.72	.487
	EG	20	4.93	1.01			

The above table presented the detailed achievement of the posttest segments. In the elements of comprehension and vocabulary, there was no significant statistical variance between the achievements of the two groups. While in the parts of idioms, speaking (general), and speaking (contextual), the variation in the performance of the two groups was significant.

These results indicated that the good command of English using communicative approach to facilitate the purpose of teaching can provide better results than teaching through the traditional approaches.

The results also confirmed the fact that the CLA approach is more appropriate for teaching English for specific purposes rather than the traditional approaches. The found limited variation in the segmental finding may be due to the inadequate period for this experiment. The significant improvement of EG in speaking segments might prove that using CLA approach develops communicative skills of the students.

Regarding the second study question about students' attitude towards the treatment of applying CLA, the following table 4 shows the results of students' questionnaire before and after the experiment.

Table 4: Students' questionnaire scores in the pre-post test

Test	Group	N	M	S.D	SE (D)	T Value	Sig.
Pre-test	CG	20	96.73	14.84	4.07	.38	.714
	EG	20	95.23	9.03			
Post-test	CG	20	96.92	13.65	3.31	-2.31	.027
	EG	20	104.63	6.08			

The above table revealed the mean attitude score of the two groups which was tested through a Likert scale with five points. In the pre-test attitude, CG scored 96.73 while EG scored 95.23, and the variance between the mean scores was 0.71 which was statistically not significant at .05 alpha. This indicated that both the groups have got the same attitude towards learning English language before the experiment. However, the mean attitude score after the experiment was 96.92 and 105.63 by CG and EG, in that order, and the variance between the mean scores was 0.027 which was statistically significant at 0.05 alpha.

This findings of attitude surveying indicated that students' enthusiasm for learning increased with applying the CLA approach. The attitude of EG was seen to change positively towards learning English by applying creative approaches during the treatment.

10. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the current study might confirm the fact that CLA teaching can be used as an alternative way in teaching speaking. In order to help improving students' speaking proficiency. Teachers should act as facilitators who guide the students in their learning process.

Students' attitude towards implementing CLA in their classroom revealed their readiness to incorporate communicative activities. They were interested in using this approach because they have the ability to involve in the learning process rather than being passive learners. Using

Communicative activities helps them to increase their speaking ability. It can be stated that most of them have a great incentive and active in learning speaking when Communicative activities teaching which covered topics related to their major. They also have the opportunity to practice different elements of speaking skills such as; how to inquire, negotiate, express opinions and evaluate. (Tsai, 2007; Incecay & Incecay, 2009; Sampath & Zalipour, 2010; Vongxay, 2013).

Applying CLA in the field of business context is crucial for advancing communication because it provides a situation where students can argue and involve in several discussions with each other, assess each other's current knowledge and fill in the gaps in each other's understanding. It offers several substitutes to build interactions among students, which are basic for language improvement and developing familiarity with their academic content materials. These results come close to those of (Vongxay, 2013; Mennaai, 2013; Ahmed& Rao, 2013; Basta, 2011; Ferdous, 2011).

11.Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study shed the light on the importance for curriculum designers for ESP courses, English for business in particular, to pay attention for communicative activities. In ESP, Business English Communication should be presented not as a subject to be studied in separation from real life situations, nor as a mechanical skill or habit to be improved. Consequently, Business English Communication should be presented in authentic contexts acquaint the students with the particular methods in which the language is used in function. This means that they will need to practice in their fields of specialty or jobs.

The assessment system should also not focus only on writing skills, and the evaluation of all language skills should be concerned. Language communication becomes the priority for business students as it is the tool of global market and finance. For this reason, text-centered and grammar –centered practices need to be replaced by the student – centered, fluency focused and problem solving activities required by CLA.

The application of the CLA should be employed in several levels of education, and different programs of ESP courses. All of the four language skills should be integrated in language examinations. Further work is also needed in syllabus design for the CLA.

At last, further research is needed to explore techniques and activities that may improve communicative approaches such as short discussions, teacher talk and role

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Appendix (A)
Students' Questionnaire

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- I can learn English more easily if I speak it					
2- The best way to learn another language is to spent time with people who speak the language					
3- If I can analyze how a language works, I'll be able to speak it well					
4- It is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language					
5- Is it important to listen a lot before starting to speak					
6- Memorizing dialogues is a good way to learn a language					
7- I feel satisfied in the different activities that are performed in the classroom					
8- Role play encourages me to speak in the classroom					
9- Communicative approach encourages me to practice English outside the classroom					
10-I prefer learning language in group work.					
11-I feel comfortable when I practice the oral activities in the class					
12-Classroom discussion is always conducted in English in English classes					
13-I like to listen to the teacher without practicing any activities					
14-It is difficult to apply CLA in our classroom					
15-I gradually understand the spoken English in discussion					
16-I have some personal difficulties to speak fluently in					

the classroom					
17- The teacher help us to discuss business topics in the classroom					
18- Communicative activities enrich my language experience					
19- I feel improved in speaking skills through the communicative activities					
20- I feel independent and confident through the discussions and communication.					